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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Subsidiary Level

In Psychology (WPS01/01)

Paper 1: Social and Cognitive Psychology

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This paper allowed candidates many opportunities to showcase their psychological skills. There were a few blank responses indicating that candidates did not plan their time effectively under exam conditions.

The calculations were done confidently although candidates are recommended to practise statistical tests and the determination of significance to increase familiarity.

Candidates engaged with scenario questions more fully than previous series. This skill still requires practice to attain full marks on this style of question.

Studies in detail were not considered in the depth expected and at times it appeared as if candidates were not certain of the details for these studies. This was particularly evident in the final essay to evaluate Schmolck's study. The essay topics were handled generically and although some knowledge and understanding of psychological principles was shown it did not relate specifically to the question asked. Evaluation points were often under-developed and very few candidates could justify evidence clearly or in a way that formed part of a balanced conclusion.

Strengths and weakness questions were challenging. It was not always apparent why a feature was considered as a strength or weakness. Again, in reconstructive memory, candidates were unable to separate Bartlett's 'war of the ghosts' study from his reconstructive memory theory.

The level of understanding was balanced across the Social and Cognitive topics. Candidates are urged to read the question carefully to ensure that they are answering the question that has been asked.

1a. In general, candidates had a sound knowledge of personality types and most identified either authoritarian or internal/ external locus of control. In a few cases the responses did not clearly state whether having an authoritarian personality increased obedience or not. This direction is required to gain credit. There is some confusion or lack of understanding where candidates talked about the autonomous state.

1b. Most candidates suggested that gender does not affect obedience, and some used either Milgram's research or Burger's experiment to illustrate this. A few answers included the idea that women often reported more stress or linked empathy to the idea of obedience. Many responses were confused and tried to cover several options.

2a. Candidates had a sound knowledge of agency theory and were able to describe it well. They were less secure when applying it to the scenario. Often candidates did not identify why the police officer was recognised as an authority figure although the scenario mentions wearing a uniform. Whilst some mentioned diffusion of responsibility, it is important to ensure that answers are linked back to the scenario given. Otherwise, this will limit access to the marks available.

Examiner tip: use the information in the scenario.

2b. Candidates often struggled to access marks on this question. Most responses were generic and just included a strength of the research reported, for example a strength of Milgram's experiment. This evidence should show a strength of agency theory which can be related to the scenario. Other candidates tried to explain how agency theory fitted the scenario and did not actually identify a strength. Candidates must read the question carefully.

2c. Questions involving improvements are often challenging and this is no exception. The suggestions made are frequently not improvements but weaknesses. Many responses put forward the idea of a larger sample but did not elaborate on this or attempt to link to validity. If an improvement is suggested the candidate must then justify that improvement to achieve the A03 mark. There was a lack of understanding of validity evident in responses.

3. Where the candidates knew the study well, these marks were easy to access. Sampling techniques or references to Milgram's study are not accepted.

Examiner tip: Candidates should learn specific details about studies fully.

4. Candidates related to this scenario and were able to apply theories of conformity to gain both marks. The most popular answer used internalisation as an explanation. Many applied both public and private conformity to Milla's behaviour. A few candidates made generic responses just defining internalisation without reference to Milla or recycling.

5. Candidates have a good knowledge of the key ethical guidelines and they listed or described them enthusiastically. These essays were generic and did not fully address the question. Where candidates used examples of social research effectively, they did produce logical arguments. Deception was discussed in many responses and often justified as necessary for validity. This point was usually supported by obedience studies such as Milgram and Burger, but Moscovici and Asch could also be used to illustrate A03 points to good effect. Only the most able candidates demonstrated an awareness of the significance of competing arguments and could develop a balanced conclusion and thus very few responses reached level four mark-band.

6a. Candidates performed well on this question, showing a good understanding of information processing. The concept of information passing from store to store was the most popular answer. Most candidates achieved one mark, and some elaborated their description to achieve both marks. Terminology was often confused.

6b. The most popular responses identified that the model was oversimplified or only a partial explanation of memory. Both these responses needed to be developed. In most instances where a weakness was credited, justification was missing or inaccurate. Where candidates were awarded both marks, they provided a good weakness and exemplified the point well.

7a. Most candidates attempted to apply the concept of schema to this scenario. The success was varied. Some candidates repeated the rubric of the question rather than applying the scenario whilst others gave the same explanation for Betsy and then for Maria. It is important to look at the mark allocation of a question to judge the appropriate depth of response. Where candidates engaged with this scenario, they accessed all the marks.

Examiner tip: Look carefully at the mark allocation to see if a response should be elaborated.

7b. Many candidates missed the point of this question. Where candidates realised, they could use evidence for this part of the question they tended to use the War of the Ghosts study and gave strengths or weakness of the study rather than using it to support the theory of reconstructive memory. Candidates often missed the link to the scenario producing generic answers and just evaluated the theory. Some candidates had appropriate strengths or weakness which they related to the scenario but struggled to express their ideas clearly.

8a. This was a simple calculation which most candidates calculated correctly.

8b. A simple determination of the mode which was completed accurately by most candidates.

8c. Many candidates only completed the difference column in the table and did not attempt the rest of the question. If the full question was attempted, candidates demonstrated their knowledge and achieved full marks. If a miscalculation had been made, they would still get T= 1 and some credit.

8d. Some candidates gave the wrong critical value (usually the value for 10 participants) and thus gave the wrong answer. A proportion of candidates used 0.05 as the value and showed a complete lack of understanding of significance levels. This should have been a simple calculation.

Examiner tip: candidates should practise looking up values in tables and determining significance.

9. There was considerable variety in the responses to this question. Many candidates offered evaluations of laboratory experiments in a more generic form, consisting of a description and evaluation of laboratory experiments. These were not always linked to cognitive experiments. There were instances where candidates had included social psychology research (especially Asch) instead, perhaps not reading the question carefully. Where candidates did include studies from cognitive psychology - they evidenced some interesting points and applied these throughout. A wide range of studies were included and used effectively to demonstrate how laboratory experiments aided memory research.

Examiner tip: Use specific examples to illustrate points.

10. Unfortunately, many candidates did not attempt this essay. It is an accessible essay and candidates should have expected to score highly. Responses were vague and did not give specific details of the participants or the tests. Findings were poorly expressed, and evaluative points underdeveloped. Due to limited knowledge and understanding of key aspects of the research and simplistic evaluation points lower-level marks were often awarded. Conversely, there were a few very well-crafted answers demonstrating that the higher levels could be achieved.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Candidates should engage with the scenario and use the information in their answers
- Candidates should make sure they know specific details from the classic and contemporary studies
- Candidates should read the question carefully
- Candidates should take note of the mark allocation to judge the required depth of response.