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# A-LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

7182/1 Introductory Topics in Psychology  
Report on the Examination

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## General

Students should be reminded if they need more space that they should not write in margins, or add notes at the end of the booklet, but should always use additional pages and indicate that this is what they have done. Otherwise there is a chance that creditworthy material will be missed.

There were three 16 mark questions on this year's paper, which required even more careful time planning. It was clear from the number of short or absent answers to Q17 that some students failed to do this, and missed out on marks.

There was also evidence from gaps in scripts (and even some student comments on scripts) that parts of the specification had not been covered on their course (statistics and working memory were examples of this). The makeup of the paper in terms of short, medium, and extended writing questions means that all of the specification can be assessed in any sitting of the paper, and students must cover the whole specification.

## Specific

1. Probably the most common weakness across students and scripts was a failure to read the question carefully. Question 03 was on 'why people conform' i.e. explanations for conformity, and this needed to be the focus of the answer; studies were central to good answers, but needed to be linked to explanations to receive credit. Lists of probably rote-learned evaluations of studies, without reference to explanations, receive little credit – how can ethical issues be made relevant to explanations? Question 05 required students to 'briefly explain', not simply state ways in which the experiment could be improved; some students missed out on marks by not elaborating on their answers. Probably the question most often misread by students was Question 11. This required an outline of 'how' Lorenz and Harlow studied attachment using animals. However the vast majority of answers included findings and implications of findings, and some even included evaluation of the studies. None of this material was relevant to the question. Finally, in Question 17 some students demonstrated impressive understanding of the cognitive approach to depression, but focused on explanations rather than treatments as explicitly required by the question.
2. Many of the answers to the extended writing questions lacked organisation, reflecting a failure to spend a few minutes planning the answer. This led to disjointed essays, lacking coherence and focus (key elements for top band answers), although the content itself was often impressive.
3. To do well, answers needed to demonstrate understanding of the material. Particularly with discussion and evaluation, fewer points in greater depth is often more effective than lists of brief evaluative points (sometimes with the same list applied to each study mentioned in the answer). An example from this year's paper was Question 03 on 'why people conform'. Asch's studies are central to this area, and some students were able to discuss the results in terms of normative and information social influence, demonstrating good understanding of reasons why people conform. Variations of Asch and later studies, leading to conclusions on gender, individual and cultural differences in reasons for conformity, could be integrated into the discussion. Too often, however, comments on e.g. gender or cultural bias in Asch's work, were too brief and list-like to be fully creditworthy.
4. Finally, it is worth reading through the whole paper at the start, as some questions are clearly linked. Question 08 required an explanation of forgetting, while Question 09 then required this explanation to be evaluated. A significant minority of students outlined one

explanation in Question 08, then had to cross it out and do another when they saw that they had to evaluate the explanation in Question 09, costing them valuable time.

Overall there were many excellent scripts, reflecting good understanding based on effective teaching and hard work. Most of the comments above and below refer to careful reading of the question, planning answers carefully, and demonstrating understanding of the material in relation to the question i.e. exam technique. Small improvements in this area would pay significant dividends for many students.

### **Question 01**

A straightforward question with many students earning maximum marks. Those that did not tended to forget the importance of an 'authority figure' in the agentic state, while referring accurately to the loss of personal responsibility.

### **Question 02**

Overall knowledge of the processes involved in minority influence was impressive, though some students did not differentiate clearly between commitment and consistency. There was variability in the extent of application to the scenario. Some examples of how Jenny might persuade the rest of the department were realistic and appropriate, but others, such as going on hunger strike, were inappropriate and clearly linked to examples such as the suffragettes. At the top end there was reference to augmentation, conversion and the snowball effect.

### **Question 03**

The key phrase in the question was 'why people conform', meaning that the focus needed to be on explanations for conformity. Some students produced excellent essays, outlining key elements of explanations for conformity and then using research findings (Asch, Sherif, Jenness etc) to evaluate explanations e.g. the roles of normative and informational social influence in explaining Asch's findings. However for many students the key term 'conformity' simply triggered Asch's studies. They described his procedures and findings but did not link them clearly to explanations for conformity; instead they focused on methodological and ethical evaluations of Asch and other conformity research (e.g. Zimbardo) that were rarely made relevant to explanations (how could ethical issues be relevant to explanations?). Better answers used a range of studies linked to explanations, and also considered relevant aspects such as gender, culture, and individual differences such as locus of control. Some students confused conformity with obedience and received little or no credit.

### **Question 04**

A straightforward question with most students receiving maximum marks.

**Question 05**

A key term in this question was 'Briefly explain', meaning that simply *stating* a way the experiment could be improved received no credit. Popular ways were different sampling methods to improve representation, and use of matched pairs/repeated measures. There was substantial variation in how these could be implemented, but many answers showed good understanding of the underlying principles of design, sampling and control. A number of students referred to the use of more realistic tasks, and the use of field studies. These were credited to the extent that they were practicable.

**Question 06**

There were various ways this question could be answered. Probably the most effective was reference to evidence from case studies. Although some students confused KF with HM and Clive Wearing, in general KF was used well to illustrate the possible roles of phonological loop and visuo-spatial scratchpad. Dual task performance was another effective approach. General outlines comparing the complexity of the working memory model with the multistore model of STM could do well, but sometimes lacked a focus on one strength.

**Question 07**

Overall this was done well with most students showing good knowledge of the techniques used in the cognitive interview. An effective route (though not essential) to the top band was to briefly explain why a technique was effective i.e. referring to context-dependent recall, reducing the influence of schemas etc.

**Question 08**

Whether the answer referred to interference theory or to contextual cues this question was done well. With interference some answers missed the key element of 'similarity of material', but virtually all could apply the explanation to Aaron's performance in the exam. One complication for some students was that they had not looked at Question 09, and when they did realised that Question 09 was easier if they had done e.g. contextual cues rather than interference in Question 08. A few then redid Question 08. Some had also put research findings in Question 08 that were more relevant to Question 09. Only a small minority evaluated a different explanation in Question 09.

**Question 09**

Students performed reasonably well on this question, but context-dependent retrieval failure was clearly easier to evaluate in terms of accessible research studies. Studies on interference effects tend to be more methodologically complicated and some answers became bogged down in confused detail. Although not necessary for the top band, some answers evaluated the studies used e.g. pointing out that some studies on context are highly artificial.

**Question 10**

Most students could state two effects of institutionalisation using appropriate specialist terminology. Most popular were disinhibited attachment and low IQ. A few answers referred to deprivation and privation as though they were effects of institutionalisation. More commonly, students wrote too much for a question that simply required them to 'state' two effects.

**Question 11**

Performance on this question was disappointing. Despite the clear injunction in the question referring to 'how' Lorenz and Harlow studied attachment, the great majority of students outlined the findings and conclusions, which did not receive credit. Some even evaluated the studies. Very few focused on the methodology or explicitly identified the dependent variables. Better answers did outline the methods and variables, and also covered extensions of the research e.g. in terms of studying effects on later emotional and sexual behaviour.

**Question 12**

This was the best answered of the 16 mark questions, with many students showing excellent understanding of learning theory and monotropic theory, and able to apply their knowledge to the scenario. Particularly impressive was the general understanding of the role of classical and operant conditioning in learning theory of attachment. Less impressive answers often had good understanding of learning theory, but presented very general accounts of Bowlby's work without a specific focus on monotropic theory. Findings of studies were an effective route to evaluation for both learning theory and monotropic theory, although some students became too bogged down in methodological issues for studies to be fully effective. Use of phrases from the conversation in the stem material was usually appropriate, with answers able to link phrases to specific aspects of learning theory and monotropic theory. Occasionally students neglected to refer to the conversation, and a few were able only to cover one theory, usually monotropic theory, as they presumably had not covered learning theory.

**Question 13**

Very straightforward and answered very well.

**Question 14**

Many students were able to provide appropriate scattergrams, with accurate title, axes, and plotting. Others missed out on one or two marks with vague titles and/or axes. However some students, despite the questions in this section mentioning 'relationship', Spearman's rho and 'correlation', provided completely inappropriate graphical displays e.g. histograms and bar charts. A small minority did not attempt this question at all.

**Question 15**

This question required reference to 'level of measurement'. Although the majority of answers could identify ordinal data for 1 mark, very few went on to characterise ordinal data or why this study produced ordinal data, which would have fully justified the use of Spearman's rho.

**Question 16**

A straightforward question if the scattergram was plotted accurately, but a significant minority of students were clearly unaware that 0.15 is a negligible correlation and 0.95 a virtually perfect correlation (straight line).

**Question 17**

Although a straightforward question, overall performance on this question was not as impressive as Question 12. This was mainly due to the number of short or absent answers, suggesting a failure of time allocation across the examination. However many students were able to outline the treatment methods used by the cognitive approach, and at the top end distinguished between the methods developed by Beck and by Ellis (a number of answers referred to patient as scientist, homework tasks, cognitive restructuring, empirical and logical arguments, behavioural activation etc). The most effective evaluation was the use of studies comparing cognitive methods with e.g. drug therapy, demonstrating their effectiveness. Comments on relapse rates, time and cost were also relevant, along with the client/therapist relationship, limitations in terms of client suitability (e.g. severity of depression) and the narrow range of the approach in terms of causality (e.g. focus on present circumstances).

Less impressive answers spent too much time on cognitive theory and *explanations* for depression without focusing on treatment for depression. In addition, critical comparison with drug therapy and/or the role of serotonin in some cases led to an overemphasis on drug therapy and the biological approach, as though this was the essay the student really wanted to write.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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