

## Model answer to SAQ

A: Identify one basic assumption from the learning perspective. (4 marks)

B :use **one** psychological study to illustrate your point. (4 marks)

A: One of the basic assumptions from the learning perspective on which important concepts are based is '**environmental determinism**' i.e. behaviour is entirely determined by the environmental contingencies of reinforcement.

This idea was proposed by e.g. B.F. Skinner in his book from 1938 *Behaviour of organisms: an experimental analysis* where he outlined his theory of 'operant conditioning' in which he claimed that behaviour was affected by its consequences, i.e. whether a behaviour will be repeated in the future depends entirely on the consequences of the emitted behaviour. If it is positively reinforced it will be repeated, if it is punished it will stop.

A consequence of Skinner's ideas is that behaviour can be manipulated or controlled, also called 'behavioural engineering'. The basic view in this is that since the organism is totally determined by the environment, manipulating the environment will decide which behaviours will tend to continue and which will be extinguished. One consequence of this is e.g. that behaviour is dependent on 'contingencies of reinforcement', which made Skinner suggest specific schedules of reinforcements that would result in different behavioural responses. This was demonstrated in numerous experiments with rats or pigeons in the Skinner box.

Another aspect of behavioural engineering is that behaviour can be '**shaped**' through successive approximations.

**B:** One study that illustrated **shaping** was done by Epstein et al. (1984) who wanted to demonstrate that insight learning demonstrated by Köhler (1925) and his research with chimpanzees did not apply to all learning. He used animals which are not suspected of higher mental capacities to do what looked like 'insight' under some conditions. In an experiment four pigeons were taught to perform three separate behaviours during different training sessions: pushing boxes in a particular direction, climbing onto a box, and pecking at a toy banana in order to be reinforced by grain. All this was done using successive approximations, i.e. each behaviour towards the wanted behaviour was positively reinforced. Flying or jumping at the banana was not reinforced and therefore eventually extinguished. After the training, the pigeons were left alone and they gradually began to push the box in the direction of the banana, and they then climbed onto the box to peck at them to have grain. This is seen as a demonstration of how separate learned behavioural elements can be combined in an adequate behavioural response in order to achieve reinforcement. Consequently, from a behaviourist view the pigeons' behaviour did not illustrate insight, rather their behaviour was shaped by the environment.

**Important information here:** Another study that could be used under B is 'superstition in the pigeon' by Skinner. And you could also use other concepts, e.g. classical conditioning and use Pavlov's study. Or 'learned helplessness as concept and the study of Seligman to illustrate, or Dweck et al. study. Or take the concept of self-efficacy and find a study to illustrate, e.g. one of the studies on sport psychology. Just to show you that you're free to choose and match concept and empirical study here.