

BIRKBECK COLLEGE  
(University of London)

Department of Psychology

ADAPTIVE LEARNING AND COMPARATIVE COGNITION  
(08/720/PSYC044U – course unit value 1/2)

### **SAMPLE ESSAY QUESTIONS 2007**

*(The examination lasts 2 hours: two questions must be answered from the six set)*

1. “Instinct and learning are mutually exclusive factors in the control of animal behaviour.” Discuss, using examples from birds and primates.
2. To what extent is temporal contiguity the critical determinant of association formation? Discuss in the context of evidence from classical conditioning experiments.
3. How far was Thorndike correct in assuming that instrumental learning can be fully accounted for by the strengthening of connections between preceding stimuli and successful responses?
4. Compare and contrast classical and instrumental conditioning.
5. How is “conditioned fear” relevant to the understanding of the development and treatment of anxiety disorders”?
6. Consider the evidence for visual pattern recognition and categorization in animal learning experiments.
7. Discuss experimental evidence and the theoretical background for the distinction between memory for recent events and response learning in animal behaviour.
8. ‘Apes cannot be taught language, but there is evidence that they have special abilities in the areas of social learning, imitation, and self-recognition.’ Discuss.
9. Thorndike called himself a connectionist — is this just a co-incidence, or can comparisons be made between modern accounts of neural networks and previous theories of animal learning?

I will attempt to mark and comment on essays within 2 weeks of receiving them.

Essays can either be “practice exam” versions, hand-written in about an hour, or longer versions, possibly word-processed.

S.F. Walker  
March 15th 2007