



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

PSYCHOLOGY A LEVEL

AUTUMN 2020

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PSYCHOLOGY

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COMPONENT 1

General Comments

Many candidates attempted all questions, however, it seemed that timing may have been an issue for some because the final question answers were, on the whole, brief. AO1 and AO3 responses were generally good, but the trend of candidates not referring to statements in AO2 questions continues.

One improvement noted was the use of Component 3 topics as examples in this Component 1 examination. It was pleasing to see that candidates displayed a synoptic appreciation in some of their answers.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1** All candidates were able to provide two ethical issues for their chosen therapy, however, arguments were not always developed. Some answers were generic, so it was not evident from candidate responses that it was a particular therapy being referred to i.e. stating that there was an element of harm but not referring 'harm' back to one of the therapies identified in the question.
- Q.2** Candidates were able to provide some general information about the findings and conclusions of Myers and Diener's research, but answers lacked specific details. Conclusions were often confused and regarded to as findings, which constrained some answers to the lower bands.
- Q.3** Responses often gained marks in the 1 to 3 band because candidates did not display the links to the statement that are necessary in an AO2 question. Links to the statement could have included reference to 'unethical' and 'limited social implications'. When candidates simply wrote about the ethics and social implications of Bowlby's research, answers read like pre-prepared responses that did not take the statement into consideration.
- Q.4** Answers that gained top band marks included a similarity, a difference and a final similarity or difference with an overall conclusion that brought in new information or made a judgement on which approach was better and why. The conclusion did not need to be at the end of the response, mini conclusions noted throughout were also awarded. Answers that gained lower band marks did not show any element of comparison or contrast; they simply listed characteristics of each approach but failed to state how they were similar or different.
- Q.5** The explanation of two assumptions was good overall. Most candidates knew two assumptions of the cognitive approach and could give an explanation as to what they were. However, examples lacked psychological detail and often ended up having no psychological content at all e.g. the recognition of a dog. Candidates must ensure that psychological examples are used from research, theories or other appropriate psychological evidence.

- Q.6** Candidates who attempted this question gave detailed responses that proved a sound knowledge of both strengths and weaknesses of the psychodynamic approach whilst stating relevant examples. However, the failure to provide an overall conclusion, or mini conclusions throughout, meant that many candidates failed to reach the top two bands.
- Q.7 (i)** Descriptions of aversion therapy and systematic desensitisation were reasonable, but not often thorough. For aversion therapy there was a lack of reference to the different types of aversion therapy, the historical context of aversion therapy and what it is most often used for today. With systematic desensitisation there was a lack of accurate terminology and description of the steps taken within the therapy. For both therapies there was a lack of reference to classical conditioning and how the classical conditioning formula/assumption is applied to the therapy.
- Q.7 (ii)** Candidates were able to give general points on the effectiveness of both systematic desensitisation or aversion therapy, but there was a lack of research or theoretical evidence to back up the points made. This meant that some answers were generic in nature. It was also an AO2 question so, even though evaluation points were made, a lack of reference to 'effective' meant that many answers were confined to the lower bands.
- Q.8** Candidates generally struggled with this debate, but it is unclear whether this was due to issues with timing or understanding. The statement was there to support candidates with their response, and those who attempted the question did use it, but a lack of information about how the positive approach is used and evidence to support or refute its use was lacking. Some responses focused solely on mindfulness and its comparison with other therapies such as drug therapy. Although this would be acceptable as part of the answer, if well linked, the debate was about the positive approach as whole and not just the use of mindfulness.

Summary of key points

- Centres should ensure that candidates use the psychological examples they have learnt in classic evidence, therapies and the debates as examples for assumption questions. Psychological evidence from Components Two and Three are also acceptable.
- Candidates must learn how to write conclusions that provide a new perspective, rather than just re-cap previously noted content.
- Conclusions must be included in all AO3 answers that are worth 10 marks or more.
- AO2 statements must be referred to in relevant answers. One way to do this is to use words taken directly from the statement or stimulus material in candidate answers.

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COMPONENT 2

General Comments

With a small number of entries, it was pleasing to see that candidates attempted all questions and generally responded to questions in an appropriate manner. Most questions were answered with a reasonable amount of detail when required but candidates are still often making generic evaluations of their own research and the research in the novel scenarios.

Some candidates were not equipped to gain all of the marks on questions regarding graphical representations while others had grasped the requirements for the full marks (e.g. appropriate labels and a title).

Many candidates did not know what is required of them when asked to explain why descriptive statistic were chosen and many conclusions were inferential rather than descriptive, which has been a common mistake in previous series.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1** Some candidates could explain the process in a reasonable amount of detail, but many responses were brief or omitted crucial features of a peer review. Candidates should be aware of the demands of the question which asked them to describe the process; marks were lost when candidates described what peer review was instead.
- Q.2** This question was mostly answered very well.
- Q.3** This question produced some vague answers with several candidates simply rewording the question which does not receive credit; e.g. test-retest is when a test is retested.
- Q.4** This question was answered well by many candidates but again candidates should be aware of the wording of the question which asked how ethics committees and ethical guidelines are used. Candidates lost marks for describing what an ethics committee was or what the ethical guidelines are.
- Q.5** In extended writing answers, some candidates were well prepared for the demands of this evaluative question, but a few candidates lost a substantial amount of marks by describing the issues rather than evaluating them. For example, there were many detailed descriptions of the issues of ethics and validity of Milgram's study but only a handful of candidates could evaluate these issues appropriately.
- Q.6** This question was answered with a reasonable amount of detail by most with some evaluation of primary research, but full marks were often missed by candidates who did not fully develop their evaluation points.

- Q.7** This question was mostly answered quite well, with some full and thorough responses of the strengths and weaknesses of brain scans. Better answers used research studies to support the evaluation although this was not essential for full marks. Candidates need to avoid sweeping comments about brain scans such as the PET scan injects radioactive material which is extremely dangerous.
- Q.8** Some candidates offered full and detailed explanations of their personal investigation and were familiar with the demands of this question, applying every response to their investigation. Where marks were lost, it was when evaluative points and justifications were generic and not applied to the context of the research.
- Q.9** As in question 8, candidates performed well on this question when the response was linked to the research. Marks were lost for generic responses, as well as a lack of knowledge of appropriate choice of graph and descriptive statistic.
- Q.10** Candidates gained higher marks in this question when they applied their response to the context of the research. Learned or prepared answers to questions which ask for a justification of choice of statistic received no credit and candidates should be aware of the need for answers to be linked to the research. Conclusions offered were still mostly inferential which has been highlighted in previous examiner feedback; candidates should be prepared in drawing descriptive conclusions from descriptive statistics.
- Q.11** As in question 10, higher marks were awarded when the candidate answered in context of the research. Marks were lost for omission of essential criteria of a graphical representation and candidates should note the number of marks available for such questions to ensure they do not offer a limited response.

Summary of key points

- Candidates should be mindful of the amount of marks available for each question when writing their response to these questions.
- Candidates should be aware of the exact wording of questions to avoid errors such as describing issues instead of evaluating them.
- Responses to research methods questions should be made in context to the research and candidates should be encouraged to practice applying rote learning to a variety of unseen research scenarios to allow them to access the marks in these questions.
- Candidates should be encouraged to practise presenting various forms of graphical representations with the required criteria to avoid losing marks on these questions.

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COMPONENT 3

General Comments

There was a mixture of responses and knowledge displayed across the answers offered by candidates. Some candidates illustrated a broad understanding of their three varied applications and knowledge of controversies. Again, these candidates were clearly well supported by their centres.

It is difficult to assess if the suggestions made for the improvement in the Examiner's Report for Summer 2019 regarding Time management, Exam strategy, Identifying and responding to subtleties in questions and Application to statement or scenario have been heeded by centres and candidates, however, it is highly recommended that these are addressed in future examinations.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Applications

Addictive behaviours

- Q.1 (a)** This continued to be a popular choice, and the A02 and A03 elements seemed to reveal a variety of responses and results. Candidates who scored in the higher bands clearly read the question carefully and evaluated aversion therapy, rather than describing it. However, there were a number of lower band answers as the links to the statement necessary in an AO2 question were often superficial, some answers just briefly mentioned the statement, either starting with or finishing with it. Again, many candidates struggled to evaluate appropriately in this AO3 question. It is important to ensure that candidates are also fully aware of which questions require a conclusion and which questions do not. Similarly, it is important to reinforce the quality of the conclusion required, so the candidate is able to reach the highest band possible.
- (b)** Some candidates were confused about what individual differences of addictive behaviours were. Some offered biological explanations, others offered individual differences explanations from other behaviours in the specification, such as stress and 'type A, type B personalities', but did not explain them in relation to addictive behaviours. There are some explanations that do lend themselves to be used across applications, but they need to be described with appropriate examples relating to the specified application if it is going to gain marks.

Autistic spectrum behaviours

- Q.2**
- (a)** There were a small number of candidates who attempted to answer this question, with a variety of responses. Lower band answers showed very little breadth or depth in their answers; they were very generic. Some answers seemed to be based more on personal opinion, and not backed up by research for AO1.
 - (b)** Some candidates described Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) with very little evaluative commentary (AO3) which was required in this answer, and again marks for the application to the statement (A02) were generally in the lower bands. Many candidates just re-worded the reference to the statement, when it needed to be applied in context and backed up by evaluative evidence.

Bullying behaviours

- Q.3**
- (a)** No candidates attempted this question.
 - (b)** No candidates attempted this question.
 - (c)** No candidates attempted this question.

Criminal behaviours

- Q.4**
- (a)** Criminal Behaviours remains a popular choice of question. As in question 1
 - (b)** there was some confusion for some candidates as to what individual differences explanations were and therefore, they gave inappropriate answers. The candidates who answered this question well and gained marks in the top band, backed up their evaluation using evidence and regularly referred to the statement by creating arguments around it to justify their evaluative points. Where fewer marks were awarded, this was often for limited depth of evaluation and application to the statement (A02).
 - (b)** There were a range of marks for the description of a biological explanation, but there was a noticeable amount of psychological terminology used well to answer this question, so higher marks were achieved by some candidates. Where fewer marks were awarded, this was often for limited descriptive detail.
 - (c)** Many candidates displayed both breadth and depth when answering the description of a method of modification. Anger management or restorative justice were used by candidates and there was an array of psychological terminology used across most answers. Candidates who wrote higher band answers showed both breadth and depth, and accuracy.

Schizophrenia

- Q.5 (a)** Schizophrenia remains a popular choice amongst candidates, and this question was answered well by some candidates. The majority of candidates chose to describe the dopamine hypothesis as their biological explanation. The top band answers showed an excellent use of often complex psychological terminology. This was the stronger answer of the two for most candidates. Again, as seen in other questions, there was some confusion for some candidates when it came to selecting an individual differences explanation of schizophrenia. However, there were some excellent answers for this part of the question, with a few candidates gaining top marks in the higher bands.
- (b)** Some marks for this question were in the lower bands as a few candidates again mixed up their explanations and evaluated explanations other than social psychological explanations. Offering evaluative comments based on the strengths or limitations of other types of explanations could have received credit if they had been used to contrast with social psychological explanations, but they weren't. Lower band responses also had superficial application to the statement and a very superficial or basic conclusion. Candidates who offered higher band answers linked their evaluation to the statement and justified their comments with appropriate psychological evidence.

Stress

- Q.6 (a)** Type A, Type B personalities and Hardiness were popular choices of individual differences explanations. There were a small number of excellent descriptions with both depth and breadth for this question. However, there were also some low band answers which again confused the explanations and selected an explanation from another category of explanations; some candidates used the 'biology of the individual' to suggest an individual difference, which wasn't really appropriate in this case. For the social psychological explanation, there were some high band responses from candidates who selected daily hassles to describe as an explanation of stress and their use of appropriate terminology was excellent. When candidates selected 'life events' as their explanation, it was good when candidates had used examples from the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, as this added a little more depth to their descriptions.
- (b)** In an attempt to evaluate methods of modifying stress, some candidates described the method of modifying instead, which as AO1 content was considered to be not relevant to this AO2/AO3 based question. The top band marks showed breadth and depth in their evaluation and were also able to link to the statement with varying success. The lower band candidates just usually started with the statement or used it at the end as a superficial conclusion. Again, it is important here to remind candidates, particularly the stronger ones, to produce a conclusion of quality, so they can access the highest AO3 mark bands.

Controversies

Candidates in general did not show a preference for attempting either question 7 (about Sexism) or question 8 (Non-human animals).

- Q.7** Sexism. This was either done extremely well, or just touched the surface of the question and the AO2 was not really visited by many candidates. In the top band, the statement was continually referred to and applied with examples throughout. The evidence chosen to back up or refute the statement was sophisticated and there were articulate interpretations extended beyond those described in textbooks. Top band answers attempted to write conclusions that did not just repeat the title, but summarised their argument based on the evidence presented. The more sophisticated (and higher band) answers included identifiable psychological research, with details of the research, and this helped to give the answer more psychological impact.
- Q.8** Non-human animals. This was either done well (mid to high bands) or just touched the surface of the question; AO2 was not really utilised effectively by many candidates. The statement was either referred to and applied with examples or occurred at the beginning and/or the end. The evidence chosen to back up or refute the statement was mixed in appropriateness and accuracy. Conclusions were usually brief and very few summarised their argument based on the evidence presented.

Summary of key points

- Ensure suggestions for improvement noted in the Summer 2019 Examiner's Report are applied and adhered to.
- Candidates need to be aware of which behaviours explanation belongs to which type of explanation; biological, individual differences or social psychological.
- With AO2 based questions that have statements, it is useful for candidates to acquire the habit of regularly referring back to the statement throughout the answer.
- It is important to ensure that the candidate is fully aware of which questions require a conclusion and which questions do not. It is also important to reinforce the quality of the conclusion required, so that the candidate is able to reach the highest band possible in relation to the rest of their answer.



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