



General Certificate of Education

Psychology 6181

Specification A

Unit 5 (PYA5)

Individual Differences and Perspectives

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - June series

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PYA5 Individual Differences and Perspectives

General

This was generally a straightforward paper and very few candidates were unable to attempt all three questions or to complete the paper in the time allowed. As usual this paper proved very challenging for some candidates. However, there were some very strong answers from well-prepared candidates who were able to adapt their knowledge to the requirements of the questions and to show a high level of understanding. There is still a tendency for weaker candidates simply to regurgitate pre-prepared answers with little reference to the actual question set.

The answers to the Approaches questions continue to be disappointing. Many candidates, even some of those who achieve reasonable marks on the essay questions, simply do not engage with the stimulus material. It is also a matter of real concern that so many candidates show such poor knowledge and understanding of the main approaches.

Section A: Individual Differences

Question 1

This was the least popular question in section A. A few candidates seemed to try this question out of desperation and did not appear to have been properly prepared for it. However, there were some good answers from candidates who were able to discuss research into dissociative disorders effectively to address the question. Weaker answers focused too much on long, detailed descriptions of case studies without making them particularly relevant to the arguments.

Question 2

This was by far the most popular question on the paper. There were some extremely impressive answers from some candidates who had wide-ranging knowledge and were able to use it effectively. A few candidates wasted valuable time in describing the clinical characteristics of an anxiety disorder. Unfortunately, they could not gain credit for this material. A small minority of candidates wrote about depression or schizophrenia and again, unfortunately, could not receive credit for this.

Most candidates were able to describe and evaluate at least one biological and one psychological explanation so partial performance was rare. Phobic disorder was the most popular choice of anxiety disorder although OCD was a close second. A small minority offered PTSD although those candidates tended to find it more difficult to provide adequate explanations. Although there were some excellent answers, weaker candidates offered very basic evaluation. Much of the evaluation was generic and not used effectively to assess the explanations.

Question 3

This question was less popular than in previous examinations. Most candidates who answered this were well prepared and able to meet the requirement for a description of three therapies. It is pleasing to see that most candidates understand how ECT and psychosurgery techniques have been modified over the years. There were some impressive answers with reasonably

detailed and accurate accounts of drug therapy. Weaker candidates tended to know more about ECT and psychosurgery than drug therapy. In part (b), there were some excellent evaluations. However, weaker candidates tended to offer very basic commentary with rather general evaluation.

Section B: Perspectives: Issues and Debates

Question 4

The parted nature of this question was intended to help students to focus on socially sensitive research. Many students were able to provide a reasonable explanation of socially sensitive research in part (a) although candidates often failed to explain it in the context of psychology. However, candidates often then lost sight of socially sensitive research in part (b) and wrote a general ethics essay. Such answers could not access the higher mark bands and it was disappointing to see so many candidates wasting time writing pages of irrelevant material. Some candidates gave examples of psychological studies which could be discussed in terms of socially sensitive issues but failed to go any further than to offer descriptions of the studies. For high marks, candidates needed to explain why the studies are socially sensitive and to discuss the wider implications of the research. Some candidates chose rather marginal examples of socially sensitive research eg eye-witness testimony research, without making any attempt to justify its inclusion. There was very little appropriate evaluation and few candidates considered wider issues such as the responsibility and integrity of the researcher or the purpose to which non-psychologists apply research findings. There were, however, some very good answers to this question where candidates had been clearly well prepared. This was highly centre specific.

Question 5

This was quite a popular question but many answers were poorly focused on the requirements of the question. Candidates often simply described studies where animals had been used and concluded, after each one, that it had been wrong to use animals in this way. It was perfectly legitimate to describe specific studies however stronger candidates were able to choose studies carefully so that they were able to make different evaluative points about each one. Some candidates simply described ethical guidelines and/or Bateson's cube without making the material particularly relevant to psychological investigations. There were some excellent answers to this question where candidates selected material appropriately and offered sustained, coherent analysis.

Question 6

In part (a), candidates were generally able to describe how theories and/or studies were reductionist but answers varied widely in the amount of detail offered. In part (b) many candidates gave unbalanced answers where they described at length arguments for the claim that psychology is a science and then spent too little time on evaluation.

Question 7

This was probably the least popular question on the paper. However, when candidates attempted this, answers were often very impressive. It was pleasing to see answers that were well constructed and coherently argued.

Section C: Perspectives: Approaches

Questions 8 and 9

It is really disappointing that many candidates continue to struggle with the Approaches questions. The main problem here is that candidates fail to engage with the stimulus material and offer pre-prepared, 'standard' answers in which the words "procrastination" or "hoarding" are simply dropped in. This does not constitute engagement and, at best, candidates will only access the bottom mark band with such answers. It is also a matter of real concern that knowledge and understanding of the actual psychological approaches are frequently quite weak. There is, for example, considerable misunderstanding about the role of classical conditioning in learning and the concept of negative reinforcement continues to elude many candidates. It is apparent that, in many centres, candidates are only taught two approaches. While psychodynamic theory and behavioural theory can usually be used successfully to explain the stimulus material in the Approaches questions, it limits the scope for candidates.

A significant number of candidates this year appeared to choose either question 8 or 9 rather inappropriately given the approaches they had been taught. For example, many candidates struggled to use the evolutionary approach to explain procrastination when they would probably have found it easier to apply this approach to hoarding.

In part (c), many candidates showed weak understanding of research methods. Bandura's Bobo doll-style experiment has become the most popular way of answering this part of the question. While this method can be applied to the investigation of a number of behaviours, candidates need to think very carefully about its plausibility and appropriateness.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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