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Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International GCE
In Psychology (WPS02)

Paper 2: Biological Psychology, Learning
Theories and Development

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General comments.

It was good to see students engaging with the questions, and providing a lot of psychological knowledge in their answers. Better answers are engaging with A02 questions in more detail and applying their knowledge to the context. Students are also reading the whole question and making sure their answers are what is required, such as calculating the average to 2 decimal places.

To improve their answers students, 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 in terms of studies including their own practical.

However, most students were able to link answers to scenarios when they were given 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

- Students need to consistently refer back to the scenario in A02 questions, especially short answer questions.
- The longer essays should have a mix AO1 and AO2 or A01, A02 and A03 when there is a scenario given.
- Students should ensure they do not repeat what they have already written.
- Students need to ensure they justify or exemplify what they have written when the question asks them to explain.

Section A

Q01

This was an AO1 question that required students to describe the role of the neuron in human behaviour. Answers that failed to gain full marks often repeated points that they had already made. Better answers often used an example of a neurotransmitter and how it affected human behaviour to gain the third mark.

Q02a

This was an A02 question where students were required to engage with the scenario. Most students did follow the command word and describe the role of internal pacemakers in the sleep wake cycle, with reference to the relevant neurotransmitters. Better answers linked to Samadhi throughout their answer. Some answers did not gain full marks due to repetition, or just focussing on internal pacemakers with no reference to the context.

Q02b

This was an AO1 and AO3 question requiring students to identify and then explain a strength and a weakness. Good answers were able to do this; however, some students could identify but then did not go on to explain, or just described the role of internal pacemakers on the sleep wake cycle. The best answers in terms of a weakness often used an example of a study and then identified and explained why the study was a weakness of the role of internal pacemakers on our sleep wake cycle.

Q03a

This was an AO2 question asking students to identify the experimental design. Most answers were able to correctly identify the experimental design. Those that did not get the correct answer often identified another research method rather than an experimental design.

Q03b

This was an AO2 question requiring students to define what is meant by the term nominal data in relation to the scenario. Most answers could accurately define nominal data and link it to the categories used by Ulrick. Weaker answers just defined nominal data with no link to the scenario or just repeated information from the stem, so not showing understanding of the definition of nominal data.

Q03c

This was an AO2 question that require students to calculate the average. Most answers were correct, with most of them taking note of the instruction to calculate the answer to 2 decimal places.

Q03d

This was an AO2 and an AO3 question. Most students could identify a conclusion that could be made from the data, with the better answers going on to explain their answer using the data from Table 1. Some used their answer to 3c as their justification and gained credit for it, though full marks could have been gained by focussing on Table 1. Some students wrote a conclusion for a correlation when it was an experiment.

Q04

This was an AO2 question where four marks were available for description of the menstrual cycle in relation to Beryl. The best answers linked all their points to Beryl, and they could describe the effects of specific hormones at various stages of the cycle. Some answers just focussed on menstruation, and not the whole of the menstrual cycle.

Q05a

This was an AO1 question. The best answers gave two accurate descriptive points about the sample used in the study. There were a range of points including where the sample came from, the breakdown of the number of twins in each group, and the social status of the families.

Q05b

This was an AO1 and AO3 question, asking for one strength and one weakness of the study. The best answers were able to identify the strength and weakness and go on to exemplify or justify their answer with points that were specific to the

study in question. Weaker answers gave generic points that could have applied to several studies. The vast majority of students wrote about the correct study in both 5a and 5b.

Q06

This question asked candidate to evaluate their practical from the biological approach. The best answers were able to offer accurate and thorough knowledge of their practical (A01) as well as showing a well-developed and logical evaluation. It was clear from their answers what their correlation had been. There were a range of different correlation carried out including the masculinity score of the brain and aggression, height and aggression, age and aggression, the number of hours of sleep and the number of hours on social media and the number of hours of sleep and exam grades. If looking at age as part of the correlation students should only use participants aged 16 years or more.

Some answers were about an experiment rather than a correlation. Centres are reminded that the practical for the biological approach is a correlation in the specification.

Section B

Q07a

This was an AO2 question that required candidates to refer to the scenario throughout their answer. The best answers were able to link four descriptive points to the training of the cat, often describing how positive and negative reinforcement could be used on the cat as well as positive and negative punishment. Or the students may have described how a schedule of reinforcement could be used to train the cat. Some students confused negative reinforcement with punishment, and some wrote about classical conditioning rather than operant conditioning.

Q07b

This was an explain question so required both AO2 identification in relation to the scenario, and AO3 justification/exemplification. Better answers could achieve both for the weakness. Some answers could only gain an identification mark as there was no justification. Some answers described how operant conditioning could be used to train Andrei to make his bed rather than explain a weakness.

Q08a

This was an AO2 question that required candidates calculate a mean score. Most students got the correct answers and were able to give their answer to 2 decimal places.

Q08b

The question required student to interpret the data in Table 3, so was a combination of A02 and A03. The best answers could accurately interpret what the ranges in Table 3 showed and then go on to justify their answer using the data from Table 3. Some students just described the data from the table with no interpretation. There is still some confusion in some answer about what the range shows. Some students wrote that a bigger range meant there was more helping behaviour. The range describes the spread of the scores, not whether one group had more of a specific behaviour than another group.

Q08c

This was an AO2 and AO3 question that required candidates compare ordinal and interval data. The AO2 mark was for identifying a comparison and the AO3 for exemplification of the comparison. Most answers that could identify a comparison explicitly, but some did not offer an exemplification. Weaker answers describe what ordinal and interval data are, without any comparison. Comparison need to include at least one similarity and one difference in the answer.

Q09a

Several answers correctly identified the unconditioned stimulus from the study (AO1). Some answers confused the unconditioned stimulus with the conditioned stimulus.

Q09b

This focussed on two ethical weaknesses of the study, so was an AO1 and AO3 question requiring both AO1 identification, and AO3 justification/exemplification. Better answers could achieve both though a lot of answers could only gain an identification mark. Most answers focussed on the ethical issue of distress in relation to Little Albert and the best answers were also able to give another ethical weakness and not repeat themselves. Some answers were inaccurate saying consent was not given as Little Albert was only a baby, when in this case consent should be gained from those with parental responsibility not the minors.

Q09c

The best answers were able to both identify one improvement to the sample (AO1) and then exemplify why this was an improvement (AO3). Some answers did identify an improvement to the sample, but then went on to explain a weakness of the original sample rather than explain why the improvement would be an improvement. Most answers did focus on the sample as the question asked.

Q10a

This was an AO2 question that required students to identify two reasons why Brigitta imitates her mother. Most students were able to gain both identification marks. Most answers focussed on social learning theory, with some using Freud's theory to identify reasons for the imitation.

Q10b

This was an explain question so required both AO1 identification, and AO3 justification/exemplification. Better answers could achieve both for the strength and the weakness. The most common strength focussed on research evidence, and the most common weakness focussed on it ignoring biological factors.

Q11

This was a discuss essay so required candidates to show knowledge and understanding, AO1, and support their discussion with application of relevant evidence, AO2. Candidates did show they were able to apply their answer to the scenario. Weaker answers failed to show their knowledge and understanding, often just stating terms used within psychoanalysis, with nothing further to show they had knowledge of what the terms were. Some answers focussed using Freud's theory to explain why Olaf had the issues he had, rather than focus on psychoanalysis as the question stated.

Q12

This question required candidates to show knowledge and understanding of research into infradian rhythms, AO1, as well as offer evaluation of the research which lead to a conclusion, AO3. Better answers were able to show they had both the knowledge and the evaluative skills developing coherent chains of reasoning which lead to a balanced conclusion. Weaker answers lacked either the knowledge and understanding, often not going beyond describing one study rather than research, or any development within the AO3. Some answers described infradian rhythms rather than focussing on the research.

Q13

This question required candidates to assess the use of brain scanning techniques and Freudian case studies in relation to a scenario so required a mix of AO1, AO2 and AO3. Good answers were able to offer accurate and thorough knowledge and understanding of both research methods, and were able to give sustained application to the context throughout their answer as well as show well developed and logical reasoning with a balanced judgement. Weaker answers often failed to offer more than limited knowledge and understanding of either of the research methods, and offered very little application. Some candidate described psychoanalysis rather than the Freudian case study, of which psychoanalysis is part of the method.

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