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# PSYCHOLOGY

7181/2 Psychology in Context  
Report on the Examination

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**7181/2****Psychology in Context****General**

As in previous series, a significant number of students had evidently been well prepared for this examination and demonstrated excellent understanding. Performance across all three sections was similar and it was pleasing to note the improvement in student responses in the Psychopathology section when compared to the previous series. There was a fairly even distribution of questions not attempted, and the majority of students appeared to complete the paper in the time allowed.

Most students attempted to engage with the specific demands of each question. However, on certain questions some students did appear to simply write everything they could remember about a specific topic area and 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 specific demands of each question. On certain research methods questions in Section B and Section C, they must apply their answers to the context of the study when this is required by the question.

Students should also take care with the balance of assessment objectives in questions which involve extended writing such as questions 5 and 12. In these questions, there should be an equal balance of knowledge/understanding and discussion/evaluation, but some students were producing excessive amounts of one assessment objective and minimal amounts of the other and thus were not able to access the higher levels and marks.

The responses seen in Section C did suggest that many students had had some practical experience of aspects of psychological research, for example, use of randomisation and how to deal with ethical issues. However, as in previous series, there were other practical areas where it appeared that many students had little or no practical experience. These weak practical areas included how to operationalise variables, how to standardise procedures and the use of measures of dispersion. It is important that students gain such practical experience as part of their course, so they understand these concepts fully and can then apply them in an examination setting.

Most students wrote their responses clearly in the appropriate space provided and this sensible use of space continues to improve series on series. However, some responses simply stopped mid-sentence and it was unclear whether the answer continued elsewhere in the answer booklet, or on an additional sheet. Students who need to write more than the space provided allows should use additional pages and should clearly indicate that their answer continues on an additional sheet. They should also clearly write the question number on the additional sheet. These additional sheets will then be matched with the response and marked as a complete answer.

## **Section A Approaches in Psychology**

### **Question 1**

There were some good responses seen to this question, but many others simply involved a general description of the components of the endocrine system rather than clearly being focussed on its function as the question demanded. There was some confusion between hormones and neurotransmitters and some students gave lengthy descriptions of the fight or flight response, focussing on the action of the nervous system rather than the endocrine system.

### **Question 2**

The majority of students were able to answer this question correctly and it appeared that many had sufficient knowledge of the cognitive approach to be able to identify the feature which was not part of the approach.

### **Question 3**

This question was generally answered less well than question 2 suggesting that students had better knowledge of the features of the cognitive approach than the limitations of the approach. The majority of correct responses were based around machine reductionism or artificial testing. A significant minority of students simply wrote vague and potentially incorrect statements such as 'ignores the biological approach'. It is important to remind students that although the approaches are distinct, they are not ignorant of each other and merely provide a different approach for explaining behaviour. There was also some significant confusion surrounding reductionism in this question where it appeared students did not seem to understand the concept so would apply it inaccurately to the cognitive approach.

### **Question 4**

A significant majority of students clearly had knowledge of social learning theory and there were many clear and coherent outlines of three different features. However, some students simply named the features and did not outline them as the question asked. The application to the scenario was also mixed with many students fully applying the features to the stimulus material whilst others failed to apply any of the features of social learning theory to the situation.

### **Question 5**

This question appeared to discriminate well between students as a wide range of responses were seen. A minority of students described and evaluated a different approach, most commonly the behavioural approach, and thus were awarded 0 marks. Description of the biological approach was typically better than the evaluation. Most students demonstrated some accurate knowledge of genetics and better responses also described the nervous system, neurotransmitters and evolution. The evaluation often centred on the benefits of drug therapies, but these were not always explicitly linked to the biological approach. A range of evaluation was seen in some responses, but a number showed confusion. For example, a significant minority of students accurately described phenotype and then went on to claim that the biological approach ignored the environment. Students should also be reminded to ensure all content is linked clearly

psychological as some very poor examples were seen, for example, the use of clothing to illustrate phenotype.

## **Section B Psychopathology**

### **Question 6**

Most students were able to produce accurate responses to this question with many demonstrating clear and coherent knowledge of two definitions of abnormality. Some students simply named the definitions and others only provided a very brief and thus limited outline. It is important to remind students that their outlines should be of definitions of abnormality not normality. This is especially important when describing deviation from ideal mental health, as some students just described ideal mental health and omitted the idea that to be abnormal you had to deviate from these characteristics. As in question 5, students should be reminded to ensure all content is linked clearly to psychology, as some very poor examples were used when attempting to illustrate definitions of abnormality.

### **Question 7**

Most students clearly had good knowledge of cognitive characteristics of obsessive compulsive disorder and there were many relevant characteristics stated. However, there was some confusion with both emotional and behavioural characteristics, as well as confusion with cognitive characteristics of other disorders, most notably depression.

### **Question 8.1**

Many students demonstrated some knowledge of matched pairs design, most typically the idea of participants being matched together on some key variable in the experiment. However, fewer students went on to describe the idea of one person from each pair being assigned to a different condition of the independent variable. Some students applied their response to the stimulus material and, although there was no requirement for students to do this, could still gain full credit if their responses contained the two required components.

### **Question 8.2**

This question was generally answered less well than question 8.1 suggesting that students had better methodological knowledge of what a matched pairs design was than why it may be more useful than an independent groups design. The most common error was students being too strong in their reasoning, incorrectly arguing that a matched pairs design removes all participant variables. As in question 8.1, some students applied their response to the stimulus material and, although there was no requirement for students to do this, they could still gain full credit if their response was accurate.

### **Question 9**

Most students answered this question very well and could correctly identify a variable on which the clients must be matched. Correct responses varied with an even mix of the first three possible responses seen in the mark scheme. Some students wrote generic variables such as IQ which clients did not have to be matched on.

### **Question 10**

This question was attempted by most students, but many responses focused solely on the scores after therapy rather than all four scores or the improvement in scores. This meant that many responses only had a limited explanation of what the results suggested with only partial justification. Few students mentioned that both therapies were successful, and fewer still mentioned that the median scores at the beginning showed how well-matched the clients were.

### **Question 11**

This question was generally well answered with many students gaining full marks. There was some confusion with quantitative and qualitative data in certain responses whilst some students failed to link their response to the study and thus were awarded no marks. It is important to remind students to read questions carefully and to apply their answers to the context of the study when this is required by the question.

### **Question 12**

A good range of responses was seen across the cohort with many students producing level 3 and 4 answers. These responses tended to outline accurately the roles of classical conditioning in the acquisition of a phobia and operant conditioning in the maintenance of a phobia. They also included at least some effective evaluation. There were some responses which exceeded the demands of the question and were detailed enough for a response to a longer 12-mark question. It is important that students tailor their responses to the actual question posed so they do not waste time writing excessive material which might mean that they run out of time on other questions. Poorer responses tended to focus solely on classical conditioning or contained no evaluation. There were also several responses which were not tailored to the development of a phobia and contained generic information on classical and/or operant conditioning or on Pavlov's and/or Skinner's research.

**Section C Research Methods****Question 13**

Most students were able to answer this question correctly, and many appeared to have enough knowledge of types of experiments to be able to identify the one used in the study provided.

**Question 14**

Most students were able to answer this question correctly, and most appeared to have sufficient knowledge of experimental design to be able to identify the one used in the study provided. This question was generally answered better than question 13 suggesting that students were better at identifying experimental designs than types of experiment.

**Question 15**

This question was generally poorly attempted. Many students incorrectly stated the independent variable or failed to operationalise the dependent variable at all and thus got no marks. Others attempted to operationalise the dependent variable but failed to do this fully with many omitting 'correct(ly)' from their response. It is important that students gain practical experience of operationalising variables, so they understand this process fully and can then apply this understanding to a novel situation in an examination setting.

**Question 16**

Most students were able to engage with the demands of this question and achieved some marks. Many students used raffle method 1 or 2 and produced a clear explanation of how randomisation could be used to produce the two word lists. However, some students omitted to explain how the words would be allocated to the two lists (stage 2 and/or stage 3). Some students attempted to use the computer method but many of these responses were very unclear as to how the computer would randomly select the numbers and allocate them to the two words lists (stage 2) and/or omitted the conversion of the numbers back to words (stage 3).

**Question 17**

There were many full mark responses to this question with students demonstrating a clear understanding of randomisation and applying this knowledge to the study. As with question 11, some students failed to link their response to the study and thus were awarded no marks. It is important to remind students to read questions carefully and to apply their answers to the context of the study when this is required by the question.

**Question 18**

It was clear from responses seen that many students appeared to have some understanding of the process of matching and many students correctly explained a key variable on which the words should be matched. However, fewer students seemed to be able to explain how the words should be matched together in each list and thus only a minority of students were awarded full marks.

**Question 19**

Most students were able to draw an accurate conclusion and then justify it using the mean scores and it is clear that they had a good understanding of what the mean is and what it represents. However, few students managed to do the same using the standard deviation. It is clear from student responses that many do not fully understand what a standard deviation is or what it represents. Many responses claimed that the standard deviations were different and although this might be literally true, the difference between the two is so small it would be more noteworthy to remark on the fact that they are almost identical. For the few students who did grasp this concept, only some then went on to demonstrate what this meant in terms of the spread of performance across the two conditions.

**Question 20**

It was clear from responses that many students appeared to have some limited understanding of the relative weaknesses of using the range. However, fewer students seemed to clearly understand the reasons why the standard deviation was more appropriate to use and thus many failed to fully answer the question posed. Many students simply stated one basic reason to use the standard deviation and thus were limited to 1 mark. There was also significant confusion with a minority of students incorrectly stating that the standard deviation was not affected by extreme scores.

**Question 21**

Students generally answered this question well with most responses scoring at least 2 marks. However, only a few students achieved all 3 marks as some failed to read the question carefully and wrote a title instead of the name of the graph. Others had inaccuracies with one or both of the axis labels with many simply referring to 'conditions' and/or 'number of words recalled'.

**Question 22**

Most students answered this question well and a range of ethical issues were seen in responses. The most common issue identified was the right to withdraw, and many students were able to clearly explain the reasons why it should have been addressed and how it could be dealt with. Some students wasted time outlining the ethical issue which was not required by the question. Some students identified debriefing as an ethical issue, and it is important to note that debriefing is a tool used by researchers to help deal with ethical issues and is not an ethical issue.



### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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

### **Converting Marks into UMS marks**

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)