

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel GCE Psychology
Paper 02 Understanding the Individual
(6PS02)

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Paper Introduction

This seemed to be an accessible paper on the whole with very few blank pages, and the vast majority of candidates seemed to have plenty of time to complete the whole paper. Issues include a lack of detail from the candidates when explaining their answers. Examiners cannot make any assumptions about what the candidates mean they can only mark what is written. Some evaluation still tends to be generic, especially when evaluating studies, and the points could apply to a variety of studies so do not show understanding of the particular study. There is also an issue with candidates stating something as though it were fact, when it is alleged, especially when it comes to evaluating studies that may be ethically controversial. Candidates are improving their answers on the scenarios often accurately linking the points they are making to the given scenario, though again lack of detail can hinder the candidates. Candidates are also improving on their ability to describe how to design a study from an unseen stimulus. The report that follows aims to point out good practices and common weaknesses that occurred throughout this paper to give guidance on how to answer questions in future series and avoid common mistakes.

Q10

Most candidates could correctly identify the two reasons for carrying out a chi square test. Errors were equally split between thinking it used ordinal data and was a repeated measures design.

There were very few candidates that failed to choose two answers.

Q11a

Candidates often did well with this being able to write a fully operationalised non-directional hypothesis. Those candidate that only gained one mark often did not operationalise the timings of the street cleaning. A small minority of candidates wrote either a directional hypothesis or a null hypothesis.

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Q11b

Many candidates could gain one mark for this by writing that the number of streets studied should be increased, but quite a few failed to gain another mark for explaining why this would make the sample more representative. Candidates often just said it would make the sample more representative, repeating what was in the question, so this was not credit worthy. The better candidates could either explain how it would make the sample more representative, or explain how they would increase the number of streets being studied. Some candidates wrote about increasing the sample in terms of people rather than areas of the town so did not gain any credit for this.

Q12a

Most candidates gained one or two marks for relating the horses' reins and blinkers to Hans' father's moustache and glasses, but only the best candidates could offer more than this to gain full marks. Candidates tended to either describe the Oedipus complex or interpret Hans' dreams which were not relevant to the question so could not gain credit.

Q12b

Most candidates were able to give some evaluative points about Freud's study of Little Hans that were well explained, and most candidates focussed on the validity of the study as the question asked. Very few gave a general evaluation of the study. Candidates often failed to achieve full marks for this question because they did not write enough. A common misconception was that Freud had never seen Little Hans.

Q13

There were very few candidates who wrote about a practical that was not from the learning approach.

a) The best candidates were able to access all three marks as they could accurately compare their observed value with their critical value and state what that meant in terms of the significance of their results. A lot of

candidates only gained two marks, as they included data, such as the number of time a behaviour was observed, but did not use their statistical test to explain whether there was a significant difference or not. Weaker candidates tended to not include any data and just included a statement about which group showed what behaviour.

bi) Most candidates were able to offer a way the reliability of their practical could be improved, with the most common response referring to a failure to accurately define the behaviours. Weaker candidates often did not write about how reliability could be improved, the most common mistake being how generalisability could be improved.

bii) Candidates could usually give a suitable improvement for the practical, but often failed to gain the second mark. The better candidates were able to gain the second mark by explaining how their improvement would make the study more reliable, or offering detail on how they would go about making the improvement. A minority of candidates offered an improvement that did not match their answer for bi) so they could not gain any credit for their answer.

Q14

Most candidates could gain two of the four marks, often for the first two answers. The most common mistakes were putting positive reinforcement instead of vicarious reinforcement, and getting the last gap incorrect with a variety of answers.

Q15a

The most common key issues were is autism an extreme male brain condition and Are transgender operations ethical. There were some other key issues that had been taken from their second year of studying, such as the biological basis of schizophrenia or are criminal born or made, and these could receive credit. The better candidates could correctly identify an issue, and then go on to describe the issue. Weaker candidates would often fail to identify an issue, e.g. just state transgender operations. Some candidates went on to explain the key issue rather than describe it. Some candidates talked about the effect of drugs in pregnancy but failed to present it as an issue often stating facts such as the effects of alcohol on the foetus.

Q15b

Candidates who wrote about autism and the male brain tended to do better, as they were able to explain how male and female brains are different and then link it to their key issue. The most common mistake with this answer was when stating that the brains of those with autism were more lateralised than male brains. Those who wrote about the ethics of transgender operations did not do as well, often because they did not write as much, with many spending a lot of time writing in detail about Money's study and the follow up when all that was needed was the results linked to the key issue. A large minority of the candidates thought that Daphne Went had undergone a transgender operation as a child.

Q16a

Candidates tended to write a lot for this question, however very few gained all four marks. Some candidates included the results as well as a description of the procedure, when all that was needed was the procedure, and some candidates went on to describe the follow up study which was not part of Money's study so was not credit worthy. Some candidates were also confused about when Brenda was given hormone therapy, and some thought she had a vagina created when she was two years old, rather than correctly stating that she was castrated.

Q16b

Only the better candidates achieved full marks here, and were able to give 8 evaluative points that were specifically linked to details of the study. Candidates did not gain marks as their answers tended to be generic and could apply to several different studies. A large minority of candidates often failed to gain marks when talking about the ethics of the study as they stated that he caused their suicides when there could have been other factors involved, or that he did show them sexually explicit material, when this is not a confirmed fact. Better candidates were able to explain how it was ethical as the parents gave consent, whilst weaker candidates claimed it was not ethical as the twins did not give consent.

Q17

Virtually all candidates were able to link their answer to the scenario, and could accurately write about how positive reinforcement could be used, with examples. Most candidates could also write about negative reinforcement and punishment in relation to the scenario as well. The better candidates were also able to write about how Oliver could have used behaviour shaping so were able to gain more marks. Weaker candidates often confused negative reinforcement with punishment. There was also a lot of repetition with this answer so limiting the marks that could be credited. There was also a large minority of candidates who wrote about vicarious learning, which is part of social learning theory not operant conditioning.

Q18a

Many candidates were able to gain a level 3 mark for this question, given plenty of detail about how they would design the study, allowing examiner to fully understand how the study would be carried out. Candidates who did not get into the top level tended to not offer detail, and so the study could not have been easily carried out from the information given in the answer.

Q18b

Candidates showed a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of longitudinal research, with marks often limited by lack of detail rather than inaccuracies. The best candidates were able to offer four explained evaluative points that were specific to longitudinal research. Weaker candidates often only offered one or two evaluative points. The most common points were about sample attrition and the lack of participant variables.

Q19

The vast majority of candidates were able to offer a biological description of gender, often focusing on the role of hormones on the foetus, with the best candidates being able to go into detail about the different hormones involved. The best candidates also went on to describe the effects of hormones in puberty or the effect of brain lateralisation. Weaker candidates were often only able to explain the role of the X and Y chromosomes and then state how this affected hormones in the womb, with little detail.

When evaluating the better candidates were able to go beyond David Reimer's case, and offer other studies such as animal studies as well as critique these studies. Weaker candidates often just described the David Reimer case in detail, rather than just focussing on how the results could support the biological explanation.

When it came to the comparison with another theory, better candidates were able to offer an explicit comparison about how the two theories were similar and/or different. Weaker candidates often just said there was a different theory and then went on to describe the alternative theory rather than offering a comparison.

Paper Summary

- When writing hypotheses ensure that both the independent and dependent variable are full operationalised within the hypothesis.
- Make sure the answer written focuses on what the question is asking rather than write down everything about a topic.
- When asked to analyse the results from the practical you carried out make sure that the data from the statistical test you carried out is included.
- Ensure what is written is accurate.
- When evaluating studies make sure each point refers to something specific about the study.

