



General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012

Psychology B

PSYB1

(Specification 2185)

Unit 1: Introducing Psychology

Report on the Examination

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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Unit 1: (PSYB1) Introducing Psychology

General

Many of the general points below have been made in previous reports, but it is worth repeating these as significant numbers of students continue to make the same errors.

The standard of responses for this examination was largely comparable with that of previous sessions. Examiners reported an increase in poor handwriting and there were some responses that were barely legible. It was also noticeable that students often 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 the content was presented in a muddled way. A larger number of students 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. Once again, many answers were poorly constructed and there were many examples where responses were disconnected, with points not following on from the original point or points made. Accessing marks in the top mark band does require a well-structured answer.

There are a high proportion of marks allocated on this paper for ‘*How Science Works*’. Questions allocating AO3 marks occurred in all sections of the examination paper, not only Section C, eg Q1(b), 2(b)(i) and 2(b)(ii). Some students did not read these questions carefully and did not focus on the requirements. Students need 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 question 2(b)(i) it was evident that some students who had thorough knowledge of appropriate investigations into gender development had not read the question and therefore failed to focus their answer on the procedures used by the researcher(s) to collect the data in the study chosen. In Section C, students found it difficult to explain how ‘stratified sampling’ and ‘random allocation’ might be carried out and for the most part they could not discuss the inappropriateness of repeated measures design for the study described. In these cases, answers rarely showed accurate understanding of the terms and there was poor application to the scenario presented.

There is still evidence that students believe that the assertions or claims they present are evidence of analysis and therefore evaluative skills. In almost all cases this is not so and statements such as, ‘*One negative is the humanistic approach ignores genes and biology*’. ‘*It also ignores the unconscious of the psychodynamic approach which is a negative*’, will not attract credit. Similarly, students took time to report relevant evidence but rarely explained exactly how and/or why this demonstrated weakness in a particular theory/explanation or approach.

In the extended writing questions, examiners have to identify areas where credit for AO1 and AO2 skills can be awarded. They then 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.’

There was an increased use of additional sheets this series and some students had not used the extra space pages in the answer booklet and had used an additional pages booklet instead. This is not an appropriate use of the additional pages.

Section A *Key Approaches in Psychology and Biopsychology*

Question 1

- (a)** Only a quarter of the responses for this question gained full marks and many students annotated the diagram in terms of lobes rather than areas of cortical specialisation.
- (b)** This was a poorly answered question as many students did not seem to realise that they were required to evaluate the use of EEGs. Answers were often muddled with EEGs being confused and many students seemed to believe that EEGs show precise areas of functioning/cortical specialisation and are an invasive technique. Very few understood that the primary function of an EEG is to indicate whether brain wave activity is rhythmic or not.
- (c)** Many students were able to provide an appropriate defence mechanism and elaborate this with reference to Emily's behaviour. However, a significant number offered one defence mechanism but then explained her behaviour in terms of an alternative defence mechanism, such as: 'Emily might be in denial. She has probably told herself that the examination was not very important so it does not matter that she failed, (rationalisation).'
- (d)** This was generally quite well answered although some students did not focus on one limitation of the psychodynamic approach which was then outlined more fully and instead offered a number of possible limitations.
- (e)** This was reasonably well answered with a good spread of marks awarded. However, students did find it difficult to access marks in the top two mark bands. There was a great deal of muddle in some of the description offered by students, who could not distinguish between the theoretical proposals of Rogers and Maslow. Many offered long lists of named concepts such as: self, free will, hierarchy of needs, congruence and so on, but did not demonstrate that they had clear knowledge of these key features. When concepts were elaborated it was evident that students often had quite superficial, and in some cases, inaccurate understanding of these and it was quite common to see comments such as: 'we do not have free will because there are laws,' or 'self-actualisation is when you get all you want,' or 'the hierarchy of needs must be wrong because people in China cannot satisfy basic needs.' Evaluation of the approach was generally weaker than the description and many responses were lists of statements of difference between humanistic theory and other explanations of behaviour. These were often in the form, 'the humanistic approach says we have free will but the psychodynamic approach says we are determined by the unconscious/the behaviourist approach says the environment determines behaviour.' Other attempts at analysis were in the form of unsubstantiated claims that there is **no** evidence to support it or the therapy is **very** effective.

As already stated, the standard of literacy in this extended writing was often very weak, with frequent spelling errors and poor structure and coherence.

Section B Gender Development

Question 2

- (a) The vast majority of students could provide a clear definition of imitation.
- (b) (i) The difficulty in this question seemed to be a lack of understanding of what was required. The question asked for detail of **how** the study was carried out. Students noted that they had to focus on a study and then launched into a description of the elements of their chosen study, citing the aim, method, results and conclusion. This meant that much of the description provided was irrelevant. Students should be aware that they can demonstrate an understanding of how science works by providing detail of exactly what researchers did to collect data in an investigation.
- (b) (ii) Some responses to this question were inappropriate as they did not present a methodological issue. In particular, some students attempted to suggest that a lack of temporal validity is a methodological issue when clearly a study can only be carried out when it is carried out. Thus, discussion of the relevance of the findings to a later time period is unlikely to be related to the methodology used by the researcher(s). Students are advised to consider carefully the relevance of possible issues to an identified study rather than just presenting any possible issue from their list of methodological or ethical issues.
- (c) (i) Fewer than half of the responses to this question gained full credit. Many students could not outline gender stability clearly. Often, for the second part of the question, answers did not focus on stability and how the comment made by William showed his lack of stability – he did not understand his own gender is fixed, but instead introduced the concept of gender identity.
- (c) (ii) As seen in 2(c)(i) above, the same proportions of students gained full credit and often students did not gain the second mark as they did not explain Tilly's question with reference to constancy, but instead suggested she had achieved stability which was not evident from the information provided.
- (d) The distribution of marks for this question was virtually identical to that achieved in question 1(d). There were some good examples of descriptive skills but some students did lose focus and much of their description became biological explanations of behaviour rather than biological explanations of gender development. References to evidence were generally good, but students did not use the evidence presented well. Students usually resorted to stating only that the research was support for a biological explanation but failed to elaborate how or why the evidence cited could be considered to support the explanation. Again, evaluative points often simply listed differences between biological and psychological explanations. It was rare that such simplistic comparisons were creditworthy as often they were undeveloped. For example, '*the biological approach ignores the unconscious which Freud says is important*' or '*it ignores the mediating processes of the cognitive explanation*'.

Section C Research Methods

Question 3

- (a)** The majority of students scored full marks for this question although weaker responses merely re-stated the pattern of the results given in Table 1 and omitted any reference to an appropriate conclusion.
- (b)** Answers to this question were relatively poor, with only a third of the cohort able to state the independent and dependent variables with clarity.
- (c)** This was very poorly answered with more than half of the responses achieving no credit. Students muddled stratified sampling with both random sampling and systematic sampling. Very few could explain in a logical way exactly what a researcher would do to gain a stratified sample of the available target population.
- (d) (i)** Although some students seemed aware that once selected the participants could be randomly allocated to conditions using a hat or computer, they were very unclear about exactly what should be done. Descriptions suggested ‘putting all the names in a hat/computer’ but could not describe what would happen next. It seemed quite obvious to examiners that many students have never had a practical opportunity to allocate either people to conditions or words to lists, in a random way.
- (d) (ii)** Similarly, few students gained full credit for this question as they struggled to explain why random allocation is important, although many were able to produce answers with vague reference to the issue of bias.
- (e)** Students have clearly learned generic responses to questions about the advantages and disadvantages of experimental designs. However, here they needed to make it clear that repeated measures would not be a suitable experimental design in this case. Some did not notice that having guessed the weight of a cake once, participants would lose their naivety in the study and it would be an illogical request to ask them to repeat the task either with, or without, other estimates on the answer sheet. In many cases they just trotted out answers which suggested the participants would be extremely fatigued having guessed once or that they would get better at guessing so their answers would improve.
- (f)** There seemed to be an expectation that as the question asked about ethical issues then the response should include how to address the issue. The question did not require students to do this but many offered such answers. Some stated that informed consent was an issue but then explained the issue of consent/permission to participate in the study, without realising these are different issues. Others identified informed consent but failed to recognise that attempting to gain this would mean it would be impossible to implement the study.
- (g) (i)** Although the Specification only names structured and unstructured interviews as types of interview, there were some very obscure answers to this question. Unfortunately, even when students chose to write about the named interviews they often drifted into answers about type of question. Some thought that structured interviews only contain closed questions and unstructured only open questions and elaborated their description in this way. They then compounded this error in 3g(ii) by discussing a limitation of closed or open questions. Others suggested that one type of interview would be a questionnaire.

- (g) (ii)** As stated above, many students discussed limitations of types of question rather than types of interview and only about a third of the cohort gained full credit for this question.

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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