



**General Certificate of Education**

**Psychology 6181**  
*Specification A*

**Unit 6 (PYA6)**  
**Coursework**

**Report on the Examination**  
*2007 examination - June series*

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## **PYA6 Coursework**

### ***General***

The standard of coursework submitted this series was once again generally high with the best work being reported clearly and concisely. Many candidates chose to select from AS topics, with memory experiments and stress correlations remaining common. A popular area from A2 was relationships, with the matching hypothesis and content analysis of personal advertisements as favourite topics.

Very few excessively long reports were submitted. A report should be approximately 2000-2500 words, excluding the Project Brief, tables, figures and appendices. The length of a good report can vary depending on a number of factors, including the amount of relevant psychological literature. However, it should be a small-scale study and a single testable hypothesis works well. Some candidates complicated their work by analysing gender or age differences when these were not the independent variables. This often led to deficiencies in the clarity of presentation of data. Material included in the project brief does not need to be repeated in the main body of the report, unless there is something to add.

There were very few ethically unsound reports submitted this year. The most common example of unethical work was face-to-face conformity. In PB8, candidates are required to identify steps to deal with ethical considerations, and these should be followed through. There were a few examples of breaking confidentiality by including all the signed consent forms. When carrying out investigations into bystander behaviour candidates should be encouraged to consider all relevant issues, including their own safety. Observing reactions to unattended packages left in a public place is not appropriate. Centres must also consider carefully the ethical issues involved in dealing with participants under the age of 16. Evidence of parental written consent should be included for all children who have taken part, but without infringing confidentiality. Checking the project brief before candidates collect data is a good way of checking these points.

Centres continued to vary in the amount of independence displayed by candidates. Sometimes a whole class carried out exactly the same investigation and collected data in groups of four or fewer. An example of this was investigating the matching hypothesis using photographs, standardised instructions and rating scales provided by the teacher. This is acceptable, and in these cases candidates were awarded 0 in A1. It is worth noting that a high degree of teacher guidance did not necessarily lead to candidates producing work of higher merit than when they showed more independence. In other centres the whole class researched the same topic, but each group devised its own materials. In both these cases writing of the whole report must be the candidate's own work, including the Project Brief. There were some instances where Project Briefs were virtually identical, suggesting a very high degree of collaboration. Candidates may work in small groups to design, pool and analyse data, but each must write up the Project Brief and the whole of their own report independently. In other centres candidates displayed a much higher degree of independence. In some cases this led to excellent work but there were a few where having all candidates designing and carrying out their own individual projects led to problems, especially in data collection and analysis. Before commencing their coursework candidates must complete a Project Brief for their study. The purpose of this is to encourage candidates to think through the design and analysis of their investigation before data collection. Sometimes Project Briefs appear to be completed after the main report has been completed. Early submission of a Project Brief allows the teacher to check the suitability of investigations and to ensure candidates have considered how they will analyse their data using inferential statistics. This is also a good opportunity to steer candidates away from topics where

relevant psychological information is limited or from over-complex studies. If support from a teacher is necessary, the A1 mark can be adjusted. It is recognised that centres may choose to organise coursework in different ways. Coursework advisers are available to discuss the best way for a centre to conduct coursework, and to offer advice on analysis of data. Teachers who are supervising coursework for the first time might wish to make contact early on.

The administration in most centres was excellent, although one problem was the relatively large numbers of mark addition errors. For a large centre where only a sample of the work is sent to a moderator this may lead to candidates being awarded an incorrect mark. Centres should ensure that the addition is checked. Another problem was incomplete Candidate Record Forms. The form includes a box to indicate the number of candidates involved in data collection. In some cases this was left blank which made it difficult for the moderator to check the mark in A1. In a few cases the number of participants was included in this box by mistake. There are still instances of poor presentation of work, especially the use of plastic wallets containing unsecured materials. In many cases individual pages are not identified with the candidate's name and this work can easily be mislaid. The use of treasury tags to secure the work is highly recommended. Almost all centres achieved the minimum requirement for annotation, which is to indicate where C2, F1, F2, F3 and F4 marks have been awarded. Frequently more detailed annotation was provided, which was very helpful during moderation. A further problem was the late submission of work by a few centres.

### ***Assessment Criteria***

The majority of centres' marks were within tolerance, but a significant minority were more generous than the moderator. Commonly this was by one mark only, but when repeated over a number of sections this added up to a considerable difference. Often, work at the top of the mark range was over-marked. Very few centres were less generous than the moderator, although where this did happen it tended to be at the bottom end of the mark range. Where there is uncertainty over whether to give the higher or lower mark, an effort should be made not to be generous on every occasion. Some of the biggest differences between centre marks and moderator marks arose when candidates had selected incorrect statistical tests for analysis, or made serious errors in calculations. Teachers are reminded that coursework advisers are available to give guidance on this.

### ***Project Briefs***

The length of the Project Brief should be kept to no more than two sides. Most candidates performed well on this part of the report and it was generally marked accurately by centres.

PB2: A few centres incorrectly credited an explanation of what a directional or non-directional hypothesis is, rather than an explanation of why it has been selected.

PB3: If an experiment is identified, candidates must identify the experimental design.

PB4: At least one strength and one weakness of the research method and/or design are required for two marks.

PB 5/6: These two sections are linked. Some sources of bias and/or confounding variables were too general and did not relate clearly enough to the investigation. Examples of this were temperature and noise when it seemed unlikely that these would be relevant. In some cases these examples were included but more likely ones, such as order effects in a repeated measure design, were not mentioned.

PB7: Candidates who made careless errors in this section (eg 0.5%) were occasionally incorrectly credited by the centre.

PB8: Candidates should be encouraged to identify the most relevant ethical issues arising in their study and explain the steps taken to deal with them. In some cases candidates demonstrated a lack of understanding of their own research by failing to address key issues. A number of centres over-credited this section.

### ***The Report***

A1: This section is still causing problems of over-marking by some centres. The intention is to reward originality by an individual candidate (three marks) or by a small group of candidates (two marks). Some centres awarded three marks simply because the candidate worked alone. Replicating research with slightly different materials, eg providing photographs in a matching hypothesis, or devising word/colour lists in a Stroop experiment, would attract a maximum of one mark. Where one candidate is involved in the data collection the mark awarded should be one or three, not two. Centres should contact their coursework adviser if they are unsure what marks to award in A1.

A2: A few centres seemed to credit three marks here automatically, while others gave two marks without any apparent reason. A brief supporting statement on the work or on the Candidate Record Form would be very helpful. Design decisions could include choice of photographs in a matching hypothesis. In some cases the quality of such photographs was so poor that it was very difficult to assess attractiveness.

B: A number of abstracts lacked the conciseness and/or clarity needed for three marks. Information should be provided on aim, method, results and conclusions, but sub-headings are not required.

C1: Introductions seem to be improving, with many candidates meeting the criteria for "concisely reported". Many candidates provided relevant and carefully selected material for their introduction, although some lacked the coherence and logical organisation needed for full marks. A few were extremely limited, however, sometimes simply presenting the study to be replicated.

C2: There were examples where there was very little logical progression from the background literature to aims and/or hypotheses. This sometimes happened where candidates focused on one area such as capacity of short-term memory, then produced a hypothesis relating to age or gender differences. For full marks the link needs to be explicit.

C3: One fully operationalised and testable hypothesis is required for two marks. Candidates were frequently awarded full marks for an experimental hypothesis when the dependent variable was not clear.

D: Method sections were generally well detailed and would allow replication. Occasionally full marks were awarded when significant details were left out. Examples of this included failure to give the method of presentation and recall in memory experiments. Markers who are very familiar with a piece of research should be aware of the tendency to see what they expect to see. Where candidates have collected data in a small group their stimulus materials will be identical. In this case photocopies of eg word lists, pictures and standardised instructions are required.

E1: A minority of candidates applied an inferential statistical test inappropriately or calculated it incorrectly. In some cases this work was awarded full marks by the centre. This is a serious problem as marks in the discussion section may be affected as well. Candidates often failed to justify the use of an inferential statistical test with full reference to the data collected. Many simply stated, "the data is ordinal" even when the dependent variable was time taken to complete a task.

E2: This section was commonly over-marked by centres. The best candidates presented raw data and accurate workings of a statistical test in a well-organised appendix. In many cases, however, workings were omitted or were very difficult to follow. The use of statistical packages does not always help candidates. While these are acceptable, teachers should ensure that candidates understand what the results mean. It was comparatively rare to find a clearly labelled summary table with appropriate descriptive statistics in the results section. Multiple charts/graphs presenting the same data in various ways, or presenting participants on the x-axis, are rarely helpful. One relevant graph or chart using an appropriate scale is usually sufficient. Confusion was also caused when candidates tried to display gender or age differences when no previous mention had been made of this.

F1: Generally, this section was well done and reliably marked, although some candidates were confused about what is meant by a significant correlation.

F2: The success of this section relies on the quality of C1. Some candidates simply re-stated the background research or introduced new material, rather than discussing the outcome of their investigation.

F3: Centres should be careful not to over-credit material which is not specifically related to the study, eg "I should have used more participants". In many cases this was suggested when a highly significant difference in results had already been found.

F4: Simply suggesting carrying out the research in a different culture should not receive much credit. Candidates showed little imagination in this section. It would be nice to see a little more thought going into suggestions for further research.

G: Many candidates had problems with this section and it was commonly over-credited by centres. For two marks all references must be provided for studies quoted in the text. This means the reader could find the original study or a detailed account of it. The full reference may be given, or reference given for the book from which it was obtained, including page numbers. A bibliography alone is not creditworthy. Clear examples of conventional references are provided in the Specification Support Document.

H: Few problems arose here.

Congratulations to the many centres who submitted well presented, accurately marked work on time.

## **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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