Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Subsidiary In Psychology (WPS02)

Paper 1: Biological psychology, learning theories and development

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Question 1

Candidates were required to describe the role of the central nervous system in human behaviour. Weaker answers often did not go beyond saying it was made up of the brain and spinal cord. The best answers were able to go beyond this and describe how messages were conveyed within the central nervous system.

Question 2 (a)

The best answers were accurately able to identify the independent variable and so gain the AO2 marks. A significant number of answers were not able to gain the mark, as they did not identify both conditions of the independent variable. Some answers incorrectly identified the dependent variable rather than the independent variable.

Question 2 (b)

To gain the fours marks for this question candidates had to identify a strength and a weakness of repeated measures design in relation to the scenario to gins the AO2 marks. They then had to exemplify or justify this to gain the AO3 marks. Unfortunately, a lot of answers failed to link to the scenario and so gave generic answers which were not creditworthy. Some answers did not read the question and gave a general strength and weakness of Cherry's study rather than focussing on her use of repeated measures which is what the question asked for.

Examiners tip: Candidates should read the question carefully, and answer the question that is asked.

Question 2 (c)

This question was answered better in terms of candidates applying their answer to the scenario. The best answers were accurately able to identify a conclusion for the AO2 mark, and then use the figures from the table to justify or exemplify this for the AO3 mark. Answers that did not get the identification mark often failed to say how sleep would be impacted by watching the scary film.

Question 2 (e)

There were a significant number of incorrect answers for this question, with a lot of answers incorrectly stating the Spearman's rho test. The best correct answers correctly identified the test Cherry would have used, and then went on to explain two reasons why she would use this test.

Question 3

This question required candidates to link their answer to the scenario for the AO2 marks in part a and the AO2 identification mark in part b., with part b having an AO3 mark for exemplifying/justifying the weakness. Answers used a variety of therapies with antidepressants being the most common. Other answers included cognitive behavioural therapy and psychoanalysis. If answers ar about a psychotherapy candidates needs to say which psychotherapy they are writing about. Only the best answers were linked to the scenario, a lot of answers did not make this link so were generic.

Examiners tip: If there is a scenario and the question asks about the scenario then all parts of an answer must have details from that scenario to gain credit.

Question 4 (a)

Candidates were required to link their answer to detail from the scenario to gain the AO2 marks for this question. A lot of answers were generic as they did not relate to the scenario so were not creditworthy. The most common hormone written about was testosterone. Those answers that did link to the scenario often did not give enough descriptive points to access the marks that were available.

Examiners tip: To make the answer related to the scenario candidates need to take details from the scenario and include them in their answer. Just repeating the name is not enough to gain AO2 marks.

Question 4 (b)

Candidates did not need to link this question to the scenario as this is an AO1 question, though marks could still be gained if they did. The best answers were able to describe how the pre-frontal cortex had a role in aggression. The weakest answers often just repeated that the pre-frontal cortex influenced aggression with no more description.

Question 5

The best answers were able to offer accurate and thorough knowledge of the research for the AO1. This was often in the form of studies, though some also described the methods used in the research as well, which was a valid way to answer the question. The AO3 element in the best answers was well-developed and logical in relation to the AO1. Weaker answers evaluated one study rather than research so the answer was limited.

Examiners tip: Use past papers with candidates so that they get used to understanding what is required for the types of questions asked.

Question 6 (a)

Some answers incorrectly identified the primary reinforcer, though a large number of answers showed clear understanding of secondary reinforcement and gained the mark.

Question 6 (b)

This was an AO2 question that required candidates to link their answer to the scenario, and a lot of answers were linked to details from the scenario. The best answers could correctly describe the schedule of reinforcement in enough detail to gain all the marks. It was clear that a lot of answers showed a lack of understanding about schedules of reinforcement as they were about positive or negative reinforcement.

Question 6 (c)

The best answers were able to gain both marks through linking their description to the scenario to gain the AO2 marks. Quite a few of the answers confused positive punishment with negative punishment. Some answers did not gain all the marks, as they gave a definition of positive punishment without linking it to the scenario.

Question 7 (a)

This question proved difficult, with a lot of answers showing limited understanding of what time sampling is. Very few answers went into the amount of description needed to gain all the marks. Most answers made some attempt to link to the scenario, though this was often not consistent throughout the answer.

Examiners tip: For AO2 questions candidates shod ensure every point in their answer is linked to details from the scenario.

Question 7 (b)

Most candidates were able to accurately draw a tally chart. Those that only gained one of the two marks often put down the age ranges but failed to include what behaviour would be tallied.

Question 8 (a)

The best answers were accurately able to title the graph, label the axes and plot the data so gaining all three marks. Some answers had uneven scales on the y axis with no indication that the scales were uneven. Other answers plotted histograms rather than bar graphs.

Question 8 (b)

Only the very best answers were able to gain 3 marks for this AO1 question. A lot of answers showed no understanding of transference in psychoanalysis, often stating that it is when you transfer your feelings and not adding any more detail. There were a lot of inaccurate answers for this question.

Examiner tip: When describing a process do not use the same word to describe what it means, as this does not show any understanding of the term.

Question 8 (c)

The most common strength identified was the fact psychoanalysis gets to the root cause of the problem, and the most common weakness was that it was subjective. The best answers were able to identify the strength and the weakness, and then go on to

justify or exemplify them. Weaker answers could identify them both, but failed to offer any justification or exemplification. Some answers described psychoanalysis rather than focussing on a strength and a weakness of it.

Examiners tip: Candidates need to ensure that the offer some justification or exemplification for any explain questions.

Question 9 (a)

The best answers were able to describe vicarious reinforcement in relation to social learning theory and describe how it can motivate imitation, and then go on to write about how the observer may then be motivated after they had imitated the behaviour. A lot of answers wrote about operant conditioning and positive reinforcement rather than social learning theory. Some answers defined motivation rather than describe it in terms of social learning theory.

Question 9 (b)

For this AO1 and AO3 answer the most common strength was using studies to support social learning theory, with one of Bandura's studies being the most common one used. This explain question was generally answered better than previous explain questions, with answers clearly identifying a strength and then justifying or exemplifying that strength. Again, weaker answers failed to gain the AO3 mark.

Question 10

Candidates were required to show knowledge and understanding of the scientific procedures act for the AO1 and then apply this to the scenario for the AO2. The best answers were able to do this successfully. Weaker answers often showed limited knowledge and understanding, often just providing a list of what issues Mateo should consider which does not demonstrate knowledge and understanding. Most answers did link to the scenario.

Question 11

Candidates needed to show knowledge and understanding of infradian rhythms for the AO1 element of this essay. This was often done through the use of the menstrual cycle and seasonal affective disorder. Some answers offered limited knowledge and understanding of infradian rhythms and instead wrote about circadian rhythms. The AO3 in the best answers provided coherent chains of reasoning that showed a grasp of competing arguments, with the very best being well-developed and balanced. Weaker answers often did not develop their points, or evaluated circadian rhythms.

Question 12

A lot of answers showed good knowledge and understanding of both studies, with accurate details of them both for the AO1, however, some answers had inaccurate details of at least one, if not both, of the studies. The question asked candidates to focus on generalisability and reliability for the AO3, and the best answers did this in relation to both studies providing developed points. Some answers did not focus on generalisability and reliability, instead offering a variety of other evaluative points as well which impacted on the mark the answer could be given.

Examiners tip: Candidates should read the questions carefully and ensure their answers are focussed on what the question asked for.