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Examiners Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel

GCE Psychology 8PS0/01

Paper 1: Social and Cognitive Psychology

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General Comments

The examination structure provided a range of question types over two main sections, social psychology, and cognitive psychology, with a final extended response requiring candidates to address a theme that occurs in both social and cognitive psychology.

Good psychological knowledge and understanding was demonstrated by many candidates, and it was clear that they had a good working knowledge of the topic areas. There were very few unanswered questions and many of the questions were attempted in some detail which benefited the candidates.

Candidates showed particular strengths in describing and explaining the strengths of Tulving's (1972) explanation of long-term memory. A good working knowledge of Realistic Conflict Theory was also evident in the responses given.

Areas of improvement to consider would be questions that require an AO2 application, simply stating a name from the scenario does not constitute application. Candidates should use elements of the scenarios in their identification and justification points. Without this application, responses are generic and therefore not creditworthy.

The longer response questions requiring AO3 appeared to challenge students at the lower end of the grade boundaries. It is important for candidates to understand the requirements of the questions in terms of the taxonomy. When a question requires an assessment to be made, candidates must make a judgement. It is also important to apply the assessment to a concept if it is required by the question, for example, in respect of obedience, in terms of reliability and validity.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper candidate are offered the following advice:

- In a practical investigation, candidates need to be able to apply the key elements of methodology, giving examples of each, that would make an investigation replicable. A response that focuses solely on the sample is unlikely to achieve full marks.
- Candidates need to understand when a scenario has been given, that elements of the scenario (not just a name) must be used in their response at least once. When there is an AO3 element, this should also be linked to the scenario.
- When a question is linked to an element of a theory, study or methodology, links need to be made. For example, assess/explain/evaluate in terms of reliability, validity, obedience, the knowledge and understanding should be targeted at the concept in question and then justified accordingly.
- Questions that require an improvement to an investigation need to use elements of the scenario and relate these in terms of the target population if some element of the sample has been chosen. Simply increasing sample size is not considered a suitable improvement.

Comments on Individual Questions

Q01a

Question Introduction

The majority of candidates could correctly define what was meant by obedience for one mark. Many candidates were also able to access the second mark by giving an example that focused on following the orders of a perceived authority figure, often citing a further example such as teacher.

Q01b

Question Introduction

The question required candidates to give two strengths of Milgram's research into obedience. Many candidates accessed the AO1 mark by referring to standardisation of the procedure, citing a suitable example from the research. However, for AO3, the candidates did not relate this back to the study and did not explain that it makes it replicable therefore reliable.

Many candidates gave a second strength, the most common response was application to real life, citing suitable examples such as Mai Lai massacre or The Holocaust. However, many candidates did not achieve the AO3 mark as it was not related to the research, for example, being in the agentic state.

Examiner Tip

Where the question requires two strengths, there needs to be a clear identification followed by a justification, where applicable, findings from research or key elements of a theory to support the identification point.

Q02a

Question Introduction

This question required candidates to define opportunity sampling. This question was generally answered quite well by the majority of candidates, suggesting that it was participants who were available at that moment in time. Some candidates used proximity and assumed that being nearby also meant they were available to participate in research, which was not creditworthy.

Q02b

Question Introduction

This question was an AO2/AO3 question that required candidates to explain one strength and one weakness of using a questionnaire to gather opinions in relation to the scenario given. Many candidates did not use elements of the scenario, simply giving a generic strength or weakness of using questionnaires and could not access the AO2 mark. The justification was therefore very weak or was not creditworthy.

Examiner Tip

In an AO2 question with stimulus material, candidates need to use elements of the scenario, other than just the name when they identify or explain the concept required by the question. Once this has been done, it provides a more accessible route for achieving the justification mark.

Q03a

Question Introduction

Many candidates were able to access the AO1 mark in identifying a suitable ethical issue in relation to the scenario. However, only some candidates accessed the second AO2 mark by using elements from the scenario such as social media usage, to describe the issue. Many candidates did not link the ethical issue to the description and gave a generic response.

Q03b

Question Introduction

This question was challenging for majority of the candidates. The question required an understanding of thematic analysis to be applied to the scenario of the positive and negative effects of media usage on teenagers. The majority of candidates did not demonstrate an understanding of thematic analysis and therefore could not apply this to the scenario.

Examiner Tip

Candidates may wish to revisit thematic analysis as used in a practical investigation. Where candidates did use this in the question, there was often some confusion between content analysis and thematic analysis, so perhaps looking at the differences between the two methods of investigation.

Q04

Question Introduction

The question required candidates to apply their knowledge of realistic conflict theory to a scenario. This question was generally answered well by the majority of candidates. The candidates demonstrated a good understanding of superordinate goals in relation to the scenario and made attempts to apply competition and scarcity of resources. Some candidates confused realistic conflict theory with social identity theory and therefore could not access the marks.

Q05

Question Introduction

Essay

The question required the candidates to assess whether individual differences in personality can affect obedience. There was a range of marks for this question although few candidates achieved level 4. Many candidates showed a limited understanding in terms of explaining how locus of control and authoritarian personality related to obedience. This limited the ability to access the higher mark levels. A number of candidates also used culture and gender as an explanation of an effect on obedience as opposed to alternative concepts that could be used to explore the effect on obedience and so were unable to achieve the higher mark levels.

Q06a

Question Introduction

The majority of candidates were able to identify a strength of Baddeley's (1966b) study in terms of reliability, citing appropriate examples from the study. The AO3, justification however was more limited, often only giving a generic response without referencing supporting evidence or elements of the study, that could perhaps have been applied in a real-life capacity.

Q06b

Question Introduction

The question required one weakness of Baddeley's study in terms of validity, and this was answered very well by the majority of candidates. The candidates were able to identify a concept from the study and whilst the justification was weaker, this was contextualised and so was able to gain credit.

Q07a

Question Introduction

A mathematical question that required the candidates to calculate the mean from a data table in the scenario. This was answered well by the majority of candidates.

Q07b

Question Introduction

A mathematical question that required the candidates to calculate the mode from a data table in the scenario. This was answered well by the majority of candidates.

Q07c

Question Introduction

A mathematical question that required the candidates to calculate the standard deviation from a data table in the scenario. Many candidates could accurately calculate the standard deviation. Some candidates achieved one mark of three, by correctly calculating the difference column.

Q07d

Question Introduction

The question required the candidates to explain one improvement that could be made to Gwen's experiment. Many candidates gave a generic response and did not relate their suggestion to elements of the scenario.

Examiner Tip

The most common response suggested was that increasing sample size would improve generalisability. This is not suitable and is not a creditworthy response.

Q08

Question Introduction

The question required candidates to describe a procedure that they could suggest to Jane for her laboratory experiment. The majority of candidates did not answer this question well as they struggled to present enough information to make the procedure replicable. Many candidates mentioned the sample but did not address what the facts in the revision would be. Many candidates also appeared to think it was necessary to have music present or absent during recall and appeared confused about elements of the scenario.

Q9a

Question Introduction

The majority of candidates answered this question well and were able to describe semantic memory as used by Tulving (1972). Some candidates showed some confusion by using episodic memory and the multi-store model of memory instead.

Q9b

Question Introduction

The candidates were required to explain two strengths of Tulving's explanation of long-term memory. This was answered well by the majority of candidates citing the case studies to support the identified strength. For the second strength, a common response was the use of brain scans, which again was supported by suitable case studies.

Q10

Question Introduction

Essay

Many candidates provided a limited response in answer to the question: evaluate reconstructive memory (Bartlett, 1932), including schema theory and did not achieve level 3 or level 4 for their responses.

There were basic descriptions given for schemas and personal experience and these were limited in terms on how the long-term memory was affected. Few candidates mentioned key terms such as rationalisations, omission and simplifications. Many candidates made reference to war of the ghosts which would have been appropriate, but the focus became an evaluation of the research as opposed to addressing the question. Some answers used Steyvers and Hemmer, application to eye-witness testimony and dementia effectively as alternative competing arguments.

Q11

Question Introduction

Extended Writing Essay

The question required candidates to evaluate how the multi-store model of memory and social identity theory can explain Donald's situation, from the given scenario.

The majority of candidates were not able to apply elements of the scenario in their response meaning that it was not possible to move into level 3 and level 4 as their arguments were not supported by applying relevant evidence in context.

Many candidates repeated the stem as opposed to applying elements of the stem in respect of their AO1 knowledge and understanding point or linking it to their evaluation. There was some confusion between the multi-store model of memory and the working memory model for AO1. Evaluation was limited and when supporting/negating evidence were used, these were not linked back to the scenario and therefore, did not explain Donald's situation.

Examiner Tip

In 12 mark essays where AO1, AO2 and AO3 are required, candidates need to address each objective to achieve the higher mark bands. It is a higher level skill to write a balanced essay, but candidates do need to use elements from the scenario as opposed to repeating the stem.