



General Certificate of Education

Psychology 2186

Specification B

**Unit 4 (PSYB4) Approaches, Debates and
Methods in Psychology**

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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Unit 4: (PSYB4) Approaches, Debates and Methods in Psychology

General

There was a wide range in the standard of responses with some centres having prepared their candidates very well for the examination. Candidates on the whole seem to understand the command 'discuss' in extended writing questions and responded at varying levels of competence. Better candidates were able to summon research and psychological theory in support of an argument as well as present evaluation. However, examiners reported a continued failure by some candidates to use appropriate psychological terminology (this also applies to short answer questions) and the use of 'everyday' examples rather than psychological ones. In many cases, difficulties structuring a coherent line of argument rather than a lack of knowledge or analytical and evaluative skills limited candidates' marks. In Section A, Option B was preferred over Option A and most compulsory questions were attempted. The quality of written communication as in recent years continues to be a cause for concern. In particular some candidates do not seem to know how to punctuate their writing. In cases where errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling obscured meaning, the task of awarding marks was made very difficult for examiners.

Section A Approaches in Psychology

Option A

Question 01

Many candidates were not prepared for this type of question and a number did not attempt an answer. Candidates need to be reminded that research skills questions will always be assessed in each option of **Section A** (Approaches in Psychology), **Section B** (Debates in Psychology) as well as **Section C** (Methods in Psychology). Quite a few candidates provided overly-descriptive accounts of Bandura's studies. Other candidates explained social learning theory and provided quite detailed accounts of cognitive factors involved in learning. Those who did focus on the question requirements produced some very good answers.

Question 02

This question was generally well done with many candidates achieving full marks. Such answers focused on tangible rewards such as tokens, gold stars, chocolates etc.

Question 03

This question proved to be more of a challenge than the preceding one. Some candidates confused punishment with negative reinforcement. Those who focused on 'avoidance' of an unpleasant stimulus or 'avoidance of punishment' coped well with this question. Some hedged their bets by putting in positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement and punishment.

Question 04

There was a lot of variation in answers but on the whole really good answers were rare. Although many candidates knew what was meant by the term 'eclectic', they did not understand what is meant by "the eclectic approach in psychology" and were thus unable to discuss the eclectic approach. Approaches were often presented as alternative explanations, with candidates simply explaining one approach, then another, without making it clear why adopting an eclectic approach would be better. Use of supporting evidence, usually twin studies, was poor and often featured general sweeping statements rather than psychological theory or research. Better answers were able to discuss the combined value of approaches and integrate psychological supporting evidence into the context of the discussion as a whole.

Option B**Question 05**

Many candidates achieved only two marks, usually for the identification of two techniques or methods. In such cases, the second mark for each was lost as no cognitive process was identified. Scans and experiments were most commonly identified as the techniques/methods but many referred to therapy and eye-witness testimony, both of which were irrelevant. A surprising number of candidates referred to schemas as a way of investigating internal mental processes with no mention of a specific technique.

Question 06

The most usual mark awarded was three. Most candidates were able to identify one feature of the psychodynamic approach and explain this in relation to behaviour, although it was noticeable that few discussed this explanation as the question required. Some very weak answers failed to provide more than a general, vague outline of the psychodynamic approach with no explanation of a feature in relation to a specific behaviour.

Question 07

In general candidates seemed to have considerable knowledge of the biological approach and better candidates were able to make valid comparisons with other approaches. However, there were several pitfalls. Some candidates' responses focused too much on the nature-nurture debate. Others made very general evaluative points regarding the scientific nature of the biological approach, usually citing lack of ecological validity of experiments. Weaker candidates often produced PSYB3 type answers, for example, discussion of the biological approach in relation to a topic (most commonly schizophrenia) or hugely descriptive accounts of the biological approach. Many of these read more like biology rather than psychology answers with detailed accounts of genetic transmission or evolutionary processes. Occasionally candidates would display the AS tendency of using the command 'refer to at least one other approach' as an opportunity to write long descriptive accounts of the chosen approach, typically behaviourist or psychodynamic.

Section B Debates in Psychology**Question 08**

Answers to this question varied widely and some candidates simply explained what a theory was, rather than its role in scientific research. Good candidates used appropriate terminology such as 'falsification' rather than 'prove'.

Question 09

It was good to see so many candidates prepared for this type of question as peer review is new to the specification. Again, an explanation of peer review rather than its role was not uncommon. An unfortunate few simply had no idea and talked about issues to do with inter-observer/rater reliability, 're-doing' the research and replication.

Question 10

Although most candidates were able to explain the interactionist approach, fewer candidates were able to gain all four marks as both sides of nature-nurture debate were not explained. However many achieved three marks by correctly applying the interactionist approach to Jamie. Where only two marks were awarded, this was generally one mark for the explanation of the 'interactionist' approach and one mark for the reference to Jamie.

Question 11

This question produced some very good answers whereby candidates correctly outlined the different types of determinism, provided appropriate examples of these and were able to deliver a thoughtful discussion with a clear link to a topic. More average answers showed knowledge of the debate but somewhat tenuous links to the topic(s) and/or imbalance where little attention was given to free will. However, there were some poor responses which talked about fate, 'pre-determination' or 'being born with a set plan'. Similarly for weaker candidates, reference to the humanistic approach triggered commentary on the idiographic approach versus the nomothetic approach and claims such as 'free will study's [sic] and research are case studies'. Some candidates strayed from the question into the nature-nurture debate equating nature with determinism and nurture with free will. There were other misapprehensions: soft determinism is simply a combination of free will and determinism or an interaction between nature and nurture; and any change in behaviour signifies free will, for example, the recovery from 'cold parenting'. Lack of precision and weak definitions featured in weaker answers.

Section C Methods in Psychology**Question 12**

Relatively few candidates achieved the full two marks and many only achieved one, usually because they failed to consider the range. Those who did were correctly able to explain that this showed a wider variation in scores in Condition B than A. A proportion of candidates did not achieve any marks as they merely restated the data shown in the table.

Question 13

Few candidates gained access to two marks here with many simply describing the median. Good answers justified their explanation. Most students gained half marks for referring to anomalous results.

Question 14

Most candidates were able to explain that random allocation was important to reduce bias or to act as a control, although a surprising number of answers identified intelligence as the confounding variable. A fair number of candidates achieved both marks but failing to link to the study limited credit to one mark. Candidates who gained no marks commonly described random sampling rather than random allocation.

Question 15

This question was generally well attempted although a considerable number of candidates confused validity with reliability. Some candidates only referred to ecological validity.

Question 16

Answers varied widely here with some rather speculative reasons given for why Group B might not have been made anxious by the story they heard. Despite this, candidates overall responded well. For those who failed to gain any marks, there was often confusion about what validity means (with issues of reliability being raised).

Question 17

Some candidates failed to link their suggested improvement to their previous answer. Again answers were varied and although many suggested taking a measurement of anxiety before and after, this was often vague. Better candidates referred to specific ways of measuring anxiety such as heart rate or use of rating scales with some expansion or explanation of these. Some candidates failed to gain the second mark because, having identified a relevant methodological improvement, they then tried to justify it rather than describe how it would be done.

Question 18

Almost all candidates were awarded at least one mark for identification of the ethical issue, usually possible psychological harm as a result of being made to feel anxious. Few candidates achieved all three marks due to failure to expand on how the issue applied to the study.

Question 19

Answers to this question varied enormously. Some candidates did produce very good answers with sound knowledge and justification for one and two tailed tests; statistical tests; levels of significance and comparison of observed/critical values. Impressively, some candidates were able to correctly explain how to interpret the Mann-Whitney statistical table for a significant finding which was not actually required for full marks. However, few candidates achieved all six marks, with a good proportion being awarded one to three marks. The last point on the question ie *'how the psychologist could use the results of the statistical test to determine whether or not the null hypothesis should be rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted'* caused the most difficulty. Many candidates were confused about levels of significance. There were frequent references to the 0.5 level being the minimal level of significance, significance meaning there was only 95% probability of chance and interpreting a statistical table for a significant finding by comparing the observed value with a level of significance (rather than the critical value in the table). The Chi-square test was commonly chosen and other inappropriate tests were the related *t* test and Wilcoxon signed ranks test. Many were unable to identify the data as ordinal. Few candidates could adequately justify using a two tailed or a one tailed test.

A few candidates ignored the instruction in the question to *'refer to the following'* and offered a plan for a piece of research which included sampling etc.

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>