



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2011**

**Psychology A**

**PSYA1**

**(Specification 2180)**

**Unit 1: Cognitive Psychology, Developmental  
Psychology and Research Methods**

***Report on the Examination***

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

### ***General***

Most candidates were well prepared for this exam and made a genuine attempt to answer all the questions. When candidates failed to score marks, despite writing fairly extensive answers, it was generally because they had misunderstood the question requirements, or had insufficient relevant knowledge.

Candidates are instructed to answer the questions in the spaces provided. This means they should write on the lines, including extra space, for each question. There should be enough space for the length of answer required. However, candidates who wish to write more should continue on additional sheets rather than using the blank spaces in the booklet.

There was a problem with the clarity and size of handwriting in a small number of scripts. In some cases the writing was also so faint that it was extremely difficult, and occasionally impossible, to read.

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

#### **Question 1**

- (a) Most candidates answered this question correctly.
- (b) Candidates who could summarise information and write concisely, produced excellent answers in the space available. Others had difficulty producing a concise answer and spent more time than was needed, writing a long answer which continued onto an extra page. Some candidates were not able to correctly spell the basic components of the model obscuring the clarity of their answer. A few candidates produced an irrelevant answer about the multi-store model.
- (c) Focus was mostly given to the central executive and the difficulty of investigating its exact function. A few candidates are still saying this model does not explain long term memory, which is not creditworthy.

#### **Question 2**

- (a) Many candidates produced an operationalised directional hypothesis. Sometimes the dependent variable in the hypothesis was not operationalised, resulting in less than full marks.
- (b) Most responses were appropriate with candidates showing a good understanding of independent groups design.
- (c) Strength: many responses focused appropriately on the absence of different types of order effects or the limitation of demand characteristics relative to a repeated measures design. Answers which elaborated a relevant strength gained full marks.

Limitation: Good answers often referred to examples of individual differences between the groups affecting reliability. Appropriate elaboration was often evident.

Lack of clarity of expression sometimes obscured the point being made.

- (d) A substantial number of candidates were able to explain the purpose of a pilot study, usually focusing on usefulness for checking and amending aspects of the procedure before the main study. The opportunity to observe and address unexpected ethical issues was also a creditworthy point. Candidates were particularly successful when they used an example to illustrate their answer for example to check the clarity of the pictures. Answers which merely outlined what a pilot study is were not credited.
- (e) Responses to this question divided clearly between those who understood and could apply the concept of standard deviation and those who did not understand the concept and hence could not interpret the numbers in the table. A common wrong answer was to claim that the memory improvement group did 'better', presumably because 2.8 is higher than 0.29.
- (f) There were some excellent answers using method of loci, narrative chaining and acronyms. A few candidates competently outlined peg word system. Some responses focused on how the strategy worked but failed to address how the strategy would apply to the recall of the required information. Candidates who used rehearsal or elaborative rehearsal of information tended to have little to say and failed to write a reasonably detailed answer. There were a few answers which were not appropriate for this experiment and these attracted no marks for example using chunking as a strategy for remembering ten pictures.

### Question 3

This was a straightforward question which produced some sound knowledge of relevant research and some thoughtful commentary on methodological issues and the practical applications of research. However, in general this question was not answered well. Given that age is one of only two factors affecting eyewitness testimony mentioned on the specification and the wealth of evidence candidates could use, this was disappointing. Some candidates may have produced a more effective answer if they had concentrated on fewer studies and reported them accurately and in reasonable detail. Too many answers were very muddled in respect of the procedures and findings of appropriate (and sometimes inappropriate) research. In weaker responses, commentary was often restricted to general comments about ethical issues and the validity of lab experiments in general. Material focused on anxiety and reconstructive memory (but not age and eyewitness testimony) was not creditworthy. Many answers were limited to general stereotypical, unsupported assertions to the effect that children have poor memories and that the memories of old people deteriorate so much that they cannot remember anything. It was hard to discern any identifiable 'research' in such answers. Other candidates mentioned older and younger adults or children but again were vague and were hard to link to research evidence in the area. Better answers included two or more pieces of identifiable research evidence that was described clearly. There were a few answers that evaluated the research well but most seemed to be following a formula which led to some very spurious or irrelevant points. For example a number of answers focused on ethics but mostly in a very uninformed way (eg the Poole and Lindsay study causing psychological harm to children because they had been deceived). Many candidates stated that studies would need informed consent from parents - gaining little credit as obviously the researchers would have done so.

A number of candidates used the Bahrick study of very long term memory as evidence of decline of memory for faces in old age, but this is not evidence of memory decline. Bahrick was studying memory decline over time not age (eg 15 and 48 year periods). The fact that someone in their sixties cannot remember their high school classmates is not a factor of age but of time. They may well be just as good eyewitnesses as anyone in their twenties.

Another common type of answer focused on various early studies by Loftus (eg Loftus and Palmer or Loftus and Zanni). Since neither was concerned with age they gained no credit. A few better informed candidates did contrast the findings that children are susceptible to leading questions with the Loftus findings on undergraduates. Such answers were typically very good reflecting on the ability to use their knowledge to address the specific requirements of the question.

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

### **Question 4**

- (a) Many responses were appropriate with candidates being able to choose insecure attachment and then explain this in the context of the stem material. Some candidates failed to apply their answer to the stem material.
- (b) Many responses were appropriate and applied the Strange Situation methodology to the stem material. Some less effective responses described the Strange Situation sequence without indicating in some way that observation was required. Some candidates wrote far more than is required for 3 marks.

### **Question 5**

Candidates who scored well in this question could provide some reasonable detail about what identifiable research has shown. Some responses were very muddled where the candidate had failed to learn even a small amount of information and report it accurately. Vague answers about collectivist and individualistic cultures were difficult to credit. Others that gained little credit tended to be too general and focused on upbringing rather than attachment (Japanese mothers rarely leave their children etc).

### **Question 6**

- (a) There were many appropriate suggestions for maintaining confidentiality, such as using pseudonyms, avoiding using photographs and avoiding identifying the location of the case study participant and/or family. A few candidates did not seem to understand the term confidentiality as some answers were based on other ethical issues eg protection of participants from harm.
- (b) Most techniques identified were appropriate and there was some thoughtful elaboration related to the case study. Answers referring to the use of meta-analysis were not appropriate.
- (c) Many candidates scored at least two marks, usually by focusing on the uniqueness of a case study and the limited possibility for generalisation. A few candidates could elaborate on this whilst others considered a second factor such as the difficulty of verifying evidence from the past. Answers focusing on limitations due to the time involved in longitudinal research were not credited as many case studies are not longitudinal.

### **Question 7**

- (b) Candidates were required to identify and elaborate an appropriate methodology for measuring aggression. Many were able to do this.  
  
Unethical answers such as 'provoke the children and observe their response', did not gain credit.

- (c) By identifying the lack of causal inference in correlation and suggesting other relevant factors which may affect children's aggression, some candidates obtained full marks. Another appropriate route was to provide evidence from research to create a counterclaim. Trying to answer by using the scattergram was not a successful strategy as the question asks about causal inference and graph shows only the relationship between factors.

### **Question 8**

The most successful candidates were able to describe one or more studies, often Field and the EPPE project, and focus on the effects on peer relations. An accurate description of one relevant study would have been awarded full marks.

Less successful answers were very muddled about the studies and focused on aggression or attachment with no reference to peer relations. A few confused day care with institutional care.

### **Question 9**

In general, this question was not well answered. Many responses failed to outline learning theory as an explanation of attachment at anything beyond the most basic level. Descriptions of Pavlov's and Skinner's work with no reference to attachment did not in themselves gain credit as the question required candidates to outline learning theory as an explanation of attachment. A number of responses mistakenly referred to Bowlby's learning theory or made incorrect statements such as 'Learning theory proposes the ability to make attachments is innate'. Although candidates could potentially gain credit by using Harlow's (1959) study as a criticism of the learning theory of attachment, many candidates who used this study did not attempt to explain its critical role.

## **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>

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