

Examiners' report

GCSE

PSYCHOLOGY

OCR Level 1/ Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in
Psychology

J203

For first teaching in 2017

J203/01 Summer 2025 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Paper 1 series overview

J203/01 is one of two examination papers which follow the same structure in terms of sections, skills and patterns of questions. This paper focuses on the topics of Criminal Psychology, Development and Psychological Problems as well as assessing Research Methods through asking candidates to plan and design an investigation.

To do well on this paper, candidates need to have a broad and detailed knowledge of the content, especially with reference to theories and studies. The ability to apply knowledge and understanding to novel sources and scenarios is also important for success. Lastly, candidates' evaluation skills need to be evident and to be effective to achieve the higher marks on this paper. Candidates who did well on this paper were able to demonstrate the range of psychological skills assessed through this GCSE including mathematical ability. Candidates who did less well often showed limited knowledge of key ideas and found application of understanding a challenge. Their attempts to evaluate sometimes lacked focus or were vague.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- provided a contextualised, well-structured and evaluative response to Question 14 - demonstrated sound knowledge of correlational and mathematical concepts - showed clear understanding of how care in the community impacted society - evaluated in context - showed good understanding of research methods in context.	- gave general or vague responses to extended questions such as Questions 7, 10, 11 and 13 (b) - demonstrated poor understanding of key evaluative concepts - gave responses that lacked contextualisation throughout - demonstrated poor understanding of research methods.

Section A overview

Generally, in this section, Cooper and Mackie's research knowledge was general and unspecific. Scatter diagrams seemed to have improved this series. However, titles remain all too often missing. Relating Eysenck to crime challenged a good proportion of candidates.

Question 1 (a)

1
(a) Identify which punishment means a criminal will lose their freedoms, rights, and privileges.

- A** Community sentence
- B** Prison
- C** Rehabilitation programmes
- D** Restorative justice

Your answer

[1]

Most candidates answered this correctly with B.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Identify which punishment involves a convicted person doing unpaid work in their local area.

- A** Community sentence
- B** Prison
- C** Rehabilitation programmes
- D** Restorative justice

Your answer

[1]

Most candidates answered this correctly with A.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Identify the appropriate term for when an offender meets their victim to make the offender aware of the consequences of their actions.

- A Community sentence
- B Prison
- C Rehabilitation programmes
- D Restorative justice

Your answer

[1]

Most candidates answered this correctly with D.

Question 2 (a) (i)

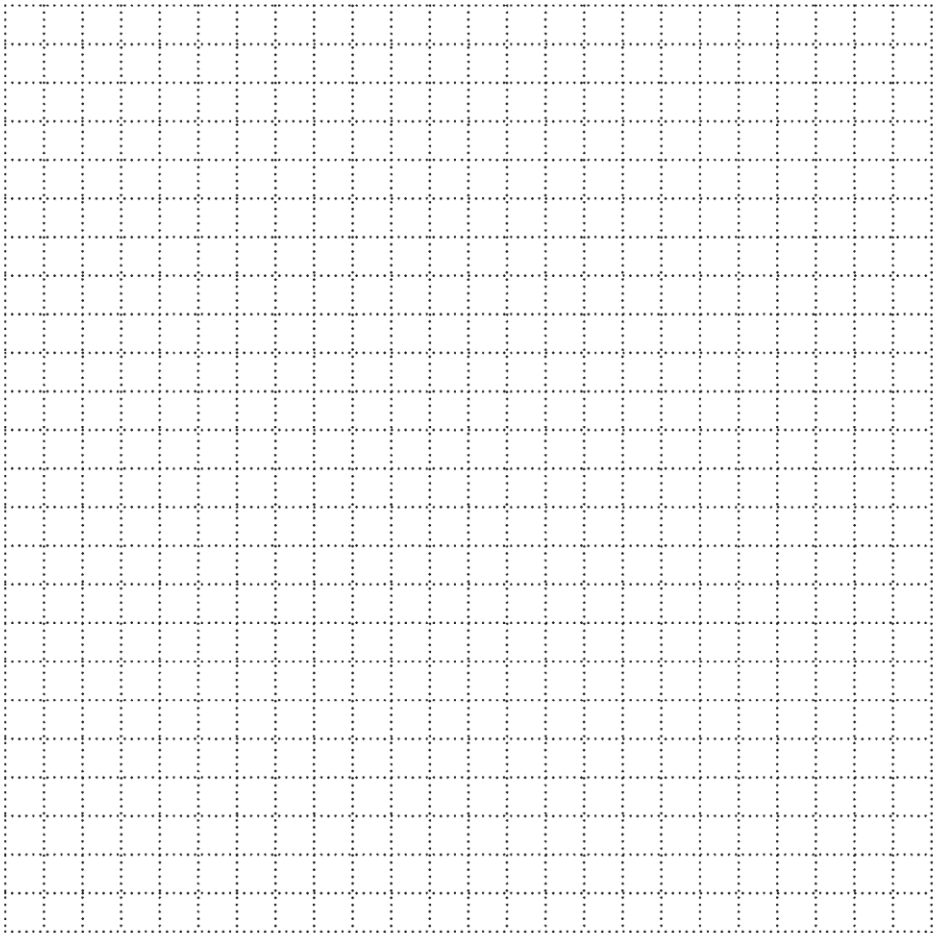
- 2 A study was conducted to see if there was a relationship between watching violent cartoons and the number of times a child performed an aggressive act. Psychologists used a group of young children and asked their parents how many different cartoons their child had watched that week that contained violence. They also asked the parents to record the number of aggressive acts their child performed throughout the same week.

The results are shown in the table.

Participant	Number of violent cartoons watched	Number of aggressive acts recorded
1	3	9
2	6	1
3	8	8
4	1	3
5	1	7
6	3	1

- (a) Using the data and scenario above:
- (i) Draw a scatter diagram to display the data collected.

[4]



Most candidates successfully constructed a scatter graph. However, many candidates did not provide an appropriate title.

Question 2 (a) (ii)

- (ii) Identify the type of correlation shown in your scatter diagram.
Tick **one** of the boxes to show your answer.

[1]

Positive

☐

Negative

☐

No correlation

☐

Most candidates correctly ticked 'No correlation'.

Question 2 (b)

- (b) Briefly explain whether or not the results found in this study support the Social Learning Theory of Criminality.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Most candidates correctly identified that the graph did not support Social Learning Theory (SLT), but many candidates just stated that there was no correlation. Rather than explaining how the results demonstrated that SLT wasn't support, i.e. We would expect violent acts to increase as more violent cartoons were watched.

Exemplar 1

This The results did not support the social learning theory of Criminality. This is because the social learning theory suggests observing a role model, such as a cartoon character, will make you want to imitate their behaviour. however the children there was no correlation between aggressiveness and watching the aggressive role model [2]

This exemplar shows a good response to this question that was given full marks.

Question 3

- 3 Briefly explain why the Social Learning Theory of Criminality is said to focus too much on nurture.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Most candidates only got 1 mark here, often not addressing both sides of the question.

Exemplar 2

Social learning theory focuses too much on nurture because it explains that criminal behaviour is a direct result of what we observe and imitate from others. It ignores any possibility that there could be a criminal gene or certain genetics in our nature as a cause.

This exemplar demonstrates how a candidate demonstrated enough knowledge to gain both marks.

Question 4 (a)

4

- (a) Name the experimental method and design used in Cooper and Mackie's (1986) study into video games and aggression in children.

Experimental method:

Experimental design: [2]

This was generally well-answered by most candidates.

Question 4 (b)

(b) Outline **one** finding from Cooper and Mackie's (1986) study.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Many responses were either very vague or incorrect. Candidates need to fully contextualise responses here.

OCR support



Teachers and candidates are advised to check study findings/details using core studies guides that OCR produce. For this study, [Core Studies Guide 1](#) will help.

Question 4 (c)

(c) In Cooper and Mackie's (1986) study, a child used a 'buzzer' to show how much punishment to give. This was used to measure the level of interpersonal aggression.

Explain why the use of a buzzer as a measurement for interpersonal aggression may be a criticism of this study.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Many candidates approached this question in a vague or unfocused manner. Specifically, construct or ecological validity need to be addressed, preferably directly.

Question 5 (a)

- 5** Kai struggles with impulsive behaviour and often gets into fights. Many people describe Kai as a selfish person as they do not care about other people's feelings. Kai has recently spent 6 months in prison for attacking another person.

Nina is out-going, sociable and confident. She loves going to parties, meeting new people and talking to friends.

Jamal is an anxious person who constantly feels guilty. However, this can lead to Jamal becoming very angry in stressful situations. Jamal punched his boss during a period of high stress.

Kai, Nina and Jamal are now enrolled on a programme run by a psychologist that aims to help people learn how to control themselves.

Using the source:

- (a)** Identify the personality type that Jamal is displaying according to Eysenck's Criminal Personality Theory.

..... [1]

Most candidates correctly answered this question.

Question 5 (b)

- (b)** Explain why the psychologist might think Nina is displaying characteristics of extraversion as identified in Eysenck's Criminal Personality Theory.

.....
.....
.....
..... [2]

Most candidates could explain that extroverts were outgoing and sociable. However, the second mark using context from the question, i.e. she loves going to parties, etc., was often missed.

Question 5 (c)

- (c) Using your knowledge of neuropsychology, briefly describe how Eysenck's (1967) Biological Basis of Personality Theory could explain why Kai committed a crime.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [3]

Many candidates confused elements of Eysenck's theory, often mixing up psychoticism with extroversion.

OCR support



Teachers and candidates are advised to check study findings/details using core studies guides that OCR produce. For this area, [A Guide to Key Theories](#) will help – this can be accessed through your Teach Cambridge account .

Section B overview

Knowledge of care in the community was sound, but candidates need to focus on how it impacts society not just the individual. Mathematics in this section tended to be strong, but candidates are to be encouraged to gain a clearer understanding of how anti-depressants work.

Question 6 (a)

6

(a) Identify the type of neuron that fires too easily or too often according to the Biological Theory of Schizophrenia.

- A Dopaminergic
- B GABAergic
- C Glutamatergic
- D Serotonergic

Your answer

[1]

Most candidates answered this correctly with A.

Question 6 (b)

(b) Identify which one of the following describes the 'gap' between neurons that chemical impulses are transmitted across.

- A Nucleus
- B Receptor
- C Synapse
- D Vesicle

Your answer

[1]

Most candidates answered this correctly with C.

Question 6 (c)

(c) Identify which one of the following is **not** a criticism of the Biological Theory of Schizophrenia.

- A It focuses too much on nature
- B It is too deterministic
- C It is too holistic
- D It is too reductionist

Your answer

[1]

Most candidates answered this correctly with C.

Question 7

- 7 Until about 30 years ago, people with mental health problems were kept in psychiatric institutions or on psychiatric wards. However, people with mental health problems are now, whenever possible, cared for in the community.

Describe ways that care in the community has had an impact on society.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [6]

There were many well-developed responses to this question. However, candidates who did not get full marks tended to either provide repetitive points or focused on the effect on the individual rather than society as a whole.

Question 8 (a)

- 8 Depression affects 1 in 6 adults in the UK. Women are twice as likely to experience depression compared to men.

A workplace study found that symptoms of depression were experienced by:

- 61% of 16–24 year-olds
- 51% of 45–54 year-olds
- 22% of 65–74 year-olds.

The study also found that 36 out of 584 workers recovered after being treated for depression.

Using the source:

- (a) Calculate the percentage of 16–24 year-olds who did **not** report experiencing depression in the workplace.

Write your answer to **one** significant figure.

Show your working.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Most answers were correct, with occasional errors or omissions of writing to one significant figure.

Question 8 (b)

- (b) Calculate the fraction of workers who recovered after being treated for depression.

Express your answer in its simplest form.

Show your working.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Most candidates answered correctly and get the full 2 marks.

Question 9 (a)

- 9** Sam and Taylor have both been diagnosed with clinical depression after failing their driving tests twice. Sam said they were never going to pass the test as they were too stupid, and all driving instructors wanted to make them fail. Taylor disagreed and said they just needed to work on the areas they failed on and try again.

Using the source and the ABC Model of Clinical Depression:

- (a)** Identify the activating event.

..... [1]

Most candidates answered this correctly.

Question 9 (b)

- (b)** Name the person who has an irrational belief.

..... [1]

Most candidates answered this correctly.

Question 9 (c)

- (c)** Name the person who has a rational belief.

..... [1]

Most candidates answered this correctly.

Question 10

10 Explain **two** criticisms of the ABC Model of Clinical Depression.

- 1
-
-
- 2
-
-
- [4]**

Most candidates could identify correct criticisms, but many did not expand on these in the context of the theory for the second mark per point.

Question 11

11 Anti-depressants can improve the symptoms of clinical depression. Explain the action of anti-depressants in the brain.

-
-
-
-
-
-
- [4]**

Many responses here were lacking. It is recommended that candidates learn the process of how anti-depressants work – for example SSRI's. Learning the process as a flow chart and then writing it out would hopefully result in improvements in this area.

Section C overview

Sound knowledge was demonstrated in this section. However, Piaget's criticisms remained a challenge for many candidates. Question 14 was the most challenging question on the paper; candidates should be encouraged to answer with a clear structure and direct focus on the question asked.

Question 12 (a)

12

(a) Identify the brain development process that happens in childhood.

- A** The cerebral cortex is formed
- B** The density of synapses in the prefrontal cortex is at its peak
- C** The grey matter in the brain reaches maximum density
- D** The prefrontal cortex fully matures

Your answer

[1]

Most candidates answered this correctly with B.

Question 12 (b)

(b) Identify the brain development process that happens in the pre-natal stage of development.

- A** The cerebral cortex is formed
- B** The density of synapses in the prefrontal cortex is at its peak
- C** The grey matter in the brain reaches maximum density
- D** The prefrontal cortex fully matures

Your answer

[1]

Most candidates answered this correctly with A.

Question 12 (c)

(c) Identify which characteristic is measured by an IQ test.

- A Egocentrism
- B Fixed growth mindset
- C Intelligence
- D Learning style

Your answer

[1]

Most candidates answered this correctly with C.

Question 13 (a)

13

(a) Identify and briefly outline **one** of the four stages of cognitive development according to Piaget.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Most responses correctly identified a stage, but candidates often merely stated concepts from the stage rather than explain them to get the second mark.

Question 13 (b)

(b) Explain **two** criticisms of Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development.

1

.....

.....

2

.....

..... [4]

Most candidates could identify correct criticisms but did not expand on these in the context of the theory for the second mark per point.

Question 13 (c)

(c) A researcher found that 12 out of 25 psychologists thought Piaget's theory was out of date.

Express this fraction as a decimal to **one** decimal place.

Show your working.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Most candidates answered this correctly.

Question 14

14* Use your knowledge and understanding from across the psychology course to explain how far you agree with the following statement:

'Research using correlations is not useful.'

In your answer, you should refer to Blackwell et al.'s (2007) study into fixed and growth mindsets and **at least one other** study from another area of psychology. [13]

There was the full spread of marks in this question, and often it was the AO3 marks that were accessed less often. Many candidates clearly displayed good knowledge of Blackwell and one other study. However, evaluation points did not directly address the question and often were very general.

Exemplar 3

Blackwell et al carried out a Correlational Study to investigate whether there was a relationship between the type of mindset a student had (fixed or growth) and their improvement in Maths scores. He collected a sample of 373 students from USA and took their Maths scores in 6th grade. In 7th grade, he gave them a Motivational questionnaire to complete which would measure their mindset*. In 8th grade, he took their Maths scores again and found that whilst the students who had a growth mindset did not always have better scores, they showed a huge improvement from 6th grade compared to those with a fixed mindset. This proved his hypothesis that there would be a relationship between the mindset of a student and their improvement in Maths.

One criticism of Blackwell et al's Study is that it was a correlational study. This means that it is very difficult to establish cause and effect and be certain that their mindset affects their improvement and not an extraneous variable such as their upbringing. This means that the results from a correlational study may not always be valid. However, a strength of the study is that the researcher is not manipulating an IV and so any possibility of demand characteristics is extremely limited- which will lead to more validity in the results.

Cooper and Mackie carried out a lab experiment to investigate
* using a fixed Likert scale rating and closed questions.

whether aggressive games would influence levels of interpersonal aggression. They took a sample of 84 9-11 year olds from New Jersey, USA. They were separated into three groups to play either an aggressive, non-aggressive or control game. Then the children were either sent to a playroom to be covertly observed with an aggressive, skill, quiet or active toy or to a room where they were given a fake scenario and asked to press the buzzer for how long they would punish the child for - as per the independent measures design. The results found that children who had played the aggressive video game ~~were more likely to be~~ showed higher levels of interpersonal aggression.

One criticism of the study is that it lacks ecological validity. This is because it was carried out in a lab setting and so did not reflect real settings. This means that the results could be invalid because the children could have shown demand characteristics. However, a strength of the study is that it is easy to identify that the aggressive game actually caused the aggressive behaviours.

In conclusion, I think that research from correlations is somewhat useful as it is easy to establish a natural relationship but we cannot always be certain that the IV is directly causing the DV.

This exemplar demonstrates a good response at a high level. Full marks were given for AO1, with two good study descriptions and 5 AO3 marks due to a good and focused evaluation related to correlations and their usefulness.

Section D overview

Research methods remain challenging for some students. Context is often missed, with many candidates providing generic responses. Candidates could gain marks by relating responses to the given scenario in more detail.

Question 15

You have been asked to carry out an **interview** to investigate why teenagers in the UK decide to vape. The theory is that the main reason teenagers vape is because it looks cool.

Use this space to plan your investigation.

15 Explain what **target population** means in your investigation.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Many candidates explained samples rather than target populations for this question.

Question 16 (a)

16

(a) Identify the type of interview you will use in your investigation.

..... [1]

Most candidates answered this correctly.

Question 16 (b)

(b) Outline how you would use the type of interview you have identified in your investigation.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Many candidates did not directly address the question here, either evaluating or being very vague/uncontextualised.

Question 17

17 Explain **one** strength of using an interview in this investigation.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [3]

This was generally well-answered by candidates, with lack of context being the main shortcoming.

Question 18

18 Other than social desirability, explain **one** weakness of using an interview in this investigation.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [3]

Some candidates still answered relating to social desirability. Candidates are encouraged to make sure they carefully read the question before answering. Again, context was often lacking in this question.

Question 19

19 Outline the procedure you would use to collect the sample in your investigation.

In your answer you must refer to:

- the sample
- the sampling method
- how the sample will be gathered.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [3]

This was generally well-answered, but some candidates confused random and opportunity sampling. Candidates should be encouraged to clearly state the sampling method in their response, as this was missing from many responses.

Question 20

20 Describe **one** ethical issue you will need to consider in your investigation.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

This was generally well-answered. Candidates should be reminded to talk about informed consent, not just consent, in future series.

Question 21

21 A common problem with self-report methods is social desirability.

Explain how social desirability could affect your investigation.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

This question was generally well-answered and contextualised.

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