



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

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 once again there were some responses that were barely legible. The online marking system in which clips are seen on screen immediately makes apparent deficiencies in presentation. Students are reminded that all responses should be written in the spaces provided in the answer booklet or on additional sheets, but never in a 'space' found in the booklet such as – at the bottom of the page.

Overall, descriptive skills remain quite weak and students do not seem to appreciate the need to learn definitions of psychological terms that are accurate. Students still struggle 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 would enable the reader to understand the relative value of each. Although many students were able to present their longer answers using appropriate paragraphs to divide the material, some still rely on double slash lines and a key to explain what this means or a single sentence followed by a spacing line. Accessing the top mark band does require good structure in the answer provided.

There is a high proportion of marks allocated on this paper for knowledge of How Science Works. Questions allocated AO3 marks occur in all sections of the exam paper not only Section C. Some students did not read these questions – A1b, B2a(ii) and B2d – carefully and did not focus on their requirements. Students need to be prepared to demonstrate their understanding of the issues relating to methodologies used by researchers and how these might affect the interpretation of the data collected and the practicalities of conducting research. In the case of question B2d it was evident that some students found it hard to focus on a methodological issue and instead wrote long descriptions of studies, not all of which were investigations into cultural variations. In Section C, students found it difficult to apply their knowledge of a limitation of independent groups design to the practical issue of how such a limitation might be overcome. It was evident that some students had not had much opportunity to practise interaction with participants and when asked to prepare instructions that could be read to a particular group of participants, they did not present information which could be read out loud.

Students are reminded that there are 5 marks each for both AO1 and AO2 skills in the 10-mark questions. 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.' Information that students seem to believe is creditworthy includes statements such as: '*The Humanistic approach ignores the unconscious which the Psychodynamic doesn't,*' or '*Kohlberg ignores the nature side of gender development.*' Such statements are not evaluative.

Once again, students 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 many students were able to describe the actions of the sympathetic division accurately referring to the perceived 'threat,' the physiological change and the alternative behaviours available, the choice of examples was not always sensible. Students who described 'going on a roller coaster/taking an examination,' found it difficult to describe fight or flight behaviours in these situations. Some students stated that 'fight is sympathetic and flight is parasympathetic.'
- (b) This was a poorly answered question as many students found it very difficult to discuss the strength or limitation they had chosen and instead resorted to listing additional possible strengths and limitations. It was rarely the case that the identified strength or limitation was related to cortical specialisation.
- (c) Students found it quite difficult to express clearly the strengths of the behaviourist approach. Unfortunately, many concepts identified as strengths were really features of the approach and answers sometimes contained long descriptions of the work of Pavlov or Skinner with no real attempt to link this material to a possible strength.
- (d) This question required students to provide an accurate description of features and concepts associated with the humanistic approach and then to organise their understanding of the distinguishing features of the humanistic and psychodynamic approaches to provide a discussion of differences between them. The descriptions of the work of humanistic psychologists were varied and a number of students covered a good range of concepts and were able to achieve 4/5 AO1 marks for their knowledge. It was encouraging to read the answers of students who had developed an understanding that was beyond rote learning and could therefore produce effective discussion of concepts of free will and the unconscious, positive outlook and pessimism and non-directive and directive therapy. However, many students did not seem to understand how to deal with differences between the approaches beyond stating these. Some students listed similarities rather than differences.

Section B Gender Development

Question 2

- (a) (i) The majority of students gave a correct response to this question.
- (a) (ii) Many students were unable to explain why people with atypical chromosome patterns would be studied by psychologists. In particular, they did not always focus on the comparisons in behaviour that would be made and how it might be possible to attribute differences found to the presence of an extra X chromosome.
- (b) This was a reasonably well-answered question although some students were not able to develop their answer and make it clear why the limitation identified was a limitation.
- (c) This question was generally well answered although some students explained *agreement with the father* in cognitive terms rather than psychodynamic terms.

- (d) This question required students to focus on a methodological problem of a study in which cultural variations in gender development were investigated. The first issue was that some of the studies chosen were not about cultural variation. The second was that some students lost focus and instead described the study rather than explaining the problem identified. Even when a methodological problem was given the explanations were often a jumble of psychological terminology such as – *researcher bias, subjectivity, lack of validity, not reliable*, that lacked coherence.
- (e) Although a predictable question given the specification, answers to this question were often muddled. Students failed to distinguish between Kohlberg's theory and gender schema theory, often stating they were one theory. Some were distracted by the term 'cognitive' and gave a *cognitive approach* answer with no reference to gender development. Description of the stages and age ranges was often inaccurate and relevant evidence was sometimes poorly described. Evaluation of the theory was often weak. Students did not seem to know how the studies they had described could be used to demonstrate that what was proposed in the theory was supported or challenged. Comparisons with alternative theories were often superficial.

Section C Research Methods

Question 3

- (a) Students found this question very difficult. Many of the answers given were untestable statements because they did not contain two conditions and/or the DV was not operational. Answers were often in the following format – *There will be a better performance in the audience condition.*
- (b) The majority of students 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 presence of an audience affected/increased the number of accurate shots through the hoop.
- (c) Titles for the graph were generally good. The y axis sometimes did not contain reference to 'mean' number of successful shots. Plotting was accurate. Many students were able to present clear and accurate graphical displays.
- (d) Students needed to be very clear about the strength and then explain why that was a strength of random sampling. Many students merely wrote a definition of random sampling.
- (e) (i) Although students were able to identify a limitation of using independent groups – such as there are participant variables, rather than explaining why this is a limitation, they then went on to describe what is meant by participant variables.
- (e)(ii) Answers to this question often lacked information about overcoming the limitation. Students could suggest that using matched pairs or repeated measures might be appropriate, but could not expand on what a researcher would actually do.
- (f) (i) This was not well answered. There were many very vague definitions of extraneous variables such as, something that cannot be controlled/something that has to be controlled.
- (f) (ii) This was quite well answered although only a few students referred to 'confounding' in their answer.

- (g) This question required students to imagine themselves as the researcher about to read out to participants in the 'audience' condition the instructions for participation. Some students produced very clear information in verbatim form. There were some students who focussed only on ethical issues.

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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