



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

**Psychology A**

**PSYA1**

**(Specification 2180)**

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

***Report on the Examination***

---

Further copies of this Report on **the Examination** are available from: [aqa.org.uk](http://aqa.org.uk)

Copyright © 2012 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

**Copyright**

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges 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 schools/colleges 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 1: (PSYA1) Cognitive Psychology, Developmental Psychology and Research Methods**

### ***General***

Most students appeared to find the paper accessible and attempted every question. Where answer spaces were left blank it seemed to reflect lack of knowledge rather than lack of time. The space provided for an answer is a good guide to how much a student needs to write. Students (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. Students who are writing too much often do so because they do not read the question carefully, do not select the relevant material and do not write concisely. Although quality of written communication is formally assessed only in the twelve mark question, it clearly benefits students if they can express themselves succinctly and can use psychological terminology effectively.

The AS papers are marked online and teachers might need to explain to their students the process of scanning and clipping. Examiners do not see whole scripts, but only the clipped part of the question they are marking. Examiners will not see anything that is written outside of the lines or margins and so students who write outside these areas risk not gaining marks. Even more of a concern is those students who continue their answer elsewhere in the booklet but make no reference to this. The best advice is for students who need to write more than the space given allows, is to use the additional pages, but make sure that they inform the examiner that they have done so. A simple 'continued' or 'see extra page' will suffice.

There were a number of students whose handwriting was almost illegible. Examiners do their best to decipher such scripts, but it is difficult for examiners to follow the flow of students' answers when it has to be decoded word by word and read several times due to poor handwriting. These students are disadvantaging themselves by not addressing this problem. Schools and Colleges should, wherever possible, try to ensure that students' work is legible. This includes the use of black ink.

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

#### **Question 1**

The answer booklet was set out to help students identify two differences between short-term memory and long-term memory. This was a straightforward question requiring the identification and elaboration of two differences. Those students who ignored the layout and wrote about STM in difference 1 and LTM in difference 2 did not always make a comparison between the same factors and thus failed to identify any differences.

#### **Question 2**

- (a) This was typically answered well apart from the inevitable few who described the multi-store model. Some students did not score full marks because their answer was inaccurate in identifying the structure and/or processes of the working memory model.

- (b) The strength was usually answered well by students who referred to supporting evidence, the practical applications of the model or who made a favourable comparison of the working memory model relative to the multi-store model. The limitation was addressed effectively where students pointed to the difficulty of designing research to measure the capacity or unitary functioning of the Central Executive. Students were not credited for claiming a limitation of the working memory is that it did not explain the long term memory (LTM) or incorrectly claiming a weakness was that it was based on case studies. Although such neuropsychological studies have been used as support of the working model they are not the basis of the model.

### Question 3

- (a) Students who had carefully read the stem material noted the reference to the age of the participants in the study being estimated by the researcher. They were thus more likely to recognise that one aim was to investigate the effect of age on eyewitness testimony.
- (b) Students usually responded by referring to the benefits in terms of validity or fewer demand characteristics. Not all students elaborated their point in order to achieve a second mark.
- (c) This question was poorly answered because many students could not accurately identify opportunity sampling and they confused this technique with random sampling. It is important for students to grasp that random refers to where everyone in the sampling frame has an equal chance of being selected and this does not apply in opportunity sampling. The word random has a different meaning in psychology compared with everyday usage.
- (d) This was generally answered well with many answers showing a good understanding of extraneous variables. Students were very inventive referring to the effect of both situational (weather, noise levels) and participant (in a rush, alcohol consumption, mental illness) variables.
- (e) There were some impressive, well focussed responses where students produced evidence from a broad range of research findings. A few weak responses focussed more on procedure than what research has shown and some answers were so vague they could not receive credit.
- (f) This was also answered well. Many students produced an accurate and reasonably detailed answer, often describing Loftus's (1979) weapon focus experiment. Students who did not score full marks usually failed to accurately identify the dependent variable in this study. Less impressive answers tried to use the Yerkes-Dodson curve to explain apparently contradictory findings in the area. Few of these outlined a study at all. Another problem was the failure to focus on one study even though this was stressed in the question.

### Question 4

Answers were often muddled and/or failed to address the requirements of the question. Some students suggested that chunking is a memory improvement strategy for LTM. This may be because they confuse chunking with organisation as a strategy. Students could usually name memory improvement strategies such as method of loci, acrostics or acronyms

but these were rarely applied appropriately. This question required application of knowledge to revision for a psychology exam, so it was disappointing that examples selected were usually for remembering colours of the rainbow, order of planets or shopping lists.

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

### **Question 5**

This was a straightforward question and many students showed sound knowledge and understanding. The few that did not do well tended to focus on Bowlby's maternal deprivation hypothesis or showed confusion with learning theory.

### **Question 6**

- (a) Students who addressed the requirement of the question, to identify how behaviour would differ between the named attachment types, scored well. As in question one, where students wrote an answer not focussing on differences, examiners had to decide whether contrasts had been made in order to credit an answer. Some answers had the behaviours the wrong way round (ie for separation behaviour Megan showing intense distress, Rosie being unconcerned).
- (b) Most students were able to identify an appropriate limitation of the use of the Strange Situation in attachment research.

### **Question 7**

- (a) Students who scored well often focussed on the anonymity of questionnaires, the lack of investigator effects or the time advantage where questionnaires could be simultaneously completed. Whether students gained full marks depended on how effectively they were able to explain the advantage they had identified. Better answers compared questionnaires to interviews, or referred to the relatively large number of adults in this study. Some students referred to the advantages of analysing data from questionnaires which was not the focus of the question.
- (b) Most responses explained the term qualitative data appropriately. A few students described quantitative data; given that the word quantitative can be so easily aligned with number, it is surprising that students get muddled about these terms.
- (c) Most responses were appropriate, although a number of questions provided would have produced numerical data (eg how long ?x2, how many ?x2) or categorical answers (usually yes/no responses).
- (d) Although most students had no difficulty in identifying two ethical issues, many students were less successful in providing suitable suggestions for how one of these issues could be dealt with. Some students just re-stated the ethical issue. Other students filled up the answer space by explaining how both ethical issues could be dealt with, leaving the examiner to decide which was the more creditworthy answer.

## Question 8

Students produced a wide range of acceptable material in response to this question. Some good answers focussed on two or three examples of research covering both aggression and peer relations. Evaluation often related to methodological issues and practical applications. Ethical criticisms tended to be speculative (they needed to ask the parents) or not appropriate (the children did not give consent). Where students had focussed on just one study there was often insufficient detail about the type of day care or the age of the children. Well written answers, with clear expression of ideas, specialist terms and few errors benefitted in the AO2 mark band. Weaker responses were those where it was impossible to identify the research the student was trying to describe, due to lack of accurate detail, or more often several studies muddled together. This was a clear case of a question where 'less is more' for some students. Had they been able to accurately describe identifiable research they would have been in a better position to explicit relevant evaluation. A few students wrote an account of the features of good quality day care, which was not what the question required. Some answers mistook day care for institutional care.

## 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](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion)