



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

Psychology A

PSYA2

(Specification 2180)

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

Report on the Examination

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Unit 2: (PSYA2) Biological Psychology, Social Psychology and Individual Differences

General

Whilst it is clear that most schools and colleges have addressed the specification revisions for PSYA2 there are some students whose responses suggest they have been taught the original specification. Students re-sitting units need to familiarise themselves with the changes to the specification.

Although the following advice was given in previous reports, it has been repeated again as some schools and colleges do not seem to have taken it on board.

The AS exam is designed to make students think about the specific requirements of each question. A skill that they need to show is their ability to select the appropriate information and to apply their knowledge. The exam has been designed to allow time for this very important skill. Students who think about which part of the specification is relevant, who apply their knowledge appropriately and who can write accurate and concise answers, will do very well. Often, time spent thinking and planning is extremely beneficial; sometimes when it comes to writing 'less is more'.

As students write their answers in the booklet, they should be guided by the space provided. Students (and teachers) should be reassured that it is perfectly possible to gain full marks in the space provided, often without the need to use the extra space. So if only three or four lines have been given, then this is all that would be expected for the allocated marks; an accurate and concise answer can gain just as many marks as one that uses the extra space but is less focused. It is possible that many students who are writing too much probably do not read the question carefully. It is clear that some very well informed students are not gaining full marks because they are simply not doing what the question asks.

Similarly, the wording used in the question will indicate to students what they are supposed to do; 'explain' requires more than a mere 'outline'. Equally if the question asks for an 'outline' then evaluation is not required. Many students wasted time and space with material that was not relevant to the specific requirements of the question. Students need to both select the relevant material and to use it in the appropriate way.

The AS papers are marked online and teachers might need to explain to their students the process of scanning and clipping. Examiners do not see whole scripts, but only the clipped part of the question they are marking. Examiners will not see anything that is written outside of the lines or margins and so students who write outside these areas risk not gaining marks. Even more of a concern is those students who continue their answer elsewhere in the booklet but make no reference to this. The best advice is for students who need to write more than the space given allows, is to use the additional pages, but make sure that they inform the examiner that they have done so. A simple 'continued' or 'see extra page' will suffice.

Section A *Biological Psychology*

Question 1

The most usual studies offered were Marmot et al and Johansson et al, with the latter usually in more detail. In general this question was answered well, with many students demonstrating knowledge of the main details of the study. Unfortunately some students are still wasting time writing far too much and using, erroneously, the blank space at the bottom of the page. A few students did not read the question carefully and offered more than one study.

Question 2

There was excellent knowledge presented by many students, who clearly knew a great deal about life changes and daily hassles. Unfortunately students did not seem able to present their answers in a way that answered the question. Simply presenting two statements along side each other does not show a difference. They need to explicitly focus on what makes the difference.

Question 3

There were a wide range of limitations given, but the more successful ones were those that were able to show why it was a limitation. For example, social desirability is a limitation because the answers might not reflect the truth and may lack validity. Other answers compared questionnaires with interviews as a method of illustrating the limitation. A large number of students are still making the classic mistake of offering types of data as the limitation but without linking it to specific types of questions. Unless there is an explicit link to open/closed questions then such answers are not relevant.

Question 4

Many students were clearly very well prepared for this essay and wrote some excellent answers. They had a good knowledge of drugs and how the different types affected the body; there were also excellent descriptions of the procedures of SIT. The commentary was not always quite so informed, with many general comments simply stating, for example, that drugs were effective, without any supporting evidence. Or that drugs had side effects, without commenting on what these were and the potential problem.

Students were less successful when offering Hardiness Training as a method, focussing on the personality type rather than the method itself and again the commentary tended to be superficial.

One of the notable problems for many students is the slightly puzzling loss of focus that was seen in their essays. These students started by considering the use of drugs, but then switched from stress management to therapies for psychopathology. It appeared as if they assumed that all drug treatments were relevant here, which clearly they are not.

A minority of students offered emotion/problem focussed approaches, which are not methods of stress management.

Section B Social Psychology

Question 5

Students showed extremely good understanding of NSI and ISI and were able to apply their knowledge very effectively to the scenario.

Question 6

Another question that was usually answered very well, with students referring to reactance, non-conforming allies, the need for independence and having an internal locus of control. Better answers were able to *explain* rather than merely *state* the reason.

There are still some students who seem to think that conformity and obedience are interchangeable terms.

Question 7

Apart from those students who confused obedience with conformity, most answers were well informed. Many students made good use of Milgram's research to expand and elaborate their reason, such as presence of legitimate authority, role of buffers and gradual commitment.

Question 8

This was also answered very well, with the most common ethical issues being lack of informed consent, deception and lack of protection from harm.

It is worth noting that in fact Milgram *did* inform all his participants of their right to withdraw at the very start of the study. However, he then made it difficult for participants to leave. If students chose to use right to withdraw as their ethical issue, they did need to show awareness of how it applied to Milgram.

Question 9

In spite of this question having been asked in a similar form in several previous question papers, students still seem to struggle with this concept and it was badly answered by the majority of students. However, there were a small number of students who appeared to have grasped the concept of social change and interestingly used examples from previous papers to illustrate their answers. Now that the specification has changed and includes the role of the minority, perhaps in the future, students will have a better understanding of the process. Social change usually starts with a consistent, committed and non-dogmatic minority who challenge the beliefs of the majority. Through the snowball procedure and ultimately through social crypto-amnesia, the minority becomes the majority. It is at this stage that social change occurs.

Section C Individual Differences

Question 10

Students seem to struggle with the interpretation of graphs and many do not seem to understand the difference between what data show ie findings and what can be concluded from the data. The graph shows a negative correlation, which is moderate-strong; this shows that the more weeks of treatment the lower the depression score. Students could also comment on the apparent “plateau” or change in direction in the middle of treatment. Very few students considered the strength of the relationship and weaker students just read the data off the graph.

Question 11

There were some excellent outlines of this definition, with good use of Rosenhan and Seligman’s features as well as the GAF. Unfortunately some students failed to note that this question also required evaluation and so failed to access half the marks. The most common mistake here was to confuse this definition with deviation from ideal mental health.

Question 12

Most students knew which three statements referred to the psychodynamic approach and scored full marks.

Question 13

There were some excellent and extremely detailed answers to this question with many students writing far more than was necessary for 4 marks. Although for some students, their answer was closer to a list rather than an outline. Most students could outline the role of genetics, infection, biochemistry and brain damage in abnormality.

Question 14

- (a) It is worth reminding students that with an applied question, they need to shape their knowledge to the requirements of the question. In this case they were asked about advice concerning disadvantages of drugs, so including all the advantages does not receive credit. Most students could comment on the possibility of side effects, addiction and the fact that drugs only treat the symptoms and not the cause.
- (b) This question proved to be a difficult one, as many students appeared not to have read it carefully. They were required to identify a psychological therapy and then explain why it might help Hugh. This is not the same as explaining what was involved in the therapy. Those who chose CBT or psychoanalysis were more successful than those choosing systematic desensitisation or flooding, because they were able to describe the underlying rationale. For example, with psychoanalysis it might help Hugh because it looks for the unconscious cause of his problem and attempts to bring it to his conscious mind where he can then deal with it.

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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