



A-level

Psychology

7182/2 Psychology in context

Report on the Examination

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General

Overall, students seemed well prepared for this paper as there was excellent recall of knowledge demonstrated across the 3 sections and no real evidence of students struggling to complete the paper or to provide full answers, suggesting good time management skills. It is evident that teachers have supported students in developing good extended writing skills, with many using the planning space and structuring their responses by using the Point, Evidence/Example, Explanation/Elaboration and Link technique.

The most common error was not addressing all aspects of the question specifically. This generally requires the student to not only read the question carefully and ensure all requirements are met in their response, but also to use their knowledge flexibly to be able to address unexpected questions. Additionally, as in previous years, the other common error was students not effectively applying answers to the question stem when asked to do so. Students therefore need to highlight key command terms and features of the question and have confidence in their understanding of the material, shaping this to meet the demands of the question, as opposed to recalling rote learned responses.

It was encouraging to see improvements in students' responses to frequently asked questions, suggesting an effective use of past-paper questions to help students to understand what questions are asking for and to develop their examination technique.

As in previous series, there were cases where handwriting was challenging to decipher and cases of incorrect numbering of answers when using additional pages. Students should check they number their responses clearly and accurately when continuing onto additional pages. Centres should be proactive in enabling students to type in examinations if their handwriting is likely to be challenging for examiners to decipher accurately.

Question 1

This question was generally answered well with most students able to provide a description of the ego and superego. There were some excellent answers which provided accurate and detailed descriptions, demonstrating impressive knowledge and understanding of both the ego and superego. However, some students muddled the parts, described the id or provided only a very limited description. Some responses gave vague or muddled descriptions of where the ego/superego operated or gave vague examples of how the component would act in various scenarios.

Question 2

This question was a good differentiator. There were some very good responses which provided an accurate and detailed outline of Wundt's method of introspection with effective use of terminology. However, despite students demonstrating good knowledge overall, some did not focus on the method of introspection, instead providing details such as, 'father of psychology,' 'opened the first laboratory in Leipzig,' etc., suggesting that students were relying on pre-prepared responses which focused on outlining and evaluating Wundt's role in the emergence of psychology as a science rather than the question set. Students should be encouraged to ensure that they understand the detail about Wundt's method of introspection and not just the background to his work.

Question 3

This question yielded mixed responses with many confusing hormones with neurotransmitters or neurotransmitters with reflex arcs, neurogenetics or neural structures. Those students who understood what neurotransmitters were, were able to achieve 2 or 3 marks for this question, depending on the level of clarity and/or detail given. Those who achieved well on this question, gave examples from other topics like depression, OCD or schizophrenia, describing how abnormally low/high levels of serotonin/dopamine results in the behavioural symptoms of the disorder. Many students then provided further elaboration of how psychoactive drugs act to amend these imbalances of neurochemicals and thus change the behavioural symptoms.

The responses overall suggest that whilst some students have some excellent knowledge and understanding, others may benefit from learning the explicit similarities and differences between hormones and neurochemicals and accurate understanding of specific neural features, such as neurogenetics, neurotransmitters, synaptic transmission, neural networks, brain structures, etc. and how these interact, using familiar examples from across the course.

Question 4

This question provided a mixed response. Many students were able to demonstrate some knowledge of incongruence being the gap between ideal and actual self, but fewer were able to apply this explicitly to the stem. They often became muddled when trying to choose which part of the stem to apply their knowledge of congruence to and there was also some misunderstanding of what congruence is and confusion of this with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Although some students demonstrated excellent understanding, overall it appears that students have some difficulty applying their knowledge of specific features of the humanistic approach appropriately.

Question 5

Generally, this question was not answered well and revealed gaps in knowledge with some students just focussing on the hierarchy of needs or explaining how CBT or psychoanalysis could be used. There were some detailed responses of how a humanistic psychologist would help a client through client-centred therapy, with effective use of terminology, but often these were generic with a lack of effective application. Most were able to identify unconditional positive regard but did not focus on explaining how the humanistic psychologist would help Karishma achieve congruence, as requested in the question. Very few students were able to fulfil all the requirements of this question to achieve the full 3 marks available.

Collectively, questions 4 and 5 indicate that some students may benefit from consolidating the humanistic approach beyond Maslow's hierarchy of needs and practising applied (past paper) questions to help develop effective application skills.

Question 6

This question on the whole was well answered with the majority of students providing detailed descriptions of operant conditioning, often including Skinner's research as part of their outline, and there were some impressive comparisons with social learning.

The full range of marks was awarded, and marks were well-distributed. The question enabled differentiation between students who can recall an answer outlining and evaluating operant conditioning and/or social learning and those who can use their knowledge flexibly to draw out effective comparison points, providing sufficient detail to make these effective without losing focus on the question.

There was some confusion between negative reinforcement and punishment, and operant and classical conditioning. However, the main differentiator was seen in the comparison skill. Students often wrote impressive, lengthy descriptions of operant conditioning and Skinner's research but then did not provide any comparison or just described social learning without making direct comparisons or just evaluated the theory, all of which yielded no comparison marks. More limited comparison generally focused on whether reinforcement was direct or indirect and/or whether research generally used human or animal participants. Better responses tended to give a more concise outline of operant conditioning, describing the content often in the context of Skinner's research and then provided effective comparison points, focusing on determinism, reductionism, real world application and/or the nature/nurture debate, with effective examples/evidence, counter points and elaboration.

Question 7

Overall, most students successfully identified the correct responses, demonstrating a good knowledge of the flight/fight system. The most common incorrect response was C ('Blood flow diverted from surface of skin'). It appeared that some missed the word 'false' in the question resulting in an incorrect selection of responses.

Question 8

This question was generally well answered. Most students were able to give an example of a hormone and provide some outline of its function with a good range of hormones presented. The most common hormones stated were thyroxine, melatonin, insulin, testosterone and oestrogen. The definition of hormones provided more differentiation with some students providing very limited or disjointed definitions whilst others provided a very detailed and comprehensive definition with effective use of terminology. Some unfortunately did not answer the first part of the question and thus missed out on the 2 marks for the definition.

Some students gave examples of neurotransmitters which can also act as hormones, these were able to gain a mark for the identification of a named hormone but only achieved the mark for the accurate outline of the function if describing the function of the chemical acting as a hormone specifically. Although noradrenaline was not a common response, when stated, the function was often a confused description.

Question 9

This question produced mixed responses. Students appear to have good knowledge of ethical guidelines and how to deal with these but did not engage well with the question set, limiting marks achieved. Many students just named an ethical guideline and how to deal with this and therefore did not gain any marks. Some limited ethical issues were given, such as participants being harmed or having personal details published, but these were not explained explicitly in context. Better responses were provided when students really engaged with the context of the study and there was a range of excellent, well considered ethical issues presented which were explained in the context of a patient who had difficulty sleeping.

Students should be aware that ethical issues require the student to explain the problem linked to ethics.

Question 10

Overall students seemed well prepared for a question on this topic. Due to the nature of the question, students were able to access AO1 marks in different ways, with some providing knowledge of the sleep/wake cycle alongside descriptions and examples of endogenous pacemakers and exogenous zeitgebers whilst others described relevant research. Overall, the question differentiated well, with the full range of marks awarded across the cohort.

Limited responses often provided brief definitions of endogenous pacemakers and exogenous zeitgebers and then described and briefly evaluated Siffre's cave study with varying degrees of accuracy. There were many generic evaluative points relating to the research outlined, such as issues with generalising findings or ethical issues with the research without effectively relating these back to discuss the impact on the question.

Better responses provided a wealth of research studies, but some focused on describing rather than discussing these with effective discussion being the main differentiator. Students appear to have been well supported in how to structure extended writing with many using the planning space, using signposting and clearly structuring their discussions by making a point, providing examples or research evidence, explaining/elaborating on this and then linking it back to explain the impact on the question. However, only the better responses were able to provide the necessary depth or effective links back to achieve the highest level of the mark scheme.

There were some excellent responses in which a range of different research studies were described with effective links to the effects endogenous pacemakers and exogenous zeitgebers have upon the sleep/wake cycle, with counterarguments and effective elaboration provided. Whilst most responses argued for and against the effects of endogenous pacemakers and exogenous zeitgebers on the sleep/wake cycle, only the better responses really discussed the interaction between the effects of the endogenous pacemakers and exogenous zeitgebers as given in the penultimate bullet point in the possible discussion on the mark scheme.

Question 11

Overall students seemed to know the difference between primary and secondary data, but many students were confused over whether data provided via the parents made the data secondary data as it was not 'directly' gathered by the researcher. This suggests they had learned definitions of primary and secondary data but struggled to fit these to the context given, questioning their deeper understanding. Although there were some good, contextualised justifications, many students did not apply their justifications and therefore were unable to access the second mark, with responses often defining primary data rather than using the stem to justify why the diary data is primary data.

Question 12

This question discriminated well. There were some excellent responses provided by students who clearly had a good knowledge of how to use content analysis and were able to apply this effectively throughout their responses, giving a range of suitable categories of different types of play and presenting the whole process clearly and accurately.

Many students could define what content analysis was but could not describe how it could be used. Other limited responses described the process but did not apply it to the context given. Contrastingly, some were able to apply their knowledge to create categories in the context of the stem but did not describe the rest of the process. Whilst others were clearly unaware of what the term meant and provided a range of suggestions for how one may analyse the content of the diaries, from plotting data onto graphs, to inferential statistics, to comparing data with other studies. There was also a lot of confusion with thematic analysis.

Students may benefit from using content analysis in a practical context, so they gain a deeper understanding of how it is used to analyse data. Students should know what an ‘explain how’ question is requiring and should apply their responses to the context given and ensure they describe the whole process for these types of questions.

Question 13

This question was another good discriminator. Students generally had good knowledge of inter-observer reliability and test-retest reliability and applied it appropriately. Where students lost marks, it was for not acknowledging that the other observer would use the same diary/data or for not explaining that the existing categories would be used. Other common errors were; not focusing on the ‘how’ requirement of the question, suggesting that the whole study should be repeated, suggesting ways to improve rather than assess reliability and a surprisingly high number of responses suggesting peer review.

Question 14

This question was generally well answered although responses were quite varied. Overall students were able to identify why an interview would improve upon the data collected from the diary, but the differentiator was how effectively they were able to elaborate to explain the “consequence” of this and the why this would be an improvement. A common error was to suggest the interview would yield qualitative data and then provide strengths of qualitative data or to recall the strengths of using interviews without elaborating on how this would improve the present data.

Question 15

This was a very well answered question. Most students achieved full marks, showing a thorough understanding of qualitative data. Closed questions which yielded responses in words were awarded credit. It was rare to see questions which yielded quantitative data and most responses were focused on play.

Question 16

This question was answered well, with the first bullet point of the mark scheme being the most common response. The most common error was when students gave vague responses such as ‘time consuming,’ not recognising that quantitative data may also be equally/more time consuming. Students should be specific, for example stating that ‘qualitative data may be more time consuming to analyse than quantitative data.’ Likewise, students often stated that qualitative data may be subjective again failing to consider that quantitative self-report data is also subjective and thus they needed to specifically state ‘the analysis of the data can be subjective.’

Question 17

This question produced mixed results with most students achieving 2 marks, mainly due to limited application to the context of this study. Most students knew how to obtain consent and the general nature of consent forms however, they did not elaborate enough on the details that parents would need to know. Another common error was for students to forget to include the requirement for parental agreement/signed consent, which was necessary to gain a mark in level 2, and/or to confuse 'brief' and 'debrief'.

Students should be reminded that a 4 marks question which asks them to 'explain how,' will require good detail of the process, as many responses were brief and lacked the necessary breadth/depth. Students should recognise that if the question says, 'for this study,' it is a reminder that their response must be explicitly applied to the context given.

Question 18

This question was generally not answered well. There was considerable challenge with what a 'type of experiment' means and much confusion in terms of understanding the types of experiment that are conducted in psychological research. Most students were not able to gain any marks on this question. A frequent, incorrect response was to identify a field or natural experiment/observation and to justify this by stating that the experiment was conducted in a natural environment. Many students focused on the type of observation and others justified the field experiment by stating that the independent variable had been controlled as the experimenter had controlled the choice of play activities.

Most of those who correctly identified a quasi-experiment were able to gain the justification marks. Responses overall would suggest that students must develop their understanding of different types of experiments.

Question 19

This question produced mixed results. Many students described the purpose of a pilot study or provided a definition of a pilot study but did not focus on the requirements of the question – to explain how the pilot study would be carried out and how conducting a pilot study would improve the present study. Some only focused on one aspect of the question, for example stating that a pilot study can identify flaws in the proposed study but did not go on to say that modifications can then be made. There was some effective application seen with students providing details of the number of participants they would include in their smaller sample for the pilot study and examples of changes in choice of play activities or timing for the play sessions. A common error was to suggest that a pilot study would check the findings of the study and therefore, focused on reliability. There was also a lot of focus on ethics. It should be noted that ethics could only be relevant if the issue identified was explicitly linked to an unforeseen ethical problem.

Question 20

This question was generally not answered well with a lot of students confusing stratified and systematic sampling. Some gave generic responses of how stratified sampling could be carried out with no link to the question, whilst others gave appropriately applied responses but used different strata and thus struggled to achieve full marks without proportions being given. Those who did understand what stratified sampling was and then focused on selecting 4-year-old children from the two different nursery

centres were generally able to achieve 3 or 4 marks efficiently. Those who achieved 3 marks tended to miss out the final bullet point on the mark scheme regarding the method for selection d.

Question 21

This question differentiated well. It appears that many students still find distributions challenging. Overall, many students muddled positively and negatively skewed distribution and although students gave more accurate responses regarding normal distributions, many could not recall the correct terminology stating, 'no distribution,' for example.

Question 22

This question was generally well answered. Although some students merely quoted data from the table rather than using it to explain their answer, overall students demonstrated an improved performance, compared to previous series. They recognised that to justify answers with reference to mean values they needed to do more than just re-state the values in the table, with a good range of comparison terms used. The most common error was to describe the result that 2-year-olds spent longer in the sandpit than 4-year-olds, rather than explaining what the difference in the mean values suggested about play preferences.

Question 23

Students appeared well prepared for this question with clear reasons provided for the choice of statistical tests being given in the context of the stem. Although the question differentiated well, the modal mark for this question was six suggesting a real improvement in performance from previous series. For those who did not score full marks on this question this tended to be due to the lack of context/link to the stem or confusion over levels of measurement and what constitutes nominal, ordinal and interval data. There was a surprising number of responses in which the rationale for independent groups design was confused and others justified interval data as being due to the duration of the observation as opposed to the actual dependent variable measured.

Question 24

This question was generally answered well with most students achieving 2 marks. The main reason for the second mark being missed was due to not using the data from the table. Some surprising responses gave the second bullet point on the mark scheme but stated the data was not significant or confused the calculated and critical/table value.

Students should take their time on these questions and read the information provided to prevent these types of errors.

Question 25

This question challenged students to show an understanding of what Type I errors are by applying their knowledge to the context given. As a consequence, it yielded a variety of responses. There were a lot of definitions of Type I errors without any application to the question which were not awarded credit. Other students gave vague references to the table which did not suggest any understanding of levels of significance, eg 'all results are close together' or 'still significant even if differing degree of freedom are used.' However, it was pleasing to see a high proportion of students who demonstrated excellent

understanding and answered this question well and with the idea that the data is still significant when using a more stringent level of significance ($p = 0.01$) and using the critical value from the table to give a full explanation and meet all the requirements of the question.

A lot of the students who did not score full marks for this question, gained credit for knowledge that $p = 0.05$ is the conventional level of significance that balances the chance of making a Type I and a Type II error. Responses overall suggest that some students need to practise using critical values tables and comparing these with calculated values with reference to Type I and Type II errors in a practical context, rather than merely learning definitions of these terms.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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