



**General Certificate of Education**

**Psychology 1181**

*Specification A*

**Unit 1 (PSYA1) Cognitive Psychology,  
Developmental Psychology  
and Research Methods**

**Report on the Examination**

*2009 examination - June series*

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# PSYA1 Cognitive Psychology, Developmental Psychology and Research Methods

## *General*

One of the most significant changes to the AS exams is that they are much less predictable. This change was made following the recommendation of QCA, which was to move away from the formulaic structure of questions with a set number of marks in a conventional format. This means that candidates now need to read the question carefully and give themselves much more time to think about the specific requirements of each question. Skills that they now need to show are their ability to select the most relevant information and to apply their knowledge. It is a very different set of skills from the previous somewhat rote-learned approach, which was a feature of the old specification. The new exam has been designed to allow time for these very important skills. Candidates who think about which part of the specification is relevant, who apply their knowledge appropriately and who can write accurate and concise answers, will do very well. Often, time spent thinking and planning is extremely beneficial; sometimes when it comes to writing “less is more”.

Now that candidates write their answers in the booklet, they should use the space provided to judge the length of answer required. Candidates (and teachers) should be reassured that it is perfectly possible to gain full marks in the space provided, often without the need to use the extra space. So if only three or four lines have been provided, then this is all that would be expected. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, an accurate and concise answer can gain just as many marks as one that uses the extra space but is less focused. It is possible that many candidates who are writing too much probably do not read the question carefully. It is clear that some very well informed candidates are not gaining full marks because they are simply not doing what the question asks.

Finally, it is worth removing the myth, surrounding the use of additional pages, that seems to have developed. The myth is that if a candidate uses additional pages then a senior examiner will mark their paper. This is most definitely not the case. Unless candidates have large handwriting, or have made a mistake and crossed out work in the booklet and need to write their answer again, they should not **need** to use the additional sheets. If a candidate has a few words that do not fit onto the lines in the booklet, it is worth writing them in the area immediately below the lined space. Examiners can see this, so there is no need to use an additional page for one or two words!

## **Section A: Cognitive Psychology and Research Methods**

### ***Question 1***

This question was answered well by most candidates. The majority of candidates could identify two specific techniques and describe them adequately. Examples were often used effectively. Some candidates identified relevant features of the enhanced cognitive interview but failed to give the elaboration needed for full marks.

### ***Question 2***

- (a) This question was answered well when candidates knew what the working memory model was, and were able to apply their knowledge effectively. Some candidates wasted time by giving a detailed description of the model, which was not required.

- (b) Most candidates selected appropriate tasks and gained full marks. Occasionally candidates' answers could not receive credit, eg listening to music for a verbal task.

### **Question 3**

- (a) Some candidates failed to recognise the term 'central tendency'. Others identified a correct measure but struggled to identify why the measure they had chosen should be used. A number of candidates explained how to calculate the measure or simply defined it, which could not receive credit. Candidates who had been well prepared for this question gave clear and concise answers such as "The median, because it is unaffected by outliers."
- (b) Sampling method was generally well understood and many candidates were able to apply the method to teachers in the school. Candidates who had not read the stimulus material carefully enough suggested ways to obtain a volunteer sample which would not have been appropriate for this specific example. Others confused volunteer with opportunity or random sampling.
- (c) & (d) A number of candidates had not read the study closely enough and selected possible extraneous variables to do with the word lists. Good answers often cited individual differences or environmental variables in question 3(c) and were then able to explain how to control this in question 3(d), eg matched pairs or keeping noise, temperature constant/controlled.
- (e) (i) Candidates sometimes gave lengthy descriptions of an appropriate memory strategy and wrote too much here. All that this question required was identification of a memory improvement strategy together with some elaboration.
- (ii) Most candidates were able to select an experimental design, although some candidates were confused and suggested laboratory or field.
- (iii) This was a challenging question for candidates and many failed to achieve two marks. Most had some idea about independent and dependent variables but failed to operationalise both. Some candidates did not realise the question related to the further experiment and went back to the original stem – organised and random conditions.

### **Question 4**

There were some excellent answers to this question. Candidates generally knew one or more relevant studies and were able to give detailed and accurate descriptions. This often included reference to the type of experiment used. Many candidates were also able to make good use of theory, eg Yerkes-Dodson law, weapon focus, etc. Evaluation was often better when competing findings were discussed, rather than when it was solely based on judgements of reliability, validity and ethical issues in the research. Some candidates focused on irrelevant Loftus research, schema theory and age, with no reference to anxiety.

## **Section B: Developmental Psychology and Research Methods**

### **Question 5**

- (a) Most candidates were able to identify this as a positive correlation. There were very few incorrect answers.

- (b) Candidates found it harder to identify a strength than a weakness. Good answers often explained the advantage when it would be unethical to manipulate variables. For the weakness most candidates focused on causality issues.
- (c) A few candidates misread the question and gave characteristics of children who go to day care. However, the majority were able to outline two clear characteristics. A few candidates listed lots of relevant characteristics, but provided no elaboration on any of them.
- (d) There were some anecdotal answers to this question. Others clearly related to day care research but did not make specific reference to peer relations. However, many candidates were clearly well prepared and were able to provide a well focused and accurate answer. A number of candidates went on to additional pages unnecessarily as the material in the space provided had gained full marks.

### **Question 6**

- (a) This question was answered very well.
- (b) Most candidates followed the instruction to tick two boxes. Those who changed their mind were awarded marks as long as they made it clear which two boxes they had intended to tick. A few ticked all four boxes and received no credit.

### **Question 7**

- (a) This question was well answered when candidates focused on two or three possible negative effects which could apply to Luca. Sometimes effects were just listed with no elaboration. In other cases, research into effects of institutionalisation was described with insufficient application to Luca.
- (b) Some candidates got confused with longitudinal and observational research and gave answers that did not apply to a case study at all.
- (c) Most responses were based on Robertson's work or Bowlby's 44 juvenile thieves. Some candidates scored no marks because they selected research clearly related to privation, such as Genie, and made no attempt to refer to disruption of attachment.

### **Question 8**

- (a) This question was usually well done by candidates who understood the term 'demand characteristics'. Some candidates clearly did not know what the term meant.
- (b) It was pleasing to find candidates who did exactly what the question asked and identified differences between the behaviour of securely attached and insecurely attached infants. A number of candidates ignored the requirement of identifying differences and simply listed characteristics of the children.

## **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website: <http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html>.