



A-level

Psychology

7182/2 Psychology in context

Report on the examination

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Overall

Overall, students demonstrated excellent knowledge across all three sections of the paper, with some impressive detail and sophisticated use of terminology. The questions discriminated well, with the full range of marks awarded for each question.

Good use appears to have been made of previous series in developing exam technique on frequently asked questions; students were commonly seen to be highlighting key command terms and features of the stem material and making use of planning space. As in previous series, there was often detailed knowledge alongside more limited evaluation/discussion. Students should be reminded of the weighting of assessment objectives and aim to select material and use concise description enabling the necessary time for thorough and effective evaluation. There were some well written holistic responses, which integrated knowledge and evaluation effectively, and often achieved the highest marks. Whilst some students used the Point, Evidence/Example, Explanation/Elaboration and Link technique to good effect, other answers using this technique were quite limited/generic and lacked sufficient effectiveness for higher marks. Where students linked back to the specific question effectively, utilised relevant examples/evidence and developed their points with counterargument and/or elaboration the approach was much more successful.

Often there was overreliance on pre-learned responses which did not address the question and/or did not apply the material in the context of the stem. Students need to have the necessary understanding and academic confidence to use their knowledge flexibly to address specific questions posed rather than rely on generic pre-learned responses.

As in previous series, there were cases where handwriting was challenging to decipher and cases of incorrect/unclear numbering of answers when using additional pages. Students should check their numbering of responses is clear and accurate when they continue onto additional pages or type their response. Students are encouraged to present clear handwritten responses or to type where appropriate.

Question 1

This question was generally answered well with most students demonstrating good knowledge of Skinner's research and reinforcement. However, responses were often focussed on definitions of reinforcement and/or on findings rather than 'how' Skinner investigated reinforcement. Better responses focussed on procedural details. As in previous years, many students still muddled negative reinforcement with punishment and there was some confusion over whether pressing levers caused or prevented the electric shock. There was very little reference to schedules of reinforcement or measuring response rate.

Question 2

This question discriminated well with a spread of marks awarded. A range of examples for evolution was seen from topics across the specification, the most common coming from attachment, fight/flight response and phobias. However, responses were often not shaped to how evolution might influence behaviour, limiting the marks awarded. Some gave an example, such as a giraffe having a long neck, but did not link this to any behaviour and therefore did not gain credit. Other responses just focussed on an outline of evolution but did not provide an example. Students should be reminded to answer all aspects of the question. There were varying degrees of success in the outline of how evolution may explain behaviour. Whilst some responses acknowledged that an advantageous trait will be passed to offspring, they did not then explain how this will make the behaviour more prevalent over time in future generations or explain the behaviour being genetically determined. There was some confusion in responses suggesting that behavioural adaptations occur within individuals who learn a behaviour through conditioning to aid survival and adapt to their environment. Wayward answers focused on the evolution of psychology as a science, the evolution of technology to study the brain and/or the evolution of definitions of mental health.

Question 3

Overall, students appeared well-prepared for this question and a wealth of material was presented. Most students were able to describe the tripartite personality, defence mechanisms and the psychosexual stages, including details of fixations. Descriptions of the Oedipus complex and the case study of Little Hans were more variable. Often students wrote detailed descriptions but did not have the required breadth/depth in the evaluation. Students should be mindful of the 6/10 split for knowledge/evaluation in 16-mark questions. Some impressive answers demonstrated a real depth and breadth of knowledge, effective use of evidence with effective evaluation integrated through the whole response. Common evaluative points focused on the contribution of this approach to psychoanalytic therapy and explanatory power. The issue of falsifiability was a common limitation, alongside the focus on case studies and psychic determinism. Better answers included details of how behaviour is determined through fixations, for example. The issue of reductionism was often muddled and reference to gender bias frequently lacked accurate detail.

Question 4

This was a very well answered question with students demonstrating strong knowledge of neurons and their functions. Some answers muddled the functions of sensory and motor neurons, resulting in 1 mark for naming the neuron. The majority of students achieved both marks here.

Question 5

This question yielded a spread of marks with a wide range of examples of hormone. Most students were able to name a hormone but found it more challenging to outline the function of the endocrine system using their example. Many treated it as two separate questions, outlining the function of the endocrine system and then stating a hormone or just naming a hormone and outlining the function of that hormone. Adrenaline was the most common example, but melatonin and insulin were also common responses. Those who demonstrated an understanding of the function of the endocrine system and shaped their response to the question achieved the highest marks. Some impressive responses focussed on homeostasis and used an example such as insulin to explain its role in blood glucose regulation. Many struggled to address the issue of function and instead focussed on the structure of the endocrine system.

Question 6

This question discriminated well with some strong responses seen. Most students had some knowledge of synaptic transmission, but this was often muddled, especially in the references to excitation. Common misconceptions included: vesicles diffusing across the synapse, action potentials travelling directly across the synaptic cleft, excitation determining the speed of the action potential or determining the number of neurotransmitters released, neurotransmitters being excitatory due to being positively charged and entering the post synaptic neuron to make it more positive. An impressive array of terminology was seen but unfortunately it was often not used appropriately. Whilst there were some excellent answers, overall, the responses suggested the need for a better understanding of excitation, inhibition and summation rather than reliance on rote learned information.

Question 7

This question was not well understood. Students often did not focus on the demands of the question in terms of 'how' functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) might be used to study Sam's memory and/or they did not have sufficient understanding of how it worked. Students were often able to provide knowledge of fMRIs, sometimes with evaluation, but very few students could apply their information in the context of the question. Neither generic descriptions of fMRI nor evaluation was creditworthy without any application. When answers were applied, they often tried to explain which parts of Sam's brain might be affected, focussing on localisation of function and Broca and Wernicke's areas rather than on STM tasks. Unfortunately, many tasks suggested by students related to language and visual processing, rather than explicitly to memory. The strongest responses gave practical and appropriate STM tasks to do in the fMRI and referred to comparison of the 3D image / blood flow differences for the two tasks with a neurotypical brain scan/baseline task to gain meaningful results. Students should be reminded to read and respond to the question set to properly demonstrate understanding.

Question 8

This question discriminated well but was generally not well answered as responses often did not focus on the 'show' aspect of the question. For many responses there was a narrow focus on Sperry's research including good detail of split-brain procedure but without focus on what research has shown, which unfortunately resulted in little credit. Evaluation of Sperry's research was often not linked back to the impact on the question set on hemispheric

lateralisation. Whilst many students had detailed knowledge of the procedure used in Sperry's research, the findings were often brief and muddled. A common misconception about split brain patients was that all motor function is in the right hemisphere so the left hemisphere has no motor control so the right hand cannot draw. There were also inappropriate references to a control group. The terms ipsilateral and contralateral were often inappropriately used. Better responses focussed on what research has shown about hemispheric lateralisation with use of a range of studies to support or challenge the concept. Although those who focussed on the question generally achieved higher marks, it was rare to see thorough and effective discussion.

Question 9

This question was answered with mixed success. Whilst most students recognised the importance of previous research, many claimed that a non-directional hypothesis should be used because there was no previous research rather than because of conflicting evidence as noted in the stem. This suggests possible reliance on pre-learned answers. Most students were unable to achieve full marks due to their answer not being in context and/or due to not giving the second bullet point of the mark scheme.

Question 10

This question was generally well answered with many students demonstrating an understanding that the independent and dependent variables need to be fully operationalised. However, many responses were limited to two marks due to a lack of clarity or inadequate operationalisation of the dependent variable. Evidently, practice at writing clear operationalised hypotheses would be of benefit to some students.

Question 11

This was a very well answered question with almost all students identifying D as the correct response.

Question 12

While knowledge of strengths and limitations of volunteer sampling was evident in many answers, most responses were limited to level 1 due to a lack of effective application. It was common to see generic evaluation of volunteer sampling and/or just a list of evaluative points with very limited application. A common strength offered was that it was less time consuming than other sampling methods which is not necessarily correct. Other responses engaged with the stem to provide limited elaboration and application by explaining that it was more time efficient 'because the researcher only has to post an advert'. A common limitation related to the issue of having a biased sample that cannot necessarily be generalised. Surprisingly, a large proportion of students suggested volunteer sampling made the study more ethical as the participants have already given informed consent by volunteering so there would be no ethical issues. Students are reminded that the words 'in this study' means that the answer should use context to demonstrate understanding. Whilst many answers were in context, only fully effective application and well-developed responses achieved the highest marks. The best answers related explicitly to the study and the characteristics that a volunteer who uses online forums may have, and how these might interact with type of learning or memory.

Question 13

This question yielded mixed results. Some students were well prepared and provided accurate and concise responses, gaining all the available marks. Most students were able to offer a suggestion, and many answers also included correct justifications. There were many irrelevant definitions of the median and range. Some justifications did not move beyond restating the data. Students are reminded to use comparative terms when they refer to the data in the table. Overall, interpretation of the median appeared to be more challenging than the range.

Question 14

This question was generally not well answered and most students did not gain marks. It was common to see partial labels that did not state 'median/score' or did not operationalise the independent variable or put one group on each axis. Additionally, there was some confusion with the range, suggesting a lack of understanding of measures of dispersion and measures of central tendency.

Question 15

This question discriminated well. Overall students demonstrated good examination technique, providing three reasons in context with a suggested statistical test. However, many responses lacked explicit reference to the study for one of the reasons, most commonly not contextualising the design. Some students gained all the available marks for the reasons but did not provide an appropriate statistical test. Appropriate statistical tests seemed fairly evenly split between Mann-Whitney and unrelated t-test with ordinal or interval data being creditworthy reasons, respectively. Some students struggled with the application element; students are reminded that they must use elements of the study to clearly justify the reason given rather than just state elements of the study. A common misconception was to identify the data as being nominal due to either having two groups of participants or due to having multiple choice answers. Students generally found it challenging to justify the type of data identified in the context of the study suggesting a lack of understanding of levels of measurement.

Question 16

Students generally seemed to have some understanding of the phrase 'significant at $p < 0.01$ ' however, this question did not yield high marks. Many responses stated that there was a '1% probability of the results being due to chance' rather than less than 1%, showing lack of understanding of the mathematical symbol '<'. Contextualised responses were more common than in previous series suggesting an overall improvement in examination technique. Simply stating, 'the difference between the results of the two groups was significant,' was not creditworthy as this was provided in the question.

Question 17

This was well answered, with the majority of students achieving the maximum mark, although some students then went on to discuss why they would do it rather than 'how.' Repeated measures design was better used than matched pairs design in terms of elaboration, as matched pairs design was more often presented with justification rather than elaboration. Random allocation was rarely used but answered well by the few who selected it. There was

some confusion where counterbalancing was used synonymously with repeated measure design.

Question 18

The full range of marks was awarded with a wide variety of responses given. Some students did not focus on the findings of the study and instead gave implications for more face-to-face learning, which was not creditworthy. Some students also gave implications but not ‘for the economy’ and/or gave economic implications for individual people but did not explain the impact on the economy in general. Teachers losing jobs was the most frequently seen response, but the more inventive answers explained how the results may have had a positive or negative result more widely on various people and then discussed the implications of these on the wider economy. Some answers talked thoughtfully about the impact on mental health from lack of contact with others (as in COVID). Others referred to the impact on mental health services and the NHS/government having to find more money for these services. Some answers discussed improved access to education for people with access needs and the consequences for the economy.

Question 19

Whilst this question discriminated well it was generally not well answered and had the largest percentage of not attempted responses. While many students knew the features of science most had trouble moving beyond listing these to effective application, suggesting a lack of understanding. Replicability, objectivity, and falsifiability were the most successful features used by students. There was a common confusion regarding paradigm shifts occurring because of the findings from one study. Falsifiability was also often explained incorrectly. Overall, the responses suggest that students need to develop a deeper understanding of the features rather than focussing on learning a list.

Question 20

This question discriminated well. Students took different approaches. Some focussed on designing a study to investigate students’ experiences of online learning, covering the bullet points but also including details of the sampling methods, hypothesis, data analysis, etc. The majority addressed the four bullet points as separate questions. The improved examination technique of focussing on the specific bullet points and providing the necessary justifications rather than trying to design a complete study suggests past paper practice and use of feedback. Unfortunately, some who just focussed on the bullet points provided very few details, especially regarding the technique, although often good justifications were given. Those who provided procedural detail tended to score highly as they were able to shape the rest of their response to their design. Some excellent justifications were provided although some were generic. Some answers gave advantages and disadvantages of different self-report techniques without clear justification for the one selected.

Suggested questions were mostly appropriate although some would clearly yield quantitative data. Credit was given for various justifications, including the context set, features of a good question and/or justification for being a qualitative question or for gathering qualitative data.

In terms of ethics, students often used protection from harm, for example, keeping results confidential etc without explaining how they would do this. There was frequent muddling of brief and debrief. Better answers were those where the ethics were clearly linked to the study.

Where analysis was covered this was usually done well, however, some responses lacked detail, and others did not provide the full process. Stronger responses provided the full process and put their analysis in context, for example, by suggesting relevant categories.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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