



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
January 2012**

**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***

Whilst it is clear that most schools and colleges have addressed the specification revisions for PSYA1 there are some students whose responses suggest they have been taught the original specification. Students re-sitting units need to familiarise themselves with the changes to the Specification.

Many students showed a good understanding of the examination requirements, for example, to use the stem material in applied questions or to select material and focus on the exact requirements of the questions. Students were, on the whole, well prepared to answer the examination questions set.

A real concern was the minority of students whose writing was so poor that it was difficult to decide whether marks could be awarded. Students should be encouraged to make sure their writing is clear enough for someone unfamiliar with their handwriting to be able to read it. In some cases answers were very faint, and the use of a black pen with dark ink would help. It is also important that students read and follow the instructions on the front page of the exam paper. In particular, they should answer in the spaces provided and not outside the box around each page. Answers continued on an extra page should clearly be marked as 'continued' and the continuation answer should have a question number associated with it. Failure to follow this instruction slows down the marking process.

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

#### **Question 1**

- (a)** Mostly appropriate answers were provided. Many answers referred to the term 'youth' misleading participants as it suggested the man in the photograph was young and this could influence the answer. Others said the reference to 'youth' was misleading because it suggested an extra person, a 'youth', was part of the photograph. Some answers suffered from poor expression resulting in a muddled answer.
- (b)** There were still a number of students who did not seem to understand the term 'experimental design' and who tried to answer by stating types of experiments such as laboratory or field. Even amongst students who understood the concept, there was some difficulty when it came to identifying the appropriate design. The explanation of why a repeated measures design was unsuitable was in some instances prefaced by unnecessary time wasting explanations of why an independent groups design would be a good idea.
- (c)** Although most students could explain the benefits of a pilot study, far fewer students gave an explanation in the context of this experiment, as required.
- (d)** There were some clear and effective answers to this question where students showed understanding and could apply this to the scenario. Some students however, failed to understand the question and perhaps would have benefited from re-reading the stem.

- (e) Although there were some ‘accurate and reasonably detailed answers’ there were many more that were just ‘generally accurate’. As in previous exam series, when asked to describe a research study, some students did not even know one study sufficiently well to access the top mark band. Some students had a little muddled knowledge of several (usually Loftus’ studies) and produced answers where the research was so poorly described it was difficult to identify. There were, however, some good answers which accurately described one or more studies. Some students wasted time evaluating the research.

## Question 2

There were a high proportion of good answers to this question. Students who failed to score full marks sometimes described the ‘report everything’ technique (not required) under the heading ‘re-instate the context’. Some answers made no reference to the context despite an explicit requirement to refer to details from the passage. Other students remembered to refer to details from the passage for the first technique but forgot to do so when describing a second or third technique.

## Question 3

There were some clear, well structured answers where students could both describe and evaluate the multi-store model (MSM) of memory. Students often scored well where they were accurate in their description of the structures and processes of MSM. Some excellent diagrams were produced that helped to explain the points being made. By way of evaluation, students often used neurobiological evidence, serial position effect, case studies and contrasted MSM with working memory which has a more detailed approach to STM. Students did less well where their answer was punctuated with long descriptions and evaluation of the methodology of studies such as the Petersons (duration of STM) and Baddeley (types of coding in STM and LTM). Although many students could outline case studies, such as HM, KF and Clive Wearing, these were sometimes inaccurate and not all students could explain whether or not these supported MSM.

## Question 4

- (a) Attention was drawn to the requirement for the variables to be operationalised in this answer. Some responses met this requirement effectively, other responses were more vague. Inevitably there were some who mixed up the IV and DV.
- (b) Although almost all students recognised that the mean score for aggression was higher in those who started day care before the age of two than after the age of two, fewer students pointed to the magnitude of the difference being small.
- (c) There was a wide range of incorrect answers to this question. Clearly a number of students did not recognise the term “dispersion”.
- (d) Most students were able to draw a bar chart. Those who drew separated bars to represent those who started day care before or after the age of two created a better visual impact than those who chose to join the two bars. Students who did not score full marks usually failed to label the axes fully eg labelled the ‘y’ axis as mean score, rather than mean aggression score.

- (e) In a majority of responses, hypotheses were both appropriate and directional. Some students failed to operationalise part of the hypothesis and so did not score full marks. A few responses were written in the form of a correlational hypothesis, which was not appropriate.
- (f) This was usually well answered with students mostly being able to identify characteristics of high quality day care and being able to elaborate on this for a second mark.

### Question 5

- (a) Some students lost marks by incorrectly identifying Sam as being resistant or Dan as being avoidant. A number failed to distinguish between insecure-avoidant and insecure-resistant types of attachment.
- (b) This question was generally answered well, although there were sometimes inconsistencies between answers in 5a and 5b.
- (c) Most responses focused on relevant limitations of the strange situations. Cultural differences and lack of ecological validity were popular points which were expanded. Where students chose to write about cultural differences and did not know the findings of a cross-cultural study very well, their responses could be quite muddled. Often ethical issues were offered, despite the question stating 'apart from ethical issues, explain one or more limitations'. There were some good answers which showed an understanding of the methodology used.

### Question 6

Considering the straightforward nature of this question, it was not well answered overall. There were some repetitive and over-long descriptions of evolutionary theory, Darwin's work and survival of the fittest. This was often at the expense of the key characteristics of Bowlby's explanation of attachment. Some students muddled attachment and maternal deprivation, even though the latter is not required on the specification. Bowlby was falsely attributed with ethological studies on various species of bird, in addition to studies on monkeys. Evaluation of Bowlby's explanation was often muddled. Reporting of Lorenz's and Harlow's work was often poor and students failed to say whether these studies supported Bowlby's theory or not. Schaffer and Emerson's study was often cited but the implications for Bowlby's theory were not accurately explained. A number of students treated this 8 mark question as if it were a 12 mark question and went well beyond the detail needed for full marks. It was perfectly possible to gain full marks in the space provided.

### Question 7

Many students found it difficult to explain what is meant by institutional care, although explanations of privation were more easily achieved. Where students are invited to use an example, the requirement is greater than just to identify an example. So, it was not sufficient to state Genie was an example of privation. It was important to use aspects of Genie's life to illustrate privation. A few students muddled deprivation (no longer required on the specification) with privation.

## Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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