



General Certificate of Education

Psychology 1181

Specification A

**Unit 2 (PSYA2) Biological Psychology,
Social Psychology and Individual
Differences**

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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Unit 2: (PSYA2) Biological Psychology, Social Psychology and Individual Differences

General

Many of the general comments given in this report were also covered last summer. Unfortunately, it appears as if some centres are not receiving the information.

One of the main issues is the extent to which candidates can select theories and research studies that are relevant to the question asked and the degree to which they can engage with the opportunity to comment and evaluate. In terms of selection issues, sometimes 'less is more'. Teachers could consider covering less material, but make sure that their candidates understand how the material can be used to address the specific requirements of each question. It appears that some teachers are still focusing on the delivery of large swathes of knowledge, but not developing the ability to use that knowledge. This approach results in many candidates being able to reproduce very detailed and very sound description of psychological knowledge. However, what they seem unable to do, especially with novel situations, is demonstrate that they really understand it and can apply their knowledge to address the specific requirement of the question. This is a real shame and leads to the underperformance of what could be very good students of psychology.

The other main issue relates to examination skills. Candidates should be aware that all the questions are written very carefully, the words are chosen specifically to elicit certain information and to allow candidates to demonstrate certain skills. It was obvious that a significant number of candidates do not appreciate this and assume that simply writing everything they know about a topic will suffice. Quite clearly this is not an appropriate approach and not following the specific requirements of a question can result in no marks being awarded. Question 10(b) is a good example of this where candidates ignored the word 'evaluate'.

One of the reasons why so many candidates used the additional pages was due to their inability to write concisely. The space provided for an answer is a good guide to how much a candidate needs to write. 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 given, then this is all that would be expected for the allocated marks. 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. 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. Time spent thinking and planning is extremely beneficial.

Section A Biological Psychology

Question 1

- (a) A fairly straightforward question and most candidates were able to access full marks.
- (b) While many candidates were able to identify a limitation, the most common being type of sample, it seemed as if many then forgot to suggest a way of correcting it. A common mistake was criticising the size of the sample; candidates appear to have little knowledge of the expected size of the sample in good psychological research.
- (c) Given that problem-focused coping is on the specification and candidates could even expect to have to write a long answer to this question, it was surprising how little candidates actually knew about it. Some also appeared to misread the question and gave a **limitation** of this method of coping with stress, rather than outlining what the approach is.

Question 2

- (a) Clearly candidates knew how to describe Type A personality but the skill of applying this knowledge and demonstrating an understanding of why this links to the negative effects of stress was beyond many. This is a classic example of how the assessment of learning has changed on the new specification; but some centres do not seem to be aware of this (perhaps the same centres who do not have access to these reports?) Students could describe in detail the personality type but were not in the possession of the skills to apply their knowledge; candidates rarely explained the link between Type A personality and the negative effects.
- (b) Most candidates could identify a relevant method of measuring personality type eg questionnaire, interview etc. A significant number were able to offer excellent detailed answers of the exact methods that Friedman and Rosenman used, eg interviews where they were frustrated/interrupted to measure hostility.

Question 3

Some candidates produced excellent answers, although the AO1 tended to be of much higher quality than the AO2. Many candidates could describe in detail the studies, but struggled with the commentary, often resorting to cook book evaluation, which was often repetitive, such as 'it only used students so you can't generalise'. Candidates should also think before they criticise a study on ethical grounds; Cohen did obtain full informed consent from the volunteers and they certainly knew that there was the risk of getting a cold. Similarly, the common cold is, for the most part, not a life-threatening illness!

The other difficulty for many candidates was selecting the appropriate material, many seemed to think that any study on stress would be relevant, so they described in considerable detail studies that gained no credit (eg workplace stress, personality, SRRS etc.) Consequently their commentary gained no credit either. However, there were some very well informed answers, which used Kiecolt-Glaser's research effectively, often making the useful distinction between chronic and acute stress. Some candidates were also able to consider research, which suggested that sometimes stress could have a positive effect on the immune system.

Brady's monkey study is NOT a study into the relationship between stress and the immune system. This study usually confuses candidates, as demonstrated in the answers to this question.

Section B Social Psychology

Question 4

- (a) Generally very well answered, although some candidates did not fully understand that in fact Milgram **did** give his participants the right to withdraw at the very start of the experiment. However, he made it extremely difficult for them to do so throughout the study.
- (b) Most candidates could offer a way to resolve the ethical issues eg debriefing and some could then go on to elaborate this by saying how it would be done. Some candidates just repeated themselves rather than explain how to resolve the ethical issue.

Question 5

It was pleasing to see the increase in knowledge in this year's cohort as the vast majority of candidates could coherently explain the social change. Candidates were using their knowledge more effectively to engage with the stimulus material to explain how this social change had occurred. Some really effective answers went down the legitimate authority route and used graduated commitment as an explanation of the gradual changes in smoking behaviour. Others considered the role of a consistent and persuasive minority, the snowball effect and the gradual conversion of the majority.

Unfortunately, some candidates became so involved in the issue of smoking that they completely forgot to include any reference to social influence.

Question 6

Answers usually showed a good knowledge of LOC but again (similar to question 2) candidates struggled to move beyond a description of the LOC and a simple statement that internal or external control was associated with less or more independent behaviour. These questions separate out the candidates from centres where there is an over emphasis on description (traditional method) from those who have a real understanding of why this would make someone more or less likely to engage in independent behaviour.

Some candidates use the terms high/low instead of internal/external and thus gain no marks.

Question 7

The majority of candidates were able to correctly select A and C.

Question 8

This was one of the most disappointing questions to mark, given how simple and straightforward a question it was. Candidates seemed to struggle to present 4 marks worth of straight description of why we conform. If the question had been a short answer one: give two explanations why people conform, it is likely that the vast majority of candidates would score full marks. Many candidates were absolutely determined to describe in incredible detail the conformity studies, with absolutely no reference to the question. Clearly studies could have been made relevant as commentary, supporting the types of conformity, but they were seldom used effectively.

The more successful answers started with NSI and linked it to compliance, and then ISI linking it to identification/internalisation and so why people conform was clearly stated.

Section C Individual Differences

Question 9

Both parts of this question were generally answered well. However, some of the examples candidates used to illustrate their answers often lacked any connection to psychopathology. Similarly the use of 'naked tribes in Africa' as an example shows very limited understanding.

Question 10

- (a) Most candidates were able to provide good detail on the psychodynamic approach, but they failed to access top marks by not linking the features to psychopathology.
- (b) This question is a good illustration of the point made at the start of the report, ie the importance of reading the question carefully. Far too many candidates simply ignored the key word **evaluate**, they simply described the approach. Such answers received no credit.

Question 11

- (a) This question was generally answered well, with some very detailed responses offering a wide variety of information, such as procedure details of ECT, side effects, success rates, relapse rates, etc.
- (b) Many candidates launched straight into their SIT answer, without any attempt to make it relevant to the question. This is a point that has been raised before in a previous report. While SIT is a type of CBT, it is used to help deal with stress. Unless candidates modified their knowledge to make it relevant to depression, they gained few if any marks. It is a risky strategy to assume SIT can be also used to address mental disorders. The other pitfall for many candidates was for them to describe the cognitive approach and the philosophy behind CBT, but then failing to explain how this therapy would be carried out. It was as if candidates did not understand what the question required; ie the **process** of how CBT is carried out.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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