

**Paper 3 · Section D option · Forensic Psychology**A-level topic mock · 2026 · Maximum mark: 48

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**Forensic Psychology is A-level only** (AQA spec 4.3.9) — it is a Paper 3 option and is not assessed at AS. Indicative content is not exhaustive; credit any other valid points. Levels-based questions (Q10 and Q11) require holistic judgement using the descriptors — match the answer to the band that best fits, then fine-tune within it. Specialist vocabulary (typology approach, organised/disorganised, data-driven approach, investigative psychology, geographical profiling, Eysenck's criminal personality, level of moral reasoning, hostile attribution bias, minimalisation, differential association, custodial sentencing, behaviour modification, anger management, restorative justice) follows AQA's 2025 wording. **Note (2025 spec):** the **atavistic form**, **psychodynamic explanations of offending** and **recidivism as a focal topic** have been **removed**; "top-down" profiling is now the **typology approach** and "bottom-up" profiling is the **data-driven approach**.

**D Forensic Psychology**

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**0 1**AO1 · 1 mark multiple choice

*In offender profiling, the typology approach classifies offenders as one of which two types?*

**Answer: B — Organised and disorganised.**

The typology approach (formerly "top-down") sorts offenders into organised or disorganised types. The other pairings belong to other topics (D = dispositional/situational, used for institutional aggression and attribution).

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**0 2**AO1 · 1 mark multiple choice

*Which one of the following is a neural explanation of offending behaviour?*

**Answer: C — Reduced activity in the prefrontal cortex.**

A is a genetic explanation; B is differential association (a social/learning explanation); D is a cognitive explanation. Only C concerns brain structure/function (neural).

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0 3

AO1 · 1 mark multiple choice

According to Eysenck, the criminal personality scores highly on which combination of dimensions?

**Answer: B — Extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism.**

Eysenck argued the criminal personality is high in extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism. The other options mix in traits (e.g. agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness) from the Big Five, not Eysenck's model.

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0 4

AO1 · 3 marks short answer

Outline the typology approach to offender profiling. Refer to organised and disorganised offenders.

**Marks for this question: AO1 = 3 marks**

- **1 mark** — the typology approach (developed by the FBI) starts from **pre-existing categories** and matches crime-scene evidence to a "type" to predict the offender's characteristics.
- **1 mark** — **organised** offenders show evidence of planning and control (a controlled crime scene, a targeted victim); they tend to be of higher intelligence and socially/occupationally competent.
- **1 mark** — **disorganised** offenders show little planning (a chaotic crime scene, evidence left behind); they tend to be of lower intelligence and socially incompetent, often acting impulsively.

*Credit "top-down" if used, but the 2025 term is the typology approach.*

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Use your knowledge of anger management to explain the programme Tyler has been enrolled on.

**Marks for this question: AO2 = 4 marks**

- **4 marks** — clear, coherent explanation that links the stages of anger management to the stem using accurate terminology.
- **3 marks** — effective but one element less developed.
- **2 marks** — partial application of the method.
- **1 mark** — brief/partial.

**Indicative content** — anger management is a CBT-based programme with three stages:

- **Cognitive preparation:** the offender learns to recognise the triggers and early signs of their anger — "recognise the early signs that he is becoming angry".
- **Skills acquisition:** they are taught coping techniques — "relaxation and positive self-talk" are exactly the skills Tyler is being taught.
- **Application/practice:** the skills are rehearsed and applied in role-played provoking situations — "situations that provoke him" — so Tyler can use them in real confrontations.

*Top-band answers name the three stages AND tie each to the details of Tyler's programme.*

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Explain how the data-driven approach to offender profiling is being used in this case.

**Marks for this question: AO2 = 4 marks**

- **4 marks** — both elements (the bottom-up logic + investigative psychology and/or geographical profiling) applied effectively to the stem.
- **3 marks** — applied but one element less developed.
- **2 marks** — one element applied accurately.
- **1 mark** — brief/partial.

**Indicative content:**

- **Data-driven logic:** unlike the typology approach, the profile is built up *from the evidence* with no fixed types — "rather than starting from fixed 'types' of offender".
- **Investigative psychology:** the systematic, statistical analysis of crime-scene details to find patterns and associations — "analyses the precise details... looking for statistical patterns".
- **Geographical profiling:** using the spatial pattern of offences to infer the offender's likely base ("centre of gravity" / crime mapping) — "uses the spatial distribution of the offences to suggest the area in which the offender is most likely to live".

Credit "bottom-up" if used; the 2025 term is the data-driven approach.

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Outline restorative justice as a way of dealing with offending behaviour.

**Marks for this question: AO1 = 4 marks**

- **1 mark** — restorative justice focuses on the **rehabilitation** of offenders through **reconciliation** with victims, rather than on punishment.
  - **1 mark** — it involves a **supervised meeting or communication** between the victim and the offender (sometimes the wider community), led by a trained mediator.
  - **1 mark** — the **victim** is given the chance to explain the real impact of the crime, so the offender understands the consequences of their actions.
  - **1 mark** — the **offender** takes responsibility, may show remorse and make some form of reparation; the aims are to reduce reoffending and help the victim recover.
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0 8

AO1 · 3 marks short answer

Outline the aims of custodial sentencing and one psychological effect of custodial sentencing.

**Marks for this question: AO1 = 3 marks**

- **1–2 marks** for the **aims**: **deterrence** (putting the individual and society off offending), **incapacitation** (protecting the public), **retribution** (society taking revenge) and **rehabilitation** (reforming the offender to reduce reoffending).
- **1–2 marks** for one **psychological effect**: e.g. **depression, anxiety and increased suicide/self-harm risk; institutionalisation** (becoming so adapted to prison routines that the person cannot function outside); or **prisonisation** (adopting the inmate "code"/culture).

*Award up to 3 marks across the two parts (at least 1 for each required element). The high rate of reoffending may be noted in passing, but recidivism is no longer a focal topic.*

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0 9

AO1 · 3 marks short answer

Outline behaviour modification in custody as a way of dealing with offending behaviour.

**Marks for this question: AO1 = 3 marks**

- **1 mark** — behaviour modification is based on **operant conditioning**: desirable behaviour is reinforced and undesirable behaviour is not.
  - **1–2 marks** — in custody this usually takes the form of a **token economy**: inmates earn **tokens** (secondary reinforcers) for desirable, non-offending behaviour, which can be exchanged for rewards or privileges (e.g. extra visits).
  - **1 mark** — tokens are given immediately after the target behaviour; the aim is to **shape and reinforce** compliant behaviour and discourage offending while in custody.
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*Discuss biological explanations of offending behaviour. Refer to genetic and/or neural explanations, and to at least one strength and one limitation.*

**Marks for this question: AO1 = 4 marks, AO3 = 4 marks**

Level	Marks	Descriptor
4	7–8	Knowledge of biological explanations is accurate and well detailed. Evaluation includes at least one strength and one limitation, both effectively explained. Clear, coherent, focused; specialist terminology used effectively.
3	5–6	Knowledge generally accurate; evaluation mostly effective but limited in places. Reasonable structure.
2	3–4	Some accurate knowledge. Evaluation limited; mainly descriptive.
1	1–2	Knowledge limited or muddled. Little or no evaluation.
0	0	No relevant content.

**Indicative AO1 content** (*note: the atavistic form is no longer on the spec and should not be credited as current content*):

- **Genetic:** twin studies (**Christiansen** found higher concordance for offending in MZ than DZ twins) and adoption studies (**Crowe**) point to a heritable component; candidate genes such as **MAOA** and **CDH13** (Tiihonen et al.) have been linked to violent offending, often via a gene–environment interaction.
- **Neural:** **Raine et al.** found reduced activity in the **prefrontal cortex** (which regulates impulse control) in offenders with antisocial personality disorder; reduced empathy has been linked to **mirror-neuron** dysfunction.

**Indicative AO3 content:**

- **Strength — supporting evidence:** twin/adoption studies and Raine's brain-imaging research provide objective, scientific support for a biological contribution to offending.
- **Limitation — concordance is never 100% and twins share environments:** this means genes cannot be the sole cause, and MZ twins' greater similarity may partly reflect more similar treatment — pointing to a diathesis-stress account.
- **Limitation — biological determinism:** claiming offending is caused by genes/brain raises serious legal and ethical issues about responsibility (it has been used in court as a defence) — a socially sensitive implication.
- **Limitation — reductionist:** focusing on biology ignores cognitive and social factors (e.g. differential association); offending is better explained by combining biological and psychological factors.

Discuss psychological explanations of offending behaviour. Refer to the case of Connor as part of your discussion.

Marks for this question: AO1 = 6 marks, AO2 = 4 marks, AO3 = 6 marks

Level	Marks	Descriptor
4	13–16	Knowledge of psychological explanations is accurate and generally well detailed. Application to Connor is effective and integrated across the stem. Discussion is thorough and effective. Clear, coherent and focused; specialist terminology used effectively.
3	9–12	Knowledge evident with some accuracy. Application mostly effective. Discussion mostly effective but limited in places.
2	5–8	Some accurate knowledge of one or more explanations. Application limited. Discussion superficial / mainly descriptive.
1	1–4	Knowledge limited; little or no application or discussion.
0	0	No relevant content.

**Indicative AO1 content** — credit any of the explanations (*the psychodynamic explanation is no longer on the spec*):

- **Eysenck's criminal personality:** offenders score highly on **extraversion** (under-aroused, so they seek stimulation), **neuroticism** (unstable, over-reactive) and **psychoticism** (cold, aggressive); their nervous systems make them harder to condition, so they fail to learn to avoid antisocial behaviour.
- **Cognitive explanations:** offenders tend to show a lower **level of moral reasoning** (Kohlberg — remaining at the pre-conventional level, focused on avoiding punishment/gaining reward); and **cognitive distortions** — **hostile attribution bias** (misreading others' actions as threatening) and **minimalisation** (downplaying the seriousness of an offence).
- **Differential association theory (Sutherland):** offending is **learned** through interaction with others; if a person is exposed to more pro-criminal than anti-criminal attitudes (and learns criminal techniques), they are more likely to offend.

**Indicative AO2 content** — engagement with Connor:

- **Differential association:** the "adults he looked up to were involved in crime", and "he learned that stealing was a normal and acceptable way to get by" — Connor acquired pro-criminal attitudes from admired models.
- **Eysenck:** being "impulsive and easily bored" and seeking "excitement and risk" fits high extraversion/psychoticism (an under-aroused nervous system seeking stimulation).
- **Cognitive distortions:** "they could easily afford a new phone" = **minimalisation** (downplaying the harm); "it was their own fault for waving it around" = blaming the victim / **hostile attribution**.

**Indicative AO3 content:**

- **Strength — differential association has explanatory power:** it accounts for offending across all social groups and shifted the focus from biology to learnable social factors, which usefully implies offending can be "unlearned".
- **Strength — cognitive explanations have real-world application:** identifying distortions and low moral reasoning underpins **CBT** and anger management, which challenge offenders' thinking and can reduce reoffending — an economically valuable application.
- **Limitation — Eysenck's theory has been challenged:** Farrington found offenders score highly on neuroticism and psychoticism but not consistently on extraversion, and the idea of a single stable "criminal personality" is questioned.
- **Limitation — cause and effect / correlation:** cognitive distortions and low moral reasoning are usually measured *after* offending, so they may be a consequence rather than a cause; differential association is also hard to test (the number of pro- vs anti-criminal attitudes cannot be measured precisely).
- **Limitation — reductionist / ignores biology:** focusing only on personality, cognition and learning neglects the genetic and neural factors; an interactionist account is more complete.

*Top-band answers will (1) describe at least two psychological explanations accurately; (2) map Connor's admired criminal role models onto differential association, his impulsivity/sensation-seeking onto Eysenck, and his "they could afford it"/"their own fault" statements onto minimalisation and hostile attribution; (3) evaluate with named evidence (e.g. Farrington, Kohlberg) and at least one limitation; and (4) reach a clear conclusion — typically that psychological explanations (especially differential association and cognitive factors) account well for offending and support effective treatment, but are incomplete without the biological factors.*