



Better AO1 in module 4

Module 4 all topics

This activity will help you to...

- Write effective descriptions of psychological theories in exams
- Distinguish between the demands of different exam questions
- Assess your own psychological writing

Describing theories & explanations

It is very common in AQA B module 4 for you to be asked to describe one or more explanations of psychological disorders. It is possible for these to be 'stand alone' questions for which a few marks are offered but it may be that you are asked to present your explanation as part of a 'describe and discuss [a specified model's] explanation of [a named psychological disorder].' essay.

It is very important in this type of question to be certain what the marks are available for. This then allows you to construct your answer accordingly so you can get as many marks as possible without wasting valuable time doing things that were unnecessary.

Any essay question will have marks available for the two fundamental exam skills:

- AO1 – showing your **knowledge and understanding** of psychological concepts, theories, studies and applications.
- AO2 – using your **commentary skills** to discuss, analyse and evaluate psychological concepts, theories, studies and applications.

This activity focuses just on the **AO1** aspect of a typical essay question. Over the page there are six responses to the question 'describe a biological explanations of obsessive-compulsive behaviour' (in a real exam question you would also be asked to 'discuss' but we're focusing here just on the describe part, so you are only looking at how well the answers demonstrate **knowledge and understanding**).

Working first on your own and then in groups, you must:

- Rank the answers according to how well they satisfy the demands of the question. Which are the best and worst and how do the remainder rank between them?
- Identify the features of each answer that have led you to your decisions? What specifically makes one a stronger answer than another?

Hint: when doing this, try to avoid generalities (e.g. 'it's just better' or 'it's more detailed'). Focus instead on the specifics (i.e. what makes it better? What sorts of additional detail are present?).

When you have finished this we will discuss our views and construct a mark scheme for you to use to assess your own answers to this type of question.

Describe...a biological explanation for obsessive compulsive behaviour.**Answer 1 – Rank:**

The biological theory of OCD says it is genetic. You inherit a faulty gene that gives you the disorder. You get the gene from your family.

Answer 2 – Rank:

The biological theory of OCD suggest that it results from a faulty gene that increases your susceptibility to the disorder. This is supported by studies that show that OCD tends to run in families and that being closely related to someone with an anxiety disorder increases the chance that you will get OCD. People with OCD also run a higher than average risk of having tics, tremors and Tourette's syndrome, further supporting the role of the nervous system.

Answer 3 – Rank:

The biological theory of OCD suggests that it is caused by something being wrong with the brain's structure or functioning. Having too much of a certain chemical might cause the OCD symptoms or having part of the brain that didn't work quite as it should.

Answer 4 – Rank:

The biological theory of OCD suggests that it may be caused by structural and functional abnormalities in parts of the brain associated with anxiety responses. In particular, OCD may be due to abnormal activity in the limbic system, particularly the amygdale (associated with anxiety responses and therefore obsessions) and the basal ganglia (control of motor activity and therefore compulsions). It is possible that these functional abnormalities are related to underactivity of serotonin in these brain structures or possible abnormalities in another neurotransmitter regulated by serotonin. Researchers have further suggested that these abnormalities may be caused either through direct injury to the brain (e.g. traumatic injury or infection) or through the inheritance of a gene or genes that influence the relevant brain areas to develop abnormally.

Answer 5 – Rank:

The biological theory of OCD suggests that it results from abnormal learning experiences. Skinner's superstition hypothesis suggests that compulsive behaviours might originate with the random association of two actually unconnected events (e.g. the touching of a certain object with the avoidance of some anxiety-provoking situation). Due to the law of contiguity, the person may learn to associate the behaviour with the reduction in anxiety even though in reality the two events are unconnected. Subsequently, the behaviour would be reinforced by anxiety reduction (through avoidance learning) every time the person did it, resulting in an increased likelihood that it will be repeated in future.

Answer 6 – Rank:

The biological theory of OCD suggests is arises due to an inherited genetic abnormality which is triggered by an environmental stressor of some kind. This results in abnormal activity in parts of the brain including the limbic system and basal ganglia. This may be caused by abnormal levels of serotonin. Other neurotransmitter may also be involved, such as noradrenaline, and possibly others as yet unidentified.