

**Paper 3 · Section B option · Relationships**

A-level topic mock · 2026 · Maximum mark: 48

**Relationships is an A-level Paper 3 option** (AQA spec 4.3.2) — 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. Specialist vocabulary (self-disclosure, matching hypothesis, filter theory, social demography, similarity, complementarity, social exchange theory, equity theory, comparison level, comparison level for alternatives, investment model, satisfaction, alternatives, investment, commitment, Duck's phases, online relationships, absence of gating, parasocial relationships, absorption-addiction model) follows AQA's 2025 *Subject specific vocabulary*. *Evolutionary explanations of partner preferences are NOT in the 2025 spec*.

**B Relationships****0 1**AO1 · 1 mark multiple choice

Which one of the following best describes the matching hypothesis?

**Answer: B — People choose romantic partners of similar physical attractiveness to themselves.**

A is the opposite of the matching hypothesis; C describes attitude alignment over time (Anderson et al. 2003); D ignores the matching constraint (everyone would ideally want the most attractive, but choose realistically).

**0 2**AO1 · 1 mark multiple choice

Which one of the following is not a factor in Rusbult's investment model?

**Answer: D — Complementarity.**

Rusbult's three factors are **satisfaction**, **comparison with alternatives** and **investment** (which combine to predict **commitment**). Complementarity is a concept from filter theory (Kerckhoff and Davis 1962).

0 3

AO1 · 1 mark multiple choice

| Which one of the following best describes Duck's grave-dressing phase?

**Answer: D — Each ex-partner constructs a personal narrative about why the relationship failed.**

A = intra-psychic phase; B = dyadic phase; C = social phase.

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0 4

AO1 · 3 marks short answer

| Outline what is meant by self-disclosure as a factor affecting attraction.

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

- **1 mark** for accurate definition: **self-disclosure** is the process of revealing personal information (thoughts, feelings, experiences) about oneself to another person.
- **1 mark** for the mechanism: Altman and Taylor's **social penetration theory** — relationships develop through gradual exchange of increasingly intimate information. Two dimensions: **breadth** (how many topics) and **depth** (how personal).
- **1 mark** for the role of **reciprocity**: when one partner discloses, the other responds with their own disclosure of similar depth. Reciprocal disclosure builds trust and intimacy.

*Credit reference to Sprecher and Hendrick's (2004) finding that self-disclosure correlates with satisfaction.*

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Use equity theory to explain Anna's feelings about her relationship with Ben.

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

- **4 marks** — Clear, coherent explanation engaging effectively with the stem; uses equity theory accurately; links to specific features of Anna's case.
- **3 marks** — Clear engagement but lacking detail.
- **2 marks** — Equity theory correctly described but limited application.
- **1 mark** — Brief, partial answer.

**Indicative content:**

- **Inequity** — Anna perceives that her *inputs* (planning dates, making effort with Ben's family, remembering anniversaries) are greater than the *inputs* Ben provides. The relationship is therefore **inequitable**.
- **Under-benefiting** — Anna is the **under-benefiting** partner (giving more than she receives). Equity theory predicts that under-benefiting partners experience anger, resentment and dissatisfaction — exactly what the stem describes ("feel unhappy and resentful").
- **Equity vs equality**: equity does not require partners to do the same things, but the *ratios* of input to output should be equal. Anna's higher inputs are not being matched by higher outputs from her or by lower inputs from Ben.
- **Resolution strategies**: equity theory predicts Anna will try to restore equity by changing her inputs (doing less), changing her perceptions (e.g. minimising her contributions) or — as the stem suggests — leaving the relationship. Walster et al. (1978) noted that under-benefiting partners often experience the most distress and are most motivated to act.

*Top-band answers will explicitly use the term "under-benefiting", link to specific stem features (planning dates, family, anniversaries), AND mention the predicted outcome (dissatisfaction / potential breakdown).*

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0 6

AO1 · 4 marks short answer

*Outline filter theory. Refer to all three filters.*

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

- **1 mark** for the overall idea: Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) proposed that romantic relationships develop through a series of **filters** that reduce the "field of available" partners to a "field of desirable" partners. Different filters operate at different stages.
  - **1 mark** for **social demography**: earliest filter; we are most likely to meet and date people similar to us in age, ethnicity, social class, geography, education, religion.
  - **1 mark** for **similarity in attitudes**: dominant filter in the early stage of a relationship (under 18 months). Shared values and beliefs predict closeness; divergence ends the relationship.
  - **1 mark** for **complementarity**: dominant in the later stage (over 18 months). Partners' needs become complementary — they fit together; one partner's needs are met by what the other offers.
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0 7

AO1 · 3 marks short answer

*Briefly outline the effects of absence of gating in online relationships.*

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

- **1 mark** for defining a "**gate**": any feature that might prevent face-to-face attraction from developing (appearance, shyness, stammer, social anxiety, age, disability, off-putting characteristics).
  - **1 mark** for explaining the effect: **absence of gating online** means people are not initially judged on these features. Personality and shared interests can develop before physical or visual factors come into play.
  - **1 mark** for consequences: McKenna and Bargh (1999, 2000) argued that the absence of gating is particularly beneficial for **lonely and socially anxious** individuals. Their study found that 70% of relationships started online were still ongoing two years later (vs ~50% for offline-started relationships).
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0 8

AO1 · 3 marks short answer

*Briefly outline the absorption-addiction model of parasocial relationships.*

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

- **1 mark** for the overall claim: **McCutcheon's (2002) absorption-addiction model** proposes that parasocial relationships develop because individuals have **deficiencies in their real-life relationships**. The parasocial relationship provides a sense of identity and fulfilment they are not getting elsewhere.
  - **1 mark** for **absorption**: the fan focuses attention on the celebrity, becoming preoccupied with their life. This provides a sense of identity and self-worth.
  - **1 mark** for **addiction**: absorption becomes addictive; the fan needs increasingly stronger involvement to maintain the same level of satisfaction (similar to tolerance in substance addictions). May escalate to delusional thinking or stalking behaviour.
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0 9

AO1 · 3 marks short answer

*Outline the three levels of parasocial relationships (McCutcheon et al. 2002).*

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

- **1 mark** for **entertainment-social**: the lowest level. Interest in the celebrity is for entertainment; fans discuss them with friends.
  - **1 mark** for **intense-personal**: a deeper level involving intense, personal feelings about the celebrity. The fan thinks the celebrity is a "soulmate" or has a special connection.
  - **1 mark** for **borderline-pathological**: the most extreme level. Fantasies become uncontrollable; the fan may be willing to act on them (spending large sums; behaving inappropriately to gain proximity). Measured using the **Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS)**.
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Discuss Duck's phase model of relationship breakdown.

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

| Level | Marks | Descriptor   |
|-------|-------|--|
| 4     | 7–8   | Knowledge of Duck's phases 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.   |
| 2     | 3–4   | Some accurate knowledge. Evaluation limited; mainly descriptive.   |
| 1     | 1–2   | Knowledge limited; little or no evaluation.  |
| 0     | 0     | No relevant content.   |

**Indicative AO1 content** — the four phases, with threshold and content:

- **Intra-psychic phase** ("I can't stand this any more"): one partner internally broods about dissatisfaction. Private. May complain to trusted friends; relationship not yet openly threatened.
- **Dyadic phase** ("I would be justified in withdrawing"): dissatisfaction brought into the open. Confrontations and arguments. Relationship can still be saved at this stage; many couples enter therapy here.
- **Social phase** ("I mean it"): breakdown becomes public. Friends and family are told, take sides, help engineer the split. Reconciliation becomes much harder.
- **Grave-dressing phase** ("It's now inevitable"): relationship ends. Each partner constructs a public narrative about why it failed — protecting reputation and supporting future relationship-seeking.
- Optional reference to the **resurrection phase** added by Rollie and Duck (2006) — using the experience of breakdown to prepare for future relationships.

**Indicative AO3 content** (any combination of strengths/limitations):

- **Strength — applied value**: couples therapy can target specific phases (dyadic-phase interventions can save relationships; grave-dressing work helps with healthy recovery).
- **Strength — captures the social dimension**: La Gaipa (1982) supported the importance of social-network involvement in breakdown — most relationship models ignore this.
- **Limitation — descriptive, not explanatory**: the model describes the process of breakdown but doesn't explain *why* relationships break down. Doesn't address underlying causes (equity, investment, alternatives, specific events).
- **Limitation — over-linear**: real breakdowns often involve re-entering earlier phases. The 2006 revision (resurrection phase) acknowledges this but the original four-phase structure still implies one-way movement.
- **Limitation — cultural bias**: developed in Western individualist cultures. Collectivist cultures (arranged marriages, extended-family involvement) may not fit the phases. Moghaddam et al. (1993).

- **Limitation — retrospective evidence:** most data come from people describing past breakdowns — vulnerable to memory distortion and hindsight bias.
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Discuss theories of romantic relationships. Refer to the case of Tania 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 at least two theories is accurate and generally well detailed. Application to Tania is effective and well integrated across the stem. Discussion is thorough and effective with strong evaluation. Clear, coherent and focused. |
| 3     | 9–12  | Knowledge evident with some accuracy. Application mostly effective. Discussion mostly effective but limited in places.   |
| 2     | 5–8   | Some accurate knowledge. Application limited and partial. Discussion superficial.  |
| 1     | 1–4   | Knowledge limited; little or no application or discussion.   |
| 0     | 0     | No relevant content.   |

**Indicative AO1 content** — candidates should cover at least **two** theories:

- **Social exchange theory (Thibaut and Kelley 1959)**: relationships are economic exchanges. Rewards minus costs. Comparison Level (CL) and Comparison Level for Alternatives (CLalt). Four stages: sampling, bargaining, commitment, institutionalisation.
- **Equity theory (Walster et al. 1978)**: what matters is **fairness**, not raw profit. Ratio of inputs to outputs should be equal across partners. Both under- and over-benefiting cause distress.
- **Rusbult's investment model (1980)**: three factors determine commitment — **satisfaction, comparison with alternatives, investment**. Commitment (not just satisfaction) predicts whether a relationship lasts. Includes intrinsic and extrinsic investment, and maintenance mechanisms (accommodation, willingness to sacrifice, forgiveness, positive illusions, ridiculing alternatives).

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

- **Equity theory**: Tania's perception that she does more (cooking, social life, remembering birthdays) is a classic **under-benefiting** situation. Equity theory predicts she should feel dissatisfied — consistent with her sense of putting in more effort than Marcus.
- **Investment model — satisfaction**: Tania's **satisfaction** appears low (she feels she puts in more than she receives).
- **Investment model — comparison with alternatives**: Jake represents an attractive **alternative** — "kind, attentive and interested in her". The investment model predicts that an attractive alternative reduces commitment. Yet Tania's commitment remains high.
- **Investment model — investment**: Tania's high investment is the key explanation. She has invested:
  - **Extrinsic**: the flat, savings, renovation, shared memories ("many memories there").
  - **Intrinsic**: emotional energy, five years of relationship-building.

High investment increases commitment because leaving means losing all of it.

- **Commitment predicts persistence:** Rusbult's model predicts that high commitment — driven here by very high investment despite low satisfaction and good alternatives — keeps Tania in the relationship. This explains the puzzle of "cannot imagine leaving Marcus".
- **Maintenance mechanisms:** Tania may be using maintenance behaviours such as **ridiculing alternatives** (downplaying Jake's appeal) or **positive illusions** (viewing Marcus more favourably than warranted).

**Indicative AO3 content:**

- **Strength — investment model has strong meta-analytic support (Le and Agnew 2003):** 52 studies, 11,000+ participants. Satisfaction, alternatives and investment all predicted commitment; commitment predicted whether relationships lasted. Held across genders, ages and cultures.
- **Strength — investment model explains low-satisfaction commitment:** Rusbult and Martz (1995) — women in abusive relationships were most likely to stay when investment was high and alternatives were few. Strong applied value (domestic-violence work, couples therapy). Particularly relevant to explaining Tania's case.
- **Strength of equity theory — Utne et al. (1984):** 118 married couples; those who saw relationships as equitable reported significantly higher satisfaction.
- **Limitation — correlational evidence:** most evidence for SET, equity and investment models is correlational. Hard to establish causal direction.
- **Limitation — vague concepts:** rewards, costs and investments are subjective and hard to operationalise objectively (Littlejohn 1989). Self-report measures of investment may be biased by current commitment.
- **Limitation — Western individualist bias:** economic and exchange-based theories fit Western, individualist relationships. Moghaddam (1998) argued they apply poorly to collectivist cultures (arranged marriage, duty-based relationships).
- **Limitation — exchange vs communal relationships (Clark and Mills 1979):** in committed romantic relationships, people may not track rewards/costs at all. They give freely without expecting equity. This weakens SET and equity theory as accounts of close relationships.
- **Limitation — gender differences:** Steil and Weltman (1991) — wives tended to under-benefit and report dissatisfaction; husbands tended to over-benefit but report less dissatisfaction. Suggests inequity is experienced differently by gender.

*Top-band answers will (1) cover at least two theories with accurate AO1; (2) explicitly map Tania's case to the investment model — high investment + good alternatives + low satisfaction = high commitment because of investment; (3) include at least one robust evaluation point per theory; (4) reach a clear conclusion (typically that the investment model best explains Tania's behaviour because it accounts for low-satisfaction commitment through investment, while equity theory predicts she should leave).*