



General Certificate of Education

Psychology 1181

Specification A

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

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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

General

Most candidates appeared to have plenty of time to answer all the questions on this paper. Where answer spaces were left blank, it seemed to reflect lack of knowledge rather than lack of time.

Although the quality of written communication is formally assessed in the long answer question, it clearly benefits candidates if they can express themselves clearly and can use psychological terminology effectively. Where candidates were asked to interpret something eg 3(d), or provide an explanation eg 5(c), their marks were often limited by failure to express their thoughts clearly.

There seemed to be a lot of confusion about the use of the terms: accurate, valid and reliable. Some candidates thought a case study would produce results that were not accurate or valid. Other candidates suggested findings were not reliable if they were carried out in a laboratory rather than the real world. It is important for candidates to understand and use these basic concepts appropriately.

Candidates should be encouraged to practise writing succinct and clear answers to questions.

Section A Cognitive Psychology and Research Methods

Question 1

This was a straightforward question which most candidates answered correctly.

Question 2

Most candidates knew this area well, but unfortunately this was not always reflected in their marks. The best answers concentrated on two or three techniques and describing at least one in reasonable detail, often giving examples to clarify how the strategy would operate in practice. Some candidates tried to mention every technique they could remember and therefore none were described well. There did seem to be genuine confusion about the peg word technique. If this is taught, it might be worth demonstrating this method using a list of words. Teachers might remind students that the plural refers to two or more not every possible technique/method.

Question 3

- (a) It was disappointing to see such poor understanding of how to write a non-directional hypothesis for an experiment. Common pitfalls were to write a directional hypothesis, a null hypothesis or a correlational hypothesis. Some candidates did not appear to understand the conventions of hypothesis writing at all and simply wrote a statement such as: 'They wanted to test memory span' or 'The capacity of STM is 7+ or – 2'.
- (b) Some candidates clearly understood why the researchers had chosen an independent groups design and were able to offer a full answer worth 2 marks. However, this question was not answered well by many candidates. Candidates needed to apply their

knowledge to answer this question but, unfortunately, many candidates simply gave a rote-learned advantage of an independent design without thinking about the context of this particular experiment where the problem of order effects or demand characteristics did not apply.

- (c) Another straightforward question generally answered correctly.
- (d) There were some full-mark answers where candidates demonstrated good understanding and were able to comment on several aspects of the graph. However, many candidates were only able to make a single point ie that adults generally had better recall than children and then 'padded out' their answer with repetition of the same point. A common pitfall was for candidates to state that 6 was the maximum number of digits recalled by children (or 7 by adults) instead of realising that this was the modal score. This was surprising as they had often successfully identified the modes in 3(c). Few candidates seemed to understand how to measure the range by looking at the information on the graph. It appears that candidates could benefit from more practical experience of interpreting graphs.
- (e) Most candidates answered this well and were able to refer to earlier research by Miller or Jacobs which had demonstrated the limited capacity of STM (ie 7+/- 2 items or a range between 5 and 9 items). A minority confused capacity with duration and tried to answer in terms of the Peterson and Peterson study.

Question 4

Many candidates who described the Brown-Peterson technique showed excellent understanding and provided a clear, appropriately detailed answer which addressed the three requirements of the question ie an outline of the stimulus materials, what the participants were asked to do and how duration was measured. Where such candidates failed to access full marks, it was usually because they had not made one of these aspects clear. Detail on what participants were asked to do was often better reported than exact details of stimulus material (eg trigrams were sometimes referred to as words or numbers). However, a significant minority of candidates did not achieve any marks on this question. Some simply stated what the duration of STM is thought to be while others did not seem to understand the term duration and described studies of capacity or encoding. A minority of candidates referred to the duration of the phonological loop and showed good understanding of the word length effect.

Question 5

- (a) This question was generally answered well with candidates showing good understanding of the techniques used in the cognitive interview. Although candidates could score full marks by giving outlines that could relate to the event in the stem. It would generally be beneficial to candidates if they could engage explicitly with the stem in questions requiring application of knowledge.

A few candidates showed a surprising lack of knowledge about the cognitive interview and either left the space in the answer booklet blank or wrote about the use of misleading questions, as in 'how fast was the shuttle going when it exploded, broke up etc'.

- (b) There were some impressive responses where candidates effectively used a range of research evidence on the effects of anxiety on EWT to answer this question. Some candidates, however, failed to access top marks because they simply described

research without applying their knowledge to this particular event. This was particularly true when candidates just described the Loftus 'weapon focus' study without making it relevant to the shuttle explosion and, in some cases, without even explaining its relevance to anxiety.

- (c) This question was generally answered well. Most candidates focused on the higher ecological validity provided by real-world studies. Weaker answers simply made this point without any elaboration. Better answers explained why a real-world setting would provide more ecological validity – usually in terms of heightened anxiety and/or consequentiality associated with real-life events. The best answers made reference to EWT studies rather than simply stating the general advantages of real-life studies over laboratory studies.

Section B Developmental Psychology and Research Methods

Question 6

- (a) Most candidates scored two marks here, but a few responses were so limited and vague (eg sad, not sociable) it was not possible to credit them. It would be in the candidates' interest to try to clearly express what they wish to say.
- (b) Most candidates understood that this was a volunteer/self-selected sample and many of these went on to explain a relevant weakness. The most commonly offered was the problem of generalising from a self-selected sample. Some candidates lost a mark by confusing a volunteer sample with an opportunity or random sample. However, they could still gain marks by explaining an appropriate weakness. A surprising number of candidates did not understand what was meant by a sample and identified the method (questionnaire) instead. Unfortunately, this meant that they usually got no marks at all.
- (c) This was generally answered well with the most successful answers focusing on issues of confidentiality and protection of harm. There were some very thoughtful responses and it was pleasing to see that some candidates could respond by giving serious consideration to ethical issues. Informed consent was a perfectly acceptable issue but candidates who used this often offered a weak way of dealing with it eg 'informed consent was an issue so the researchers would have had to ask them to give their consent'. A surprising number of candidates did not seem to understand what was meant by an ethical issue and wrote about problems of sampling instead.
- (d) Many candidates were able to provide an appropriate advantage and a disadvantage of a questionnaire and to explain it. The main pitfall here was to describe a strength or weakness of a questionnaire without explaining it in comparison to an interview. For example 'people could answer dishonestly because of social desirability bias'. This could equally be true of an interview. Better answers included the explanation that it could be easier to lie on a questionnaire because the respondent is not face-to-face with the researcher. There were some very brief answers such as 'it's quick and easy'. Candidates who have tried to construct questionnaires might realise that while they may be quick to administer they are far from easy to construct.

Question 7

- (a) There were some very good answers to this question but poor expression in some answers obscured meaning. A number of candidates simply described observational studies rather than offering an advantage.
- (b) Again, there were some very good answers. It was not necessary to remember exact percentages of securely and insecurely attached children in the various studies and some excellent full-mark answers contained no such figures. What distinguished good answers was a clear understanding of the pattern of results in such studies ie that secure attachment was the most common type in all the countries and that it was in the proportion of the different types of insecurely attached infants that the differences occurred. Another good point was to include the fact that there was often more variation within cultures than between them. Weaker answers showed real confusion about the effects of individualistic versus collectivist cultures. Some candidates did not address cultural variations but simply described studies eg of kibbutzim in Israel without making them relevant to attachment.

Question 8

- (a) Most candidates scored full marks for this question although a few confused day care with residential institutions such as orphanages.
- (b) Although there were some good answers to this question, many were rather vague, eg 'it should be of good quality' with no elaboration on what would contribute to 'good quality'. Another pitfall was to identify a feature with no clear indication as to why this would be desirable eg 'lots of other children'. Some answers contained quite accurate and detailed accounts of studies which have investigated the effects of various types of day care but were not couched in the form of advice to Ali's parents. For example, studies were cited which suggested that children could become aggressive as a result of long hours in nursery but no advice about how to avoid this was included. Many candidates failed to notice that Ali's parents both worked full-time and suggested that Ali should not be in day care for longer than 20 hours per week. Some candidates did not focus on the question at all but gave their own (usually negative) views on what they thought about full time day care.

Question 9

Some candidates managed to select appropriate studies and then describe and evaluate them effectively. Hodges and Tizard or Rutter's Romanian orphans were often used to good effect, especially when candidates were aware of the difference in quality of care. However, many candidates confused institutional care with day care. Other answers became side-tracked by discussing Bowlby's maternal deprivation hypothesis without using this material in the context of effects of institutional care. Another common pitfall was to write copiously about privation eg Genie or the Koluchova twins, again without making it relevant to institutional care.

The Robertsons' study of 'John' was creditworthy and was most effectively used where candidates wrote about the initial disruption of attachment which can occur in an institutional setting. Perhaps it was unjust of some candidates to say that the Robertsons, in their study, wilfully neglected to end John's distress. The Robertsons were explicit that they were not in a position to influence John's care. They were aware of his distress and they certainly did not cause him distress in order to make their film.

Fewer candidates than in previous examination series were able to accurately present reasonably detailed description of relevant research. Evaluation tended to be formulaic and repetitive for each study eg this research has ecological validity, rather than engaging with the particular features of the study.

In this question the length of the answer was no indication of quality.

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>