



AS

PYSCHOLOGY

7181/1 Introductory topics in Psychology

Report on the examination

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General

The overall performance on this paper was pleasing and generally of a good standard, with only a slightly lower mean mark than last year's peak mean. It was clear that some students had been very well prepared for this examination. There were some high-quality responses that demonstrated excellent understanding of psychological knowledge, application and evaluation skills. However, the amount of detail and specialist terminology students included in their answers varied. While many students generally performed well in the first assessment objective (AO1) demonstrating good knowledge and understanding, some appeared to have little knowledge and/or muddled understanding of psychological concepts. There was a great deal of variation in performance on the second assessment objective (AO2) which required students to apply their knowledge and/or understanding. This variation was even more noticeable on assessment objective three (AO3) where students were required to analyse, interpret and evaluate.

Performance across the sections was more consistent this year. Performance on Section C (Attachment) was highest with a mean of 56%. Section A (Social Influence) produced a mean score of 55%, whilst section B (Memory) had the lowest mean score of 52%. This may have been because there were several questions in the Memory section that students found challenging, including the questions on ways to minimise investigator effects and on distributions. Marks on the Research Methods questions were lower than last year and more in line with earlier exam series.

Performance on Q3, Q13 and Q23 suggested that many students should work to improve their AO2 skills. They need to ensure they fully engage with the stem/scenario and do not just state the name of the person in the stem, which is not effective application. They must use their knowledge and understanding to explain what is happening in the scenario.

While there were some impressive responses, some students did not include sufficient detail in their answers, particularly in the extended response questions, Q5 and Q24. The mean mark for the 12-mark essay was much higher this year, even though it was a question focused on Asch variations, a point some students missed when writing their responses.

On some questions, some students neglected to address the demands of the question. This was most noticeable on Q4, where students were asked to evaluate social support as an explanation of resistance to social influence. Some students defined social support or simply described research, which did not demonstrate the AO3 skill required.

Not unexpectedly, higher order skills of evaluation and discussion are still an area for development for some students. They need to present contextualised arguments rather than generic points which do not constitute effective evaluation/discussion. Some students appear to be relying on generic evaluation points and are not necessarily shaping them to the question. Others need to clearly link their points to the question.

Very few students wrote more than was required this year, and the number of not attempted responses was lower than in previous years, suggesting there was good engagement with the

paper. Most students also appeared to complete the paper in the time allowed. The quality of handwriting from a minority of students continues to make some responses very challenging to read.

Section A: Social Influence

Question 1

This was a straightforward knowledge question and about 75% of students scored at least half marks. However, there were some answers which gave a circular definition, and some seemed to be describing commitment, not consistency. Successful answers contained elaboration, with many students using examples effectively. Others just stated an example without explaining how the example demonstrated consistency as a factor in minority influence.

Question 2

This was also a relatively straightforward question, with almost 50% of students scoring full marks. Many students clearly knew that deception was used in conformity research studies to prevent the possibility of demand characteristics occurring, but only some elaborated on how this might affect validity. The more successful answers linked to the impact it would have on measuring conformity accurately. Some students explained their answers within the context of a specific piece of research such as Asch's study.

Question 3

This was the first of three questions on the paper where students had to outline knowledge and apply that knowledge to a scenario. Just over half of the students achieved a level 2 mark. Many were able to identify and explain how the policeman's uniform was a symbol of legitimate authority which would signal to Amal the need to obey the officer. Many students also recognised that the police officer standing next to Amal reflected proximity, but few were able to explain how this would influence obedience, e.g. by fearing the immediate consequences of not obeying. Some students referred to agentic shift which is not a situational variable or evident in the scenario. Not all answers were applied to the stem and a minority of students only gave one variable. Most students realised that they needed to do more than just name the variables, as the question asked for explanations of the behaviour.

Question 4

This question required evaluation of social support as an explanation of resistance to social influence and was one of the lowest scoring questions on the paper. It had one of the lowest means as % of max marks. Almost 4% of students did not attempt an answer. It was also the 3rd highest not attempted question on the paper and just over a third of students scored no marks. Questions that require students to 'evaluate' still appear to confuse some students, as a good number explained social support (in relation to resistance) which was not creditworthy. Higher-scoring answers referred to evidence to show how social support could increase resistance. Some students chose appropriate research but did not link it to the

question. Others referred to the Rosenstrasse protests but did not always explain how this reflected social support and/or how it impacted resistance. This question was a good discriminating question with more successful answers either offering one evaluation point in some depth, or more than one with some elaboration of each evaluation point.

Question 5

Performance on this question was pleasing, with a good spread of scores across the range of marks available. Performance was slightly skewed towards the top end. Overall, it was a good discriminating question. Many students answered this 12-mark essay question well, with a mean mark of just over half the marks available, and just over half of the students scoring at levels 3 and 4. Some students did not focus on the question - which was about two variables affecting conformity and simply outlined the original Asch study.

Very successful answers described how each variable was manipulated and the measured impact it had on conformity. Some answers only contained description without evaluation or gave very limited evaluation which was sometimes generic. More successful answers discussed the strengths and limitations of the variation research. Only a very few students did not attempt this question, fewer than in previous years for essays worth 12-marks. There was also only a small percentage of students who scored no marks. Again, this was a better outcome than in previous years.

Section B: Memory

Question 6

This question worth one mark was easily accessible and answered very well, with over 90% of students achieving the mark. Only a handful of students did not attempt the question. A few students gave an answer that lacked clarity e.g. 'how the information is stored' which might also refer to coding rather than capacity of memory. Students need to ensure that their definitions of specialist terms are clear.

Question 7

This question worth one mark on the duration of short-term memory according to the multi-store model was also successfully answered with about 80% of students giving an accurate answer. However, some students clearly guessed answers e.g. one month, 4-6 seconds. Some students muddled duration with capacity. Again, only a handful of students did not attempt the question.

Question 8

This question was the least successfully answered of the memory questions, with just over a third of students achieving the mark available. While some students understood that the duration of LTM was potentially a lifetime, others wrote 'infinite,' which lacks accuracy or 'forever' which is not true as memory is lost at the end of a life. Some gave unqualified answers such as 'very high'.

Question 9

This question was answered reasonably well with many students identifying that it was a task testing STM which codes acoustically. Answers obtaining full marks then explained the effect on memory i.e. that the 'similar sounding' words get muddled/confused, making it harder to recall them. Almost 50% of students scored the full two marks, and about 75% scored one mark. There were some successful examples of clear, coherent answers which used appropriate terminology. Pleasingly, only a minority of students did not attempt the question.

Question 10

Performance on this question was very similar to the previous question, which was not surprising as the questions involved similar knowledge and application skills. Many students identified that it was a task testing LTM which codes semantically. Answers obtaining full marks explained the effect on memory i.e. that the 'similar meaning' words get muddled/confused making it harder to recall them. Again, there were some nice examples of clear, coherent answers which used appropriate terminology.

Question 11

This question was answered well by many students who not only described the steps involved in random allocation but also gave some appropriate application to the stem. Over a third of students achieved full marks. Some students muddled more than one method by referring to numbering the participants and then using a random name generator. Answers which attracted full marks fully explained the final step of how the participants would be allocated (either alternately or first 50 in condition A then second 50 in condition B) but some students did not explain or omitted this final step.

Question 12

This question worth four marks asking for two ways the interviews could be designed to minimise investigator effects was a challenging question for many students. With a mean mark of just over one, some students did not attempt the question and about a third received no marks. Only just over 10% of students achieved more than half marks. There were some good answers that explained two clear and coherent ways that would reduce investigator effects. However, many students suggested changing to another method such as using a questionnaire, rather than explaining how the design of the interviews could be modified. Some students gave limited or muddled suggestions or described ways to reduce demand characteristics rather than investigator effects. Some answers explained ways to assess whether there were investigator effects e.g. recording the interviews and checking, rather than suggestions for how to minimise such effects. Questions that require modifications to the design of research, appear to be challenging and students need to practise these.

Question 13

The cognitive interview style of questioning has appeared on previous papers and many students were able to identify two relevant techniques used in cognitive interviews. Some applied these techniques explicitly to the scenario. Others wrote a generic explanation and did not engage with the stem: merely stating 'Kristen' should do 'x' was not effective application. Others tried to explain why a technique would increase accuracy in recall, not how it would be used in this scenario. Students need to focus on identifying and interpreting the command words in questions.

Question 14

Over 40% of students gave a clear and coherent limitation of the cognitive interview earning full marks. Some good answers gave detail in the description of the limitation, often citing evidence from research e.g. Kohnken et al., (1999, Milne & Bull (2002). However, about 25% of students scored zero marks. Some students are still using 'costly' as a limitation without any clarification of what it is about the cognitive interview that is costly e.g. the specialist training it requires. Some students mistakenly referred to the use of leading questions.

Questions 15.1 and 15.2

These two questions, worth two marks each involved identifying types of distribution and justifying the answer. Some students identified both distributions correctly and gave justifications based on the pattern of central tendency scores. However, far too many students did not recognise that the measures of central tendency in Q15.1 were close enough to merit a normal distribution. Too many students also forgot to write 'skew' in their answer for Q15.2. It was not enough to simply say 'positive' distribution. Some students only received the justification mark because they were able to give the correct pattern in the measures of central tendency but named the distribution incorrectly. Some students only wrote that the measures of central tendency varied, or they re-stated the values in the table but did not describe the pattern. There were also various invented answers e.g. a close distribution. These questions had the highest percentages of being not attempted and the lowest means seen across the paper.

Section C: Attachment

Question 16

This was a very accessible multiple-choice question with over 90% of the students able to identify the correct answer. Very few students did not attempt the question, and most students marked only one answer.

Question 17

This question was a follow up to Q16, asking students to draw a conclusion about attachment types using the data in the pie chart. Approximately 25% of students referred to the fact that children who had spent time in an orphanage were more likely to be insecurely attached/ less

likely to be securely attached and gave an appropriate reference to the pattern of data in the pie chart. Many answers were unable to gain the second mark for the question, either lacking clarity by writing about children ‘mostly being insecure,’ rather than ‘most children’ being insecure, or because of a lack of justification through reference to the data. Some tried to explain why this type of attachment might have occurred by referring to the data in the pie chart which did not address the question.

Questions 18 and 19

Q18 was a very straightforward knowledge question where almost 80% of students were awarded the mark for naming one of Schaffer’s stages of attachment. However, Q19 required another of Schaffer’s stages to be outlined. While over 40% of students wrote a clear, coherent and detailed outline, with appropriate terminology of a different stage, some students just named another stage. Others did not give enough detail in their description to merit three marks. Some students muddled ages and features of the stage they described. A very few students appeared to have misunderstood the question and identified/outlined types of attachment rather than stages.

Question 20

This multiple-choice question was more challenging with two thirds of students correctly choosing the best description of Ainsworth’s Strange Situation as option A. Only a small number of students did not attempt the question.

Question 21

This question asked for an explanation of one strength of the Strange Situation as a way of studying attachment, apart from ethical issues. While just over a third of students answered this question clearly and coherently, many did not focus on the demand of the question which included the phrase ‘as a way of studying attachment.’ Some students referred to the implications of the research or referred to other research support, neither of which was creditworthy. About 40% of students were unable to score marks for this question.

Question 22

This question required an explanation of a limitation of the Strange Situation as a way of studying attachment and was answered more successfully than Q16. Just over 50% of students scored full marks, and about 20% scored zero marks. Some focused on the issue of the findings of the Strange Situation research rather than its method of measuring attachment. Only a very small minority referred to ethical issues.

Question 23

This was the third question on the paper where students were required to demonstrate their knowledge (of the learning theory of attachment) and then apply this to the scenario. This question was answered slightly less successfully than Q3. There was generally good knowledge of the learning theory explanation of attachment. Indeed, some students wrote an unnecessarily lengthy description. However, students often did not move into the level 2 band

because there was little, if any application to the scenario. There was a good deal of variation in the use of specialist terminology and some students showed muddled understanding of the terms. There was also evidence of a misunderstanding of role of operant conditioning in attachment. This question was a good discriminator of student performance.

Question 24

The final extended response question on the paper (8 marks) asked students to discuss the influence of early attachment on later relationships. It was pleasing to see how many students answered the question, compared to the last 2 years when the final question was often not attempted. This question acted as a good discriminator. There was a near normal distribution of scores with a mean mark of 3.5. While about 40% of students scored half or more marks, only about 10% reached level 4. Good answers were able to outline research showing the link between attachment type and behaviours in later life such as peer relationships, bullying behaviour, adult romantic relationships and/or relationships with own children. However, some students did not shape their answer to the question. This was especially the case of those who chose to use material on maternal deprivation and then often failed to focus on the effects on later relationships. Some responses were largely descriptive with little, if any, evaluation. Others attempted some evaluation, but this was not always fully elaborated and therefore was not effective.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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