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# **Examiner's Report**

## Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel International GCE  
Advanced Level In Psychology  
(WPS02) Biology Psychology & Learning

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## Overall

Candidates engaged with the majority of the questions showing a lot of psychological knowledge in their answers. There were very few blank pages, and candidates seemed to be able to manage their time well and attempt all the questions including the three essays at the end.

To improve their answers candidates need to be able to justify their answers when it comes to explain questions, as many could gain the identification mark but then failed to offer any explanation. There was also an issue with generic points, especially when it came to strengths or weaknesses that were in a context, these need to be linked to specifics from the context.

However, most candidates were able to link parts of their answers to scenarios when they were given, including in the essays. It would help candidates to know what the different command verbs expect in the form of an answer, especially those used in essays, as a lot of candidates were limited in what marks they could gain due to lack of conclusion or judgements where they were needed.

## Paper Summary

- Candidates need to consistently link answers to the context throughout if a context is given within the question.
- When questions ask candidates to explain candidates need to offer some justification for their answer.
- Focus on what the question is asking so if it is asking for an improvement candidates should not write about a weakness.
- Know the skills involved for the command words that may be used for essays rather than just describing and evaluation.
- Include conclusions or judgement within essays in order to gain the higher levels.

A more detailed analysis of individual questions and answers follows.

## Section A

### Question 1 (a)

Those candidates that were able to gain 2 marks did so by identifying a strength and elaborating on this point whilst linking it to the context. However, this question was not very well answered as some candidates described a PET scan rather than explain a strength, and others did not link their answer to the context. Of those who did identify a strength it

being a scientific method was the most common, though this was often not justified for the second mark.

#### Question 1(b)

Most candidates could identify two improvements that could be made to the study, linking it to the context. These were often improvements linked to the sample. Only the best candidates were able to gain further marks for justifying the improvements, often not going beyond stating it would make the sample more generalizable but not offering details about why it would do so. Some candidates wrote about the weaknesses of the original sample rather than focussing on justifying the improvement.

#### Question 1(c)

Most candidates could not accurately define what was meant by a type I error.

#### Question 2(a)

This was well answered with most candidates being able to identify at least two symptoms of seasonal affective disorder. Some candidates failed to gain all the marks as they used synonyms, so repeated what they had already written, e.g. writing sleepy, fatigued.

#### Question 2(b)

Many candidates did not gain all the marks as they describe light therapy in general, rather than relate it to the context of Lysander. There tended to be a lack of detail about how the therapy was carried out. Weaker candidates wrote about what SAD is rather than focus on light therapy.

#### Question 3(a)

Most candidates were able to gain the mark for accurately writing a directional hypothesis for a correlation. However a large minority of the candidates either wrote a non-directional hypothesis or wrote an experimental hypothesis about cause and effect.

#### Question 3(b)

The majority of candidates successfully completed the standard deviation accurately and gained all four marks. Most of those who did not gain all four marks gained some marks through showing some working out. They often gained the marks for working out the sum of

the difference. After that some candidates either did not attempt to apply the formula or they divided by the incorrect number. Those candidates who gained three of the four marks often failed to square root their answer.

#### Question 3(c)

Most candidates were able to accurately identify that the results were not significant. Many of these failed to accurately use the formulae and statistical table at the front of the paper. The candidates either wrote the wrong critical value, or they thought 0.5 was the critical value. Some candidates were able to correctly state the observed value was smaller than the critical value but they did not mention what the critical value was.

#### Question 4(a)

Most candidates were able to correctly identify two areas of the brain.

#### Question 4(b)

This was not very well answered, most candidates were able to correctly identify at least one out of the strength and weakness, however very few were then able to go on and justify either of these. The most common strength was being able to identify research evidence that supported the explanation, with the better candidates being able to justify this. The most common weakness was that there were other factors that might cause aggression, but the justification for this, where it was attempted was weaker, with many candidates not going beyond naming another factor that may influence aggression.

#### Question (5)

This essay had a range of marks, though the majority of candidates were in level 1 or level 2. The most common study was Brendgen et al. (2005), with roughly equal amounts of answers focussing on McDermott et al. (2008) and Hoeflemann et al. (2006). The A01 often showed accurate knowledge and understanding, with a majority of candidates showing they knew the details of the study. The A03 tended to be underdeveloped often consisting of single statement sentences, often without specific links to the chosen study. There was also a lack of conclusions and where they were presented these tended to be superficial, restricting candidates to the bottom two levels. Candidates need to focus on developing their chains of reasoning as well as presenting balanced conclusions for evaluate essays.

## Section B

### Question (6a)

Most candidates failed to score this mark. The term operationalisation was often misunderstood, with many candidates writing how they would set up the study rather than how they would measure the behaviour of playing together. Some candidates repeated the question writing 'children playing together' without writing about how this would be measured.

### Question (6b)

Just over half the candidates accurately calculated the correct percentage.

### Question (6c)

Many candidates failed to score this mark as they wrote how to work out the range rather than a definition of what the range was. Candidates need to read the command word of the questions carefully and ensure they are demonstrating the skills required by the command word.

### Question 6(d)

Most candidates were able to accurately identify at least one of the strength or the weakness, only the better candidates were able to offer any justification. The strength usually related to ethics, but the candidates often failed to justify their answer. The better candidates were able to justify their answer through comparisons with covert observations. The weakness often focussed on changes in behaviour, with the better candidates being able to justify this in terms of demand characteristics or social desirability. Those candidates who failed to score any marks on this question often gave a strength and weakness of observations rather than focus on overt observations. Therefore their points were true of other types of observation as well. Candidates need to read the questions carefully and make sure their answers are focussed on the specifics of the question.

### Question 7(a)

Most candidates could successfully define what an unconditioned stimulus was.

#### Question 7(b)

Most candidates could accurately state what the neutral stimulus was.

#### Question 7(c)

Just over half the candidates could accurately state what the conditioned response was. Those who failed to gain the mark often did not state what Katya was scared of.

#### Question 7(d)

Candidates' comparison skills tended to let them down, and this is a skill that candidates need to practice. A lot of candidates failed to gain marks as they wrote detailed descriptions of operant and classical conditioning, but failed to offer any direct comparisons. Most candidates that did offer a comparison point tended to focus on the difference between the two theories in how people learn, gaining the second point for elaboration.

#### Question 8(a)

Many candidates tended to give generic answers to this question, rather than relate the details of the sample to specifics about their learning theories and developmental practical. The answers could have applied to any of the practical's they had carried out. Those candidates who did gain a mark often failed to gain the second mark as detail was lacking, such as where and when the sample was collected. Candidates must ensure their answers are specific to the practical being asked about to access the full marks.

#### Question (8b)

Candidates who failed to score marks often gave generic answers that did not relate to the specifics of the practical from learning theories and development, or gave results from a practical that was not an observation, most often giving results from questionnaires. Those candidates who did gain a mark often failed to include specific details about the quantities to gain the second mark. When asked about the results of a practical candidates do need to include some specific details about the numerical data.

### Question (8c)

This question was poorly answered with the vast majority of candidates giving generic answers about reliability rather than focussing on details about how their practical was not reliable. Some candidates wrote about generalisability rather than reliability. Candidates need to read the question carefully, and when asked about their practical need to offer points that are specific to their practical.

### Question (9a)

The better candidates were able to accurately state what the independent variable was, and understand that it was whether a food pellet was given after the practice runs or not. Weaker candidates often just wrote the food pellet.

### Question (9b)

This was better answered than the independent variable with most candidates accurately being able to state what the dependent variable was.

### Question (9c)

The most common answer focussed on reducing suffering. The better candidates were able to focus on reducing suffering whilst the weaker candidates often wrote that you should not cause any harm to animals. The housing of animals was also another common issue described. Some candidates repeated what they had written in the first sentence again, and so only gave a partial description rather than a full description. Some candidates tried to describe two issues, when the question only asked for one issue. In these cases the candidates often did not give the detail needed for either issue to gain both marks. Candidates must read the questions carefully and ensure they fulfil the demands of the question.

### Question (10)

There were some good examples of A01 in the essays with the better candidates being able to demonstrate accurate knowledge and understanding of dream analysis. The A03 was not as good, with very few candidates offering assessment within the essay, and often failing to come to a judgement. Candidates often evaluated dream analysis rather than assessing it. Weaker candidates focussed their A03 on psychoanalysis rather than on dream analysis. Candidates need to know the different demands of the different command words used for essays.



## Section C

### Question (11)

Many candidates could describe the procedure and findings of Watson and Rayner's study showing good knowledge and understanding. The A03 was often underdeveloped, with the weaker candidates evaluating the study in single sentences with little reference to details from the study. Only better candidates were able to offer a conclusion with only the very best going beyond a superficial conclusion. Candidates need to link their A03 points to detail from the study and develop their A03 points into coherent chains of reasoning to gain the higher levels as well as offer conclusions.

### Question (12)

Candidates found this a challenging question. Most candidates were able to successfully merge the A01 knowledge and understanding with the A02 application rather. The most common biological factors were external zeitgebers, with the most common learning theories being social learning theory. The better candidates were able to go beyond this and link classical and operant conditioning to the context. Weaker candidates often lost focus on the question, and went on to say how different theories could help Nalu sleep better.

The A03 was not as good, with some candidates missing it out altogether. Those who did include A03 points often failed to link it back to Nalu and the 'to what extent' aspect of the question. There was a lack of judgement in the essays.

Candidates need to practice the different skills needed for the different command words on essays.

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