

# **A-LEVEL**

# **PSYCHOLOGY**

7182/1: Introductory topics in Psychology  
Report on the Examination

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## General Comments

This is the third sitting of the 7182/1 examination and centres are becoming more familiar with its particular demands. However, there are some consistent problems that can significantly weaken performance. The range of questions, with different mark allocations and skill requirements, makes heavy demands on the student to read the paper carefully and to plan their answers equally carefully. There were a number of examples where students do not appear to have taken care to read the questions closely. For example, for question 8 a significant minority of students failed to gain marks as they did not address the need to refer to the stem material. Similarly, in question 5 there were many excellent outlines describing ethical issues in social influence research, but a frequent failure to *discuss* them. Question 7 was a pure evaluation question, but again there were many long *descriptions* of techniques used in the cognitive interview. In question 15 many students focused on the limitations of questionnaires rather than the advantages of case studies. A few minutes focusing on the question and planning the answer would have helped avoid these pitfalls.

In contrast to these problems there was less evidence of students being unprepared for large chunks of the specification. There was clear evidence of excellent teaching and preparation, with many students showing impressive performance across all sections of the paper. Exceptions were question 3, where a significant minority of answers demonstrated a lack of understanding of statistics and experimental design, and question 10, on economic implications of research into the role of fathers in attachment. It was disappointing that so many students struggled with this question, as, even if unprepared, some lateral thinking would have led to ideas such as, cost implications of paternity leave given evidence of the importance of the father's role versus allowing more women to go back to work if the father can be at home.

Performance across the different sections varied. Sections A and D were overall completed more successfully than sections B and C.

### Question 1

This question was answered well by the majority of students. The majority used social support and locus of control as explanations of resistance to social influence. Descriptions were usually accurate, though a few answers had internal and external locus of control the wrong way round. An effective route for social support was to provide brief examples from the research literature. Students who referred to autonomous state, high level of moral reasoning, situational factors in Milgram's studies and so on often did well, but references to the authoritarian personality were usually inappropriate. Unusually, many students actually provided too much detail for a 2-mark explanation.

### Question 2

Again this was answered well by many students, though a number did not present the ratio in its simplest form and failed to gain a mark. A minority had the ratio the wrong way round and did not receive credit.

### Question 3

To achieve full marks students had to identify the chi square test as a test of difference for nominal/categorical data using an independent/unrelated design. As marks were awarded for identifying the reasons correctly even if the wrong test was named, most students did reasonably well on this question. However, a significant minority did poorly, referring for example to

correlations, interval data, related design, sign test or t-test etc, reflecting a weak understanding of statistics and experimental design.

#### **Question 4**

The question referred to changes in smoking behaviour in young people between 1987 and today and answers needed to refer to this specific issue to earn marks. There were some excellent outlines of the key elements of minority influence, applied to smoking behaviour. Some students were confused over specific details of concepts such as the augmentation effect or social cryptoamnesia, but still earned reasonable marks. Occasionally the processes of minority influence were outlined but not linked to smoking behaviour in young people and did not earn marks. There were some effective answers focusing on normative and informational social influence, but often this approach had problems dealing with the process of change from 1987 to the present day. The informational approach tended to be more effective in this respect.

#### **Question 5**

This question was not generally done well. Students tended to focus too much on describing actual ethical issues, which were often given in overwhelming detail, and not enough on discussing various relevant aspects. The most popular issues covered included deception/lack of consent, protection from harm and right to withdraw. There were a variety of aspects to discuss. These included the need for deception to prevent demand characteristics and improve the validity of studies; presumptive or retrospective consent; debriefing and psychological support after the study; the social/cultural significance of findings (cost-benefit analysis); the positive impact on ethical approaches in psychology, etc.

#### **Question 6**

This multiple-choice question was done very well, with the vast majority of students earning 2 marks.

#### **Question 7**

In contrast to question 6, performance on this question was more mixed. Although this was clearly an evaluation question, many students spent too long describing the features of the cognitive interview and too little evaluating the technique. Evaluation was often limited to a mention of how a particular feature of the cognitive interview might improve recall accuracy. More effective evaluation referred to research studies of comparative effectiveness of the cognitive interview versus standard techniques (eg increases in both correct and incorrect information or appropriateness for different age groups). Other relevant points included the investment in time and money in training police in the technique, the time the full cognitive interview takes and the fact that some elements might be more effective than others (so reducing the time the cognitive interview takes).

#### **Question 8**

There were some excellent descriptions of the multi-store model (MSM), covering all or most aspects. These included the three stores, their capacity, duration and coding and the role of attention and rehearsal in information transfer. At the top end, answers referred to the linear nature of the model and its role as the first complex model of human memory.

Students were also required to refer to issues in the stem, such as remembering PIN codes and mobile phone numbers. Most answers were able to link these to the limited capacity of short-term memory (STM) and the vital role of rehearsal and chunking. However, a minority of answers failed to address this aspect of the question and failed to access the marks available.

General evaluation of the MSM was varied. At the top end there was effective use of studies to support capacity, coding and duration of the three stores. Use of case studies showed more variation in accurate description and interpretation of findings. For instance, HM was sometimes confused with split-brain work. However, some excellent answers not only covered the relevance of case studies to the MSM, but were able to outline how they provide counter-evidence in the form of separate long-term memory stores (episodic, procedural, semantic; HM and Clive Wearing). KF was often used effectively to support the more complex view of STM provided by the working memory model.

Less effective answers simply stated points without elaboration, for example ‘the working memory model provided a better account of STM’, without reference to research evidence. Some also spent too long on methodological evaluation of studies without linking it to the strength/limitations of the MSM of memory.

Overall, another common weakness was in the organisation of the answer. Essays often contained sufficient relevant material to do well but then presented it in a disorganised fashion, jumping from one aspect to another. With three elements to cover (outline of the MSM, application to the stem, evaluation/discussion of the MSM) a few minutes spent planning the answer was very beneficial.

### **Question 9**

The key to this question was the focus on ‘findings from research’. General theories, ideas on the role of the father or common-sense points were not creditable, and procedural/methodological details were not required. Most students avoided these pitfalls and were able to refer to relevant findings, though detail was sometimes lacking. These included findings on the development of primary/secondary attachment, the role of the father (play vs emotional support) and implications for the child’s development. Some effective answers covered single parent families and the adoption by the father of the maternal role. At the lower end answers focused more on the role of the mother (eg Bowlby) and/or presented general statements on the role of the father.

### **Question 10**

This question clearly came as a surprise to a number of students, although a few moments’ thought would have led them to some relevant material such as research showing the importance of the paternal role and hence to an increase in availability of paternal leave. This, in turn, can free up mothers to return to work if they wish. Many answers referred to the implications of these changes – cost of paternity leave versus economic gain of mothers’ returning to work. A few students discussed ways in which having the father at home might reduce later adolescent problems and criminality and consequently reduce economic costs to society. Where such speculations were psychologically informed, credit was given. Some less successful answers focused on older research that devalued the father’s role, implying that paternal leave was wasted and fathers should stay at work.

**Question 11**

Although there were some very good answers to this question, overall the standard was lower. It was a very straightforward question but many students either did not read the question or had clearly prepared essays on maternal deprivation/privation. In the latter case they had great trouble shaping their material to the question of early attachment and later childhood and/or adult relationships. A good example was Bowlby's study on the 44 thieves. 'Affectionless psychopathy' has implications for the ability to form and sustain relationships but most answers using this material failed to consider this, with no explicit link to the question. A similar issue arose with respect to Koluchova's work and the Romanian orphans. Such research could have been made relevant, but often this link was missing.

A far more effective approach used by many students was structured around Bowlby's internal working model as a model for later relationships (eg romantic relationships, parenting style). The findings of Hazan and Shaver, Myron-Wilson & Smith, Zimmerman, Main et al etc were then used to evaluate the model. At the top end, answers considered research both supporting and contradicting the model. This was also a question where methodological evaluation could be used effectively – the use of questionnaires, retrospective analysis of early attachment type, cause/effect relationships etc – to undermine the validity of findings. In some cases students spent far too long evaluating a single study (usually Hazan and Shaver), limiting the scope of their answer. Some students made effective use of general issues such as determinism and negative aspects of the continuity model.

A number of students made reference to non-human animal work such as Harlow. This was credited where there were explicit links to the question, especially if combined with an awareness of the problems of applying such findings to humans

Finally, a few answers were side-tracked into Ainsworth, the Strange Situation and development of attachment, describing and evaluating procedures and attachment types in far too much detail and not making it relevant to the question.

**Question 12**

Many students achieved full marks on this question by providing brief outlines of behavioural changes such as disruption to activity levels, sleeping patterns, eating behaviour or aggression. Simple statements such as 'change to sleeping pattern' did not provide sufficient detail for full marks. A few answers focused on emotional or cognitive characteristics and did not earn marks. One surprisingly common approach was to combine changes to sleeping and eating patterns and present them as one symptom, which of course they are not.

**Question 13**

Overall this question was done well. Many students achieved full marks by providing clear outlines of three definitions of abnormality and applying them to the description of agoraphobia in the stem. Some became muddled over deviation from ideal mental health, confusing it with deviation from social norms and/or forgetting the 'deviation' aspect. There was also a tendency to give far too much detail of the criteria for ideal mental health. Statistical infrequency and failure to function adequately were generally handled effectively. A few students failed to address the need to refer to the description of agoraphobia in the stem and so could not access these marks.

**Question 14**

Again, a question done well with most students achieving full marks. The most popular limitations were the development of phobias in the absence of a traumatic event and the possible role of biological preparedness in the origin of phobias. The failure of the model to account for the cognitive characteristics of phobias was rare but creditworthy. Although 'reductionism' was sometimes used, a few students clearly did not understand the concept as it applies to behavioural models.

**Question 15**

Answers to this question were generally of a lower standard than expected. Many students focused on problems with questionnaires rather than the advantages of case studies. References to the longitudinal nature of case studies or the possibility of using a range of methods to generate large amounts of qualitative and quantitative data were rare. Often the only relevant comment was 'case studies generate rich qualitative data' with little detail or explanation. More effective answers did refer to the value of the relationship between investigator and Patient X in improving the reliability and validity of data collected.

**Question 16**

The specification clearly separates 'genetic' from 'neural' explanations of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). A small minority of students focused only on genetic explanations and did not receive credit. However, answers covering the explicit link between specific genes and levels of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine were creditworthy.

A number of answers provided impressive detail of possible structural deficits in OCD (involvement of basal ganglia, parahippocampal gyrus, orbito-frontal cortex and the 'worry' circuit etc). This was often combined with reference to low levels of serotonin and high levels of dopamine. Hence, marks for outlines of neural explanations were generally good. However, evaluation was on the whole less effective. A minority of better answers referred to relevant scanning studies of structural change in OCD and the success of drug therapy supporting the serotonin explanation. This was sometimes extended to an awareness that not all OCD patients show structural change or respond to drug therapy, undermining the explanations. Animal research on OCD-like repetitive behaviours produced by high dopamine levels was not common but relevant. There were many muddled references to reductionism and determinism.

Less effective answers were usually able to refer to drug therapy but often became diverted into irrelevant material on problems with such therapy, such as side effects or addiction. However, many students considered the cause/effect problem with neural explanations. Comparison with alternative behavioural/cognitive explanations and the success of therapies based on them was rare but often effective.

Finally, a general problem was a lack of organisation in many answers, with evaluation points scattered around and so reducing the coherence of the essay.

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

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