

PSYCHOLOGY

Overall grade boundaries

Higher level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 9	10 – 20	21 – 30	31 – 42	43 – 54	55 – 67	68 – 100

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 11	12 – 22	23 – 32	33 – 45	46 – 57	58 – 70	71 – 100

Higher level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 2	3 – 5	6 – 8	9 – 11	12 – 15	16 – 18	19 – 25

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Most of the papers submitted for this session's internal assessment were investigating appropriate topics that lent themselves well to experimental study as required in the IB psychology course. There were still a few cases of topics, such as conformity, that, while interesting to the candidate, tend to raise ethical issues that researchers at this experience level are generally not prepared to manage. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that all IAs follow the IB ethical guidelines that are available on the Online Curriculum Centre and from each school's IB Coordinator.

The majority of topics could be classified under the broad heading of cognitive psychology. However some projects in social psychology, comparative psychology and developmental psychology were appropriate and handled very well.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A Introduction

Most introduction sections cited background studies relevant to the research hypothesis. There were several cases, however, where some of the studies cited only tenuously related to the aim of the study. For the requirements of the IB psychology Internal Assessment only one research hypothesis is needed. Several papers tried to research and analyze more than one hypothesis and these papers had a difficult time adequately and thoroughly covering all that needs to be discussed with each hypothesis within the word limit. While more than one hypothesis may be of interest to the candidate, it is in their best interest to narrow their focus to one hypothesis for study.

While more IAs included an appropriately operationalized hypothesis, a few were worded so as to sound correlational. Stating that one condition will cause an increase or decrease to the dependent variable is a correlational style of wording rather than saying that the measurement of the dependent variable for one condition will be greater than or less than in the other condition.

Criterion B Methods – Design

Proof of ethical considerations being taken into account and acted upon appropriately must be included in this section. A few papers stated that there were “no ethical issues” which is rather vague. It would appear that such wording indicates that problems in research such as inflicting pain or discomfort on the participants were absent, but this additional commentary was rarely included in such cases. “Ethical issues” could also be taken to mean ethical guidelines, which all projects should explicitly take into account and be documented. Note that informed consent is always required. While this is improving with more papers documenting the informed consent process and a blank informed consent statement, in a few cases participants only gave their consent to participate without being as fully informed as possible before participating in the study.

Criterion C Methods – Participants

Papers should include indication of the sampling procedure used as well as relevant characteristics of target population. The target population may be rather narrowly defined, such as 16 – 18 year old secondary school students in a particular geographical area. Random allocation measures also need to be outlined if appropriate.

Criterion D Methods – Procedure

This section was generally well done. The description of the procedure should be clearly worded, thorough, yet concise.

Criterion E Results

The use of inferential statistical tests is required along with descriptive statistics. Many IAs only briefly stated the results without any narrative description in this section or analysis in the discussion section. For example some results showed large differences in standard deviations between the two groups yet many candidates did not discuss why this might have happened.

It is important to note that all graphs and tabular data need to be fully labelled, clearly presented and in summary form. Raw data should not be graphed. Candidates should keep in mind what their two conditions are and only display the summary data for these two conditions. For example, several papers graphed gender differences in performance while the research hypothesis was not investigating gender.

Criterion F Discussion

The discussion sections were rather well done overall. Candidates seem to be better prepared on the purpose of this section and what type of information should be included. However, some candidates discussed weaknesses at length yet had not fully discussed their findings and how they related to the background research cited in the introduction section. Many of the strengths and weaknesses discussed were somewhat general in nature rather than specifically tailored to the unique situation of the study being carried out. For example, larger sample size was very commonly discussed and may have been an issue, but at the same time selection procedure might have been an issue and not discussed in this section.

Criterion G Format

The references made in the body of the paper and those included in the bibliography/works cited section should be complete with every study cited in the paper being included in the bibliography. Formats for internet-based references and secondary source material were inconsistent at times. Most papers followed the required format in terms of sections and headings.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

Each session the overall quality of the studies submitted for internal assessment seems to be improving. Some further practical recommendations are as follows:

- Allow candidates to critique or review the work of other students using the guidelines and assessment criteria as the basis for commentary. This not only helps the author of each paper, it develops understanding of what is required by all candidates.
- While only one research project is officially assessed for the IB final mark, it is recommended that candidates have the opportunity to develop the skills needed in the production of the final project throughout the year. This could include analysis of published studies, carrying out mini studies, practice in writing hypotheses, data analysis of various sample sets, reinterpretation of findings of published studies, analysis of background studies (including identification of strengths and weaknesses), etc.
- The writing style required for the Internal Assessment requires candidates to be precise, concise and thorough. Instruction on this style of writing is highly advantageous to the candidates. Peer editing, small group discussion of the each candidate's writing and the use of exemplars are several methods that have been successful for candidates in the past.

Standard level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 2	3 – 5	6 – 8	9 – 10	11 – 12	13 – 14	15 – 20

The range and suitability of the work submitted

There was a substantial and welcome range of replicated experimental work. There was also variety in the topics selected, most of which came from investigations that were covered by the syllabus. This was a sensible choice since it meant that candidates whose work was related to the syllabus had the opportunity to increase both their depth and breadth of knowledge. Some concern remains over the ethical issues that can arise, especially in relation to work conducted with children. Teachers should remain sensitive to the ethical issues associated with children. In particular written parental approval must be sought when including children in any psychological investigation. It is insufficient to have head-teacher permission alone, although that permission is also required.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Although the experimental method was generally well understood there is a particular aspect of this method that is given inadequate attention. Candidates attempt to replicate, or adapt, an experiment taken from a published journal. They rely on the clarity of the author's expression and coherence in order to replicate the work. Each report that a candidate writes should be scrutinised to ensure that it too in its turn may be replicated. In several cases this was not possible because insufficient information was given, or the information lacked clarity. For example the method section must include a brief description of the participants, explain what sampling technique was used and what parent population was employed for the sample itself. Without this information it is simply not possible to replicate an experiment.

The weakest, and most undesirable, form of sampling is simply to choose people who happen to be around at the time and are willing to subject themselves to an experiment. This solution to sampling becomes even more problematic when a candidate has to use members of his or her own class and is left to attempt the experiment without the presence of the psychology teacher, or any other teacher. Candidates wrote about this situation occurring in their own experiment and the consequences of using unwilling students from their own class. This state of affairs is reprehensible and should be avoided. There are always difficulties in obtaining a relevant and reasonable sample, but it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that the experiment is conducted along scientific lines and that no person is demeaned or hurt by the experimental process.

In contrast there were many examples where the replicated experiment was of the highest quality and associated with the clearest and fullest report, as recommended by the IBO Guidelines for Psychology.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- Guide students so that they select an experiment that relates to an area of the syllabus that they themselves are studying.
- Make certain that each of the ethical guidelines is implemented by students, especially those that involve children
- Ensure that an additional responsible adult is there at all times when children are involved in a psychology experiment
- Persuade students that their own experiment must be scrutinised so that another psychologist is able to replicate the experiment precisely, using the student's written report of his/her work
- Students need to think in advance when selecting a sample. The relevant participants should be selected and briefly described, a carefully chosen sampling strategy should be used and described, and the parent population identified.

Higher and standard level paper one

Higher level

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 19	20 – 25	26 – 31	32 – 52

Standard level

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 19	20 – 25	26 – 31	32 – 44

General comments

The numbers of candidates choosing to study psychology in the IB programme continues to grow, with a 47% increase from the last session at SL, and a 16% increase at HL. The standard achieved by candidates was noticeably improved over that of previous sessions, particularly at HL. In general, candidates were better able to judge the amount of time needed for responding to the short answer questions in Section A. In comparison with previous examination sessions, more candidates were able to address the requirements of questions as set, and could therefore demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of psychology. The following consideration of candidate performance identifies those aspects of examination performance and understanding of syllabus content which could be improved to facilitate an increase in numbers achieving higher grades.

The areas of the programme and examination that appeared difficult for the candidates

The compulsory short answer questions in Section A were generally appropriately and accurately answered for the biological perspective. However, responses to the cognitive, the learning and the humanistic perspective questions tended to contain less accurate material and/or did not fully address question requirements. Responses to the learning perspective question seem to suggest the acquisition of disembodied knowledge, as candidates were often unable to explicitly link material to the topic of learning.

Section B choices were heavily weighted towards the cognitive and the humanistic perspectives with few candidates attempting the learning perspective question, a change from previous sessions which may reflect a lack of confidence in applying ethical considerations to content rather than a lack of relevant knowledge.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

In this session candidates who were equally well prepared for each of the perspectives were able to demonstrate the extent of their knowledge and understanding in sound responses to all the compulsory Section A short answer questions. Many candidates were able to produce accurate description of relevant material for the biological, the cognitive and the humanistic perspectives. Responses from candidates in some centres were a pleasure to read as they demonstrated in-depth knowledge and understanding of relevant material applied in a logically constructed answer focusing on the requirements of the question.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Section A

Question 1 *Outline historical or cultural considerations that have given rise to the biological perspective.* *[8 marks]*

Candidates were generally well informed on the historical conditions which influenced the biological perspective and it was pleasing to note their awareness of the philosophical bases of biological psychology. The experimental method and its central place as a methodology employed in the biological perspective were appreciated as indeed was the work of Darwin, Pavlov and Skinner. These were rightly linked with the increasing importance of science and the scientific method.

However, some candidates still need to learn to pace themselves more effectively. Usually, an [8 mark] answer on this paper may be contained within two sides of normal sized handwriting. Candidates should discipline themselves in the time allocated to each question, however tempting it may be to write at great length when responding to one in particular.

Question 2 *Choose one cognitive research study that could be considered to be controversial.*

- a) *Outline the method used in the chosen study.* *[4 marks]*
- b) *Explain why the study is considered controversial.* *[4 marks]*

Frequently candidate responses failed to make clear the cognitive aspects of their chosen study. In particular, candidates offering social psychological research need to justify such material as cognitive if it is to be acceptable in this section of the paper. This question focused on a brief description of the method employed by researchers so candidates offering results, conclusions, and evaluation did not attract additional marks.

‘Controversial’ elements could be most appropriately seen in terms of ethics, with alternative interpretations producing only very weak justification as being controversial.

- Question 3**
- a) *Describe one study in which environmental factors contribute to explanations of behaviour within the learning perspective.* [4 marks]
- b) *Explain how the findings of the study described in part a) have helped psychologists to understand behavioural change.* [4 marks]

Answers to this question were not always confined to *one* study. Frequently, the description provided in part a) was not linked to learning and the behavioural change required in part b).

Responses offering the research of Pavlov and of Skinner were usually sound, although Tolman's work, and findings on Kohler's insight theory tended to be problematic for candidates.

- Question 4**
- a) *Outline two assumptions of the humanistic perspective.* [4 marks]
- b) *Evaluate one of the assumptions outlined in part a).* [4 marks]

Although part a) was successfully answered by the majority of candidates, part b) responses tended to be very weak, offering little or no evaluation of the chosen assumption. Candidates could have discussed the validity and reliability of self-reports as used by Rogers to understand self-awareness and related this to a relevant assumption; consideration of the accuracy of biographical data on which assumptions of intrinsic goodness may be based would have produced appropriate evaluation. Evaluative answers often omitted a balance of both strengths *and* limitations.

Section B

- Question 5** *Discuss strengths and limitations of research methods used within the biological perspective.* [20 marks]

The term "research methods" was not always interpreted in an appropriate way in which case candidates failed to maximise their marks. Although more than one method was required, weaker responses often only considered one, thus minimizing opportunities to gain marks. Many candidates fixed on the experimental method alone, without referring to observation, case studies, and the high proportion of correlational investigations conducted in biological psychology. Answers were not always well balanced despite the clear instruction in the question to discuss both strengths and limitations of appropriate methods.

- Question 6** *Assess the extent to which one concept or model of information processing has helped in understanding cognition.* [20 marks]

Many candidates failed to make an effective link between material under discussion and 'understanding cognition'. Sound answers usually related to the topics of attention, perception or memory. Weaker responses suggested a lack of familiarity with at least one of these key topics, with candidates struggling to make insight learning or conformity relevant to the question.

- Question 7**
- a) *Some research studies within the learning perspective are seen as ethically contentious. With reference to such research studies, describe relevant ethical considerations.* [8 marks]
- b) *To what extent have ethical considerations affected the interpretation of behaviour within the learning perspective?* [12 marks]

Candidates attempting this question tended to describe studies of learning rather than focusing on ethical conditions, with too many offering methodological considerations in place of the required ethical considerations. Few candidates considered animal research studies but their responses tended to be well done.

Part b) of this question appeared to puzzle some candidates. Codes of Ethics have evolved over time and current sets of guidelines if applied to classic research studies may have had a powerful impact on our understanding of the learning process.

- Question 8** *Examine the contribution and current standing of the humanistic perspective as an alternative to the scientific study of behaviour.* [20 marks]

Candidates attempting this question frequently ignored the focus, *i.e.* ‘an alternative to the scientific study of behaviour’, instead describing ‘all I can recall about the humanistic perspective’. Where this approach was adopted, some candidates did seem to have appropriate knowledge but had not developed the skills necessary to demonstrate the use of such information in addressing the specific demands of the question. Many candidates failed to offer a balanced account, in particular omitting reference to the strengths of the perspective in offering an alternative to the scientific study of behaviour. However, where candidates had been fully prepared, exceptionally good answers were offered, with many attracting marks in the top band.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

The review of candidate responses to individual questions seems to highlight the need for more preparation in applying evaluation to material, e.g. the effects of ethical considerations on interpretation of behaviour; the impact of methodological considerations on theoretical explanations of human behaviour. Rather than learning ‘evaluation’ comments and adding them at the end of a section of content description, informed candidates should be able to demonstrate an appreciation of why and how such considerations must be an integral aspect of any psychological research. Cultural, ethical, gender, and methodological considerations should be addressed throughout course delivery in an integrated manner rather than as ‘add-ons’ if the candidate is to develop a thorough grasp of the discipline of psychology.

Preparation for answering questions on the cognitive perspective seems to require more explicit focus on the acquisition, reproduction, storage and transformation of information and the effect this processing has on human behaviours.

As mentioned in previous subject reports, fully prepared candidates should understand the meaning and the requirements of command terms as listed on pages 67 to 69 of the *psychology guide*. This may be addressed initially as a group exercise, then by candidates working in pairs and finally individually, through writing essay plans which focus on addressing the requirements of a question as set.

Time spent reading all the questions on the paper is well spent, in order to ensure adequate knowledge and understanding of each part of a question. It is obvious in the imbalance in marks awarded where a candidate has plunged into answering a question on the basis of knowledge of part a) without considering the requirements for part b).

Higher and standard level paper two

Higher level

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 4	5 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 18	19 – 23	24 – 29	30 – 40

Standard level

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 2	3 – 4	5 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 11	12 – 14	15 – 20

General comments

The most popular options on this session's exams were the Psychology of Dysfunctional Behaviour, Psychodynamic Psychology and Social Psychology. Health and Lifespan Psychology were in the middle group, while very few candidates answered questions from Comparative or Cultural Psychology.

There was evidence of good understanding of options in a pleasing proportion of centres, as reflected by candidates' performance, with clear descriptive knowledge of theories, description and assessment of empirical evidence and the inclusion of relevant evaluative comments. Overall, the performance level presented in most scripts reflected good knowledge of options with more emphasis on description than analysis and evaluation.

The areas of the programme and examination that appeared difficult for the candidates

While most candidates appeared to be rather knowledgeable in the general areas of each option, responses earning marks in the low to middle bands found it difficult to communicate this knowledge in a way that helped to precisely answer the question. These difficulties were characterized by overly descriptive answers where candidates tried to write everything they knew about a topic or option rather than tailoring their response to include only the most relevant bits in support of their argument. There is much room for improvement in learning how to directly answer the questions by being more selective with the information that is communicated in the responses. This is not to say that breadth is preferred to depth or vice versa, but rather that focused responses generally earn higher marks than imprecise, all encompassing or disorganized content.

In some centres candidates still chose options for which they were not prepared.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Content knowledge demonstrated by many candidates was rather thorough and accurate. The vast majority of candidates were able to support their responses with psychological evidence by citing either research studies and/or theories that were generally appropriate to each question.

Responses to questions from the Health, Dysfunctional and Social Psychology options earned the highest marks with candidates appearing to be well prepared to answer the questions set for this exam. Surprisingly, Psychodynamic Psychology had one of the lowest means. This seems to be principally due to poor performance on question 17. Additional explanation can be found below in the next section of this report.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Comparative Psychology

Question 1 *Describe and evaluate **two** research methods that are used in comparative psychology.* [20 marks]

This question was only attempted by a few candidates. The responses tended to be rather general and descriptive as opposed to being focused to some of the unique aspects of research methods within the field of comparative psychology. Some candidates did refer to ethical or philosophical viewpoints on the validity of applying findings from research on non-human animals to the behaviour of humans, however these points were not well developed.

Question 2 a) *Analyse the predictive accuracy of **one** theory when applied to the individual behaviour of humans.* [10 marks]

b) *Analyse the predictive accuracy of **one** theory when applied to the individual behaviour of non - human animals.* [10 marks]

This question was rarely attempted by candidates. Those who did respond gave broad generalizations of the continuum of behaviour between non-humans and humans and often failed to make a point about using comparative theory to predict behaviour.

Question 3 *Consider ways of*

a) *inter - species communication in non - human animals.* [10 marks]

b) *intra - species communication in non - human animals.* [10 marks]

This question was not attempted by candidates.

Cultural psychology

Only a small number of candidates made attempts to answer questions from this option. Unfortunately in most cases these answers reflected common-sense knowledge of the option.

Question 4 *Assess how differences in **two** cultural dimensions have an impact on human behaviour.* [20 marks]

A discussion of how cultural dimensions such as individualism-collectivism, power distance, and Confucian dynamism, among others, would have been appropriate in answering this question.

Question 5 a) *Describe **two** relevant studies **or** theories of cultural identity.* [12 marks]

b) *Evaluate the **two** studies **or** theories described in part a).* [8 marks]

Culture's impact on identity, self-concept and self-construal has been widely researched and theories on independent and interdependent cultural identity could have been used to answer this question.

Question 6 *Assess the extent to which methodological considerations have affected the interpretation of results of **two** empirical studies within cultural psychology.* [20 marks]

A range of studies have been carried out cross-culturally to investigate topics ranging from language acquisition to perception, communication and self-efficacy. Cross-cultural research faces many of the same challenges as single-culture research but with added issues such as translation difficulties, researcher bias and cultural awareness.

The psychology of dysfunctional behaviour

Question 7 a) *Describe **two** therapies or treatments for dysfunctional behaviour.* [12 marks]

b) *Evaluate these therapies or treatments.* [8 marks]

This question was the most frequently answered of all questions on Paper 2 and it attracted a number of well-prepared candidates who often wrote at length about different therapies and treatments. Accurate, detailed knowledge was presented by many candidates, most chose areas such as behaviour modification, rational emotive therapy and drug treatments. Evaluative commentary generally took the form of comparative analysis of the effectiveness and appropriateness of therapies or treatments. It should be noted that some candidates chose two therapies from the same general model (e.g., systematic desensitization and flooding) and were able to adequately answer this question. The treatments/therapies did not necessarily have to be from different models.

Question 8 *Explain how methodological considerations affect the interpretation of dysfunctional behaviour.* [20 marks]

Rather than approaching this question from a research methods angle as the question asks, candidates more frequently discussed therapeutic issues. Research into dysfunctional behaviour has taken many forms, from experimental research of Rosenhan to case studies of culture-bound syndromes.

- Question 9** a) *Describe **one** classificatory system of dysfunctional behaviour. [12 marks]*
- b) *Evaluate the effectiveness of this classificatory system. [8 marks]*

This was a very popular question, candidates were well informed and produced comprehensive descriptions. The DSM was the most popular focus. Many candidates had strong and detailed understanding of the DSM and were able to describe it at length. Evaluation was generally better than for previous examinations. Evaluation of effectiveness took many forms with many responses citing Szasz's criticisms and cross-cultural issues. Examiners were pleased to see that many answers presented clear arguments that were supported with appropriate empirical studies.

Health psychology

- Question 10** *Describe and evaluate the application of research findings and theories from health psychology. [20 marks]*

Responses to this question were very strong as candidates appropriately discussed how findings from research into areas such as stress and addiction have been applied to help improve health. High scoring responses coherently tied research to practical situations within health psychology.

- Question 11** *Analyse the predictive value of **one** theory when applied to an individual's health related behaviour. [20 marks]*

This question was the least popular within this option. While responses presented adequate knowledge of theories within the field, relatively few analysed how these findings could be used to predict and alter health related behaviour.

- Question 12** a) *Describe factors that are related to disordered patterns of eating. [8 marks]*
- b) *Compare **two** theories **or** studies related to disordered patterns of eating. [12 marks]*

Very few attempts were made at this question with midrange marks being most frequent. Basic description of eating disorders was common with few candidates fully discussing possible social, cognitive or cultural factors. Some responses did address the effect of the media and globalization on the prevalence of eating disorders in Asian cultures.

Lifespan psychology

- Question 13** a) *Describe **one** theory **or** study supporting the idea that human development continues throughout the lifespan. [12 marks]*
- b) *Evaluate the theory or study described in part a) [8 marks]*

A common element of weaker responses was to discuss theories or studies that focused solely on early development and its subsequent impact on adult behaviour rather than theories/studies of human development as it continues across the lifespan. Theories of childhood attachment were one such common approach that did not precisely answer this question. Stronger responses focused on theories such as Erikson's psychosocial stages of development.

Question 14 *Explain how cultural **or** gender considerations affect the interpretation of behaviour in lifespan psychology.* [20 marks]

Responses most often focused on gender development and identity rather than gender considerations or cultural issues that have affected theories or studies in lifespan psychology.

Question 15 *Beginnings of development have an irreversible lifelong impact. Discuss this statement using psychological research.* [20 marks]

Most candidates answering this question supported their discussion by citing the work of psychologists such as Ainsworth, Klein and Freud. Lower to mid-scoring responses were generally overly descriptive and did not demonstrate the skills required by the command term ‘discuss’.

Psychodynamic psychology

Question 16 *Discuss how cultural considerations affect the interpretation of behaviour in psychodynamic psychology.* [20 marks]

Responses tended to focus on the cultural conditions present during the development of Freudian theory, cultural practices, and eurocentrism. Very few discussed research into cultural differences in traditional psychodynamic theories, such as Malinowski or Ochse & Plug and how this research may have affected traditional psychodynamic theory.

Question 17 *Assess the role of both the unconscious and conscious mind in human behaviour.* [20 marks]

Candidates were well versed in Freudian views of the role of the unconscious, however relatively few adequately address neo- or non-Freudian standpoints on the role of the conscious mind in human behaviour. The vast majority of candidates gave overly descriptive answers fully detailing Freud’s theory of the structure of the mind and hydraulic theories. Although many answers reflected good descriptive knowledge in most cases only limited evaluation was present. A few candidates compared theories of the unconscious mind as viewed by both Freud and Jung, yet very few provided a balanced account with discussion of other theorists’ views of the conscious mind.

Question 18 *Compare and contrast the psychoanalytic explanation of **one** human behaviour (e.g. aggression, sex role development or moral development) with a neo-Freudian interpretation of the same behaviour.* [20 marks]

Responses were extremely detailed in the description of applications of two different psychodynamic theories to a particular behaviour. However, discussion of explicit similarities and differences between the two explanations was very limited. Most responses only included implicit comparison that did not allow them to earn marks in the higher ranges.

Social psychology

Question 19 *Using examples, describe and evaluate methodologies used in social psychology.* [20 marks]

There were two general approaches to this question in terms of organization of the responses. The more popular was to discuss particular examples of research in social psychology and then evaluate them. This approach was focusing on the examples and sometimes got a bit off track in discussing the detailed particulars of a specific study rather than the research methodology employed. The other approach tended to be organizing the essay around the specific research methods (e.g. controlled observational study) and then giving an appropriate example (e.g. Milgram's obedience studies). The latter approach tended to earn higher marks as candidates seemed to remain more focused on the demands of the question rather than getting bogged down in the details of one study.

Question 20 a) *Distinguish between prejudice and discrimination.* [4 marks]

b) *Consider the relationship between prejudice and discrimination.* [16 marks]

This question was quite popular as well and part (a) was done rather well with candidates making a clear distinction between prejudice and discrimination. Overall, responses to this question were quite strong as candidates had been well prepared on studies of prejudice and discrimination.

Question 21 *Using psychological research, describe and evaluate social psychological insights into independent behaviour.* [20 marks]

This question posed a challenge to candidates as most were unable to remain focused on the demands of the question – being independent behaviour rather than obedience or conformity. Most responses simply described studies by Asch, Milgram or Sherif without focusing or elaborating on the insights these and subsequent or variant studies gave us into understanding independent behaviour.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

While content knowledge of most candidates was moderate to excellent, the distinguishing factor for the strongest responses was the candidate's ability to use their content knowledge to specifically answer the question. Rather than writing everything known about a general topic, highest marks went to responses that were more selective in what was written and always thoroughly justified why a specific study or theory was included in the response. That is, candidates explained how a particular bit of psychological knowledge related to the question. This was often aided by using the terms from the question throughout the response in order to remain focused.

Evaluative skills are becoming stronger each session with candidates now being very comfortable in providing a more well-rounded discussion of the question at hand. Candidates should work towards being able not only to cite considerations that affect certain theories or studies but to also demonstrate their understanding as to the implications of such evaluative commentary on the original work. The framework for evaluation provided by cultural, ethical, gender or methodological considerations can also be aided by providing alternative explanations that provide another viewpoint or fill in the gaps or weaknesses of traditional or other theories and studies. Arranging debates on certain issues within psychology or organizing group assignments in which students present critical commentaries of empirical research are possible activities that can encourage critical thought.

There are still some centres where candidates choose from all options. Teachers need to make absolutely clear to candidates which options they are prepared for.

Candidates should be familiar with the precise meaning of the command terms on pages 67-69 of the *Psychology guide*.

Higher level paper three

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 16	17 – 19	20 – 30

General comments

Many centres showed an improvement in standards compared with previous years. Given the 19% increase in the percentage of candidates taking the paper and the number of new schools and teachers, this was a most welcome trend. Candidates allocated their time for each question in an exemplary fashion and usually focused consistently on the questions that were set. Caution needs to be exercised in the manner that specific terms are used since there is no automatic transfer of the meaning of terms between qualitative research and those same terms applied in a more quantitative approach to psychological investigations.

The areas of the programme and examination that appeared difficult for the candidates

It was evident from candidates' writing that few have practical experience of qualitative research. Yet even a brief relevant application would bring substantial benefits to candidates and would enable them to understand the decisions that must be made when engaging in practical research. For example the type of sampling used for interviewing or survey purposes has an important influence on the ability to generalise from findings of the investigation. Although candidates may be told about theories related to research, their ability to understand is a function of how they perceive the reality of the research process itself. That perception is much more likely to be an accurate reflection of reality if the experience is first hand. In this respect at least, qualitative research has a similar solution to the experimental method in the way that candidates are best able to comprehend and learn about its underlying processes.

Several candidates were insufficiently familiar with ethical considerations used in psychological research to produce a coherent response to a question related to the care required for interviews. The uses of small scale surveys were sometimes unknown and the techniques of useful sampling needed for such surveys gave rise to occasional inadequate suggestions. The application of a semi-interquartile range did not appear to have been considered by some candidates and some strange circumstances were described for its use that would have been entirely inappropriate and misleading.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Candidates were generally well aware of the interviewing process and the ethical considerations that should be observed when conducting research along these lines. They also knew about random sampling as a technique and how a relevant target population should be identified. Their knowledge of standard deviation as a concept was usually good and its usage was well known

- Question 3**
- a) *Define the following terms (diagrams may be used)*
- *Standard deviation*
 - *Semi-interquartile range* [6 marks]
- b) *Explain the circumstances in which the standard deviation and the semi-interquartile range are likely to be applied.* [4 marks]

Standard deviation was well known although at times either the definitions offered were incomplete or the diagrams were inappropriate or incorrect. The use of diagrams was generally far more beneficial for candidates to use since they were better able to explain how the spread of scores operated when a normal curve was employed. Regrettably the semi-interquartile range was less well known and although there were times when inter-quartile range was understood, the relatively simple application of the term ‘semi’ was either not known or ignored. Those candidates that employed diagrams generally were more successful in their definitions.

In keeping with part a) the circumstances for using the standard deviation were well described although occasional attempts to incorporate the concept of outliers were usually misplaced. The semi-interquartile range is better equipped to deal with outliers since their actual numerical value has less effect on the results. Few candidates were aware of the effect of nominal, ordinal, interval or ratio scales in relation to this question.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

There is no doubt that understanding the issues implicit in qualitative research is much more difficult if candidates have to learn entirely by theory rather than by application. A relatively simple application could be accomplished, mainly in the student’s own time. This might, for example, take the form of devising appropriate questions, conducting an interview that was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed on to hard copy by the candidate. The transcript could then be subjected to a simple thematic content analysis.

An alternative would be to arrange for a verbal protocol to be recorded, providing that safety considerations were paramount.

It is clear from candidates’ answers that actual knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and its processes are often lacking and that common sense of itself is insufficient for the task of answering the set examination questions. Complex reasoning is frequently involved and candidates need to make fine distinctions between different value judgments where there is no single right answer but where interpretation really does matter.