



AS LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

7181/2 Psychology in context
Report on the Examination

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General

Many students had evidently been well prepared for this examination and demonstrated both excellent understanding and well-developed skills enabling them to access marks across all three assessment objectives. Performance across Section A (Approaches in Psychology) and Section B (Psychopathology) were similar although each was slightly lower than in previous examination series. Performance on Section C (Research Methods) was significantly lower both in comparison to Sections A and B and to previous examination series. The majority of students attempted most or all of the questions and most appeared to complete the paper in the allocated time.

The quality of student responses appeared to vary depending upon which assessment objective was being assessed. Students seemed to perform relatively well when demonstrating knowledge and understanding (AO1), slightly less well when analysing or evaluating (AO3) and performance was notably weaker when applying this knowledge to novel scenarios (AO2). Some students appeared to specifically struggle with applying their knowledge of research methods and this was particularly evident in several of these questions in both Section B and Section C. It is important that students develop each of the assessment objectives equally, so they can effectively address the demands of all three in an examination setting.

The responses seen in Section C appeared to suggest that a significant minority of students had minimal, if any, practical experience of carrying out psychological research. Notable areas of weakness included the use of the sign test and how to formulate hypotheses. Students often did not understand how to apply their knowledge of these to a novel situation. It is important that students gain such practical experience, so they understand these concepts fully and can then apply them in an examination setting.

Section A Approaches in Psychology

Question 1

There were some detailed and accurate responses to this question. However, other responses simply involved a general description of the structure of the peripheral nervous system rather than clearly focusing on the functions that 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 2

This question was generally answered well, with many students producing Level 2 responses. However, some answers did not focus on the question and offered little more than a description of genotype and/or phenotype without applying this knowledge to the stimulus material. Additionally, there was some confusion between the two terms. Some students appeared to lack a sound understanding of phenotype in particular and so were unable to effectively apply this to the stimulus material.

Question 3

Many students appeared to have a sound knowledge of the endocrine system and were able to effectively explain the functions of two glands. As adrenaline is named on the specification, many students understandably chose the adrenal gland as one of their choices and focused upon its function in the fight or flight response. However, some students appeared to confuse the role of the

adrenal gland (and the hormones it produces) and the role of the sympathetic nervous system. It is important that they understand the functional differences of these in the fight or flight response.

Question 4

This question appeared to discriminate well between students, with a full range of responses awarded. However, there was a minority of students who described and evaluated cognitive explanations and/or treatments of depression rather than the cognitive approach in general and thus performed poorly.

Description of the cognitive approach was varied with some accurate and detailed responses. Of these, some students described a wide range of assumptions in less detail whilst other students picked two or three and went into greater depth. However, many other responses contained little accurate description, and in a significant minority, there was confusion with learning approaches or the biological approach. There was a significant minority of students who simply described the cognitive approach and did not offer any evaluation.

Many students appeared to have some knowledge of the strengths and limitations of the cognitive approach and were able to give some evaluation. However, many of these points were brief and undeveloped and thus were not used effectively; a requirement for a Level 3 or 4 response. Students appear to be making similar mistakes as previous cohorts and it is recommended that they read examiner reports, to learn from these.

A significant minority of students still confuse the methods used by an approach with the approach itself. For example, in the cognitive approach, although many of the methods used are objective, the approach itself is not. This is because a significant proportion of it is based upon inference. If students chose a methodological point as a strength or limitation, it is important that they explain how this is a strength or limitation for the approach itself. Students also continue to write inaccurate statements regarding an approach ignoring other approaches. For example, the cognitive approach does not ignore environment or biology as both are involved in the formation of schemata. Students need to moderate their language and explain how the cognitive approach focuses on information processing and mental processes and underemphasises the role of the environment and/or biology.

Section B Psychopathology

Question 5

Disappointingly, little over half of the students were able to correctly answer this multiple-choice question. It is important that students learn a variety of behavioural, cognitive and emotional characteristics for phobias, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Question 6.1

Most students were able to accurately outline two definitions of abnormality. Many were also able to apply their chosen definitions to the statements in the stimulus material. The mean as a percentage of the maximum mark for this question was around 60%. However, some students simply named two definitions rather than outline them and thus did not address the demands of the question. Other students failed to apply their definitions or simply wrote vague comments such as 'shown in statement A.' Students needed to explain why some content in one of the statements was an example of a particular definition of abnormality.

Question 6.2

This question was generally answered well, suggesting that many students were able to evaluate one definition of abnormality clearly and coherently. Some students clearly explained one point in detail whilst others explained two (or more) points in less detail. It is important that students explicitly identify which definition of abnormality they are evaluating, as there were some responses where this was unclear. Additionally, a minority of students simply described a definition of abnormality and were awarded zero marks as they had failed to address the demands of the question.

Question 6.3

Many students were able to at least give some reasoning as to why conducting a peer review could improve psychological research, and thus were awarded some marks. However, some students simply described the process of a peer review, whilst others appeared to have no understanding of the purpose of peer review. Many students focused upon checking for errors and making subsequent improvements, but few could offer and explain any other reasons for conducting a peer review. It is important that students can identify and explain several reasons why peer reviews are conducted.

Question 7

Many students were able to give some description of one biological explanation for OCD, but the detail and accuracy of responses varied significantly. Some students clearly had detailed and thorough knowledge and were able to skilfully combine knowledge of genetics and neural explanations into one coherent explanation. Indeed, some students wrote excessively long responses, 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. However, other students appeared to have little, if any, knowledge. A significant minority of students could say little more than 'OCD is passed down through genes'.

Question 8

A wide range of responses to this question were seen, but most students were unable to produce level 3 or 4 answers. Most responses demonstrated some knowledge of CBT, but many lacked sufficient detail. Many students attempted some evaluation but, as with question 4, few were able to explain their points to make them effective. Many responses did not focus on the use of CBT to treat depression and thus did not fully address the demands of the question. It is important that students focus their answers upon this, especially in their evaluation.

Section C Research Methods**Question 9**

This question was generally answered very well, and it was clear from responses seen that many students appeared to have some understanding of an aim and were able to write a suitable aim for the study. The mean as a percentage of the maximum mark for this question was around 75%. There was some confusion with research questions and/or hypotheses, whilst other students struggled to articulate what is meant by an aim. Additionally, a small minority of students only answered half the question, either just stating what is meant by an aim or just writing an aim for the study. It is important for students to remember that they must address all the demands of the question in their response.

Question 10

Most students appeared to have little, if any, knowledge of the sign test and thus could not access any marks on this question. The mean as a percentage of the maximum mark for this question was less than 20%. Of those who did appear to have some knowledge, some could only give one reason whilst others failed to apply their reasoning to the study. Very few students were able to give two reasons of why the sign test was appropriate to use in the study with reference to the study itself. This question appeared to demonstrate a general lack of understanding of the sign test and specifically when it should be used.

Question 11

As with question 10, this question seemed to demonstrate a lack of knowledge and understanding of the sign test and specifically its calculation. Most students were awarded zero marks and appeared to have no understanding of how to calculate 'S'. The mean as a percentage of the maximum mark for this question was around 25%. A minority were able to calculate 'S' correctly but only some of these students fully explained how they did so, thus many did not fully address the demands of the question. It is clear from both this question and question 10, that the sign test needs to be an area of focus for students as 'when to use the sign test' and 'calculation of the sign test' are explicit on the specification.

Question 12

Many students could articulate some explanation of how the psychologist could carry out a pilot study. However, some students did not fully understand the question and instead explained why they should conduct a pilot study rather than how to conduct one. Many students were able to explain some methodology, but others failed to apply it to the study and simply wrote generic statements about 'carrying it out beforehand with a smaller number of participants'. It is important to remind students to ensure they fully apply their response to the stimulus material where this a requirement of the question.

Question 13

There were many full mark responses to this question. Most students clearly demonstrated an understanding of when directional and non-directional hypotheses should be used. The mean as a percentage of the maximum mark for this question was around 60%. Some students were not awarded the explanation mark as they simply wrote statements such as 'because there is previous research'. This is not sufficient explanation because this research could be conflicting and students need to be clear here by explicitly stating what the previous research showed.

Question 14

It appears that many students do not seem to have the skills to enable them to write an operationalised experimental hypothesis. The mean as a percentage of the maximum mark for this question was less than 20%. There were many errors made in the responses to this question ranging from some students writing either non-directional or correlational hypotheses, to some writing aims or research questions. Other responses identified an incorrect dependent variable (such as the number of mathematical problems solved) or omitted one of the conditions of the IV and thus were not awarded any marks. When students did write a directional experimental hypothesis, it was often poorly expressed and the independent and/or dependent variable was not operationalised. Common errors included omitting 'correctly' from the dependent variable, or confusing the two conditions of the independent variable in the follow-up study with those in the original study. As in question 4,

students appear to be making similar mistakes as previous cohorts and it is recommended that they read examiner reports, to learn from these. It is also 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 15

Many students were able to identify an appropriate extraneous variable and give a practical description of how it could be controlled. However, fewer students could explain why it should be controlled. They wrote vague statements about 'affecting the results', rather than explicitly explaining how the variable could affect the time taken to correctly complete the mathematical problems. A significant minority of students did not understand that this was a repeated measures design and gave individual differences/participant variables which were almost always incorrect.

Question 16

Most students were able to engage with the demands of this question and achieve at least one mark. Most students demonstrated the concept of randomisation of names either through the hat method or random number generator. Fewer students were able to put this into context to the follow-up study. Many omitted the fact that the psychologist would need a list of all the students' names at the university, whilst others did not include the selection of twenty names to use as the sample. It is important for students to ensure that they fully apply their response to the stimulus material where this is a requirement of the question.

Question 17

Many students were able to give some explanation of one problem with random sampling, but as with previous questions, many failed to apply their answer to the follow-up study and thus did not fully address the demands of the question. Most students explained a possible problem with representation, but often these were generic statements that were not explicitly about the follow-up study. As with previous questions, it is imperative that students fully apply their response to the stimulus material where this is a requirement of the question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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