A LEVEL
PSYCHOLOGY

7182/2: Psychology in Context
Report on the Examination

7182
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General Introduction to the November Series

This has been an unusual exam series in many ways. Entry patterns have been very different from those normally seen in the summer, and students had a very different experience in preparation for these exams. It is therefore more difficult to make meaningful comparisons between the range of student responses seen in this series and those seen in a normal summer series. The smaller entry also means that there is less evidence available for examiners to comment on.

In this report, senior examiners will summarise the performance of students in this series in a way that is as helpful as possible to teachers preparing future cohorts while taking into account the unusual circumstances and limited evidence available.

Overview of Entry

Overall, it seems that time was not an issue in this paper, with very few questions left not attempted and no issues with incomplete answers or papers. It was encouraging to see some good synoptic elements in the responses marked, with students drawing on knowledge and skills learned in other areas of the specification to tackle the questions presented. It was also pleasing to see a continuing improvement in the students' understanding of neurobiology and the use of specialist terminology as we progress through the specification.

Unfortunately, students continue to struggle with following the key instructions presented in the questions. It is vital that students take time to read through questions and instructions carefully to avoid unnecessarily losing important marks.

Teachers should try to provide students with as much practical experience as possible and encourage students to use their understanding and practical experience rather than relying on generic, rote learned content. It should be noted that rote learned content is often learned inaccurately and is rarely rewarded with high marks.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Approaches in Psychology

Question 01

This question was generally well-answered with most students selecting the correct response. The most common incorrect response was distractor C.

Question 02

This question was well-answered with most students identifying the correct response. Incorrect responses were distributed across the three distractors although B was the most common.

Question 03

This question was a good discriminator of students' understanding. There were some excellent, clear descriptions of the role of defence mechanisms, showing an impressive understanding and

use of terminology but also a surprising number of students did not attempt this question. Those students gaining only one of the two marks generally provided a limited description which lacked clear elaboration. Some students were only able to name defence mechanisms but seemed unclear on their role and thus could not gain credit for their answers.

Question 04

This question produced a mixed response. Overall limitations were attempted better than the strengths, with most focussing on the lack of scientific rigour/unfalsifiablity of the psychodynamic approach, although there were some strong responses using issues and debates from 7182/3 e.g. those which focussed on androcentrism. Strengths tended to be quite general with those relating to treatments most common but overall strengths were often limited or muddled.

Question 05

Overall, students seemed to have a sound understanding of operant conditioning and could outline the basic ideas and types of reinforcement. Sadly, students continue to muddle the learning approaches with some students describing classical conditioning and/or social learning theory. Application was the strongest of the three assessed skills, with weaker students able to explain the types of reinforcement more clearly through application and more able students able to integrate application throughout their description and evaluation.

Positive reinforcement and punishment were generally explained accurately but negative reinforcement tended to be more muddled.

Although there were cases of thorough and effective evaluation, sadly many responses still tended to present generic evaluation with weaker answers focussing on methodological issues of Skinners' research rather than a critique of operant conditioning. The issue of generalising Pavlov's research from animals to humans was often stated but not developed, focussing on ethics, and demonstrating little awareness of the importance of animal research in the behavioural approach. There was some effective and well- discussed evaluation focussing on token economy systems and linking this back to application in terms of the issues of long-term behavioural changes once rewards were discontinued. Unfortunately there was also evidence of pre-learned behaviourist essays which were not altered for this question.

Section B

Biopsychology

Question 06

It was pleasing to see many correct answers to this challenging question with a modal mark of 4; however, there was a wide range of incorrect responses. A number of students wrote names of areas rather than identifying areas by giving the appropriate letters, suggesting that they either did not read the instructions provided in the question or more likely that they lacked knowledge of the neuroanatomical localisation of the functions. The most common muddle was between B and C but B and A were also frequently confused.

Question 07

Generally well answered, with most students achieving full marks. However, some students muddled the durations whilst others presented differences based on internal vs external rhythms.

Question 08

Whilst nearly all students were able to give one limitation of self-report, many of these were limited and generic. Better answers tended to focus on the subjectivity of pain although there were also some nice answers on social desirability.

Question 09

This was a challenging question which highlighted a general lack of understanding of inhibition. The majority of responses fitted the level 1 description mainly due to muddling processes and/or using inappropriate terminology. Surprisingly few students discussed IPSPs or the effect of inhibition on summation; those that did this accurately generally achieved full marks. There were some impressive neurobiological responses discussing the impact of inhibition on the permeability of the post-synaptic membrane to chloride and potassium ions and the consequential hyperpolarisation of the membrane and subsequent difficulty reaching threshold to initiate an action potential. However, too many students described inhibition as a slowing down of action potentials, failing to grasp the 'all or nothing' principle.

Question 10

Most students demonstrated some understanding of fMRIs and ERPs and were able to present a difference and a similarity, although these were often limited. Generally, differences were presented better than similarities. Good responses generally focussed on the differences in spatial/temporal resolution and similarities in being able to measure brain activity linked to specific tasks.

Question 11

This question discriminated well. There were some excellent responses, demonstrating accurate and detailed knowledge of split-brain research with relevant evaluation points effectively explained with appropriate use of terminology. Unfortunately, some students confused split brain research with localisation of function providing evidence from case studies such as Phineas Gage. Whilst other students seemed to be trying to repackage pre-learned essays on general hemispheric lateralisation. As in previous series, students often fell in the trap of including detailed knowledge but often with quite limited/generic evaluation which was costly given the division of marks for these skills.

Section C

Research Methods

Question 12

Overall, students seemed to be challenged by this question, with only a third of students identifying the correct response. Although all the distractors functioned well, C was the most common incorrect response.

Question 13

Most students were able to identify the correct correlation coefficient and reassuringly the most common incorrect response was B, suggesting that students were generally able to identify a negative correlation.

Question 14

Most students were able to identify the graph as being a scattergram and were able to give a limited explanation of why this would be appropriate but fewer managed to provide an explanation that referred to the actual data collected.

Question 15

It was surprising that the modal mark for this question was zero, with many students explaining it would be inappropriate as the correlation was too weak, despite the majority of students correctly identifying the correlation co-efficient to be -0.80 in question 13. Many also suggested that it would be inappropriate to draw a conclusion when there were outliers. Good responses explained that recreational screen time and academic performance were only co-variables and thus a third variable such as sleep could be responsible for the results and thus causation could not be inferred. However, a lot of responses were limited/generic stating merely that it was not appropriate as it was correlational.

Question 16

Most students seemed to have an idea of what a meta-analysis is but many struggled to clearly explain what the term meant with lots just giving examples of meta-analysis studies. Good answers made it clear that a range of previous studies on a specific topic were analysed together to draw overall conclusions.

Question 17

The modal mark for this question was zero due to a surprising number of students struggling to follow the instructions to place one tick in each column. It was sadly common to see ticks in every row. Overall, students seemed to struggle more with identifying the population than the sample.

Question 18

It was surprising that the modal mark for this question was zero. Unfortunately, a lot of students just defined what a directional hypothesis was or gave the conclusion of the study. Just under half of the responses managed to correctly explain that there was past research indicating that recreational screen time would reduce academic performance.

Question 19

Despite having just explained the use of a directional hypothesis in question 18, many then went on to write a correlational hypothesis or non-directional hypothesis and thus failed to achieve any marks for this question. Those who wrote a directional hypothesis were generally able to operationalise the dependent and independent variables, although some still used ‘Group A’ and ‘Group B’ to describe conditions of the independent variable and some hypotheses were muddled.

Question 20

This question really challenged students and revealed a common gap in students’ knowledge/understanding. The vast majority compared the mean and standard deviation values (despite this being asked in question 21) with no reference to distributions. Of those students who did recognise normal and skewed distributions, there was some confusion between positive and negative skews. Very few students managed to achieve full marks for this question.

Question 21

Most students were able to offer an anwer about what the data suggested about the effects of screen time on test performance although some still failed to justify their responses with a comparison. Despite this type of question being commonly asked on exam papers, a surprising number of students merely described/stated the data or focussed only on the mean or standard deviation, providing only a partial answer.

Question 22

Sadly, a large number of students did not attempt this question which was costly given the number of marks available. Those who answered the question achieved their marks for identifying the appropriate statistical test and explaining why the test would be appropriate but struggled to do so in the context of the study. It was good to see that some students were able to clearly and accurately contextualise their reasons and achieve full marks but this is a skill that teachers are advised to encourage students to practise, (justifying their choice of statistical test in context).

Question 23

This question differentiated well, with some clear and contextualised explanations detailing the whole process and others providing partial answers or muddling up the process or purpose of matching. This is an area teachers would be well advised to check understanding as although it may appear a simple process many students fail to grasp the key elements. Those who did understand the process and could describe it in context, generally covered the first 3 bullet points with only a few covering the final bullet point.

Question 24

This question was generally well answered with most students identifying academic ability/IQ/sleep as an appropriate variable. Those who did not achieve 2 marks for this question generally failed to explain how the variable identified would have affected test performance if it was not controlled.

Question 25

Responses to this question generally showed a sound understanding of different types of observations and the rationale for choosing these as well as knowledge of key ethical issues. However, the responses also demonstrated that students are still struggling to understand what time and event sampling are. It was rare to see time sampling explained accurately and students often referred to sampling methods (e.g. opportunity sampling) rather than time/event sampling.

Students often described a range of potential ethical issues whereas the question required them to detail how they would deal with one relevant ethical issue. Those who correctly addressed this bullet point tended to focus on requiring parental/guardian consent, but this was often merely stated with generic justification rather than providing practical detail of how to deal with the ethical issue.

Reliability was tackled with mixed success. Some students had an excellent understanding of inter-observer reliability, detailing a practical explanation of how reliability of the data could be assessed through inter-observer reliability. However, there were also too many students who did not seem to understand the procedure and some suggested repeating the study at different times. Some answers also focussed on how to improve inter-observer reliability rather than how it would be assessed.

Overall, there is little evidence that students are engaged in or completing their own practical work. Responses generally consisted of a plethora of relevant key terms that were not applied appropriately and generic justifications rather than practical details. With more practical experience and less rote learning of theoretical concepts, students would be far less likely to confuse the alternative sampling terms. Teachers should be encouraged to deliver as much of the research studies content as practically as possible in order to develop the skills their students require to tackle design questions and even for students' potential further study in this field.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.