



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2021

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Subsidiary Level

In Psychology (WPS01/01)

Paper 1: Social and Cognitive Psychology

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General Comments

This paper allowed candidates many opportunities to demonstrate their psychological knowledge and skills. All questions on the paper were attempted in most cases. Although there were a few blank responses they were not limited to a specific part of the paper indicating that candidates approached this paper confidently and were able to complete it in the time available.

The mathematical assessment questions were generally answered well with candidates completing the calculations accurately. Candidates should recognise the different types of graphs required and ensure they are familiar with the features of a bar chart and that they can label it fully.

Candidates often experience difficulties with questions involving strengths and weakness. Frequently these responses are generic and do not relate to specific details about the study or theory required. In many responses it is not evident why an identified feature is considered as a strength. Similarly, where candidates were asked to explain ethical issues that should be considered in social psychology, few candidates achieved the exemplification mark as the response did not specifically relate to social psychological research.

Some candidates demonstrated a lack of detail in their answers. Candidates are reminded that they should be aware of specific details of studies mentioned in the specification and that they should be able to distinguish between Asch (1951) study and his later work. In the Working Memory Model, candidates should be able to describe the function of the component parts clearly.

In longer response questions, detailed knowledge is also required to allow thorough and accurate discussion. Additionally, candidates are encouraged to develop their chains of reasoning in the evaluation. An awareness of competing arguments is necessary to access the higher marking levels.

Overall, there was an improvement in candidates' responses to a scenario. It is, nonetheless, still worth emphasising that when a scenario is given in a question, the response must be contextualised and apply psychological knowledge to explain that scenario. Candidates' knowledge and understanding appeared equal across both the Social and Cognitive topics. As in previous series, candidates would find it helpful to be aware of the different command terms and analyse how they should be used in a response to a certain type of question.

Paper Summary

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

Candidates must analyse the command terms so that they have a clear awareness of the type of response required.

Candidates must learn content thoroughly so that they can incorporate accurate details into their answers.

Candidates must avoid generic responses and provide specific responses when answering strength and weakness questions about studies.

Candidates should consider balanced conclusions and competing arguments in longer essay questions.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Q1a

Question Introduction

Two AO1 knowledge and understanding marks were available for an accurate description of one finding of Asch's 1951 experiment. Some confusion was apparent between the 1951 experiment and the later variations accounting for many incorrect answers. Candidates showed a basic knowledge of the findings which limited their marks to one as they were less adept at elaborating on this to achieve both marks.

Q1b

Question Introduction

This question gave an AO1 identification and an AO3 justification/exemplification mark for each strength and weakness. In this case candidates were required to give one strength and one weakness of Asch's 1951 experiment. Again, there were inaccuracies as the later variations of Asch or details of Moscovici's research were included in candidate responses. Many generic responses with no reference to the designated study were evident. Candidates who identified strengths or weakness did not justify these points. Strengths were in short supply but candidates were aware of the androcentric nature of this research and could develop this idea to gain 2 marks.

Examiner Tip

Candidates must ensure they know specific details about studies identified in the specification.

Q2a

Question Introduction

A few candidates were able to answer this question well, giving sufficient detail about their practical to gain full marks. Some candidates described a procedure for a study involving a questionnaire but failed to link to the social approach making a generic response. Disappointingly, many candidates had carried out an experiment (replicating Asch or Milgram). A few observations were also described. Others gave details of their cognitive or biological investigations. The question is specifically related to the procedure and so no marks could be credited for aims or findings. The social practical investigation should be a questionnaire. Candidates are strongly reminded that any investigation must adhere to the ethical guidelines and centres are asked to consider the ethical requirements very carefully before allowing an investigation to proceed.

Q2b

Question Introduction

There were two AO2 application marks here for an appropriate description of results from the social practical in relation to the quantitative data. Some candidates described the term quantitative data and gave generic answers which did not gain credit. Some data was obviously from an experiment and was not related to an approved social practical. Successful candidates stated clear percentages in response to closed questions in their questionnaires. These were often about attitudes to either conformity or obedience.

Q3a

Question Introduction

This question involved a straightforward calculation and the majority of candidates achieved the mark.

Q3b

Question Introduction

This question required the answer to be expressed as a ratio. Again, the majority of candidates achieved this mark. A few presented the ratio the wrong way round and others presented the ratio as a fraction gaining no credit.

Q4

Question Introduction

One AO1 knowledge/ understanding mark and one AO3 justification mark was available for each ethical issue identified and related to social research. Many candidates could access AO1 marks by identifying appropriate ethical issues. This was often superficial and consisted of identification only with no elaboration. Very few candidates achieved the AO3 by exemplifying the issue in relation to social psychology. Occasionally Milgram or Burger were mentioned but no justification offered. More focused responses developed their points by applying examples from Milgram's work.

Examiner's Tip

The AO3 justification mark must relate to social psychological research.

Question 5

This is a levels-based question testing AO1 knowledge and understanding and AO3 justification/exemplification with equal emphasis. Candidates are required to assess how well agency theory explains obedience in society. Generally, there was a good balance of AO1 and AO3 points presented in the responses. Candidates wrote about agency theory confidently and used psychological terminology accurately demonstrating good knowledge and understanding. Evidence to support the theory was varied with some choosing to use Milgram original experiment and variations to support their argument

whilst others made excellent use of the many real- life examples available. Mostly candidates attempted a conclusion albeit superficial but struggled to assess competing arguments and did not develop chains of reasoning fully. A few candidates presented a well- constructed essay with good evidence and balanced conclusions and attained Level 4 marks.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should make sure that they understand the meaning of each command term.

Cognitive Psychology

Q6a

Question Introduction

There are two AO1 knowledge and understanding marks awarded for describing the phonological loop. This question produced variable responses many of which were muddled. Often candidates struggled to explain it clearly in relation to the Working Memory Model. The relationship with the central executive was not fully understood either. More confident candidates recognized the phonological loop's responsibility for auditory information although only a few candidates made reference to the limited time scale for storage. Where candidates elaborated on the role of the phonological loop in subvocal rehearsal they usually accessed both marks.

Q6b

Question Introduction

There is an AO1 mark and an AO3 mark for each strength and weakness. This question was not answered confidently. Many responses did not provide strengths or weaknesses relating to the function of the central executive. Some descriptive points were made but there was a lack of understanding of key information. Candidate responses for the strength were very weak if they were attempted. More candidates attempted to identify the weakness than the strength although this was often an underdeveloped point about a lack of research to support the central executive. Some candidates managed to achieve the AO3 point by discussing difficulties of testing and a lack of scientific evidence as well as recognising the pivotal role of the central executive in the Working Memory Model.

Q7a

Question Introduction

There was one AO2 mark for the correct answer to a calculation. This was completed well.

Q7b

Question Introduction

There are three AO2 application marks for this maths question. Candidates were required to draw a bar chart to represent data given. The title of the bar chart was often unclear. Most candidates plotted the bars correctly although in some responses the bars were not shown as discrete. Very few candidates labelled the axes fully to show the conditions (acoustically similar/dissimilar words) so that the graph could not be interpreted without looking back at the scenario. A surprising number of candidates attempted to plot a scatter graph.

Q7c

Question Introduction

This question has one AO2 application mark and one AO3 justification mark. Responses must relate to Georges' results. Candidates were mostly aware that STM encodes acoustically. Some candidates found it difficult to link this to processing and the similarity effect. Very few candidates offered a justification of this. There were many generic responses with no reference to George's work at all.

Q7d

Question Introduction

There was an AO2 application mark and an AO3 exemplification mark in this question. Many candidates knew a strength of repeated measures design and expressed this clearly but did not relate the use of this design back to the scenario producing a generic answer. Some candidates elaborated the significance of the effect of some participant variables on the results and achieved both marks.

Q7e

Question Introduction

This question has one AO2 mark and one AO3 mark for an accurate identification and justification of each improvement suggested. Generic responses limited the awarding of marks in this question. Many candidates pointed out a problem with the study but did not offer an improvement. Some candidates suggested a different method which is changing the study rather than improving it. Other candidates offered a nice improvement but then failed to exemplify this.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should use evidence in relation to the context and avoid generic answers.

Q8

Question Introduction

This question was an 8 mark open response question which was assessed using the levels based marking criteria. There were 4 AO1 and 4 AO2 marks available. The candidate had to refer to the scenario in an answer. Many responses included a confident description of schema and how stereotypes and past experiences can play a role in their development. Some candidates linked these ideas effectively to an active process of reconstructive memory. Candidates still muddled the idea of reconstructive memory with Bartlett's 'War of the Ghosts' study. In a few cases candidates used the study to demonstrate how reconstructive memory worked but many accounts of the study were superfluous. There was a distinct improvement in application to the scenario from previous sessions. Infrequently candidates developed application to the context and the higher levels of the mark-scheme were attained. Many links to the scenario were made by repeating the stem of the question without any analysis. Candidates are advised to read the question carefully as several produced a summary of eyewitness testimony rather than the role of reconstructive memory in explaining the scenario.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should read the question carefully.

Section C

Q9

Question Introduction

This question was a 12-mark open response question which was assessed using the levels- based marking criteria. It is important to note that there is an AO1 and AO3 response required. Thus, candidates were expected to give equal emphasis to knowledge and understanding and justification in this answer. Candidates in general showed good knowledge of Burger's research and were able to detail the sample, aim, procedure, controls and occasionally the results. A few candidates presented minimal AO1 evidence limiting their description to 'a replica of Milgram'. The evaluative points showed little development of logical chains of reasoning and were often generic. Other candidates relied heavily on ethical considerations or why Burger's work was an improvement on that of Milgram. This approach made it difficult to reach a balanced conclusion. Conclusions were often simply a repeat of the strengths and weaknesses identified. Several answers were unbalanced and did not achieve an equal emphasis between AO1 and AO3 points.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should develop AO3 points to provide a logical chain of reasoning in the longer essay questions.