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# AS PSYCHOLOGY

7181/2 Psychology in Context  
Report on the Examination

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7181  
June 2017

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Version: 1.0

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**7181/2****Psychology in Context****General**

Many students had evidently been well prepared for this examination and demonstrated a very good understanding of all three sections. Approaches in Psychology and Psychopathology were answered particularly well and notably better than Research Methods. It was also pleasing to note that the majority of students appeared to complete the paper in the time allowed.

In Sections A and B most students seemed to engage with the actual question posed rather than writing pre-prepared answers, and this was particularly pleasing on the 12 mark question in Section A, where most students engaged with stem and produced effective application. However, there were examples of responses that were not related to the questions set and it is important to remind students to read the questions carefully. This was a particular issue in Section C, where students must link their answers to the context of the study if required by the question. Many responses in Section C did suggest that students had some practical experience of procedures, such as stratified sampling or identifying extraneous variables. However, there were other practical areas, such as the use of counterbalancing or selecting an appropriate hypothesis, where it appeared that the majority of students had little or no practical experience and thus did not understand how to apply these concepts. It is important that students gain practical experience as part of their course.

The majority of students wrote their responses to questions clearly and in the appropriate space provided. However, as mentioned in the examination report for the previous series, it is important to remind students that these papers are marked online and examiners do not see whole scripts. Examiners will only see that which is written on the lines provided for answering a particular question. They will not see writing in the margins or answers written in the space belonging to another question. Students who need to write more than the space given allows, should use additional pages which will be matched with the response and marked as a complete answer.

It is also important the students' handwriting is legible and they use black ink or ball-point pen as instructed. The quality of handwriting of a minority of students this year made some responses very challenging to read. Additionally, some students did not use the correct pen and their writing was very faint and thus difficult to read.

In responding to multiple choice questions, students do need to make sure they use the correct method, ie "...fill in the circle alongside the appropriate answer". Some seem to ignore the instructions and use a tick or cross to indicate their chosen answer.

**Section A Approaches in Psychology****Question 1**

Most students answered this question correctly. However, some provided more than one answer when the instruction clearly stated 'Shade **one** box only'. It is important to remind students to read and follow the instructions for multiple-choice questions.

**Question 2**

There were some very good responses to this question in which students displayed a good understanding of the fight or flight response. A minority wrote more than sufficient content for full

marks. Weaker responses lacked detail and only included a limited amount of information about the processes involved. Some students provided a long list of the physiological effects of the fight or flight response with little else, which limited the mark awarded. A small minority of answers had no focus on biology and simply described the behavioural characteristics of 'fight' and 'flight', which could not gain any credit.

### **Question 3**

This question was answered very well by the majority of students, with answers referring to variations of the Skinner box/rat/pigeon experiments. Most responses focused on Skinner's studies rather than his theory but it is important to note that 'research' refers to studies or theory and thus students could have outlined operant conditioning theory and gained credit. Answers that described vicarious reinforcement or punishment without any link to (negative) reinforcement could not gain credit.

### **Question 4**

This question was generally answered very well with some clear and coherent application. Most responses focused on direct reinforcement with few students using token economy or vicarious reinforcement. A minority of students confused negative reinforcement with punishment or provided an answer focusing on punishment rather than reinforcement.

### **Question 5**

Few students appeared to understand the meaning of inference and thus many were unable to apply this to the stem and gain any marks. Some answers conveyed an understanding of inference but without referring to mental processes. A number of responses were limited as they referred to biology (ie the 'brain') rather than cognition (ie the 'mind'). There were also a number of examples seen where no answer was attempted, suggesting that some students did not have the knowledge to enable them to answer this question.

### **Question 6**

Many students had a good level of knowledge and understanding of social learning theory with appropriate application. However, most responses were at level 2 and level 3 largely due to the limited effectiveness of the evaluation, which tended to be generic, unexplained or not clearly linked to social learning theory. Detailed descriptive accounts of Bandura's Bobo Doll study were not creditworthy and evaluation of this study was only creditworthy if it was used to evaluate social learning theory. A minority muddled social learning theory with behaviourism, which had a detrimental effect on the level and mark awarded.

## **Section B Psychopathology**

### **Question 7**

Most students understood that flooding meant an immediate exposure to the stimulus as well as the requirement that this is done until the person is calm or they no longer fear the stimulus. However, few referred to the prevention of avoidance and thus only a minority achieved full marks. A number of students wrote answers in the context of treating a particular phobia, which could gain credit, providing their answer included the three key components required for a complete description of the procedures undertaken in flooding.

### **Question 8**

This question was generally answered very well. The majority of students evidently had an excellent understanding of systematic desensitisation and thus produced answers which contained a complete description of the procedures involved. Where one mark was awarded, this was usually

because students failed to refer to relaxation training or to the gradual exposure to the stimulus. Again, a number of students wrote answers in the context of treating a particular phobia, which could gain credit providing their answer was a complete description of the procedure.

**Question 9**

Most students were able to give a reason why systematic desensitisation was more successful than flooding, although many did not go on to discuss this reason and thus only gained one mark. The most common response was that systematic desensitisation was 'more ethical' or 'less traumatic' than flooding but many did not discuss this further, such as relating this aspect to attrition rates. Fewer responses referred to other possible answers, such as the success it would have for certain individuals.

**Question 10**

Where students clearly understood what was meant by obsessions and compulsions, there were some excellent answers provided, which gained full marks. However, it was disappointing to see a significant minority who did not understand the terms or who had muddled obsessions and compulsions. Knowledge of the terms was sometimes incomplete, which limited the number of marks awarded. For example, some students simply referred to obsessions as 'thoughts' without the addition of some other relevant descriptor (eg 'intrusive') and others referred to compulsions as 'behaviours/acts' without the 'repetitive' aspect. The application to 'Bob' was often accurate and clear where students had a clear understanding of obsessions and compulsions. However, those who muddled the terms also tended to also muddle the application and thus didn't get the marks.

**Question 11**

There were excellent responses from some students who provided clear and detailed knowledge of biological explanations of OCD, which were effectively applied to 'Bob'. Superb detailed knowledge was seen in some students' answers relating to the COMT/SERT genes and the role of the orbital frontal cortex. A variety of biological explanations were given with genetic explanations being the most common but typically these responses tended to be less detailed than those answers that focussed on the neural aspect.

Unfortunately, a minority of students produced accurate and detailed knowledge of biological explanations but had no application in their response, thereby limiting marks to level 1. Most students demonstrated some knowledge of biological explanations of OCD and thus most gained some marks but a minority simply wrote generic answers about genes and inheritance without explicit links to OCD.

**Question 12**

This question was generally answered well by most students. Many responses focused on the fact that people could go back to work and generate money for the economy. A number of responses also focused on the cost implications to the NHS, such as a comparison of drugs being cheaper than CBT or the cost of training therapists for CBT compared to drugs. In some responses the link to the economy was not clearly explained and these responses were only awarded one mark. Responses that were not linked to the treatment of depression did not gain any marks.

**Question 13**

Many students produced level 3 responses, which demonstrated knowledge of two definitions with some effective evaluation. However, few students accessed level 4 due to either a lack of detailed knowledge of two definitions or due to ineffective evaluation.

There were some effective evaluative responses in relation to cultural bias but overall evaluation tended to be weak or superficial. Students frequently struggled with the evaluation of the definitions

described, producing answers with poorly expressed points, significant irrelevance and confusion between definitions. Reference to irrelevant examples that did not relate to psychopathology did not gain credit.

## **Section C Research Methods**

### **Question 14**

There was evidently much confusion amongst students as to when a directional or non-directional hypothesis should be used and many failed to get any marks on this question. Those who did correctly state the hypothesis should be non-directional portrayed this in many ways, ranging from 'the hypothesis should be non-directional' or 'the hypothesis should not be directional', to simply 'no' in response to the question stated. However, only around half of these correct responses went on to accurately explain the reason for this in relation to the fact that there was no previous research. Many students stated that 'the hypothesis should be directional as it was clearly seen from the data that participants...'. It appears that many have not had sufficient practical experience of selecting an appropriate hypothesis and thus did not understand how to apply their knowledge in order to accurately answer this question.

### **Question 15**

The overwhelming majority of students clearly knew how to calculate a percentage and most were awarded two marks. Virtually all also provided their workings to support their answer. Those students who gave an incorrect answer but included correct workings were awarded one mark.

### **Question 16**

Most students clearly understood that stratified sampling was more representative or reduces research bias but many did not refer to subsets of students in the correct proportions. A minority confused stratified sampling with systematic sampling. There were also a number of students that didn't attempt the question, suggesting that they did not have the knowledge.

### **Question 17**

The vast majority of students scored one mark for this question with their understanding that primary data is first hand data. Very few referred to it as being 'original' data. Even fewer students referred to primary data as data collected specifically for the research being carried out and thus few were awarded two marks. There was significant confusion in responses illustrating a lack of understanding surrounding primary data as many students were incorrectly focusing on who was collecting the data.

### **Question 18**

Some good responses were provided by the minority of students who understood why the mean was the most appropriate value and could refer to it as being more representative. Of these correct responses, only around half went on to clearly explain why it was the most appropriate and thus few students achieved full marks. It was evident that the vast majority did not understand why the mean would be the most appropriate measure and stated incorrect reasons, such as 'the mean is the most appropriate as it shows the overall average' and so scored no marks.

### **Question 19**

This question was answered very well with the vast majority of students producing correct mean values for both tasks and thus being awarded full marks. A small minority were awarded partial credit for stating an incorrect answer but with correct workings.

**Question 20**

It was very clear from responses to this question that most students did not understand the purpose of counterbalancing and so scored zero marks. Most responses incorrectly stated that the purpose was to 'reduce, eliminate or prevent' order effects. Students seemed to be unaware that the purpose of counterbalancing is to control or equally distribute the impact of order effects. Other responses were tailored towards an explanation of how you would do counterbalancing rather than discussing the purpose. There were also a significant number of blank spaces suggesting that some students did not have the knowledge to enable them to attempt this question.

**Question 21**

There were some excellent answers to this question with appropriate extraneous variables (EVs) identified and elaborated. However, many students failed to achieve the third mark as they did not explicitly state what effect the EV would have on the time taken to complete the spot the difference task (DV). Many correct responses referred to the type or volume of music being played, or the difficulty of the spot the difference tasks. However, a minority of students failed to achieve any marks as their responses referred to participant variables, such as poor eyesight or IQ, which would have been accounted for through the use of a repeated measures design. Additionally, some answers were vague and referred to 'environmental conditions' as an EV without explicitly referring to the change in these conditions between the tasks and thus limited the marks awarded.

**Question 22**

Most students produced some limited explanation of how the follow up study improved upon the first study and thus achieved level 1. However, few went on to give a detailed explanation of this improvement, often only focussing on either why the follow up study was positive or why the original study was negative without comparison. Those students who achieved level 2 tended to focus on the follow-up study being more objective, a more scientific measurement or allowing cause and effect to be established, and then compared this with the relevant opposing weakness of the original study (more subjective, less scientific and only opinion so does not establish cause and effect). A minority of students mistakenly assumed that the first study generated qualitative data as it was self-report and so focused on the limitation of that versus the quantitative element of the follow-up study, and so scored no marks.

**Use of statistics**

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

**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](#)