PSYCHOLOGY

Paper 9990/12

Paper 1 Approaches, Issues and Debates

Key messages

Candidates need to know all components of the study as listed in the syllabus. Questions can be asked about any part of a study. This is also the same for approaches where a candidate needs to know how each type of psychologist would try to explain behaviour.

Candidates need to read the whole question carefully to ensure that their responses are fulfilling the demands of each one. For example, the question may require data or a named issue to be included. To achieve full marks these need to be correctly present in their responses. The essay (final question) requires four evaluation points to be in depth (two strengths and two weaknesses) with at least one of these about the named issue.

General comments

The marks achieved by the candidates sitting this examination covered a wide spread of possible marks. Some candidates provided a range of excellent answers to many of the questions and could explain psychological terminology well, providing evidence that they were prepared for the examination. There were very few blank answers.

Stronger overall responses followed the demands of each question with explicit use of psychological terminology and logical, well planned answers in evidence. Appropriate examples were used from studies when the question required it and there was evidence of candidates being able to apply their knowledge of studies to novel situations, for example, writing about one similarity and one difference between two studies. This was also somewhat evident for the questions about real-life application.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) Many candidates were able to identify the correct technique of an EEG. Some candidates mentioned techniques not used in the Dement and Kleitman study but that had been used in other core studies.

(b) Popular correct responses noted that the technique was objective, scientific, produced quantitative data or allowed the researchers to know which phase of sleep the participant was in.

(c) Stronger responses could clearly describe one of the dreams from the Dement and Kleitman study. The most popular choice was the basketball dream with responses tending to spell out the vertical eye movements. Reponses that failed to gain credit including dreams not reported in the study itself and those that produced *horizontal* eye movements.

Question 2

(a) Stronger responses could identify two features of the sample from the Bandura study. Popular choice were the age and sex of the participants. However, there were responses that described the behavioural characteristics of the sample including that they were matched for aggression levels by their teachers. This example is not a feature of the sample. A feature refers to a *demographic* aspect of the sample like age range or location.

(b) A wide variety of responses was seen for this question. Creditworthy responses ranged from adults using the findings to restrict the amount of violent TV a child should watch, to explaining why adults may be aggressive now due to their childhood role models. Weaker responses tended to give findings of Bandura and not state the real-life application or apply the findings to children directly without addressing what an adult could do with the knowledge of the findings. Stronger responses explicitly stated how the findings or part of the procedure could be used by an adult to change behaviour for the better.

Question 3

(a) Stronger responses provided a correct result for Alex the parrot either for all trials or first-trial-only in terms of success rates. Many responses were not able to provide data to back up their chosen result, as was specified in the question. Some responses gave an incorrect result of Alex performing better with familiar objects which was not the case.

(b) Very strong responses to this question tended to focus on the Alex being able to show symbolic comprehension of the concept of same/different. There were some brief responses that covered aspects like knowing he understood same/different. There were also responses that gave another result (different to what was asked for in **3(a)**) that could not gain credit as the question required a conclusion.

Question 4

Stronger responses directly answered the question about *ethical issues*. These responses argued whether the guideline had been broken and then suggested *why* this could have been an issue for any of the participants. Many responses just simply stated, quite correctly, that both guidelines had been broken but then did not explain why this could have been an issue. These received partial credit.

Question 5

(a) Candidates can improve their answers to questions like this by focusing on the term or concept that is named in the question. In this case it was false memory. Weaker responses gave a brief definition of a false memory then wrote about what Laney did in the study. Questions about the background to the study require candidates to know the key concept/psychology that is being investigated in this study *without* any context to that study. Some excellent responses could clearly define what a false memory is and the psychological procedures involved in the formation of them.

(b) Many candidates could choose an appropriate result from the Laney study to show how a false memory for asparagus had been formed. Popular results were taken from the Food Preferences Questionnaire and the Food History Inventory showing changes pre- and post-manipulation.

Question 6

(a) Many candidates were able to begin their response from the point outlined in the question (returning three weeks later). Stronger responses clearly demonstrated knowledge of the procedure including an unexpected recognition test, use of foils and a rating scale for level of 'familiarity'. Candidates can improve on this type of question by only answering about the procedure and *not* the results and/or conclusion. The procedure has a focus on what the participant actually experienced in the study to be able to produce the results. Weaker responses focused on the results rather than the procedure itself.

(b) Many candidates could identify one reason why standardisation is important. Very strong responses clearly identified a reason, explained why this reason was important and then chose an appropriate example from the study to gain maximum marks. Some responses were generic about the benefits of standardisation without any explicit link to Canli which was a requirement of the question. Popular answers were about reliability and validity.

Question 7

(a) Candidates need to understand what a social psychologist would believe in. Whilst stronger answers could identify the role that groups and social context has on our behaviour, these were in the minority of answers. Many responses were simplistic and sometimes tautological.

(b) Candidates need to be able to apply aspects of a study to real-life behaviour and this was only sometimes evident for this question. The stronger responses could identify how the prods or the clothes worn by the experimenter might be *useful* for military personnel *and then* explain why or how it could be utilised in training. Weaker responses tended to state that the military can simply replicate what Milgram did without any explanation as to which aspects might be the most useful.

(c) There were a range of real-world applications covered in responses to this question. Examples included developing whistle-blowing policies in jobs where obedience can lead to serious problems (e.g. doctors and health care), potentially explaining examples of genocide due to destructive orders and making teachers wear a uniform to show authority and increase obedience in students.

Questions 8

(a) (i/ii) Candidates need to know how psychologists collect their data, including what questions are asked to participants throughout the core studies. There was limited evidence for this in responses to this question. Stronger responses could give one question about mood and one question about physical condition along with the response categories the participants could choose from. Many candidates provided their own questions based around concepts that were measured in the Schachter and Singer study but without any response categories.

(b) Many very strong responses contained a well thought through comparison of two biological approach studies. Analysis in these responses was detailed where the answer identified a similarity/difference, described what it was and then used *both* studies in depth to show *why* it as a similarity/difference. Other responses produced some brief attempt to compare or made no explicit explanation in terms of a similarity or difference to gain partial credit. The stronger responses often produced a sophisticated comparison for both the similarity and difference with evidence of a logical and coherent explanation of a component of the study (e.g. the sample or both were testing emotional responses in participants) that showed the examiner *why* it was an important similarity/difference.

Question 9

The strongest responses evaluated the Saavedra and Silverman study in depth and in terms of two strengths and two weaknesses with at least one of these points covering the named issue of ethics. Common choices included generalisability, the collection if valid in-depth data issues surrounding potential psychological harm. Candidates need to ensure that they follow the demands of the question, covering two strengths and two weaknesses all in equal depth. Some responses did cover the four evaluation points but were brief or did not use the Saavedra and Silverman study as examples, which meant the response scored in the lower bands. Other responses included three evaluation points that were thorough, logical and well argued with a fourth point that was brief which meant the response did not reach the top band in the main. Candidates need to know that description of the study does not gain credit in this question, which requires evaluation.

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Paper 9990/22
Paper 2 Research Methods

Key messages

- The responses overall showed a good level of knowledge and understanding, both of the studies and of research methods in general. Many answers showed a good grasp of the terminology of research methods which is important as it underpins so much of psychological knowledge.
- Some of the research methods concepts in the syllabus are skills based and some responses suggested that these skills need developing. Many questions require an answer which is linked to the question stem, for which a specific rather than a generic answer is required. This is another skill which was very evident in some responses but in others needed developing.

General comments

Many responses offered accurate explanations and use of concepts such as question types and data types. In other areas, such as in writing hypotheses, many responses suggested that further development of this skill is needed. Responses to the final question on the paper, about designing a study, often approached the task in a clear, structured way. Others focused only on one aspect of the study so could earn limited marks.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) Typical responses to this question part gained partial marks or no marks. One reason was that the question asked for a directional hypothesis and many answers gave non-directional hypotheses which could not be credited. For example, candidates wrote responses such as 'The mood of the stooge will have an effect on the interpretation of arousal'. Such responses needed to indicate the direction of this effect. Of the responses giving a directional hypothesis, some operationalised one variable, but few operationalised both.

Hypothesis writing is a skill and uses applied knowledge rather than being dependent on the recall of a fact or the application of a fact.

(b) There were many more correct responses to this question part than to part **(a)**. However, a small number of answers attempted to create a null hypothesis by reversing causality, saying the stooges mood was (or was not) affected by the participant. Although the majority of good responses used 'There will be no difference between …' to start the null hypothesis, there were other good responses, such as 'Any effect on interpretation of arousal level after exposure to stooges in different moods is due to chance'. However, neither approach is necessarily better, what matters is getting the relationship, or otherwise, between the variables properly expressed, for example including both the IV and the DV. A typical weaker response that scored zero was 'There will be a difference between arousal and the stooge'.

Question 2

(a) Responses to this question part were typically good, although were more likely to contain better attempts to define sample than population. Better answers defined 'population' in general terms, such as a group of people with something in common (such as living in the same place or doing the same job).

(b) Answers to this question were good, with a wide range of appropriate answers. A very small proportion of responses suggested that the question had been misunderstood, and made reference to the sampling method or the advertisement.

Question 3

(a) This question was answered correctly in the majority of responses. However, many responses were much longer than required, including either description or examples, which are not required when the command word in the question is 'Name'.

(b) The question specified one advantage of responses, so responses that explained two advantages had the best answer credited, and were unlikely to earn full credit as neither advantage was detailed. Some responses relating to random sampling were purely descriptive, making points such as 'Everyone has an equal chance of being selected'. Of itself, this statement simply describes what random sampling is, the *advantage* is the effect this has on how representative the sample is.

Question 4

(a) (i) Many responses to this question earned the mark, showing a sound understanding of the type of data gathered.

(ii) There were many excellent responses to this question, with most including reference to a numerical or rating scale and the number of points on the scale.

(b) There were some excellent responses to this question, with some earning the second point with detail and others with explicit, descriptive links to the study.

Question 5

(a) Most responses identified one of the control conditions, and gave an appropriately brief response. However, a significant minority of responses referred instead to a controlled *variable*. Such responses often incorrectly referred to the provision of a glossary for all participants.

(b) A common error here was to simply state the independent variable instead of giving a reason, for example 'The two groups had the same IQ'. To provide an answer the response needed to go on to say '… so that any differences between the groups could not have been due to intelligence but were more likely to be caused by ASD'.

A less common issue was with very limited responses, such as answers that simply stated a term, for example 'To make it more valid'.

Question 6

Many responses were unable to identify the main difference between field and natural experiments, namely whether the IV can be manipulated by the researcher or not. Where this distinction was made correctly, high marks were typically gained. Better responses also tended to include more examples, including ones that the candidate had made up to illustrate a point, such as 'Investigating how the weather affects students by measuring classroom work on sunny and rainy days' as an example for a natural experiment. Examples, whether from actual experiments, such as Piliavin et al. for the field experiment, or made up ones, were essential to answering the question fully. Examples did not need to be from a core study in order to be creditable responses. However, the examples did need to be psychological ones, some responses referred to examples of experiments on plants, which could not be credited. When psychological examples are given they need to be described in sufficient detail, just stating a reference is not sufficient to demonstrate understanding.

One of the barriers to answering this question well appeared to be an inability to identify the independent variable in an experiment and therefore to determine whether or not it had been artificially manipulated.

Finally, there was a tendency for responses to include the idea that field experiments and/or natural experiments had *no* controls. This is not the case in either instance. Both can employ controls of some variables, but this is limited in both cases, typically (but not necessarily) more so in natural experiments.

Question 7

(a) Most candidates answered this question correctly.

(b) Limited responses tended to say that scans were done by machines or were scientific, without expansion. The suggestion of why this made them more reliable needed to follow, and better responses included this, such as 'so there was no human error' or 'so there was no subjectivity/bias'.

(c) Although there were many good, and often simple, suggestions that earned the mark here, a significant minority of responses offered an alternative way to collect data that would give a quantitative score, which could not be credited, as it did not answer the question set.

(d) Although there were responses that recognised that the study was a correlation and therefore causal conclusions could not be drawn, some did not link this knowledge to an explanation. In addition, there were many incorrect responses from which this critical knowledge was missing.

(e) There were many good responses to this question. Some very good answers related to the distress that disclosure of private information might produce and some of these included examples, which were creditworthy.

Some weak responses did not address the words 'in terms of ethics' in the question, and the hint in the stem about the study possibly being unethical. Instead, they offered practical reasons why it was better, which could not be credited.

Question 8

(a) This question was generally very well answered. In a minority of responses open questions were essentially defined as 'not a fixed choice', which only indicates what they are *not* rather than what they *are*, so was insufficient for credit. For closed questions, just saying 'Questions answered with a yes or no' is insufficient as it needs to be clear that there can be a range of fixed choices in different questions.

(b) There were mainly good responses for open questions although occasionally the questions answered could only be answered with limited choices, so were actually incomplete closed questions. For example, 'Are you comfortable helping people at night?' could simply lead to yes/no answers.

(c) Although there were many excellent responses to this question, a frequent error was to give a generic idea, such as 'people are not restricted by options'. To improve these, specific detail related to Hugo's study was needed.

(d) Although there was a small number of excellent, detailed answers that were worth three marks, many were too basic and generic, for example being limited to a definition of validity. Another problem was that some responses included two suggestions whereas the question specifically required one, so only one could gain credit. A final problem was that many responses showed a misunderstanding of the difference between demand characteristics (features of a study that suggest the aims to participants) and social desirability bias (a response of participants to their beliefs about the social context of questions (for example in interviews or questionnaires) which causes them to give more socially acceptable responses than are actually true for them.

Question 9

(a) Although most responses earned credit, a common incorrect response was 'line graph'.

(b) There were many full mark responses to this question. Occasional incorrect responses labelled axes with the 'number of children' or 'hours being aggressive'.

(c) The most common response as the 'range', although 'standard deviation' was also given. A very common incorrect response was to give a measure of central tendency, such as the 'mean'.

(d) (i) There was much confusion with responses to this question, suggesting that the question stem had not been read. This illustrates the importance of reading the whole question.

(ii) As with **9(d)(i)**, there was confusion with this. The responses typically included appropriate descriptions for the measure of spread given in **9(d)(i)**, suggesting better recall of statistical procedures than for identifying types of data and matching them to appropriate measures of central tendency.

Question 10

(a) Many responses showed a clear structure which led to covering many of the required aspects of research design. Others focused only on one aspect of the study so could earn limited marks.

Responses typically tended to focus on the 'natural situation' rather than on the nature of the IV, so the examples given in an attempt to explain were often not of possible experimental manipulating but on locations.

Another problem was that controls were rarely given. When they were specific attempts to state a control, this was often confused with a control group or condition. Furthermore, there was a tendency to include ideas that are not required for designing a study, such as about the aims or hypotheses (since the study is based on these, i.e. they are decided and the study develops from this starting point).

(b) Some good responses identified relevant participant variables (e.g. mood, personality) and gained two marks for detail, i.e. explaining why this could be problematic. They then partly identified a solution, e.g. measuring mood or personality, but did not go further with this information. To complete the answer, such responses need to continue to explain how this could be used, e.g. to use the information about mood or personality to divide the participants equally between conditions according to this variable in order to control for its effects.

Finally, some weaker responses ignored the reference to 'procedure' and gave a weakness of doing a lab experiment.

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Paper 9990/32
Paper 3 Specialist Options: Theory

Key messages

Questions 1(a), 3(a), 5(a) and 7(a)

It is important that candidates are made aware of the terminology identified in the syllabus as well as key terms used in named theories and studies, as some were unable to identify and/or define the terms given in these type of questions. Revision of terminology using flash cards could prove useful. Where the response gave an example to help define the term this often achieved full marks. These questions are worth two marks and a brief response is appropriate; some overwrote for this question which meant they had less time available for questions that were worth more marks.

Questions 1(b), 3(b), 5(b) and 7(b)

These questions either asked the candidates to describe a part of one of the named studies from the syllabus or a summary of the key features of the study. The question could also ask the candidate to describe a theory or technique used by psychologists that is named in the syllabus or identified in one of the studies or theories named in the syllabus. This question is worth four marks and the candidates should write a more extended answer.

Questions 1(c), 3(c), 5(c) and 7(c)

These questions required the candidate to explain strengths and/or weaknesses of what they have described in part **(b)**, or to make a comparison, and may require candidates to evaluate using a specific issue. This question is worth six marks so the candidate should write a more extended answer for each point made. Some responses were very detailed for one point but then only briefly discussed the second point, which limited credit.

Questions 2(a), 4(a), 6(a) and 8(a)

This question requires description of specific content from the syllabus. Candidates should describe the three or four studies, theories or techniques identified in the syllabus under the appropriate bullet point. For this examination, some of the answers did not cover the studies/theories under the bullet point or covered different parts of the syllabus content that did not answer the question set. It is also important that the descriptions are given in the context of the specialist option, e.g. Psychology and Organisations. For example, when a general theory is given it must be linked to the topic area, e.g. for **Question 8(a)** on leadership styles the response should link the various leadership styles to organisations, and not other types of groups that might have leaders such as the military. Many of the responses for this question were quite brief.

Questions 2(b), 4(b), 6(b) and 8(b)

This question requires the candidate to evaluate the theories and/or studies described in part **(a)** of the question. There will also be a named issue that the candidate must discuss in their response. Ideally, the candidate should discuss a number of issues in order to be considered to have presented a range of issues. In their response, the candidate must provide some form of analysis. This could be done by discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the issue being considered, presenting a counter-argument to the issue under discussion or comparing the issue between two studies and/or theories. A conclusion at the end of each issue would be helpful in order to show understanding of the issue under discussion. In order to achieve the requirements of the Level 4 band descriptor it is recommended that responses are structured by issue rather than by study and/or theory. It is also recommended that the response start with the main issue to make sure that the answer covers this requirement of the question.

Many of the responses either covered just the named issue and no other or covered other issues rather than the one named in the question. Quite a few of the answers were structured by study/theory rather than by the issue which often led response to be quite superficial and repetitive. Very few answers provided sufficient analysis.

General comments

There was a very small entry for this first sitting of the 9990 syllabus. Some responses were strong and provided some thorough details of studies and theories as well as being able to evaluate their descriptions in some depth.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) Many responses achieved full marks for this question and gave a detailed explanation of what is meant by 'learned helplessness'. The best answers explained that learned helplessness develops from negative experiences and this then leads to a sense of helplessness in similar situations in the future. Some responses were very brief, whereas others were overwritten for this question.

(b) This question was fairly well answered in the majority of responses. Most were able to achieve some credit for providing some correct information about the Beck depression inventory (BDI). Many knew there were 21 items on it and the scoring system used, as well as giving a description of what the scores meant in terms of the severity of depression. Some responses incorrectly stated the wrong scoring system (e.g. 1–10) or gave a confused or muddled answer with few correct details about the BDI.

(c) Almost all answers gave at least one valid strength of the BDI and all attempted the requirement of two strengths. Popular responses included the fact that quantitative data was used and this meant comparisons could be made at a future date with a depressed person to see if their depression had changed. Many answers gave three or four strengths and were credited with the best two. These achieved fewer marks overall.

Question 2

(a) Most answers were able to provide description from the relevant points on the syllabus (biomedical, cognitive and behavioural, and psychodynamic explanations of OCD). There were a few detailed, accurate and coherent responses with many references to appropriate terminology which also referred to how the approaches explain the development and maintenance of OCD. Many responses achieved in the lower levels due to giving either very brief answers or answers where the different approaches to OCD were mixed together. Candidates should be aware this question is worth eight marks and attempt to include an appropriate amount of information (including specific details of the approach).

(b) The responses were mainly weak with most achieving either Level 1 or Level 2. The answers did include reference to the nature versus nurture debate as applied to the explanations of OCD. The vast majority of answers only referred to this issue and therefore their response could not be considered to be detailed with a range of issues covered. Responses that only considered the named issue could not achieve more than four marks.

Most answers had evidence to support their discussion about nature versus nurture, although this was often very brief. Many responses did not include any analysis and did not consider strengths and/or weaknesses of the issue, provide any counterargument or a comparison between the different explanations in terms of the issue under discussion. Without this analysis, these answers could only achieve Level 2 maximum. As often just one issue was discussed, the responses were normally in the Level 1 band even if the discussion hinted at some analysis.

Question 3, 4

There were too few candidates to be able to produce a meaningful report for these questions.

Question 5

(a) Responses for the question were very good and many achieved full marks. Most were able to identify the three phases the body goes through when responding to stress. A few of the answers were quite brief and achieved limited credit as a result.

(b) This was fairly well answered in the majority of responses. Most were able to achieve limited credit for providing some correct information about a questionnaire that measures stress. All responses described the Holmes Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS). Many gave examples of life events and were able to explain what the scores meant in terms of stress levels. Some answers incorrectly stated that the person completing the questionnaire rated their life events on a 0–100 scale, but this was done beforehand by the creators of the questionnaire. Better responses were able to explain that the person just selected the life events that had happened to them and that the data produced is quantitative.

(c) Almost all answers gave at least one correct comparison point between a physiological and a psychological measure of stress. Most responses mentioned that both collect quantitative data as the similarity between the two measurements. Most responses did not give a difference or gave an incorrect difference (e.g. stating that the SRRS collects qualitative data). Correct differences could include the objectivity of the data and demand characteristics.

Question 6

(a) Most answers were able to provide description from the relevant points on the syllabus (medical techniques, psychological techniques and alternative techniques for managing and controlling pain).There were a few detailed, accurate and coherent responses with many references to appropriate terminology and details of the pain management technique. Many responses achieved in the lower levels due to being very brief. Candidates should be aware this question is worth eight marks and attempt to include an appropriate amount of information (including specific details of the pain management technique).

(b) The responses were mainly weak with most achieving either Level 1 or Level 2. The answers did not include specific reference to practical applications of the pain management techniques, although many answers did refer to issues with applications in their response. Popular discussion points included reference to effectiveness, side effects and cost. Most responses were very brief.

Many responses did not include any analysis and did not consider strengths and/or weaknesses of the issue, provide any counterargument or a comparison between the different pain management techniques in terms of the issue under discussion. Without this analysis, these answers could only achieve Level 2 maximum. As often just one issue was discussed, the responses were normally in the Level 1 band, even if the discussion hinted at some analysis.

Question 7

(a) Some of the responses given for this question achieved full marks and the answers were able to explain that the changes in shift rotation take place after a longer period of time. Some of the responses were muddled.

(b) This was not well answered in the majority of responses with most achieving limited credit for providing a brief summary of the findings of the Fox et al. study. A few were able to give some detailed results but most provided some of the conclusions of the study rather than findings.

(c) Almost all answers gave at least one correct strength or weakness of the Fox et al. study and could explain why this was a strength or a weakness with a brief example from the study or an extended comment. Popular responses included that the study had good ecological validity but lacked qualitative data (other than anecdotal evidence) to show why the token economy was effective. Some made more than two points but these were all very brief and the answer was credited with the best two. These achieved fewer marks overall. To improve, responses need to give a strength and a weakness and explain why this is a strength or a weakness with a specific example from the study.

Question 8

(a) Most answers were able to provide description from the relevant points on the syllabus (leadership style: effectiveness, situational leadership and styles of leader behaviour). There were some detailed, accurate and coherent responses with many references to appropriate terminology and the leadership styles described by the psychologists named in the syllabus. Most of the responses achieved in the lower levels due to giving either very brief answers or answers where the theories of leadership such as the universalist leader were described. Some of these responses achieved marks as the candidates could briefly link the type of leader to the style that this type of leader might adopt within the organisation. References to the theory about leaders being born and not made were not creditable for this question, as this is an explanation of why a person may become a leader rather than a leadership style. Responses should focus on the bullet point that the question covers, rather than using other information from the syllabus which risks not answering the question set. Candidates should be aware this question is worth eight marks and attempt to include an appropriate amount of information (including specific details of the approach).

(b) The responses were mainly not well answered with most achieving either Level 1 or Level 2. The answers often included brief reference to cultural bias and some showed some understanding of how the theories about leadership styles might have a Western bias. Some responses also considered what types of leaders might be appropriate in non-Western cultures and these responses achieved some credit. Most responses just focused on cultural bias without any reference to any other issue that could be applied to leadership styles such as effectiveness, determinism, comparison of theories, etc. Some of the responses just gave a description of leadership styles and how these might apply to different organisations. These responses achieved in the Level 1 mark band, as they showed some understanding of the application of leadership styles within organisations.

Most responses did not include any analysis and did not consider strengths and/or weaknesses of the issue, provide any counterargument or a comparison between the different leadership styles in terms of the issue under discussion. Without this analysis, these answers could only achieve level 2 maximum. As often just one issue was discussed the responses was normally in the level 1 band even if the discussion hinted at some analysis.

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Paper 9990/42
Paper 4 Specialist Options: Application

Key messages

- What has been learned from the AS Level component of the syllabus should be transferred to the A Level components. For example, at AS Level, candidates learn about methodology, such as experiments, which also apply to A Level.
- Questions should be read carefully ensuring that the focus is on what the question asks (see **Questions 1(a)** and **1(b)**).
- All components of the question should be included in answers. For example, question part **(d)** for **Questions 1**, **2**, **3** and **4** required advantages and disadvantages (plurals) *and* a conclusion.
- In ***Section B***, **Questions 5**, **6**, **7** and **8**, methodological knowledge must be evident and detailed for top marks to be accessed. The procedure, however detailed, is just one methodological aspect. Methodology must be explained in sufficient detail, rather than merely identified (see **Questions 5(a)** and **8(a)**).
- In ***Section C***, **Questions 9**, **10**, **11** and **12**, answers must include a debate which has two sides: strengths/advantages and weaknesses/disadvantages. Supporting evidence should also be provided.
- Psychological knowledge should be applied wherever possible. Anecdotal and common sense answers will not achieve top marks.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) Many answers could not be credited because the question was not answered specifically, instead general comments were made that were vague. The question asked for an outline of the psychoanalytic explanation of phobias and, rather than referring to the id, ego and superego, answers were about the stages of psychosexual development or about little Hans. Whilst little Hans can be used as an example to support the psychoanalytic explanation, a description of only little Hans scored no marks.

(b) Those who did not know the psychoanalytic explanation of phobias struggled to answer this question part, often giving limitations of the study of little Hans which did not answer the question set. A simple limitation, offered in some answers, was that the psychoanalytic explanation has no evidence that the id, ego or superego exist.

(c) Often full and detailed answers were written in response to this question part. The Behaviourist classical conditioning explanation featured, with candidates focusing on Watson and his study of little Albert. Strong answers demonstrated specific knowledge of UCS, UCR, etc. that was used to explain how Albert's phobia was learned.

(d) Answers often scored full or nearly full marks. Most candidates included two advantages and two disadvantages and a conclusion in their answers, and nearly always scored full marks. Answers only including one advantage (or disadvantage) or not including a conclusion could not score full marks. A number of conclusions merely repeated what had already been written and such summaries scored no marks. A conclusion is a 'decision reached by reasoning' and as the reasoning had been done through the advantages and disadvantages, the decision/conclusion about case studies used to study phobias needed to be drawn.

Question 2, 3

There were too few candidates to be able to produce a meaningful report for these questions.

Question 4

(a) There were many successful answers this question. Answers that identified an ethical guideline, such as 'confidentiality', could not be credited without expansion, which was needed to make the point clear and to relate the point to the study.

(b) Many candidates correctly wrote about the calculation of a mean, for example, and that a bar chart could be drawn. Other candidates were not able to demonstrate understanding of data analysis. Some candidates wrote about using two judges to analyse the data, as is done for inter-rater reliability, but as a seven-point scale was used, the use of judges was inappropriate as there was nothing to judge.

(c) Some answers scored limited credit because of a lack of detail. Better answers mentioned the term 'test-retest', explained how this could be applied (such as repeating the same test two or three weeks later), and then explained how the two scores could be correlated to assess the level of agreement.

(d) Some candidates did not answer the question fully and were not able to score full marks. Some conclusions were very good, but others merely repeated what had already been written.

Section B

Answers to questions in this section should include an appropriate design, have applied a range (four or five) of relevant methodological design features, each of which is explained fully, with good understanding.

Question 5

(a) Answers to this question could include any appropriate method, the crucial component was that the design had to involve virtual reality (VR). Many answers used an experiment, comparing symptom assessment with virtual reality with a 'traditional' self-report clinical assessment. Many answers did not clearly show that this was an appropriate independent variable (IV). Similarly, many answers did not identify a dependent variable (DV) even through results were often mentioned. Some answers wrote about an experimental design, with better answers using repeated measures to control for participant variables. Some answers briefly stated 'I would use a repeated measures design' without elaboration. A lack of elaboration on terminology was a common feature; it is an essential component. An example of this is where an answer will refer to a 'sample of participants' without a mention of the sampling technique or the target population from which the sample is taken. Some answers used an interview following use of the VR procedure, but there was often no methodological detail of the type or what the interview involved.

(b) Many answers made no comment about why a particular method had been chosen. Better answers focused on one or two aspects explained in detail. For example, one answer explained that a repeated measures design had been used because it controlled participant variables and that it allowed a direct comparison of symptom assessment by a traditional clinical interview compared with VR for the same person. For the 'psychological' component of this answer, where knowledge of the topic area is shown, many answers described VR in general, whereas better answers focused on how VR can be used to assess symptoms, such as how a person with schizophrenia behaves in a specific social situation.

Question 6, 7

There were too few candidates to be able to produce a meaningful report for these questions.

Question 8

(a) This question required the design of a study using an interview, other methods did not answer the question set. Many answers stated 'I will conduct an interview' but needed to expand on this, scoring limited credit. To score high marks, answers must show methodological knowledge. For interviews, the type of interview should be stated; whether it is structured, unstructured or semi-structured. There should also be a mention of whether the interview will be face-to-face or whether it will be done by telephone. Any interview requires questions to be asked and so knowledge of questionnaires also applies: the type of question, an example of a question, how the question will be answered (type of rating scale), the number of questions and whether there will be an overall total (if closed questions). In addition to these specific features, general features of any method could also be included such as details of the sample, or type of data, for example.

(b) Relevant methodological knowledge here might be to explain why a structured interview was used with closed questions on a five-point scale (for example). This would be to gather quantitative data so each type of rotation can be compared numerically. Another possible explanation could be about the sampling technique, for example explaining how participants would need to be gathered from different types of rotation and why a random sample (for example) might be better than a self-selecting sample. Answers should also include some psychological knowledge which comes from the specific topic area in question. For example, job rotation might keep workers at the same level of responsibility whereas job enrichment involves increased responsibility. This would have an effect on job satisfaction levels. This knowledge would then explain why in part **(a)** particular questions were chosen to be asked in the interview.

Section C

There were many good answers to questions in this section, but there were also some weak responses. The main reason for this difference was examination technique. Answers in this section require a discussion which would involve a consideration of the arguments in support of the statement and the arguments against the statement. Following this a conclusion can then be made about the extent of agreement or disagreement. Examples from relevant research should be used to support the arguments for and against.

Question 9

The stronger responses were often balanced, including arguments both for and against, and were sometimes supported with relevant psychological evidence. Better answers also showed a knowledge of the study by Paul and Lentz (1977) and a few answers referred to biomedical treatments for schizophrenia. A small number of answers stated 'I agree with this statement' and then gave one or two anecdotal comments. Such answers scored very few marks because no psychological knowledge was evident. Some answers considered one or two psychologically informed arguments and scored more marks, but often these answers were imbalanced.

Question 10, 12

There were too few candidates to be able to produce a meaningful report for these questions.

Question 11

There were a number of very good answers in response to this question which used ample evidence to support both sides of the debate. Some answers considered a whole range of different methods of adherence before concluding which were more or less valid. Some of these answers lost sight of the question, which was specifically pill-counting, and needed to focus more closely on the question set.