

Specimen Paper Answers – Paper 1

Cambridge International AS & A Level Psychology 9990

For examination from 2024



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Introduction

These specimen answers have been produced by Cambridge ahead of the examination in 2024 to exemplify standards for those teaching Cambridge International AS & A Level Psychology 9990. We have provided examples of high and either middle or low-level answers from Specimen Paper 01, Section B, questions 9(a), 9(b) and 10.

The marks given are for guidance only and are accompanied by a brief commentary explaining the strengths and weaknesses of the answers. Comments are given to indicate where and why marks were awarded, and how additional marks could have been obtained.

The mark schemes for the Specimen Papers are available to download from the [School Support Hub](#).

2024 Specimen Paper 01

2024 Specimen Paper Mark Scheme 01

Past exam resources and other teaching and learning resources are available from the [School Support Hub](#).

Details of assessment

The syllabus for Cambridge International AS & A Level Psychology is available at www.cambridgeinternational.org

Paper 1 – Approaches, Issues and Debates

Written paper, 1 hour 30 minutes, 60 marks

Candidates answer **all** questions.

This paper contains two sections:

- Section A: short answer questions
- Section B: extended response questions which may ask for comparison between studies and will require candidates to evaluate a study(s).

Paper 1 tests candidates' knowledge of the core studies. Candidates will also be asked questions based on the four approaches (biological, cognitive, learning and social) and the AS Level issues and debates.

Question 9

- (a) Describe what was recorded by the female observers in the study by Piliavin et al. (subway Samaritans). [4]

Specimen answer – high

Both of the observers wrote notes about the comments that some of the passengers said. One of the observers also noted the race and sex of all people in the critical area. The race of every helper was also recorded.

Mark awarded = 3 out of 4

Examiner comment

The candidate was awarded 1 mark per statement as each one was correct and were some of the information recorded by the female observers in the study by Piliavin et al. As these 4-mark questions use a points-based mark scheme, the candidate needed to make one more valid point to be awarded the fourth and final available mark.

Specimen answer – low

The observers noted down that passengers said like 'It is a man's job to help' or 'I did not know where to look or how to help' or 'I cannot help'. Males helped more often.

Mark awarded = 1 out of 4

Examiner comment

These 4-mark questions use a points-based mark scheme. The only marks that can be awarded are in the first half of the first sentence. The remainder of the answer is describing what was found (a result) which is not relevant to the question. This question is about the procedure and not the results. To improve, the candidate needed to write about what was recorded, such as the race and sex of all passengers or the recording of the latency time before help was given.

Common mistakes

- Candidate do not write the same number of points as there are marks for the question.
- By giving results from a study when the question is about *what* was recorded rather than *describing* a result.

- (b) Explain **one** similarity and **one** difference between the study by Piliavin et al. and **one** other core study from the social approach. [8]

Specimen answer – high

The other study I will compare Piliavin to is Milgram. One similarity is on ethics. Both used deception to fulfil the aims of the study. Piliavin deceived passengers into thinking that the event was real and that the victims really were drunk or ill. Also, they thought the model was a real person who helped the victim when needed. Milgram deceived his participants by letting them think that Mr Wallace was giving real responses and also getting electric shocks if he got an answer incorrect.

One difference is the technique used to recruit participants. Milgram used volunteer sampling and advertised in a local newspaper. He stated what types of participants he wanted like only being male. Therefore, they chose to want to take part. Piliavin used people in a subway carriage, and they had no choice.

Mark awarded = 7 out of 8

Examiner comment

The 8-mark questions are marked using levels-based mark schemes, with 4 marks for the similarity and 4 marks for the differences. The similarity is very good and meets the requirements for Level 4 of the mark scheme. The idea of deception is well explained, and the candidate uses both studies as clear examples to explain why it is a similarity. The difference is not quite as good and meets the criteria for Level 3. The difference is explained in terms of the (sampling) technique used in the studies. However, it is only named for one of the studies (Milgram) with an outline so only one study has been used as a clear example. The candidate needed to state the technique used by Piliavin with a brief explanation as to why it was an opportunity in order to meet the criteria for Level 4.

Specimen answer – low

Both have ethical problems. Milgram deceived his participants into thinking they were giving electric shocks. Piliavin also deceived participants.

Both studies had a difference in that they did use stooges but in different ways.

Mark awarded = 3 out of 8

Examiner comment

The 8-mark questions are marked using levels-based mark schemes, with four marks for the similarity and with four marks for the differences.

The similarity is brief and only uses Milgram as a brief example of how participants were deceived. Therefore, it is a Level 2 response. To improve, the candidate needed to explain, in more detail, who the participants thought they were shocking. Also, an example from Piliavin would be needed and explained in detail to get into Level 4.

The difference is a Level 1 response. It is brief, and correct, but there are no examples from either study. To improve, the candidate needed to provide examples from *both* studies to show how the stooges were used in different ways.

Common mistakes

- Candidates do not use both studies as examples.
- By not explicitly stating what the similarity/difference is. The examiner needs candidates to make this explicit before they can award marks.
- Candidates choose a study that is not from the approach asked for in the question.

Question 10

Evaluate the study by Hölzel et al. (mindfulness and brain scans) in terms of **two** strengths and **two** weaknesses. At least one of your evaluation points **must** be about generalisations. [10]

Specimen answer – high

As there were many controls, the study could be confident about cause and effect (IV affecting DV). These included the criteria needed to be met to be able to participate and they had chosen the regions of interest in the brain, Hölzel could be confident that it was the mindfulness program (the independent variable) itself that was causing a change in brain grey matter density (the dependent variable).

The study was standardised for all participants. Hölzel had a standardised procedure including the contents of the MBSR mindfulness program, and when the participants were brain scanned before and after the mindfulness. This means another researcher could easily replicate this study to test for reliability.

The sample was mainly Caucasian. This makes it difficult to generalise to other groups of people who might do mindfulness differently.

With questionnaires, participants can sometimes give socially desirable answers as they want to look good to a researcher rather than telling the truth. This could lower validity. The completion of the FFMQ before and after the program might have made some participants rate differently based on wanting to look good for the purposes of the study (especially those in the MBSR group) rather than it being about the program making people feel better.

Mark awarded = 8 out of 10

Examiner comment

The 10-mark questions are marked using a levels-based mark scheme.

The first paragraph is in detail. The idea of cause and effect is clear in this response, and the candidate uses correct examples from the study by Hölzel et al.

The second paragraph is also in detail. The candidate mentions standardisation, replication, reliability and provides two examples from the study that are correct.

The third paragraph covers the named issue, but it is only brief. The candidate correctly presents a potential generalisability issue with the study but does not then explain why exclusively using Caucasians may affect generalisability. The candidate would need to do this to make this paragraph in detail.

The final paragraph is in detail too. The candidate presents a potential weakness of questionnaires and uses an example from the study by Hölzel et al. to explain why it is weakness.

Overall, this is a top end Level 4 response as there are three points in detail with one brief, and the named issues is covered. The majority of points are in detail and evidence is used from the study by Hölzel et al. throughout.

Specimen answer – middle

As there were many controls, the study could be confident about cause and effect (IV affecting DV). These included the criteria which needed to be met to be able to participate in the program meaning cause and effect were not affected.

There was a standardised procedure. For example, the program content for the mindfulness program. This increases the reliability of the study.

The magnetic scanning may have caused some psychological stress to participants as they were stuck in a tube. Some people withdrew.

They collected quantitative data which means that it was probably objective and could be used for statistical analyses and some comparisons.

Mark awarded = 5 out of 10

Examiner comment

The first paragraph is brief but in context. The use of controls is presented as a creditworthy strength and there is an attempt at using the study as an example, but it only names a control. To improve, the candidate needed to explicitly state what the IV and DV was in this study.

The second paragraph is also brief but has some context. Standardisation and reliability are presented as the strength and gain credit. There is a brief example from the study. However, to improve the candidate needed to mention the idea of replication and give a further example of standardisation from the study to make the point in detail.

The third paragraph is also brief with some context. The idea of psychological stress in an MRI scanner is creditworthy but it is not in detail. To improve, the candidate needed to explain in more detail what the stress problems could be with the participant being in a scanner.

The fourth paragraph has no context. Whilst the point is correct, the candidate has not provided an example from the study to support their claim. To improve, the candidate needed to provide evidence from the study that quantitative data were collected and how it was analysed.

The named issue of generalisations has not been covered.

The candidate presented four evaluation points *but* three are strengths and only one is a weakness. Therefore, the best two strengths (first and second paragraphs) and the only weakness (third paragraph) are accepted. The fourth paragraph cannot therefore be used to help place the answer into the correct level.

There are three points in brief but all have context, so the answer is awarded a bottom end Level 3 mark. The omission of the named issue means the maximum mark that could have been awarded was top end Level 3.

Common mistakes

- Candidates do not cover the named issue. A response cannot get above Level 3 if it does not use the named issue.
- The candidate answer describes aspects of the study outside the focus of the question, e.g. aims, procedure, and results. This question is about evaluation not description.
- Candidates do not cover the four points (two strengths and two weaknesses) with equal detail.
- Examples from the study are not used to explain why something is a strength or a weakness.
- Candidates do not always follow the question instructions to provide two strengths and two weaknesses, e.g. giving three strengths and one weakness.

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