Pearson

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

October 2017

Pearson Edexcel International GCE

In Psychology (WPS02)
Paper 2 Biological Psychology, Learning Theories and Development

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General comments

It was good to see candidates engaging with the questions, and providing a lot of psychological knowledge in their answers. There were very few blank pages, and candidates seemed to be able to manage their time well and attempt all the questions including the three essays at the end.

To improve their answers candidates, need to be able to justify their answers when it comes to explain questions, as many could gain the identification mark but then failed to offer any explanation, especially when asked about improvements. There was also an issue with generic points in terms of research methods and studies.

However, most candidates were able to link answers to scenarios when they were given, including in the essays. It would help candidates to know what the different command verbs expect in the form of an answer, especially those used in essays, as a lot of candidates were limited in what marks they could gain due to lack of conclusion or judgements where they were needed.

Paper summary

- Candidates need to consistently refer back to the scenario in A02 questions, especially short answer questions.
- Essays should have a mix AO1 and AO3.
- Candidates should ensure they do not repeat what they have already written.
- Candidates need to ensure they justify or exemplify what they have written when the question asks them to explain.

Section A

1) This was an AO2 question that required candidates to engage with the scenario consistently throughout their answers. Candidates who failed to gain full marks often did not engage with the scenario, or repeated points that they had already made.

2a) This was an AO2 question where candidates were required to calculate Spearman's Rank test. Most candidates gained at least 1 mark for correctly calculating the d^2 column. Better candidates could accurately work through the formula to give the correct answer. Some candidates failed to follow the instruction of giving the answer to two decimal places.

2b) This was an AO1 and AO3 question requiring candidates to identify and then explain a strength and a weakness. Good answers were able to do this; however, some candidates could identify but then did not go on to explain. Some candidates

described what a correlation was as a strength rather than identifying what a strength of a correlation was. The most common weakness was the fact correlations do not show cause and effect.

3a) This was an AO2 question so the answer had to be linked to the scenario throughout. Most candidates were able to link their answer to the scenario in some way, but this was not often carried out throughout the answer. Some candidates included studies in their answer but these were not linked to the scenario. Very few candidates went beyond the fact that aggression could be inherited, with little description about how genes may have affected Tariro's aggression.

3b) This was an AO1 and AO3 questions requiring candidates to identify and justify/exemplify a weakness of the role of genes in aggression. The better answers were able to do this, in some case the justification/exemplification was related to 3a which was creditworthy. Other candidates were able to identify a weakness but failed to justify/exemplify their answer. The most common weakness was the fact the explanation ignores other factors.

4a) This was an AO1 question, with most candidates gaining the mark. A few candidates said that the aim of the study was to measure violence. Some candidates were not specific enough in their answer, and did not focus on murderers who pleaded guilty for reasons if insanity.

4b) This was an AO1 and AO3 question focussing on one way the study could be improved. Most candidates were able to identify an improvement, most often in terms of how the sample could be improved. However, very few candidates were able to justify/exemplify why this would be an improvement. Some candidates focussed on the weakness of the study rather than explaining why their suggestion would be an improvement.

5a) This was an A02 question, where the answer had to be linked to the scenario throughout. Most candidates were accurately able to describe how Gabriella would gain a volunteer sample for 1 mark. Some candidates would state what a volunteer sample was, and some candidates wrote about a different sampling method.

5b) This was an A02 question, where the answer had to be linked to the scenario throughout. Candidates who did not gain these marks often did not refer to the scenario in their answer. Some candidates made the assumption that volunteer sampling meant that the participants had given informed consent. Some of the answers were not specific to a volunteer sample and could have been true of other sampling methods as well.

5c) This was an AO1 and AO3 question that required candidates to identify and justify/exemplify a weakness of volunteer sampling. Better answers were able to do both the identification and the justification/exemplification, though a lot of answers failed to justify/exemplify. Some answers were not made explicit to the volunteer sampling methods and could have been true of other sampling methods as well.

5d) This was an AO1 identify question, which the vast majority of candidates were able to accurately do.

6) This was an assess question which required knowledge and understanding of the role of internal pacemakers (AO1) as well as assessment which lead to a judgement (AO3). The better answers were able to do both requirements, often having several judgements throughout their essay. Other answers often lacked detail on either the AO1 or the AO3. Many answers failed to offer assessment throughout the essay, with some not offering any judgement at all.

Section B

7a) This was an AO2 question that required candidates to refer to the scenario throughout their answer which most answers achieved. A lot of answers could have referred to psychoanalysis as they were not linked to object relations therapy specifically. There was a lack of description about aspects of object relations therapy in a lot of answers, and some answers described how object relations could explain Amelia's issues rather than how the therapy could be used.

7b) This was an explain question so required both AO1 identification, and AO3 justification/exemplification. Better answers could achieve both for the strength and the weakness. A lot of answers could only gain an identification mark. Some answers did not identify a strength but described what the therapy was.

8a) This was an AO2 question that required candidates to refer to the scenario throughout. Most candidates did refer to the scenario throughout their answers, however there was a lack of detail about how a content analysis could be carried out.

8b) This was an AO2 question that required candidates to refer to the scenario. Better answers were able to correctly state why Mateo used the mode as a measure of central tendency. However, a lot of answers just stated what the mode was without stating why Mateo would use it.

8c) This was an AO2 question that required candidates to not use the type of data collected as part of their answer. A lot of answers included the type of data as a reason for Mateo using the statistical test, indicating they had not read the question fully. Some answers showed a lack of knowledge about reasons for using a specific test.

9a) Bastian was the most popular study chosen for this question. Part a was an AO1 question, with most candidates being able to correctly answer this.

9b) This focussed on two weaknesses of the study, so was an AO1 and AO3 question requiring both AO1 identification, and AO3 justification/exemplification. Better answers could achieve both though a lot of answers could only gain an identification mark. Some answers gave generic weaknesses, without reference to specifics of their chosen studies, therefore the weaknesses could apply to several studies.

For question 9 a small minority of answers were focussed on the incorrect study.

10a) This was an AO2 question that required candidates to refer to the scenario throughout their answer. Some answers did not refer to the scenario, and just described what an overt observation was without referencing how Naif could tell the students they were going to be observed. Only the very best answers were able to give two accurate descriptive points in reference to the scenario.

10b) This was an explain question so required both AO1 identification, and AO3 justification/exemplification. Better answers could achieve both for the strength and the weakness. A lot of answers gave statements about observations in general which are only true of specific types of observation. Candidates should name the type of observation they are referring to if their answer is not true for all observations. A lot of answers said that knowing they were being observed meant participants had given informed consent, when this is not necessarily true.

11) This was a discuss essay so required candidates to show knowledge and understanding, AO1, and support their discussion with application of relevant evidence, AO2. Candidates did show they were able to apply their answer to the scenario. Weaker answers failed to show their knowledge and understanding, often just stating terms used within operant conditioning with nothing further to show they had knowledge of what the terms were.

12) This question required candidates to show knowledge and understanding of Freud's psychosexual stages of development, AO1, as well as offer evaluation of the theory which lead to a conclusion, AO3. Better answers were able to show they had both the knowledge and the evaluative skills developing coherent chains of reasoning which lead to a balanced conclusion. Weaker answers lacked either the knowledge and understanding, often not going beyond naming the stages, or any development within the AO3.

13) This question required candidates to evaluate both structures of the brain and social learning theory as explanations of aggression, requiring AO1 and AO3 for both explanations. A lot of answers were able to offer good knowledge and understanding of social learning theory, though some did not go beyond naming attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. However, the knowledge and understanding of brain structures as an explanation of aggression was not as thorough, with only the very best answers going beyond isolated elements. Answers often showed an imbalance with the AO3 compared to the AO1, with some answers not having any AO3. A lot of answers offered no conclusion, or the conclusion was superficial.

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