



AS LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

7181/2 Psychology in context
Report on the Examination

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General

It was pleasing to see a significant number of students had evidently been well prepared for this examination and demonstrated excellent understanding in their responses. Performance across all three sections was similar, although marks in the research methods section were slightly depressed. Encouragingly, the majority of students appeared to complete the paper in the time allowed.

It was evident that many students did attempt to engage with the specific demands of each question. However, on certain questions some did appear to simply write everything they could remember about a specific topic area and failed to address the actual demands of the question. It is imperative that students read the questions carefully to ensure they understand and address the specific demands of each question.

On certain application questions in Section A and Section B, and on research methods questions in Section C, students must apply their answers to the context of the question when this is required. Students should also be minded to think carefully about their choice of examples used to illustrate concepts. In several instances, these examples were not psychological and were therefore inappropriate. This was particularly noticeable in question 9.

The amount of detail students included in their responses also varied. Some wrote excessive amounts of content, which was particularly noticeable in questions 1, 5 and 8. However, others wrote very little and did not include sufficient detail, which was noticeable in the AO1 content for question 9, particularly for statistical infrequency. It is important that students tailor their responses to the actual question posed so they neither waste time writing excessive material nor fail to include sufficient content.

Students should also take care with the balance of assessment objectives in questions which involve extended writing, such as question 9. In these questions there should be an equal amount of AO1 and AO3, but some students were producing excessive amounts of one assessment objective and minimal amounts of the other and thus were not able to access the higher levels of the marking scheme.

The responses seen in Section C did suggest that many students had some practical experience of carrying out psychological research, such as the use of experimental designs and how to obtain informed consent. However, as in previous series, there were other practical areas where it appeared that many students had little or no practical experience and thus did not understand how to apply these concepts. These weak practical areas included the use of correlations and how to correctly interpret standard deviations. It is important that students gain such practical experience, so they understand these concepts fully and can then apply them in an examination setting.

Most students wrote their responses clearly in the appropriate space provided. However, some responses stopped mid-sentence and it was unclear whether the answer continued elsewhere in the question paper, or on additional pages. Students who need to write more than the space provided allows should use the additional pages at the end of the question paper and should clearly indicate that their answer continues there. They should also clearly write the question number on the additional page. These additional pages will then be matched with the response and marked as a complete answer. It is also important that students do not write outside of the boxes as this material might not be seen by the examiner and thus may not be marked.

Section A – Approaches in Psychology

Question 1

There were some detailed and thorough responses to this question, but others simply involved a general description of the structure of a neuron or a synapse, rather than being clearly focussed on the process of synaptic transmission as the question demanded.

A significant minority of students wrote excessive amounts of relevant content and used all the extra space as well as additional space at the back of the question paper. Although students did not lose marks for this, they did potentially lose valuable time which could have been better spent elsewhere.

Question 2

Students produced some lengthy and, at times, detailed responses to this question. However, as in previous series, there was some confusion between hormones and neurotransmitters. Some students gave lengthy descriptions of the fight or flight response and so were focussed on the action of the nervous system rather than the role of adrenaline as the question demanded. It is important that students read the question carefully and understand the demands of the question before they attempt a response.

Question 3

Many students appeared to have a detailed and thorough knowledge of Pavlov's methodology and used appropriate terminology throughout.

A significant minority of students did not focus their answer on how Pavlov investigated classical conditioning and gave what appeared to be rote learnt responses which simply described the process of classical conditioning and were not focused on Pavlov's methodology. It is also important that students use appropriate classical conditioning terminology here as this is required for top level responses.

Question 4

Most students had sound knowledge of social learning theory and many were able to clearly apply this knowledge to the scenario. However, some students simply named or outlined concepts and did not apply them to the scenario as the question asked. Where students did attempt to apply their knowledge to the scenario, this application was varied with some fully applying the concepts of social learning theory to the stimulus material, whilst others simply quoted parts of the stimulus material with no explanation or link to any of the concepts of social learning theory.

As with the previous question, it is important that students use appropriate terminology from social learning theory here as this is required for Level 2 and Level 3 responses.

Question 5

This question appeared to discriminate well between students as a wide range of responses were seen. A significant minority of students simply described the cognitive approach in general and thus performed poorly. Many students gained some marks but did not fully engage with the question and wrote about the use of scanning techniques to measure brain structure and/or function, but did not actually outline cognitive neuroscience. Some students had a detailed understanding of cognitive

neuroscience and wrote excessively long answers, often going on to the additional pages at the back of the question paper. Although students did not lose marks for this, they did potentially lose valuable time which could have been better spent elsewhere.

Question 6

This question was generally answered well, suggesting that students had a clear knowledge of the strengths of the cognitive approach. Most correct responses were based around real life application and the development of effective treatments.

A minority of students simply wrote vague and potentially incorrect statements, such as 'it is objective'. It is important to note that although many of the methods used by the cognitive approach are objective (such as the use of laboratory experiments and brain scanning techniques), the approach itself is not entirely objective as a significant proportion of it is based upon inference.

As in previous series, if students chose a methodological point as a strength (such as the use of highly controlled methods of investigation), it is important that they explain how this is a strength for the approach itself.

Section B – Psychopathology

Question 7.1

Most students were able to accurately name two behavioural characteristics of phobias but there was some confusion with other characteristics and other mental disorders. Some students wrote extensive outlines or descriptions of the behavioural characteristics. Although they did not lose marks for this, it was not a requirement of the question and so they potentially lost valuable time, which could have been spent elsewhere.

Where students had named two correct behavioural characteristics, most students were then able to successfully apply these to the scenario. There was some confusion between panic behaviours (a behavioural characteristic) and anxiety/fear (an emotional characteristic). Some students either incorrectly named an emotional characteristic or incorrectly applied panic behaviours with an example of an emotional response.

Question 7.2

Most students had good knowledge of systematic desensitisation and demonstrated sound understanding of the key elements of relaxation, anxiety hierarchy and gradual exposure. However, some students failed to apply this knowledge to the scenario and thus did not address the demands of the question. As with questions 2 and 3, it was important for students to use appropriate terminology as it was required for Level 2 responses.

Question 8

This question was generally answered very well suggesting that students had a detailed and thorough knowledge of cognitive explanations of depression. Some students described the underlying theory of Beck or Ellis but failed to use this effectively to explain depression and thus did not fully address the demands of the question.

Some students wrote excessively long responses, including the use of several examples, often going on to the additional pages at the back of the question paper. Although students did not lose marks for this, they did potentially lose valuable time which could have been better spent elsewhere.

Question 9

A good range of responses was seen across the cohort with many students producing level 3 and 4 answers. These responses tended to outline both definitions of abnormality accurately with some detail and also included some effective evaluation.

Poorer responses tended to focus solely on only one of the definitions or contained no effective evaluation. Some students simply provided a very brief and thus limited outline, particularly for statistical infrequency. It is important to note that outlines should be of definitions of abnormality and not normality. This is especially important when describing deviation from ideal mental health, as some students just described ideal mental health and omitted the idea that to be abnormal you had to deviate from these characteristics.

It is also imperative to ensure that all content is linked clearly to psychology, as there were some very poor examples used when attempting to illustrate statistical infrequency.

Section C – Research Methods

Question 10.1

Many students struggled to write an operationalised non-directional correlational hypothesis. There were many errors made in the responses to this question ranging from some students writing either directional or causal hypotheses, to some writing aims or research questions. When students did write a non-directional correlational hypothesis, it was often poorly expressed with neither co-variable fully operationalised. Many students omitted 'on a scale from 1 to 10' for the stress co-variable and 'from work due to sickness in the previous six months' for the illness co-variable.

It is important that students have sufficient practice at identifying the nature of investigations and writing appropriate hypotheses, so they understand this process fully and can then apply this understanding to a novel situation in an examination setting.

Question 10.2

Most students were able to answer this question correctly and had sufficient knowledge of sampling methods to be able to identify the one used in the study provided. There was some inaccuracy seen and a small minority of students gave responses that lacked precision.

Question 10.3

Students struggled with this question and demonstrated a lack of understanding of correlations in general and specifically how to analyse scattergrams. Many students failed to identify the nature of the relationship and for some that did, their justification was often lacking and not fully applied to the context of the study. For example, some students simply stated that as stress increases, so does illness.

Question 10.4

Many students seemed unable to engage with the demands of this question and could not articulate why causal conclusions cannot be drawn from correlational analysis. Of those students who could offer a valid explanation, many simply talked about intervening variables, which were frequently and inaccurately referred to as extraneous variables.

As with previous questions, this question appeared to demonstrate a general lack of understanding of correlations and specifically how they are different to experimentation.

Question 10.5

There were many full mark responses to this question with most students clearly demonstrating an understanding of types of data and an ability to apply this knowledge to the study.

Question 11.1

It was clear from responses seen that many students appeared to have some understanding of the mean and what this told us about the effectiveness of the strategies in the follow-up study. Most students were able to correctly state that meditation was more effective. However, some struggled with the justification and simply repeated the values from the table rather than talk about the difference in the mean scores from the start and the end of the week.

Question 11.2

Many students were unable to draw an accurate conclusion and then justify it using the standard deviation scores. These students demonstrated a poor understanding of what the standard deviation is and what it represents.

Some responses did not focus on the meditation condition and instead discussed the difference between the two strategies, which was not what the question demanded. As with question 11.1, many students simply repeated the values from the table rather than talk about the difference in the standard deviation scores from the start of and at the end of the week for the meditation condition.

Question 11.3

Many students appeared to have a good understanding of how to obtain informed consent. Most were able to give some outline but better answers addressed both the 'informed' and the 'consent' components. It is also important that students frame their response in the context of the follow-up study as the question demands.

Question 11.4

Most students were able to give an accurate outline of at least one way of changing the design and most responses scored at least 2 marks. Most students seemed to understand the meaning of the term 'design' in the question and the most common responses were to change the experimental design to matched pairs or repeated measures.

However, a significant minority of students did not frame their answer in the context of the study, which was required for Level 2 and 3 responses. Other students focused incorrectly on the reasons why the design should be changed rather than how it should be changed. For those who chose a matched pairs design, many demonstrated some knowledge of matching participants on some key

variable in the experiment. However, fewer students went on to describe the idea of one person from each pair undergoing a different condition of the independent variable (in this case meditation or healthy diet).

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.