



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

Psychology A

PSYA4

(Specification 2180)

**Unit 4: Psychopathology, Psychology in Action
and Research Methods**

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on **the Examination** are available from: aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2011 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

Unit 4: (PSYA4) Psychopathology, Psychology in Action and Research Methods

General

It was noticeable which centres had provided their candidates with opportunities to carry out practical work and which had not. Candidates who did have experience of designing and carrying out research were able to select and apply knowledge to the questions in this section, and in particular question 18, in a meaningful way.

There was evidence that many candidates had been prepared well for this examination. There were some impressive answers to Section A on Psychopathology with detailed and accurate AO1 and sustained and effective AO2/AO3. Examiners are looking for knowledge and understanding, and these remain the key to good marks.

Candidates continue to show less impressive ability on Section B, Psychology in Action. On this section, effective application of knowledge is essential for reasonable marks. Evidence suggests that many candidates do not read the questions carefully and do not think about what exactly is required to answer them. Centres should encourage candidates to take into consideration the number of marks awarded for questions in Section B when planning their answers.

Performance was variable on Section C, Research Methods with some candidates demonstrating a very good understanding indeed of the topic and of the use and interpretation of inferential statistics in question 26. Variation in performance on this section was often centre specific and seemed to reflect candidates' experience of planning and undertaking practical work. Some areas of research methods continue to remain problematic for many candidates notably hypothesis writing and validity.

Scripts were marked on paper this series however centres should still train candidates to present their answers clearly as this paper will be marked online in future. Some candidates did not number questions carefully and many ignored the instruction on the answer booklet to leave a two line space between answers this will be problematic for candidates when their scripts are marked online and centres should encourage candidates to adhere to the instructions provided on the answer booklet.

Section A Psychopathology

Candidates continue to demonstrate better understanding of knowledge (AO1) than evaluation (AO2/AO3) in this section. Examiners do not expect twice as much AO2/AO3 as AO1, but to reach the higher bands AO2/AO3 material must demonstrate clear understanding and a line of argument. Too many candidates are still relying on basic methodological evaluation of research studies, without bringing out the relevance for explanations or treatments when this is the focus of the question.

The most effective approach to evaluation was found in answers that focused on the findings of studies, and their relevance for explanations and treatments. This is the most fundamental aspect of how science works. Candidates should be dissuaded from presenting one line statements of evaluation: such statements are classed as basic or even rudimentary commentary and attract minimal credit.

Responses that referred to issues, debates and approaches at appropriate points and demonstrated clear understanding of their meaning and relevance gained credit but IDA is not a requirement in Section A. In many places, IDA had been largely rote learnt and were thrown in at regular intervals, with little regard for their relevance to the rest of the answer. The concept of free-will, in particular was almost always used inappropriately in this section. The concept of determinism was over-used, sometimes being mentioned several times in the same essay. Nature/nurture was slightly more successful.

Topic: Schizophrenia

Question 01

This was the most popular question attempted by over half of the cohort. Instances of partial performance were rare and many candidates considered three or even four relevant biological explanations of schizophrenia, the most common being genetics, biochemistry and neuroanatomy. Most candidates outlined the genetic explanation using research and were able to achieve reasonable AO1 marks by doing so. There were some impressive descriptions of the dopamine hypothesis, many including specific details relating to D2 receptors.

There were two main problems with AO2/AO3 in weaker candidates. Some focused on methodological evaluation of research studies without making the implications of their criticism clear in relation to the biological explanation presented (eg genetics). Many candidates attempted generic points on reductionism and determinism. Some weaker candidates covered three or more explanations which limited AO2/AO3 and the development and elaboration of argument. Many candidates did not follow a clear line of argument and this limited their marks.

Higher AO2/AO3 marks went to candidates who evaluated each explanation as they went through the essay. Those candidates who were able to consider the inter relationships between biological explanations (for example genetics and biochemistry) were also rewarded.

Topic: Depression

Question 02

Although this was a straightforward question, many candidates struggled to achieve reasonable AO1 marks and provide the level of depth and detail required. Unusually, a fair proportion of candidates achieved higher on AO2/AO3 than AO1 on this question. Most candidates focused their answers appropriately on drug therapy and ECT, with a small number of answers focusing on psychosurgery. Descriptions of drug treatments and ECT were often relatively superficial and sometimes inaccurate. Candidates who achieved top band AO1 were those who outlined specific modes of action of different anti-depressants or those who considered different modes of ECT (bilateral and unilateral) and more recent ECT based approaches.

Some candidates presented the underlying biological rationale for treatments, for example biochemical imbalances. In stronger candidates, this was explicitly linked to the effectiveness of treatments and was creditworthy. However, weaker candidates sometimes became sidetracked into explanations of depression without considering the implications for treatment. This received very limited credit.

Weaker candidates often struggled to get beyond the level and type of evaluation required at AS level. Many made claims (for example regarding side effects) that were imprecise and lacked elaboration or evidence. Generic evaluation could be seen in the weaker candidates such as 'this is deterministic/reductionist' with little justification of why. In better answers, evaluation was organised around three main areas, appropriateness, effectiveness and ethical issues. However, outcome studies were few and far between in question 02. Candidates should be encouraged to include outcomes data when discussing treatments on all topics for Section A.

Topic: Anxiety Disorders

Question 03

This was the least popular of the options in Section A. More answers focused on phobias than obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Question 03 (biological explanations) was answered better than question 04 (psychological explanations) by a considerable margin. The most important point to note on both questions 03 and 04 was over lengthy description. Candidates needed to spend longer on the AO2 evaluation for both questions on anxiety disorders.

Most candidates provided appropriate biological explanations often focusing on genetics and most were able to achieve at least reasonable AO1 marks. Some centres had prepared candidates to present extremely detailed answers focused on neuroanatomical causes of OCD. However some stronger candidates with a lot of knowledge provided long descriptions, candidates should be encouraged to think carefully about the level of depth and detail required for the number of marks available. Few candidates presented evolutionary explanations which was a pity as there is a large amount of accessible material particularly in relation to phobias. AO2/AO3 was most successful when relevant supporting studies were used effectively and selectively.

Question 04

Performance on question 04 was considerably weaker than question 03. The most common explanations for both types of anxiety disorder were based on the learning, psychodynamic and cognitive models. Whilst candidates could gain reasonable AO1 marks by outlining just one explanation, most presented two or even three explanations for their chosen disorder. With phobias, many candidates included lengthy descriptions of Little Hans and/or Little Albert, without these studies being used effectively to illustrate or to support the explanation. Weaker candidates seemed to have learned these studies without really appreciating their relevance to the underlying explanation.

As with question 03, AO2/AO3 commentary and evaluation was somewhat superficial and basic in the majority of cases. Candidates who cover psychodynamic explanations should be discouraged from presenting generic evaluation of Freudian psychology as these gains little credit.

Section B *Psychology in Action*

Candidates still need to be reminded that Section B is the applied section and they must be prepared to apply their knowledge to the demands of the question, rather than merely describe what they know. In order to do this, candidates must read questions very carefully. For example, question 07 asked for 'findings' and question 12 asked about 'effectiveness'. Many candidates ignored these words and often produced answers that failed to gain many marks.

Candidates should also be given clearer guidance on length and detail required in Section B answers. Mark allocations vary between different questions and a real problem for candidates was how much to write for questions worth 2, 5 or 10 marks. This resulted in some candidates writing far too much for a short question or sadly, not enough for a question which carried a substantial proportion of marks. Four or 5 mark questions do not require answers of over a page. Candidates need to allocate their time appropriately and it was apparent that many found this difficult.

Topic: Media Psychology

Question 05

This question was challenging for candidates and many did not appear to read the requirements in the question carefully. The question required candidates to suggest information to include in the leaflet and use research to justify the choice. The most common problem made by candidates was describing research with no attempt to apply it to the leaflet in the question. Some candidates presented far too much procedural detail of research studies, without considering the implications or conclusions of the research for video games. Some candidates presented findings of research into watching violence (TV, films and the inevitable Bobo dolls) or presented examples taken from cases reported in the press. These often contained little psychological material and gained minimal credit.

Candidates who achieved high marks, structured their answers around advice for the leaflet (for example, alerting parents to the possibility of desensitisation) followed by justification using relevant research findings. There was no requirement to include both negative and positive effects of gaming; however, those candidates who approached the question in this way found it easier to structure their answers.

Question 06

This question was generally well done with better candidates scoring 4 or 5 marks for descriptions of the Hovland-Yale model. Many candidates provided much more detail than was necessary for a 5-mark answer, often including two or three research studies which supported the claims of the Hovland-Yale model. A small number of candidates became sidetracked into the Elaboration Likelihood model and presented details of peripheral versus central processing routes.

Question 07

This question produced a diverse range of answers and it was clear that many candidates were unprepared for a question on intense fandom. Many candidates did not seem to have a clear understanding of the meaning of intense fandom. Others did not read the question properly and produced lengthy procedural descriptions of studies into intense fandom. AO1 credit was awarded for descriptions of research 'findings' and candidates who looked carefully at the wording of the question and focused their answers on this achieved the higher marks.

Better candidates scored well on the AO1. However, even the stronger candidates did not divide their answer appropriately between the AO1 and AO2/AO3 marks and there were very few answers scoring highly on the AO2/AO3 evaluation of the findings.

Topic: The Psychology of Addictive behaviour

Question 08

Most candidates appeared to understand some principles of the learning model. However, many answers described the processes of classical/operant conditioning and social learning without explaining or illustrating these within the context of addiction. Weaker candidates often illustrated the principles with reference to Pavlov's dogs or Bandura's Bobo doll which received minimal credit if there was no attempt to apply this to addiction. Candidates who did best structured their description around one of the examples on the specification - smoking or gambling, which helped them to demonstrate their understanding of the learning model. Reference to all stages of addiction (initiation, maintenance and relapse) was not required for higher marks.

Question 09

This was a challenging question for candidates. Credit was achieved by explaining how self-esteem might influence vulnerability to addiction. Many candidates argued that low self-esteem influenced vulnerability and presented relevant research studies that demonstrate this link. However, going beyond research into explanation was often not addressed.

Question 10

This was a relatively straightforward question but many candidates misread the requirement to produce a statement and instead produced a question. There were still confusions over the distinction between qualitative and quantitative data. Although the stem of the question clearly referred to the response format of the questionnaire involving a tick box, many candidates thought that since the statement involved words, the data must therefore be qualitative.

Question 11

Question 11 was straightforward and was answered appropriately by most candidates. Common answers referred to the advantages of anonymity and the difficulties of measuring self-esteem precisely and accurately.

Question 12

Credit was awarded here for a discussion of the effectiveness of interventions for addiction. Many candidates failed to address the requirements of the question as it was set and chose to describe different types of interventions - no credit was awarded for this. Similarly, candidates ignored the requirement to “use findings from this study”. This was a shame as there were clearly some very well informed candidates who did not respond to the question as it was set. Centres should alert students to the need to look carefully at the question requirements and the number of marks for each question in order to ensure that they avoid providing irrelevant material.

Topic: Anomalistic Psychology

Question 13

This question was not answered well. Many candidates ignored the precise wording of the question or misinterpreted what was required. Some discussed scientific fraud in general, presenting examples of fraud in other areas of psychology. Other candidates presented examples of anomalistic fraud focused on psychic mediums tricking audiences rather than fraud within the context of psychological research. Few got to grips with the question and identified the main issues such as lack of trust and loss of reputation. Centres should encourage candidates to think about the consequences of fraud (lack of trust for example) in this topic area.

Question 14

Question 14 was done quite well overall. The most common response referred to the role played by operant conditioning and/or coincidence in superstitious behaviour. Although candidates understood the area, some provided extended description of Skinner and his pigeons and lost sight of Leon. Many candidates simply did not appreciate that this was a 5-mark question and wrote far too much.

Question 15

Candidates also produced some good answers here, with many making use of the comparison between Abbie and Leon. The pitfall here was to write about why people may not have anomalous beliefs without any reference to Abbie at all.

Question 16

This question produced a diverse range of answers. Some candidates confused out-of-body experiences (OBE's) and near-death experiences, presenting muddled answers which attracted few marks. Other candidates did write about out-of-body experiences but focused too much on descriptions of methods of studies, the question asked candidates to demonstrate their understanding of what research had shown. Good answers focused on the findings of research and contextualised these within explanations of OBE's.

Section C Psychological Research and Scientific Method

Topic: Psychological Research and Scientific Method

Question 17

This question was answered well. Most candidates provided a detailed aim that was awarded 2 marks. A minority of candidates provided a more general aim that was credited with just 1 mark, such as “to investigate the effect of colour on performance in cognitive tasks”. For both marks some elaboration (either related to colour or performance) was required.

Question 18

This question was problematic for a lot of candidates. Many candidates confused the introduction with the abstract or the method sections and received no credit. Some recognised the inclusion of aims/hypotheses in the introduction but did not achieve 2 marks because they did not make reference to background information. A few impressive answers showed real understanding and referred to “contextualising the research”.

Question 19

Although this question was worth only 1 mark, many candidates produced lengthy answers. Some distinguished between specific types of validity such as external validity or population validity. A small number of candidates became confused between validity and reliability and provided a definition of the test-re-test method. Just over half of candidates gained the mark.

Question 20

There was a broad range of answers to question 20, with candidates in roughly equal measure being awarded marks across the full range. The majority had at least a rough idea of external validity but found internal validity more problematic. The weakest answers were those where the candidate confused internal with external validity. Answers that achieved the full 4 marks generally selected the most straightforward ideas; individual differences due to the independent design for internal validity and sampling bias or mundane realism for external validity. Candidates who achieved only 1 mark for internal validity often became confused when referring to demand characteristics (which could be made creditworthy) by explaining this in the context of repeated measures – which was clearly irrelevant in the question.

Question 21

There were some lovely, imaginative responses to this question which was answered well in general. The majority of candidates achieved 2 marks by including an example of how colour could be used in a real world setting. The most popular answer was use of colour in classroom walls or on textbook pages to aid learning in particular subjects.

Question 22

The majority of answers to question 22 demonstrated an understanding that independent judges were required to reduce bias, and in doing so the majority achieved two marks.

Question 23

Few students achieved full marks on question 23, providing little additional information to that included in the question stem. Candidates were too focused on providing details of ethics (which was not required), at the expense of standardised instructions. Some candidates also made an error in their instructions by stating that participants would be given 40 shapes, 20 red and 20 blue, when in fact participants would only be given one colour of 20 shapes. A further common error was writing that participants would be given a limited time to make the toy. Writing a limited time is not a clear standardised instruction and stronger candidates wrote exactly what the time limit would be. Very few candidates checked if participants had any questions at the end of the instructions. Candidates who had conducted research were at an advantage here and produced answers of a higher quality.

Question 24

Hypothesis writing is still a problematic area for many candidates – despite the requirement to do this at AS level. Many candidates achieved zero marks on question 24, having mistakenly written a directional or a null hypothesis. Many responses were lacking in clarity or failed to include an operationalised DV so only achieved 1 mark. The best answers were concisely and clearly worded responses such as “There will be an association between birth order and career choice”, which achieved the full 2 marks.

Question 25

Virtually all candidates identified an appropriate sampling technique. However, a large number did not score full marks because their account of how to obtain the sample was confused or insufficiently linked to the study in question on artists and lawyers. Candidates who chose a random sample needed to explain how the target population would be identified.

Question 26

Some centres had clearly prepared their candidates very well and many showed an impressive understanding of inferential statistics scoring 11 or 12 marks. However, other candidates struggled with the question and collected very few marks. Some of the most common errors were as follows.

A number of candidates did not know how to express the statistical conclusion of a research study, by referring to observed and critical values and probability. There were errors in correctly identifying the observed and critical values and their relationship to the hypothesis. A large number of candidates did not label the axes of the graph or only showed data relating to first born career choices.

Some candidates chose the wrong statistical test; some did choose the correct statistical test but did not then state the reasons why the test was appropriate.

Yet again, advice to teachers is to do some practical work. It was clear that some candidates were very familiar with the rationale for selecting a test and deciding if an observed value is significant or not. These candidates had a strong advantage on question 26.

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>

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion