



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

Psychology B

PSYB2

(Specification 2185)

**Unit 2: Social Psychology, Cognitive
Psychology and Individual Differences**

Report on the Examination

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Unit 2: (PSYB2) Social Psychology, Cognitive Psychology and Individual Differences

General

This series was notable for a general improvement in the standard of students' responses. Although there are exceptions documented within this report, answers to the shorter-style questions were often very good. This included the *How Science Works* AO3 content which, historically, and particularly in January, has tended to cause students problems. Many appeared more prepared for these questions than their predecessors, perhaps benefiting from increased familiarity with the question format through the use of exemplar material over a number of series.

There were some impressive answers to the various extended response questions, especially in the topic areas of *Social Influence*, *Perceptual Processes* and *Autism*. Examiners were pleased to see lots of examples of essays that encompassed sophisticated use of evidence and critical comparison, alongside detailed, accurate description. There were many full-mark and top-band answers, within which students were able to demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of the material under review, and fully meet the requirements of the question.

This was not the case for everyone however, and there were some disappointing responses. Despite its status as the most popular topic on the paper, lots of students continue to find the *Remembering and Forgetting* section difficult. This was particularly the case within the essay on forgetting: many students offered little discursive content and instead limited themselves to a series of unexpanded comments relating to ecological validity, ethical and methodological issues. Whilst these can be valid points within this or any other essay, they must be developed and applied to the particular explanation (or theory, or treatment) under discussion.

Time management continues to be an improved feature of students' performance on PSYB2. Most paced themselves well through the exam and there were few examples of unfinished answers. Indeed, for many students, the strongest and most detailed answer appeared to be the last one they had attempted. Question popularity remains in the following order: Remembering and Forgetting (as mentioned above), Social Influence, Anxiety Disorders, Autism, Social Cognition and Perceptual Processes.

Students should be reminded that quality of written communication is assessed on the ten-mark answers and vague, inaccurate or ambiguous expression can limit the marks awarded in these questions. Although most students were able to articulate their knowledge and understanding to a reasonable standard, there were examples of very poor communication, such that the meaning of entire sentences was often difficult to discern.

The opportunity for schools and colleges to access the enhanced results analysis for their entries for this component will provide detailed breakdown of student performance for each question part and should inform teaching.

Section A Social Psychology

Topic: Social Influence

Question 01

The majority of students were able to offer an adequate definition of normative social influence and were awarded both marks. There was occasional confusion with informational social influence, although this was much less in evidence than in previous series. Many students supplemented their definition with an example and, although a little redundant as not required by the question, this did at least underline their thorough understanding.

Question 02

Again, most students coped comfortably with this question and were able to apply their knowledge effectively to the scenario. Having defined the concept above, many took a fairly economical route - suggesting that Andrea would, 'dress more smartly in future'... 'to fit in', and earned two marks as a result.

Question 03

Many students gained five or all six of the available marks for this question. The vast majority were able to identify factors in obedience, the most popular being 'proximity of the authority figure', or those built around the concept of legitimacy such as 'context/location' and 'uniform'. Most could explain the effect of each factor on obedience also. Detail of Milgram's variations were typically used to support discussion, as were alternative studies eg Bickman. Those students who lost marks tended to offer vague examples, explanations or inaccurately used variations.

Question 04

The open nature of this essay allowed for such a range of material that most students were able to score in at least the 'good' band. There were also many excellent answers. Many students were able to provide detailed definitions of explanations and concepts – 'evaluation apprehension', 'distraction' and 'arousal' were particularly convincing. Relevant studies were offered and the effects on performance (both positive and negative) were analysed. There was often sustained critical analysis of particular explanations, such as the idea that 'distraction' can better account for the findings of animal studies, and the notion that 'evaluation apprehension' has difficulty accounting for the deleterious effect of blindfolded audiences on performance.

That said, many students failed to adequately account for the full range of performance effects, claiming that evaluation apprehension, for instance, always leads to inhibition. Finally, a significant number of students continue to labour under the false assumption that there is such a thing as a 'non-dominant response' that can have a negative impact upon performance.

Topic: Social Cognition

Question 05

Many definitions of the adaptive function of an attitude veered a little too closely to 'normative social influence' to gain full credit. Lots of answers emphasised overt behaviour rather than attitude and were penalised as a result.

Question 06

Most students were able to apply their knowledge of the adaptive function successfully to the stimulus. The inclusion of the word 'behaviour' in the stem meant that students who had not fully conveyed their understanding of the concept in question 05 were able to draw upon examples of how Michael might change his behaviour - informed by a change in his attitude - and gained full marks.

Question 07

The better answers, to this question tended to be those that took the primacy effect and recency effect as separate entities. These were named, defined – so that the effect on impression was made clear – and empirical evidence and/or real-life examples were appropriately used as discussion. Analyses of stereotyping that adopted a similar approach also scored well. Less successful was the use of central traits: definitions were often vague, with the subsequent effect on the impression formed not being made clear.

Question 08

Collectively, these essays tended to be less impressive than those in the corresponding Social Influence section, with very few scoring in the top band. Those students who did were likely to have selected the self-serving bias and the fundamental attribution error as their preferred biases. Descriptions of the actor-observer effect were often vague or incomplete. Better answers often paired each bias with an appropriate study alongside effective analysis of why the biases operate. There were some very good examples of exceptions to the biases, particularly for the self-serving bias. Responses in the lower bands included definitions and studies that lacked clarity. It was not uncommon to see details of several investigations in this area merged together to create a confusing picture overall.

Section B Cognitive Psychology

Topic: Remembering and Forgetting

Question 09

Two marks was the norm here. Typical definitions referred to 'memory for motor skills' for procedural and 'memory for facts/general knowledge' for semantic. There was confusion between 'semantic memory' and 'semantic processing' in a small number of answers. The third 'distinction' mark proved rather elusive and many students did not attempt it, perhaps assuming they had already distinguished between the two types of memory by defining them. Indeed, some students, who included terms such as 'declarative' and 'non-declarative' as part of their definitions, gained the third mark almost 'accidentally' as a result. Others were more explicit and produced detailed distinction points that were often based upon the amount of conscious processing required for each type of memory.

Question 10

Most students were able to outline two features of the working memory. Credit was also awarded for outlining broader 'features' of the model such as 'limited capacity' or 'dual-task performance', alongside the more obvious sub-systems/components. Some students merely provided a list of named features and received a single mark only.

Question 11

This was one of the less well answered questions on the paper. Many students described class exercises in an anecdotal fashion rather than recognised studies, for example, '*close your eyes and count the number of windows in your house...*' Those students who did outline genuine investigations tended to confuse or omit important information, such as detail of both conditions of the study, to the detriment of the answer. Of the full-mark answers that were seen, the Hunt (1980) study was a popular choice.

Question 12

Again, a question that many students found difficult. Most were able to state a relevant strength (usually, '*the model is a more detailed version of short-term memory*') but few were able to develop this into a coherent explanation. Those who did often drew contrast with the passive and/or unitary nature of short-term memory described within the Multi-store model. There were some excellent accounts of how the model can help account for phonological deficits linked to difficulties with reading, but these were few in number.

Question 13

This was one of the more disappointing essays on the paper. Students often showed themselves to be adept at describing one or both of the explanations but AO2 analysis marks seemed to be much harder to come by. There were descriptive errors too however. Many students did not change the word 'displace' to an alternative in their explanation of displacement. Writing about retrieval failure was often more detailed, although this was often couched as a 'reason for remembering' rather than a 'reason for forgetting'.

As with previous extended response questions on forgetting, students would all too quickly lapse into generic evaluation points linked to particular studies, rather than addressing the shortcomings or otherwise of the named explanations. As a consequence, many responses tended to score around the 'average' or 'good' bands, with very few at the top end.

Those students who did access AO2 tended to do so through 'use of evidence'. Studies that demonstrate a serial position curve eg Murdock, were often well explained in the context of displacement of the middle items. Lots of students were able to use serial probe studies too as a means of explaining the displacement effect. As ever, the Godden and Baddeley study was a relevant and popular choice for retrieval failure, but this also tended to trigger a series of unsubstantiated comments related to ecological validity and ethical issues that were rarely applied to the explanation. In questions of this type, students are better advised to analyse strengths and weaknesses related to the explanations themselves, as opposed to ethical and methodological issues that are tied to specific investigations.

Topic: Perceptual Processes

Question 14

This multi-faceted question was misinterpreted by many. Students were first required to define distortion illusions in general; many failed to do this and instead provided a named example of a distortion illusion (the second element of the question) followed by a lengthy explanation of how the illusion works (something students were not required to do). Many did, however, offer an account of what distortion illusions tell us about perception (the third element of the question) and so scored two out of the three marks. Occasionally, students' understanding of distortion illusions in general became evident through the explanation they gave of their named illusion; thus, in many cases, the third mark was awarded on that basis.

Question 15

Students were much better at outlining Gestalt principles than in previous series and the majority scored both marks. 'Proximity' and 'similarity' were the principles most favoured by students, but some addressed the question using broader concepts such as 'holism' and 'the law of Pragnanz'. As with question 10, some students produced a list of named principles only and were awarded a solitary mark.

Question 16

This question caused few problems for most. Relevant perceptual set studies typically were clear and sufficient detail of conditions/tasks was included for both marks. The Gilchrist and Nesburg study was the one chosen most often, however, some students wrote inappropriately about the Navon study of Gestalt laws of organisation.

Question 17

Not unlike question 12, detailed, three-mark explanations were rare. Stated limitations often relied on general comment concerning ecological validity, without an attempt to link these to perception investigations specifically. Some of the better, more detailed answers were based on the difficulty of making comparisons and establishing control in cross-cultural studies of perceptual set.

Question 18

Although a much less popular choice numerically, this was one of the better answered questions on the paper. Often students demonstrated a clear grasp of the key concepts within Gibson's theory and were able to give detailed explanations and lucid examples related to these. Use of evidence was also strong with many drawing upon the work of Bower and/or Gibson and Walk study in order to illustrate the innate, direct properties of perception. There was often coherent, critical comparison with Gregory's theory and, occasionally, Neisser's theory was cited by means of compromise. Some students, unfortunately, wrote about Gregory rather than Gibson, whilst others offered detailed descriptions of both theories without any obvious attempt to compare them.

Section C Individual Differences

Topic: Anxiety Disorders

Question 19

Two symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder were accurately described by many – typically, and predictably, the 'obsessions' and the 'compulsions'; though physiological symptoms of anxiety were also deemed creditworthy. Some students gave symptoms that did not adequately distinguish OCD from other disorders, such as 'irrational thinking'.

Question 20

Many students could identify the correct experimental design used in the study but fewer could provide an appropriate outline. A considerable number, however, thought the design was 'independent groups' or even 'matched pairs'. Finally, 'quasi-experiment' was an often seen answer.

Question 21

The advantage of 'repeated measures' was often stated rather than explained, for instance, 'no participant variables' was frequently offered without elaboration. Better, fuller answers tended to be those based on the time and cost-saving benefits of using the same participants twice in comparison to alternative designs. It was possible to gain two marks if the answer in question 21 could be matched to that in question 20, therefore, many students scored full marks in this question for an advantage of independent groups having named it above.

Question 22

This question provided most students with a straightforward route to two marks. The vast majority were able to state that the therapy described had been 'effective' and justify their answer with reference to the figures in the table.

Question 23

Attempts to explain Sammy's phobia varied and this question tended to discriminate well. Most attempted to explain the scenario using classical conditioning but many gave muddled accounts using appropriate terminology (CS, UCR, etc.) but in the wrong places. A mark was often awarded for a vague reference to association linked to the events described in the stem. Some students demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of behaviourist principles, referring to both classical conditioning and avoidance learning in their answers and would have scored several more marks had they been available.

Question 24

Essays in this section were not quite as strong as they have been in recent series. Many students did not seem to have the depth of knowledge of systematic desensitisation required to gain all the AO1 marks that were available. Instead, 'sketchy' descriptions were often advanced and key concepts, such as 'anxiety hierarchy', were mentioned but not elaborated. Most students could assemble two or three relevant evaluation points, but other attempts at analysis such as those centred around 'cost', 'time', 'effort', etc were rarely reasoned or based on comparison. For instance, systematic desensitisation was often claimed to be 'unethical', 'expensive' and 'time-consuming' without any acknowledgement of treatments that would be more ethical, cheaper or faster.

Not all essays fell into this category however, and there were students who clearly knew this area very well, producing detailed, reasoned analyses of the treatment in the context of possible alternatives.

Topic: Autism

Question 25

As with the corresponding question on the previous section, most students scored two marks here. Some students lost a mark by giving a relevant symptom, but then offered a second symptom/behaviour that was little more than an extension or example of the first, as in the case of *repetitive behaviour* and *hand flapping*. A surprising number gave an answer that could be construed as 'poor verbal interaction' despite the fact that this was clearly ruled out by the question.

Questions 26, 27 & 28

The same issues on the *Anxiety Disorders* section were also relevant here. Many gave the wrong design for question 26 or the correct design without the outline. 'No participant variables' was often quoted for question 27 without elaboration. Question 28 posed few problems; the therapy was judged to be 'effective' by most and justified with reference to the data in the table.

Question 29

The parental involvement question was quite poorly answered with relatively few students accessing both marks. Many answers made reference to the importance of 'consistency' or 'continuity' in therapy but failed to explain why this might be significant. Some made only vague reference to children being happier with their parents present and were not awarded marks. The better answers tended to make two separate points or use evidence to support an argument. Many students quoted the finding by Koegel – that 30 hours of parental involvement is equivalent to 200 hours in therapy – to useful effect.

Question 30

Students were limited to two cognitive explanations in this question but this did not seem to affect the quality of the answers which were often good or better. Most students selected 'theory of mind' and 'central coherence deficit' as their preferred explanations, and invariably demonstrated good descriptive understanding. Supporting studies too were detailed and clear, and there was noticeably good use of evidence in many answers. When students chose to discuss 'failure of executive functioning', they were typically less convincing, but there were some impressive exceptions.

There was evidence of well-informed discussion and this was often in relation to cognitive explanations in general, rather than specific theories. Many students made the point that cognitive explanations tend not to provide information relating to causal factors, and that an interactionist approach to autism, that makes some attempt to include insights from the biological perspective, would be more informative.

Weaker answers tended to be overly descriptive with little appropriate analysis, and there was occasional confusion over which explanation could best account for which symptoms.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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