



Advanced Extension Award

Psychology 6881

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - June series

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AEA Psychology

General

The following report is on the examination of the Advanced Extension Award for Psychology that AQA offered on behalf of all awarding bodies. Although the report is written as a stand-alone document, teachers may find it helpful to read it in conjunction with:

- the examination paper
- the marking scheme
- the specification
- the Guidance to Candidates document.

It was evident that fewer candidates had been inappropriately entered for the examination this year, with the majority of candidates sitting the examination satisfying the grade descriptors for merit or even distinction in some part of the paper however to gain a merit or distinction it is necessary to sustain such performance.

The rubric guidance to candidates which advised them to spend around 15 minutes preparing each answer (eg unpacking questions and reflecting upon them, selecting the most suitable material from their repertoire, planning answers, etc) had been taken on board by most candidates. This resulted in fewer candidates submitting overly long but poorly focused answers. In the AEA the issue is not necessarily how much knowledge a candidate possesses but how effectively he or she uses that knowledge to answer the question posed.

Section A: Theoretical Issues and Debates

In general, there was evidence that this section was found to be more accessible by candidates than in previous series.

Question 1

- (a) (i) In most cases candidates could identify the main points in Eysenck's extract. Not uncommonly, candidates used identical wording to the extract, or conversely, elaborated to the extent that one side of writing could no longer be considered an 'outline'.
- (ii) Generally, this question was done well. Stronger responses identified and discussed a range of ethical and/or moral issues, coherently and often insightfully. Weaker responses framed ethical issues or guidelines in the limited context of research.
- (b) Free will versus determinism was the most commonly selected debate. With less success, some candidates chose to write about the reductionism versus holism debate or the nature versus nurture debates.

Stronger responses had a clear focus on Heather's extract and dealt with issues therein in a clear and logical style, using psychological approaches or research effectively to contribute to the discussion. Some weak responses displayed little or no engagement with the extract.

In some cases, it is evident that the wording of the question has caused some confusion amongst candidates – who believed they should only discuss for example free will or determinism; reductionism but not holism, etc.

- (c) Perhaps this was the least popular of the three options in this section. Common examples of researcher bias were Freud and Zimbardo. Answers tended to be imbalanced, describing the bias but offering little in the way of a discussion of how the researcher bias might be overcome.
- (d) Candidates were generally able to provide clear explanations of gender bias, commonly explaining alpha and beta bias. Examples frequently involved the moral reasoning/development area of psychology, eg Kohlberg, Gilligan, Freud. Some highly detailed and informed answers were seen here. Less convincing were responses accusing researchers, who had used single sex samples, of generalising their findings to the both sexes.
- (e) Explanations of culture bias frequently referred to ethnocentrism, eurocentrism, emic and etic. Common examples included research into relationships, diagnosis of abnormality and the work of IQ researchers such as Jensen or Yerkes. As above, less convincing were those responses accusing researchers who had used single culture samples of generalising their findings to the rest of the world.

Section B - Methodology

Question 2

There is increasing evidence that candidates are planning their responses to this one-hour section before writing. However, there are still a significant number of candidates who do not and whose design decisions reflect a stream of thought, with frequent backtracking and prevarication.

Responses, overall, were less verbose this year.

- (a) Methods often included questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, field or laboratory experiments and less often, observation/participant observation. Many suggested designs were plausible and appropriate, often displaying some thought about the issues of measuring superstition cross-culturally and what sort of 'difference' could be measured (eg types of superstition or amount of superstition).

Most candidates included reference to sampling, though often the suggested sample size and sampling strategy was impractical or implausible.

There was sometimes a tendency to provide too much description of sampling procedures at the expense of other details, eg exemplar questions in the interview.

A few candidates, especially those designing laboratory experiments, became confused about what was actually being compared, having created multiple experimental conditions.

Worryingly, some candidates' justifications of design decisions were pre-learnt and did not apply to the study they had designed, eg prevention of order effects was frequently used as a justification for an independent measures design.

- (b) This question was answered very well by many candidates, framing discussion of ethical considerations within the chosen design. Weaker answers tended to offer general or glib discussion of ethical guidelines, without any application to the design presented in answer to part 2(a).

- (c) Whilst there was better evidence of candidates understanding and applying data analysis in this session, it is still, perhaps, the weakest skill of the AEA Psychology cohort.

On the positive side, a greater proportion of candidates than in previous examinations could correctly identify, describe and justify appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

There were some reasonable attempts to describe analysis of qualitative data in terms of thematic analysis or coding.

However, some candidates had probably not thought through the data implications of their design. As such, a proportion of candidates had suggested recruiting samples from ten or more different cultures but only realised upon reaching part (c) that Mann Whitney U test does not extend beyond two conditions.

Other frequent problems included advocating the use of correlational analysis in order to test for cultural differences in superstition means, medians and modes for nominal or frequency data. Both these errors betray a superficial understanding of data analysis.

Section C: Approaches and Applications

Question 3

This was by far the most commonly attempted question.

Many candidates provided fulsome analysis of how behaviourist assumptions explain events described in the extract. A number of candidates impressively extended their answer to describe the reinforcement of parents behaviour, either in terms of negatively reinforcement (avoidance of tantrums) in allowing the son in their bed and the positive reinforcement of Byron's suggested regime (keeping a diary/notebook).

Discussions of other psychological explanations tended to focus upon psychodynamic explanations, especially the notion of the boy's behaviour illustrating features of the Oedipus complex. Answers frequently included biological and cognitive explanations. In general, these answers were applied well to Emma's son's poor sleeping routine.

Question 4

Many candidates, explanation of individual differences in levels of confidence derived from psychological approaches, in particular, the psychodynamic (inner psychic harmony) and behaviourist (reinforcement history) approaches. In answering this question, many other areas of psychology were used, sometimes insightfully or creatively. These included links between confidence and extroversion, self-esteem, self-efficacy, attribution theory, unconditional positive regard and adolescent identify formation. These efforts were often commendable (if not always sustained) and displayed the ability of candidates to think on their feet.

Question 5

This was the least frequently answered question.

The item on schizophrenia and creativity produced very mixed answers. Some candidates provided lengthy biological explanations of schizophrenia, without addressing the similarities of schizophrenia to creativity, sexual activity and endurance of schizophrenia in the gene pool. Better answers used evolutionary explanations regarding attractive mates or hypothesised about common underlying biological mechanisms of schizophrenia and creativity.

The item about 'rage' frequently referred to 'fight not flight' type explanations, sometimes in the context of precipitating environmental factors (eg crowding, etc). Other biological explanations referred to hormone imbalances, brain chemistry, frontal lobe and limbic system function.

The item about wealthy female shoplifters produced interesting answers. Biological explanations often referred to possible 'heritability' of thieving. Additionally, candidates often described bio-behavioural type explanations where the thrill of stealing produces an addictive (positively reinforcing) adrenaline hit.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.