Version 2

General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2011

Psychology A PSYA1

(Specification 2180)

Unit 1: Cognitive Psychology, Developmental Psychology and Research Methods

Report on the Examination

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

Unit 1: (PSYA1) Cognitive Psychology, Developmental Psychology and Research Methods

General

Most candidates seemed well prepared for this exam and made a genuine attempt to answer all the questions. When candidates failed to score marks, despite writing fairly extensive answers, it was generally because they had misunderstood the requirement for a question. Candidates are instructed to answer the questions in the spaces provided. This means they should write on the lines, including extra space, for each question. This should be enough space for the length of answer required. However, candidates who wish to write more should continue on additional sheets rather than using the blank spaces in the booklet.
There was a problem of legibility with a small number of scripts. In some cases the writing was very faint and in some the hand writing was extremely difficult, and occasionally impossible, to read.

Section A Cognitive Psychology and Research Methods

Question 1

This was answered correctly by most candidates.

Question 2

There were some excellent answers where candidates described the memory strategy using coherent expression. Some candidates seemed aware of appropriate strategies but lacked the language skills to describe them clearly and accurately. Many candidates could name two relevant strategies and gain up to 4 marks but often failed to describe the strategies in sufficient detail to get full marks. Rehearsal was sometimes described as when you rehearse something. Method of Loci was usually well described, although some candidates left out the final retrieval stage. The strategy that was done least well was the peg word method. Most described this as improving memory by rhyming a list with numbers (ie one-bun) but often failed to explain that this was the learning of the pegs not the word to be learnt. There also seemed to be a common misunderstanding of chunking. Chunking takes a large number of items and transforms them into fewer (ie we cannot remember, say, 12 items in STM but if we can chunk them into 3 groups of 4 we can). Candidates described taking one item and breaking it into smaller chunks. This adds more not less demands on a limited STM so is not a creditworthy strategy.

Question 3

(a) Most candidates accurately reported independent groups/measures, unrelated or between subjects/groups design. Candidates seemed better prepared to identify the experimental design than in previous examination series, although there were some who incorrectly identified the type of experiment (eg laboratory experiment).

(a) If candidates got 3(a) wrong (laboratory experiment) then their limitation was usually wrong, so there were some incorrect references to low ecological validity. When candidates selected a correct limitation eg participant variables they did not always elaborate it well enough for two marks. Examples of individual differences were most plausible when they focussed on an appropriate characteristic for this study eg memory differences.

(b) Candidates who looked at the results on the graph and commented appropriately on the pattern of correct and incorrect statements, scored full marks. It is advisable for candidates to read the labels on the axes of a graph. A number of candidates failed to do this and so reported inaccurately on the average number of *participants* who had made statements.

(c) Answers generally showed good understanding of the cognitive interview approach. Candidates who just named a process, eg *report everything*, did not score full marks. Some elaboration or application to the stem was necessary to obtain a second mark.

(d) Responses to the term *investigator effects* were varied. A few candidates wrote excellent responses identifying cues the investigator might produce in the context of the study, which might lead to the investigator's expectations being fulfilled. Quite a number of candidates inappropriately discussed leading questions and often cited Loftus's work.

Question 4

The majority of candidates obviously had a good knowledge of the multi-store model (MSM) and were able to apply it to the scenario. It was pleasing to be able to give maximum marks to so many answers. The majority of students who did badly on this question focussed on the transfer of information from sensory stores to STM. They seem to be confused about the nature of sensory stores and/or are confusing sensory stores with STM. Answers such as 'he didn't pay attention so information did not go to the STM' disregard the fact that sensory stores last a fraction of a second and the stimulus material (which states Jamie has looked up the number in a directory) is now in STM). Other answers suggested that because Jamie did rehearse the number during the conversation that it did not go from sensory to STM. Centres might do better to briefly mention sensory stores but focus on STM and LTM. A number of answers suggested that the concepts of maintenance and elaborative rehearsal were part of the MSM. Maintenance and elaborative rehearsal were introduced by Craik and Lockhart (1972) as a way of *criticising the MSM* which had simply relied on 'rehearsal' as a means of transferring information to LTM.
A few candidates inevitably choose to write about WM not the MSM.

Question 5

Apart from a few who described and evaluated the MSM most had some idea about WM. For a substantial number the description was limited to the components of WM with very little about the processes involved. A diagram helps to show the relationship between components and is credit-worthy. The model has been revised several times since the original (Baddeley and Hitch,1974) particularly by Baddeley in 2001. Any version is acceptable.

Many answers suggested that students had been taught evaluation of WM but did not fully understand it. So, for example, students described dual task experiments but did not say why these supported the notion of different short term stores. Some described one part of a dual task experiment (such as doing two visual/spatial tasks) without the contrast (one visual and one verbal) – this makes the information basic rather than reasonable or effective as it doesn't really help evaluate the model. Another common error was to suggest it is easier to do two similar tasks compared with two dissimilar. There was also a tendency to describe evidence without explaining how it contributed to the evaluation. Some answers accurately explained the word length effect but did not link it to the phonological loop and its limited duration.

Section B Developmental Psychology and Research Methods

Question 6

(a) The majority of answers described Ainsworth's procedure well – both generally accurate and detailed. Better answers identified such things as the observation methodology, the participants, the context and the sequence of the pre-determined activities. Weaker answers just identified the sequence of activities, sometimes in a jumbled arrangement. A few misunderstood the focus of the question and concentrated on describing the types of attachment. Whilst some of this was creditworthy most was not.

(b) This was a question which discriminated between candidates. Some excellent answers discussed the nature of external validity, ecological or population validity in the context of Ainsworth's studies. Some weaker answers wrote lengthy responses describing cross cultural variations on the Ainsworth paradigm but there was often no clear link to validity. A few candidates muddled validity with reliability, for example discussing the difficulty of re-testing the same children or the potential lack of reliability in an observation study.

Question 7

(a) This question was generally well answered, if anything a little too fully (ie maximum marks could have been obtained with much less writing). The distinction was usually very clear and well illustrated with examples. Candidates were able to explain the difference between privation and disruption of attachment and elaborate effectively and/or give relevant examples of each. The best answers thoughtfully drew out points of contrast, or, made explicit where privation and disruption lay in the examples they had chosen. A few candidates used the term "deprivation" which sometimes made their answer to this question unclear.

(b) Some candidates did not address the focus of the question which was the influence of findings of research into attachment. Too often answers described research into aggression or peer relationships with no reference to the question. Better answers considered the influence of attachment research on hospital practices and/or day care provision (staff ratio, staff training etc).

Question 8

(a) Nearly all candidates identified relevant research in their answers but often the focus was not on the findings. For example, the most common research used here was Harlow's work and all candidates mentioned some procedure. The majority went on to describe findings but for some this was limited to a sentence and for a few, absent. A small number described the learning theory rather than findings which challenged it.

(b) Bowlby's theory was typically described well and most answers were in the accurate or generally accurate bands showing good levels of knowledge and understanding. The variation of marks was a measure of the accuracy and detail of the answer.

Question 9

(a) Many candidates showed some understanding of a natural experiment but a substantial number confused it with studies in a natural environment.

(b) Most answers were creditworthy although some merely named rather than outlined a method. The best responses suggested a way which involved both observation and recording of the behaviour. Few candidates suggested the use of interviews or questionnaires, although these were creditworthy.

(c) This question was usually well answered and there were very thoughtful responses, for example, where candidates suggested that consent from the children as well as informed consent from parents would be appropriate, given the age of the children. It is encouraging to see that candidates are able to give consideration to ethical issues. However, worryingly, a few did not seem to be aware of what ethical issues are.

(d) This was an easy question for many candidates although some candidates did just restate the question "Peer relations are the relationships you have with peers". Such answers did not gain any marks. Many understood what a peer is and were able to elaborate on the relations/relationships part for 2 marks. A few candidates thought that peers were teachers, parents etc.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results statistics page of the AQA Website.