
AS
PSYCHOLOGY

7181/2 Psychology in Context
Report on the Examination

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General

There were a significant number of students who demonstrated a very good understanding in all three sections and it was apparent that they had been well prepared for this examination. Approaches in Psychology and Research Methods were answered particularly well and it was pleasing to note the improvement in student responses in the Research Methods section when compared to the previous series. As in previous years, the majority of students appeared to complete the paper in the time allowed.

Most students seemed to engage with the actual question posed but there was some variable engagement in certain questions. In Section A and B there were two questions (7 and 10) where students appeared to produce pre-prepared answers on a different question to that posed. On several research methods questions in Section C and question 5 in Section A, students failed to address the actual demands of the question. It is imperative to remind students to read the questions carefully and to ensure they understand and address the demands of each question. On research methods questions they must link their answers to the context of the study when this is required by the question.

Many responses in Section C did suggest that students had some practical experience of procedures such as writing open questions for questionnaires, identifying and outlining ethical issues and calculating measures of central tendency. However, there were other practical areas largely based around why design decisions are made such as why random allocation is used, why stratified sampling improves the design and why some measures of central tendency are more suitable, 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 such practical experience as part of their course.

There were a small number of incorrect responses on the multiple choice questions, where students 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. However, encouragingly this appeared less frequently than in previous series.

The vast majority of students wrote their responses clearly and in the appropriate space provided and this continues to improve in each subsequent series. However, it is still important to remind students that 7181/2 is marked online and examiners do not see whole scripts, but only the clipped part of the question they are marking. Therefore, examiners will not see anything that is written outside of the lines or in the margins. 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.

The legibility of students' handwriting also seems to have improved as the number of scripts being referred due to handwriting concerns significantly decreased, possibly due to those with poor handwriting using more appropriate methods such as word processors. However, there was still a minority of students whose barely legible handwriting made some of their responses very challenging to read. Additionally, as in previous series, some students did not use the correct pen and their writing was very faint and thus difficult to read.

Section A Approaches in Psychology

Question 01

There were many correct answers to this question and it was apparent that the majority of students had the knowledge to be able to identify the description of introspection.

Question 2

There were some excellent responses to this question and it was clear that many students had a secure and detailed knowledge of Wundt's role in the emergence of psychology as a science. Many students discussed more than one point but, on occasion, this led to some very long responses with excessive detail which was not required for full credit. Some responses were limited as they were not focused on discussion of Wundt's role and simply described who Wundt was. It is important to remind students that the command word discuss means 'present key points about different ideas or strengths and weaknesses of an idea.'

Question 3

This question was answered well by the majority of students who attempted it. Many of these students could correctly identify two glands and the vast majority could correctly identify at least one. Students generally performed less well when outlining the function of the gland and there was some confusion, muddling and/or inaccuracy in some responses. When outlining the function of the gland, students could focus on either the hormones they secreted or on the physiological effect of those hormones. There were many responses which correctly identified and outlined the function of other glands not mentioned on the mark scheme and these were awarded full credit. Unfortunately, there was a significant minority of 'blank' responses where no answer was attempted suggesting that some students did not have the knowledge to enable them to answer this question.

Question 4

There were many correct answers to this question and it was apparent that the majority of students had the knowledge to be able to identify the description of an overt observation.

Question 5

Most students appeared to have a good knowledge of the strengths and limitations of the two types of observation. However, many failed to actually use this knowledge to answer the question on discussing reasons why covert may have been more beneficial than overt. There were many limited responses which either explained limitations of overt observations or strengths of covert observations but without comparison. Equally there were many responses which had implicit discussion of benefits which was not clear and thus not sufficient for full marks.

Question 6

There were some excellent responses to this question in which students demonstrated clear and detailed understanding of why a sign test would be an appropriate statistical test to use on the data in this study. Unfortunately, although some responses were clear and detailed, a minority failed to apply this to the data in this study and were limited to Level 1. Some students appeared to have very limited or no knowledge of the sign test and there were a number of 'blank' responses where no answer was attempted. Additionally, some students only demonstrated knowledge of how to perform a sign test not reasons why it would be used. It is expected that as the Sign test is the only introduction to statistical testing, students will be aware of the reason(s) why statistical testing is applied to raw data of the type fitting application of a Sign test. There were many possible accurate responses to this question and students could choose one in detail or more than one in less detail. It is important to note that although students could refer to level of measurement there is no requirement for them to know this information to be able to answer this question, as it does not appear on the AS level specification.

Question 7

The majority of responses did not focus upon the question and appeared to have been pre-planned answers to a different question either about Pavlov's salivation in dogs experiment or behaviourism in general. As a consequence, few students achieved Level 4 which required an explicit focus on Pavlov's contribution. Additionally there was a lack of focus on understanding of human behaviour in some student responses which was also a requirement of the question. Due to this lack of focus on Pavlov's contributions and human behaviour the majority of responses were limited in their effectiveness and thus at Level 2. Most students simply provided detailed descriptive accounts of Pavlov's salivation in dogs experiment which was not linked to his contribution and then simply evaluated this experiment rather than discussing how this experiment may or may not have contributed to our understanding of human behaviour. A minority muddled Pavlov with other behaviourists such as Skinner or with social learning theory which also had a significant detrimental effect on the level and mark awarded.

Section B Psychopathology

Question 8

A significant majority of students clearly had knowledge of behavioural characteristics of phobias and there were many clear and coherent descriptions of a behavioural characteristic which might be seen in someone with a phobia of wasps. However, some students simply named the characteristics and did not describe it as the question asked and others failed to apply the behavioural characteristic to a person who has been diagnosed with a phobia of wasps.

Question 9

This question was generally answered less well than question 8 suggesting that either students had better knowledge of behavioural characteristics than of emotional characteristics or found it easier to apply the phobia of wasps to a behavioural characteristic rather than an emotional one. The majority of students could name an emotional characteristic but many of them failed to either provide a clear description of that characteristic and/or apply it to a phobia of wasps. There was also some confusion and muddling with cognitive characteristics.

Question 10

Many responses did not focus upon the question and appeared to have been pre-planned answers to a different question about systematic desensitisation in general. As a consequence, many responses either did not include the specific material required to correctly answer the question or included additional content which was not required. Of those students who did focus on the question, some failed to apply this information to treating someone with a phobia of wasps as thus could not attain the AO2 marks. Some students did focus clearly on the use of hierarchy and relaxation in treating someone with a phobia of wasps and produced some excellent responses.

Question 11

There were excellent responses from some students who provided clear and detailed knowledge of the use of drugs in the treatment of OCD. A variety of different drugs was seen in student responses with SSRIs being the most common and the focus varied from the biological action of the drug to the impact it had on the symptoms of OCD. There were many possible accurate responses to this question and students could choose to outline one drug in detail or more than one in less detail. Most students demonstrated some knowledge of the use of drugs to treat OCD and thus most gained some marks but some responses lacked detail and there was some confusion and/or muddling in others.

Question 12

This question was generally answered well with many students producing Level 3 responses which demonstrated accurate and detailed knowledge of one or more cognitive explanation(s) with some effective evaluation. Most students were able to provide some knowledge of cognitive explanations of depression with most focusing on Beck's theory and Ellis' ABC model. The level of detail of knowledge varied greatly; some responses included excessive detail clearly linked to depression which was more than sufficient whilst others were vague, limited or not clearly focused on explanations of depression. Unfortunately, some responses were more focused on treatment rather than explanation which limited the level and mark awarded. The discussion of these explanations was equally varied but was generally weaker than the knowledge demonstrated. There was a lack of focus on explanations in places and substantial brief, unexplained and

ineffective discussion points. Some students did produce highly effective evaluative responses and, when combined with accurate and detailed knowledge, this allowed them to produce some excellent Level 4 responses.

Section C Research Methods

Question 13

This question was generally answered very well and most students were able to explain why matching the students was important. However, some failed to apply their response to this specific situation as thus were limited to 1 mark.

Question 14

Many students were able to identify an appropriate variable to match the students on and then go onto explain how this might affect satisfaction scores. There were many possible accurate responses with the most common being how difficult they may find the topic (often linked to IQ) and prior knowledge of business studies. A significant minority of students identified an appropriate variable but then failed to apply it to this situation and explain how it may have affected satisfaction scores. There was also a significant number of students who failed to engage with the question and simply suggested one of a number of generic variables such as IQ, gender or age. Unless these variables were clearly linked to an appropriate variable (such as linking age to interest/experience of using computers) they would not be appropriate variables to match students on in this study and thus would not receive credit. It is important to remind students to engage with the question posed and tailor their answer to that specific question not to simply produce a response of non-specific rote-learned material.

Question 15

It was clear from student responses that the vast majority of students appeared to have some understanding of the process of random allocation. However, fewer students seem to clearly understand the reasons why random allocation is used and thus failed to answer the question posed. Of those students who did answer the question correctly some failed to apply it to this situation and thus were limited to 1 mark. It is important to note that simply referring to removal of bias without any outline or application is not sufficient to gain any credit. Reference to bias needed to be clearly focused on either removal of researcher bias or removal of participant bias and should be outlined and applied for full credit.

Question 16

Most students clearly understood the strengths of stratified sampling and/or the weaknesses of opportunity sampling. However, many failed to tailor this knowledge to the actual question posed and did not explain why stratified sampling might be better than opportunity sampling in this study. Most students produced limited responses where they simply explained the strengths of stratified sampling or the weaknesses of opportunity sampling. Some students did explain why stratified sampling was an improvement in general but failed to apply their reasoning to this specific design. Equally there were many responses which had implicit explanation of improvements which was not clear and so not sufficient for full marks. A significant minority of students either produced responses which had no relevant content or did not attempt the question suggesting that some

students did not have the knowledge to enable them to answer this question. There was also some confusion with systematic sampling. This is particularly disappointing considering there was a similar question on the previous examination paper in the June 2017 series which also asked about how stratified sampling could be an improvement (although in comparison to volunteer sampling). It is important to remind students that just because a topic appears on an exam in one series does not mean that the same topic cannot appear on the exam in the following series. It is also important to use previous examination questions with students to ensure they are familiar with the style and type of questions which they may be presented with in their actual examination.

Question 17

The overwhelming majority of students answered this question correctly and there was a wide range of appropriate questions which would generate qualitative data seen in student responses. Unfortunately, a very small minority of students wrote Likert scale questions which would have generated quantitative data.

Question 18

There were some excellent responses to this question with a range of different appropriate problems with analysing qualitative data seen. Most students who identified an appropriate problem went on to clearly explain it and thus gain full credit. However, some students failed to address the actual question posed and explained problems either with collecting qualitative data (such as 'it takes time for participants to complete') or with the validity of the qualitative data (such as 'participants might lie in their responses'). Responses must be based on analysis to gain credit and the most common error seen was where students were focusing on subjectivity of the participants when answering the questions to produce the qualitative data rather than subjectivity of the researcher when analysing the qualitative data.

Question 19

Most students answered this question correctly and a wide range of outlined ethical issues was seen in responses. Unfortunately, a few students simply named an ethical issue without outlining it.

Question 20

Most students were able to draw an accurate scattergram with two appropriately labelled axes on suitable scales. A small minority of these students also produced an accurate and appropriate title which referred to the relationship between the two co-variables. However, many students failed to either provide a title for their graph or produced an inaccurate or vague title which was not sufficient for credit. There were also errors in plotting points in some responses and some students produced very small graphs with inappropriate scaling. Some students failed to read the question correctly and did not draw a scattergram. A variety of incorrect types of graph were seen but the most common was a line graph where students had joined up the plotted points.

Question 21

The vast majority of students scored one mark for this question as few responses had both components required for two marks. Most responses only included a description of the relationship between online hours and satisfaction but did not identify the relationship as a negative correlation. The description of the relationship was expressed in several different accurate ways but the most common was more online hours the less satisfied they were. A small number of students produced confused conclusions based on causal relationships which were incorrect.

Question 22

This question was answered very well with the vast majority of students correctly calculating both the mode and median satisfaction scores and thus being awarded full marks. A very small minority made a mistake in their calculations leading them to produce an incorrect median and/or mode. Unfortunately, a very small number of students failed to fully answer the actual question posed and calculated a mean value instead of either the median or mode.

Question 23

There was evidently much confusion amongst students as to why the median would be more representative than the mode in this data set. Most responses simply consisted of statements of how to calculate the median and the mode rather than explaining a reason why the median might be more suitable to represent the average score in this study. Some students were able to explain why the mode was less representative of the average satisfaction scores and thus produced a limited explanation but very few were able to explain why the median was more representative. Only a very small minority of students were able to explain that the median was more representative as it is **numerically** closer to more of the other scores in the data set compared to the mode and thus few students gained 2 marks. Some students simply repeated the question stating that the median is more representative than the mode without any explanation.

Question 24

There were a lot of correct answers to this question and it was apparent that many students had the knowledge to be able to identify the negative skew in this data. However, when compared to the other MCQ on this paper, more students did not attempt this question and the number of correct responses was lower. This suggests that their knowledge of negative skew was poorer than their knowledge of introspection (Q1) and overt observations (Q4).

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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