



General Certificate of Education

Psychology 1186

Specification B

Unit 1 (PSYB1) Introducing Psychology

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - January series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

Unit 1: (PSYB1) Introducing Psychology

General

Candidate performance at this first session for the new specification varied enormously. Many candidates had prepared well and were able to demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding across all areas. Evaluations were less evident in many of the responses to the longer questions and certainly this is something that centres should seek to address. It was not uncommon to see answers to the 10-mark questions which consisted of 1 ½ sides of description and a mere two or three lines of evaluation. It was noted that many candidates did not have sufficient space to write their answers in the answer booklet and many candidates did use extra sheets. This issue has been addressed for future sessions. Quality of written communication was very poor in some cases, to the extent that it was extremely difficult to discern meaning.

Question 1

Part (a) was generally well done, with the majority of candidates gaining two or three marks. Most responses used Skinner's rats for the example although there were some good everyday examples that showed clear understanding. Occasionally, candidates scored no marks because they confused operant and classical conditioning.

Part (b) was less well done, often because many candidates offered ethical rather than methodological issues. There was also a tendency to give a lengthy description of the method rather than focus on the limitation.

For part (c)(i) candidates who recognised the need to focus on the general roles of the two sections of the autonomic nervous system rather than specific bodily responses tended to score full marks.

Nearly all candidates gained two marks for part (c)(ii); those who did not usually presented sympathetic or parasympathetic responses that were not included in the text.

Responses to part (d) tended to show a good awareness of key humanistic concepts although this knowledge was often expressed incoherently, almost as a stream of unconnected or inadequately explained ideas. It was also fairly common to see confusion and inaccuracy in relation to basic terms. For example, many candidates suggested that low self-esteem resulted from incongruence between actual and ideal self, when it is more accurate to state that it results from incongruence between the perceived self/self-concept and the ideal self. Some candidates were evidently unaware that an instruction to 'refer to another approach' is an invitation to compare the other approach with that under discussion, rather than simply describe another approach in tandem. Whilst descriptions were often lengthy, evaluations were frequently less so. That said, many top band answers to part (d) were seen.

Question 2

In part (a)(i) most candidates could name Klinefelter's syndrome, although spellings were often approximate and occasionally bizarre. A number of candidates referred incorrectly to Turner's syndrome or Down's syndrome.

Part (a)(ii) discriminated reasonably well. Many candidates explained how studying people with atypical sex chromosome patterns enabled an understanding of the effects of genes, biology and nature on gender-related behaviour, but rather fewer noted how this would involve comparison between such cases and people with typical sex chromosome patterns.

Part (b) was a keen discriminator. Large numbers of candidates who scored no marks had failed to realise that the responses should take the form of questions rather than definitions or statements. Even where questions were presented, they were often inappropriate and there was considerable confusion between stability (consistency over time) and constancy (consistency despite changes in external appearance or context). In addition, large numbers of candidates posed questions asking children what they 'wanted to be' or 'would like to wear', thus focusing on preference or desire rather than beliefs about gender. Candidates who based their questions on Damon's study of George tended to gain no marks because their questions focused on awareness of social convention and expectation rather than beliefs. Despite the various problems, it was pleasing to see that a number of candidates could offer sensible, straightforward questions of the type used by Slaby and Frey (1975) in the Gender Concept Interview.

Part (c) elicited a variety of creditworthy responses in which candidates showed knowledge of various social learning theory concepts. Most candidates gained two marks for knowledge and many gained at least one mark for application. Those who did not score full marks tended to lose credit because their application was not fully explicit in terms of behaviour.

Answers to part (d) tended to score reasonably well as long as the candidate focused on gender and did not stray into a general discussion of Freudian theory and psychosexual stages. Unfortunately, many answers consisted of lengthy description of each psychosexual stage and nothing more. Better candidates confined their description to gender-related aspects of psychodynamic theory and evaluative points that pertained directly to psychodynamic explanations of gender.

Question 3

Answers to part (a) invariably scored at least one mark, although a good number of candidates failed to refer explicitly to the direction and/or degree of the difference in the mean scores and therefore gained only one mark.

Part (b) discriminated well, with the majority of candidates scoring either two or three marks. Most candidates managed to get one mark for plotting the bar-graph correctly. Axis labels, however, were often either absent or inadequate, and titles often did not include either unit of measurement or explicit reference to the conditions by name.

In parts (c)(i) and (c)(ii), candidates were better able to identify the dependent variable than the independent variable. Indeed, fewer than half the candidates could identify the independent variable correctly.

Part (d) discriminated well as might have been expected. Successful candidates were able to provide a hypothesis that included reasonably accurate reference to the dependent variable and both conditions of the independent variable. Weaker candidates included reference to one variable only, or overly generalised reference to both. A fair number of candidates presented questions or statements that were in no way testable.

The first section of part (e) was generally not well done, with many candidates explaining a random sample as one where people were 'picked at random', or describing a way of selecting a random sample (names from a hat). Despite problems defining the term, candidates often managed to pick up marks in the second part of the question by referring to issues such as bias ('bias' was common) and representativeness.

Both sections of part (f) were poorly done. Many candidates clearly had no understanding of the term 'experimental design' and answers were often wild guesses. Some candidates who were roughly in the right area presented various types of experiment (field, laboratory, quasi) as an answer to (f)(i), indicating unfortunate confusion between type of experiment and type of experimental design.

Part (g) was often badly answered with only a minority of candidates able to offer a clear and unambiguous definition. Unfortunately, most responses were not creditworthy as they referred rather generally to 'something affecting the results', or simply gave examples of extraneous variables. Fortunately, many candidates who had problems defining the term were nonetheless able to show an understanding of the concept in their answer to the second section of the question. Some excellent answers were seen in which candidates identified a relevant extraneous variable, explained how it might affect some participants and not others, and also specified the likely effect on the results.

Part (h) presented a challenge in that it required design input on the part of the candidate. It was evident from some responses that candidates had benefited from taking part in 'how science works' activities as part of their study. Such candidates were able to offer a variety of creditworthy responses including construction and use of a rating scale or content analysis using specified categories. Many candidates, perhaps those who had insufficient experience of practical psychology, made non-specific suggestions, for example, use a pilot study, which were unrelated to the specific task at hand.

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>