
AS PSYCHOLOGY

7181/2 Psychology in Context
Report on the Examination

7181
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7181/2

Psychology in Context

General

Student performance indicated that many had been prepared well for this examination, demonstrating good understanding of Approaches in Psychology, Psychopathology and Research Methods and completing the paper in the time allowed.

There were a few questions that challenged students and indicated that students do need to ensure that they read questions carefully and provide answers that directly address the requirements of the question set. There were examples of responses that were not related to the questions set in each section. In Section C, students should be reminded to link their answers to the context of the study – a significant number of responses were not contextualised and therefore failed to gain full credit on some of the research methods questions. Other responses in this section did suggest that some students had limited practical experience of procedures such as random allocation or dealing with ethical issues. It is important that students gain such practical experience as part of their course.

Most students presented their knowledge and understanding of the topics clearly and appropriately. As always there were examples of handwriting that were very challenging and examiners struggled to work out students' answers. 7181/2 is marked online and teachers need to explain to their students the process of scanning and clipping. Examiners do not see whole scripts, but only the clipped part of the question they are marking. Examiners will not see anything that is written outside of the lines or margins, and therefore the clipped area. The best advice for students who need to write more than the space given allows, is to use the additional pages, but make sure that they inform the examiner that they have done so. A simple 'continued' or 'see extra page' will suffice. Some students did not follow the instructions relating to responses to multiple-choice questions.

Section A Approaches in Psychology

Question 1

This was answered quite well although a significant number of students struggled with the instructions about how to indicate their choice of response in the appropriate mark box and even more with how to amend their choices correctly.

Question 2

There were some issues with the accuracy of knowledge here and many students produced answers that were very confused. There was only a superficial/limited understanding of how excitation and inhibition are involved in synaptic transmission. Often there was no knowledge that excitation and inhibition occur at the post synaptic membrane and some students suggested that synapses were firing or that excitation caused more neurotransmitter and inhibition caused less.

Other responses suggested that excitation referred to more firing and inhibition to less firing but an understanding of the summation of excitatory and inhibitory influences was rare, even in knowledgeable answers. At the simplest level students should be aware of the general idea that transmission is halted if there are more inhibitory effects in total and proceeds if there are more excitatory effects overall.

Question 3

This was answered very well by many students who demonstrated a good understanding of both classical conditioning and Social Learning Theory and could apply the concepts/features associated with these effectively to the novel behaviours in the stem. Some responses did have muddled reference to the neutral stimulus (NS), the unconditioned stimulus (UCS) and the conditioned stimulus (CS), in particular, that the fear was the UCS rather than the 'being trapped' element. However, the majority were impressive in their accurate application of schedule terms. It was acceptable for responses to be a combination of both classical conditioning and avoidance behaviour. Some students focused only on direct reinforcement and operant conditioning principles in part B rather than the indirect effects of vicarious reinforcement.

Question 4

Many students had some understanding of genotype and phenotype but struggled to apply their knowledge to this novel scenario about 'fillings'. Even some sound answers had an imprecise use of terminology, especially references to monozygotic (MZ) twins or identical twins as having 'similar' genes or having 'almost identical' genes. Many students failed to appreciate that all identical twins have identical genes and that all people exhibit traits that are a function of both genetic and environmental influences. Instead, they suggested that the data could be explained as either a result of genes or of phenotype.

Question 5

There were some very good answers to this question and students had sound knowledge of features of the cognitive approach. Responses to explaining two limitations of the cognitive approach were less successful, sometimes lacking explanation or even being incorrect. A significant number of responses, for example, seemed to suggest schemas lead to stereotypes and therefore this limits the cognitive approach because stereotyping is a 'bad thing.' Understanding that people are cognitive misers in the way they process information and therefore might stereotype, is a useful piece of information, as such awareness might in fact help us to deal with stereotyping in society. There were also a number of attempts at limitations which were too extreme in their assertion such as, cognitive psychology ignores emotion, ignores biology and ignores culture or only uses experiments. Students need to construct more coherent discussions about apparent weaknesses of approaches and should be more circumspect in the way they present these ideas.

Some students misread the question and produced answers that focused on the cognitive approach to depression. These were rarely creditworthy.

Section B Psychopathology

Question 6

This question was generally answered well.

Question 7

Unfortunately, students often wasted time and effort outlining theory in response to this question. When answers mentioned therapy, the focus was not always on describing one or more strategies used in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), but instead on offering superficial points such as homework tasks, activities, disputing and so on, but without any expansion of these to show practical usage.

Question 8

There were many correct answers to this question although the same issues about question completion occurred here as in Question 01. Also, some students provided two answers rather than one when the instruction clearly stated 'Shade **one** box only'.

Question 9

There were some very good answers to this question in which students showed clear understanding of how systematic desensitisation could be used in treatment for this specific fear of cats. Some students did not emphasise the element of relaxation and just referred to gradual exposure as a calming process. These responses seemed to be more related to flooding.

Question 10

There were some exceptionally good answers to this question as well as some examples of extended writing that achieved very low marks.

Quite a few students related Emma's response to 'thinking' rather than biology – presumably linking thoughts to the information given, ie, 'something in their brains'. The question clearly asked for neural and genetic explanations, so such material was not relevant. A number of responses failed to mention the stem, which was unfortunate as the application marks were then lost although others related Melanie's response to both genetic causes and also to the possibility of the behaviour described as being acquired through observation. The most common error was for muddle in the description of catechol-o-methyl transferase (COMT) and serotonin transporter (SERT) genes and when serotonin or dopamine might be increased or decreased. Attempts at evaluation were sometimes limited as they related to perceived general issues with biological explanations rather than those specific to neural and genetic explanations.

Section C Research Methods

Question 11.1

For full credit students needed to apply their knowledge of a problem associated with volunteers in this particular study. Many only referred to bias or representativeness and did not relate their responses to type of offender/ possible effect on therapy or on anger scores.

Question 11.2

There were many different suggestions given for random allocation and all suggestions that were practical and would result in the required groups were credited. However, many responses never went beyond the idea of putting names in a hat or into a random number generator, meaning that all the researcher would have is names in a hat or in a generator. Students should be able to describe accurately what they would do to reach the final stage of having the required number of people in the required groups. It was very clear that many students had no idea of what they would have to instruct the computer or random number generator to do in order to reach this stage.

Question 11.3

Full marks were rarely achieved as most responses failed to show understanding of what was being measured in this study (the DV) which was a **reduction** in anger scores not anger scores or anger. Some students thought the study was looking for a difference between the start and end of therapy rather than between two different therapies.

Question 11.4

Many students failed to write enough about the data. Instead, they seemed to be providing answers to a question that required justification of one chosen suggestion, often just referring to the greater reduction in Group 2/Therapy B indicating that it was more effective. There were many points that could have been extrapolated from the data in Figure 1.

Question 11.5

Many students overlooked the most significant improvement to be derived from using a matched pairs design, ie the matching on pre-therapy anger scores. These students resorted to explaining matched pairs in a generic way without reference to the criteria which could be used for matching. Instead they often suggested IQ, age and sex as the crucial points, rather than pre-therapy anger scores. While credit was available for demonstrating an understanding of matched pairs design these responses did have to be contextualised and unfortunately many answers were generic.

Question 11.6

It was surprising that a number of students missed the second part of this question. An appropriate ethical issue was outlined (often fully) but then there was a failure to explain how this issue could have been dealt with. The importance of keeping the whole question in mind is highlighted in this case. Some responses presented a muddle of possible issues and markers had to try to match an appropriate issue with its appropriate solution. More worrying were the responses where one issue was described and a different issue was dealt with.

Question 11.7

Answers were often disappointing as students seemed unaware that median values are a form of average and stated that a problem was the median is not an average. Others made vague statements about how the median doesn't use all the values, but it would be difficult to find a median without the other values.

Question 11.8

This was generally answered well by the majority of students. However, there were quite a number of responses where knowledge was evident but marks were not obtained because the answer was not contextualised.

Question 11.9

It was again difficult to give full credit to responses in some cases as they were often vague or undeveloped so the information about the strength of using questionnaires as a technique for data collection often lacked clarity.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)