



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

Psychology B

PSYB1

(Specification 2185)

Unit 1: Introducing Psychology

Report on the Examination

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Unit 1: (PSYB1) Introducing Psychology

General

The standard of responses for this examination was largely comparable with that of previous sessions. Examiners reported some difficulties associated with poor handwriting and there were some responses that were barely legible. It was also noticeable that some candidates struggled to express themselves with clarity and coherence. In these instances, descriptive skills were weak and although answers showed evidence of knowledge and understanding, often they were muddled. A larger number of candidates found it difficult to develop evaluative points and a significant proportion merely listed statements such as 'the X approach is different from the Y approach' without attempting to explain why or how the comparison point might impact on the approach being evaluated. Although many candidates were able to present their longer answers using appropriate paragraphs to divide the material, some wrote each sentence as a 'mini' paragraph or wrote continuously and then inserted double slash lines haphazardly throughout the response. Accessing the top mark band does require good structure in the answer provided.

A high proportion of the marks on this paper are for evidence of How science works. Questions allocated AO3 marks occur in all sections of the examination paper, not only in Section C. Some candidates did not read these questions (A1b, B2b(ii) and B2c) carefully and did not focus on their requirements. Candidates need to be prepared to demonstrate their understanding of the issues relating to methodologies used by researchers and how these might impact on the interpretation of the data collected and on the practicalities of conducting research. In the case of question B2c, it was evident that some candidates who had thorough knowledge of investigations into sex-role stereotyping did not read the question, and therefore failed to focus on the procedures used by the researcher(s) to collect the data in the study chosen. In Section C, candidates found it difficult to apply their knowledge to the use of a different experimental design to collect the data for the investigation, or how to deal with the ethical issues that would arise in the investigation. In these cases, answers often presented knowledge of the terms with no evidence of application to the scenario presented.

Candidates are reminded that there are 5 marks each for both AO1 and AO2 skills in the long answers. Examiners are directed to identify areas in the writing where some credit for AO1 and also for AO2 skills can be awarded and have to make a judgement for the whole response as to how many of the 5 marks for each skill would be an appropriate total for the answer, so that the overall mark matches the appropriate mark band for the response. It is rarely the case that a single sentence or statement would be 'worth an AO1/AO2 mark,' however, many candidates annotate their own writing with indications where they think marks will be awarded. Information that candidates seem to believe is creditworthy includes statements such as: One negative is the SLT approach ignores genes and biology. It also ignores the unconscious of the psychodynamic approach which is a negative. Such statements are not evaluative and will not attract credit.

Candidates did seem to manage their time effectively and there was evidence of good use of the planning spaces in the paper.

Section A Key Approaches and Biopsychology

Question 1

- (a) Although almost half of the responses gained full marks for this question, many candidates were unable to offer accurate or recognisable names for the components required.
- (b) This was a poorly answered question as many candidates did not seem to realise that they were required to 'evaluate the use of adoption studies' and instead evaluated adoption studies rather than their use.
- (c) Candidates found it quite difficult to express clearly the limitations of the humanistic approach. Sometimes issues with the approach such as lack of scientific rigour or lack of evidence were phrased inappropriately; eg there is no evidence, it rejects genes, it rejects the behaviourist/cognitive/psychodynamic approach. Other comments were often criticisms of key concepts of the approach with little explanation of why that concept could be seen to be a limiting feature. Many candidates seemed to believe that free will means an individual can 'do anything' and this is a limitation because 'we cannot just do what we want.'
- (d) This was reasonably well answered with a good spread of marks awarded, however, candidates did find it difficult to reach the top band of 9/10 marks. There was a great deal of muddle in some of the description offered by candidates who could not distinguish clearly between the features of behaviourism and SLT. Many failed to understand that in some research the behaviour of children was directly reinforced and therefore the study cited was not an example of SLT and observational learning. Descriptions of Bandura's research were varied with numerous versions given. Unfortunately, some candidates then criticised the study without making attempts to show how such criticism might impact on the approach itself. A surprising number of candidates referred to the Bobo doll investigations as case studies. Evaluation of the approach was quite weak and many candidates presented a series of undeveloped points. Often these were merely points of difference between the SLT approach and other approaches such as 'SLT ignores biology/the unconscious or even – free will'. Candidates should recognise that superficial differences are not creditworthy unless the impact on the usefulness of the theory under discussion is made clear. It was gratifying to note that some candidates did focus on discussion of gender differences in imitative behaviour and how research into testosterone might account for these when mere imitation did not. Overall, candidates failed to appreciate the role of mediating cognitive factors and how these can account for whether or not an individual chooses to copy an observed behaviour.

Section B Gender Development

Question 2

- (a) The majority of candidates scored 2 or more marks for this question, although some failed to cite a difference between the terms and only described each term.
- (b) (i) Many candidates were unable to describe the stage of gender constancy accurately. Usually candidates gained credit for explanation of the comments made by Sally.
- (b) (ii) This was a poorly answered question. Many candidates seemed to misunderstand what was required and suggested that categorising children, 'would not be fair as they develop at different rates' or that children might be, 'the wrong age for the stage.' They did not seem to appreciate that they were to focus on the practicalities involved when researchers assign the responses of children to a category system and the issues that might arise when this is done.
- (c) This question required candidates to focus on a sex-role stereotyping study and describe the procedure used by the researchers to collect their data. Many candidates referred to the method section in passing but concentrated on the results found and the conclusion drawn instead. Some candidates chose a study that was not a sex-role stereotyping investigation and therefore could not receive credit for their descriptions.
- (d) Again, candidates did find it difficult to produce top band answers (9 or 10 marks) for this question. More worryingly, almost 10% of candidates received no credit for their attempts. The majority of candidates focused on the explanation of gender development provided by Freud although some did include the work of others and gained good marks for comparison of explanations. Description was often marred by lots of irrelevant detail about stages other than the phallic stage. Candidates sometimes omitted the key point that gender development is an unconscious process, and when the unconscious was described it seemed to be almost as a conscious process of 'choosing to push out the thoughts so we can forget them.' Identification was also poorly described and again was often presented as an actively conscious process of 'learning to copy the same sex parent.' Evaluative points were often very superficial including weak points about how the psychodynamic approach ignores or disagrees with SLT/biological/cognitive explanations of gender, with no discussion of whether or why these approaches might provide more accurate information.

Section C Research Methods

Question 3

- (a) The majority of candidates were able to describe the pattern of the results but failed to use this as an explanation for the conclusion that could be drawn – the relaxation therapy seemed to be effective.
- (b) Many candidates were able to present clear and accurate graphical displays. However the titles for the graph were often quite poor, many candidates copied line one of the stem and produced the aim of the study. The x axis sometimes did not contain reference to 'median' anxiety ratings. Some line graphs had no lines joining the points and some candidates plotted the points accurately and then drew a line which did not go through those points. Some bar charts had oddly sized bars.
- (c) (i) Most candidates were able to offer an alternative measure of central tendency, although some did suggest a measure of dispersion.
- (c) (ii) Many candidates could not think of a sensible limitation of the measure of central tendency chosen and instead suggested the limitation was that the statistic was not a measure of dispersion.
- (d) Candidates needed to think carefully about which possible ethical issue they chose to answer this question as the majority of the marks were for addressing the issue identified in the study undertaken. Some candidates chose an issue and then suggested doing a different study as a way of addressing the issue. Others identified a possible issue and then explained exactly why it was an issue rather than answering the question set.
- (e) Many candidates were able to identify a methodological issue and expand on that issue. However, they often failed to discuss the likely impact on the study and therefore did not access the final mark. Some answers were a muddle of bias or subjectivity on the part of the parents.
- (f) This was not well answered. There were many definitions of independent groups design and often of the advantages of using that experimental design. However, many candidates were unable to apply their knowledge to describing how a researcher could conduct this investigation using an independent groups design.
- (g) (i) This was quite well answered and many candidates were able to suggest the additional information that was likely to be available in an interview with the parents at a later date.
- (g) (ii) Although the majority of candidates were able to write a clear open question, some produced attempts that were clearly closed – 'Did the therapy work?' or produced double questions – 'Was the therapy effective? If so, how?'

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>

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