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CAMBRIDGE
International Education

Cambridge International AS & A Level

PSYCHOLOGY **9990/12**

Paper 1 Approaches, Issues and Debates **February/March 2026**

MARK SCHEME

Maximum Mark: 60

Published

This mark scheme is published as an aid to teachers and candidates, to indicate the requirements of the examination. It shows the basis on which Examiners were instructed to award marks. It does not indicate the details of the discussions that took place at an Examiners' meeting before marking began, which would have considered the acceptability of alternative answers.

Mark schemes should be read in conjunction with the question paper and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

Cambridge International will not enter into discussions about these mark schemes.

Cambridge International is publishing the mark schemes for the February/March 2026 series for most Cambridge IGCSE, Cambridge International A and AS Level components, and some Cambridge O Level components.

This document consists of **24** printed pages.

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Generic Marking Principles

These general marking principles must be applied by all examiners when marking candidate answers. They should be applied alongside the specific content of the mark scheme or generic level descriptions for a question. Each question paper and mark scheme will also comply with these marking principles.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 1:

Marks must be awarded in line with:

- the specific content of the mark scheme or the generic level descriptors for the question
- the specific skills defined in the mark scheme or in the generic level descriptors for the question
- the standard of response required by a candidate as exemplified by the standardisation scripts.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 2:

Marks awarded are always **whole marks** (not half marks, or other fractions).

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 3:

Marks must be awarded **positively**:

- marks are awarded for correct/valid answers, as defined in the mark scheme. However, credit is given for valid answers which go beyond the scope of the syllabus and mark scheme, referring to your Team Leader as appropriate
- marks are awarded when candidates clearly demonstrate what they know and can do
- marks are not deducted for errors
- marks are not deducted for omissions
- answers should only be judged on the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar when these features are specifically assessed by the question as indicated by the mark scheme. The meaning, however, should be unambiguous.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 4:

Rules must be applied consistently, e.g. in situations where candidates have not followed instructions or in the application of generic level descriptors.

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GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 5: Marks should be awarded using the full range of marks defined in the mark scheme for the question (however; the use of the full mark range may be limited according to the quality of the candidate responses seen).
GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 6: Marks awarded are based solely on the requirements as defined in the mark scheme. Marks should not be awarded with grade thresholds or grade descriptors in mind.

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9990/12 Mark Scheme March 2

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Social Science-Specific Marking Principles
(for point-based marking)

1 Components using point-based marking:

- Point marking is often used to reward knowledge, understanding and application of skills. We give credit where the candidate's answer shows relevant knowledge, understanding and application of skills in answering the question. We do not give credit where the answer shows confusion.

From this it follows that we:

a DO credit answers which are worded differently from the mark scheme if they clearly convey the same meaning (unless the mark scheme requires a specific term)
b DO credit alternative answers/examples which are not written in the mark scheme if they are correct
c DO credit answers where candidates give more than one correct answer in one prompt/numbered/scaffolded space where extended writing is required rather than list-type answers. For example, questions that require *n* reasons (e.g. State two reasons …).
d DO NOT credit answers simply for using a 'key term' unless that is all that is required. (Check for evidence it is understood and not used wrongly.)
e DO NOT credit answers which are obviously self-contradicting or trying to cover all possibilities
f DO NOT give further credit for what is effectively repetition of a correct point already credited unless the language itself is being tested. This applies equally to 'mirror statements' (i.e. polluted/not polluted).
g DO NOT require spellings to be correct, unless this is part of the test. However spellings of syllabus terms must allow for clear and unambiguous separation from other syllabus terms with which they may be confused (e.g. Corrasion/Corrosion)

2 Presentation of mark scheme:

- Slashes (/) or the word 'or' separate alternative ways of making the same point.
- Semi colons (;) bullet points (•) or figures in brackets (1) separate different points.
- Content in the answer column in brackets is for examiner information/context to clarify the marking but is not required to earn the mark (except Accounting syllabuses where they indicate negative numbers).

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3 Calculation questions:

- The mark scheme will show the steps in the most likely correct method(s), the mark for each step, the correct answer(s) and the mark for each answer
- If working/explanation is considered essential for full credit, this will be indicated in the question paper and in the mark scheme. In all other instances, the correct answer to a calculation should be given full credit, even if no supporting working is shown.
- Where the candidate uses a valid method which is not covered by the mark scheme, award equivalent marks for reaching equivalent stages.
- Where an answer makes use of a candidate's own incorrect figure from previous working, the 'own figure rule' applies: full marks will be given if a correct and complete method is used. Further guidance will be included in the mark scheme where necessary and any exceptions to this general principle will be noted.

4 Annotation:

- For point marking, ticks can be used to indicate correct answers and crosses can be used to indicate wrong answers. There is no direct relationship between ticks and marks. Ticks have no defined meaning for levels of response marking.
- For levels of response marking, the level awarded should be annotated on the script.
- Other annotations will be used by examiners as agreed during standardisation, and the meaning will be understood by all examiners who marked that paper.

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Annotations guidance for centres

Examiners use a system of annotations as a shorthand for communicating their marking decisions to one another. Examiners are trained during the standardisation process on how and when to use annotations. The purpose of annotations is to inform the standardisation and monitoring processes and guide the supervising examiners when they are checking the work of examiners within their team. The meaning of annotations and how they are used is specific to each component and is understood by all examiners who mark the component.

We publish annotations in our mark schemes to help centres understand the annotations they may see on copies of scripts. Note that there may not be a direct correlation between the number of annotations on a script and the mark awarded. Similarly, the use of an annotation may not be an indication of the quality of the response.

The annotations listed below were available to examiners marking this component in this series.

Annotations

Annotation	Meaning
	A creditworthy point made by the candidate A creditworthy 'what' for a generic everyday application question
	An incorrect response
BOD	Benefit of Doubt
REP	Repetition of a point
	Unclear response
I	The named issue in the 10-mark essay
L1 L2 L3 L4 L5	Levels used for the 10-mark essay (L1–L5) Levels used for the 8-mark similarity/difference question (L1–L4)

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Annotation	Meaning
NAQ	Not Answering the Question
SEEN	The blank page has been seen. An attached response has been seen.
+	A creditworthy strength in the 10-mark essay. A creditworthy 'how' for a generic everyday application question
–	A creditworthy weakness in the 10-mark essay.
b	A creditworthy point in the 10-mark essay that is **b**rief
d	A creditworthy point in the 10-mark essay that is **d**etailed
e	A creditworthy example in **Q4(a) and 7**

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
1(a)	**From the study by Baron-Cohen et al. (eyes test):** **State the number of participants in Group 1.** 1 mark for correct answer. 15.	**1**	Take the first answer only.
1(b)	**Outline what is meant by 'social sensitivity'.** 2 marks for full definition. 1 mark for partial/brief definition. e.g., The ability of a person to identify/understand that other people have feelings and ideas when in a social situation (2 marks). The ability of a person to identify the feelings of others (1 mark). To be 'socially' respectful of others (1 mark). The ability to be socially sensitive (0 marks).	**2**	1 mark = empathic side. 1 mark = social situation. Facial expressions, body language, respond appropriately and social cues can be taken as the 'social situation'.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
1(c)	**Outline <u>one</u> result comparing male participants to female participants.** 2 marks for the result with a meaningful comparison. 1 mark for the result with no meaningful comparison. **The name of the test must be mentioned to be awarded more than one mark.** e.g., 2 marks Females (in group 2/3) scored higher than males (in group 2/3) on the eyes test. Males (in group 3/students) scored higher than females (in group 3/students) on the AQ test. e.g., 1 mark Females scored higher on the eyes test. Males scored higher on the AQ test. e.g., 0 marks Females/males scored higher. Females scored better on the eyes test. Males scored worse on the eyes test.	**2**	If the candidate states male vs female HFA/AS then 0 as no female HFA/AS were in the sample. Candidates do **not** need to name the group to be awarded up to full credit (as for eyes test, for group 2 and 3 it was the same direction). However, accept that for Gp2, scores were very similar. No marks to be awarded for a value judgement of 'better' or 'worse' or 'less able'. Note: one mark <u>max</u> can be awarded if result is in the correct direction, but it is clear which test it is (e.g., choosing the emotions based on eyes).

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
2(a)	**One feature of the sample used in the study by Saavedra and Silverman (button phobia) was that the participant was a boy.** **Identify <u>three</u> features of the sample, other than that it was a boy.** 1 mark per correct feature. 9-year-old. Hispanic/American. He was presented by his mum to a Child Anxiety and Phobic Program. He did not meet the criteria for OCD. He did meet the criteria (DSM-IV) for a phobia. He had experienced a bowl of buttons falling on him (at school). Got his phobia at 5 years of age/4 years prior to study.	**3**	List is definitive. Do **not** accept boy, had a phobia of buttons, opportunity sample.
2(b)	**Explain <u>one</u> weakness of the sample.** 1 mark for identifying the sample weakness. 1 mark for example from the study by Saavedra and Silverman. e.g., The sample lacks generalisability (1 mark: identification). It was only one <u>boy with a unique phobia</u> (of buttons) (1 mark: example).	**2**	Only one boy is **not** enough for the example mark. Context = unique/specific phobia of buttons.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
3	**A local business wants to introduce an activity that will help its workers increase their attention and improve their memory during important meetings.** **Suggest what activities the local business could introduce, using your knowledge of the study by Andrade.** 1 mark per correct suggestion made linked to Andrade. The workers could be given a piece of paper. That has shapes on it. They can colour/shade them in. There should be a margin to write notes/target information about the meeting. Tell the workers not to worry about being neat/their neatness (at shading). Ask the workers to focus on specific pieces of information in the meeting. Tell the workers they can review their attention/concentration afterwards with a colleague checking the recollection of the meeting. Tell the workers to **not** to engage in free doodling/drawing their own doodles. Ensure that the meeting is in a (dull) quiet room. There are other creditworthy suggestions.	**4**	If the candidate chooses a specific type of business like a call centre, this is fine. No credit for justifying advice as this is not what the question is about. Do **not** credit the following: 'Doodling', 'doodle' or 'secondary task' by itself. Scribbling. Allow them to draw their own doodles. Ask them to start <u>shading</u> in the <u>shapes</u> = 2 marks A different explicitly named secondary task can be awarded 1 mark (e.g., fidget toy).

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
4(a)	**Outline <u>one</u> assumption of the learning approach, including an example from the study by Bandura et al. (aggression).** 2 marks for full assumption. 1 mark for partial/brief assumption. 1 mark for example from the study by Bandura et al. (**must** be linked to given assumption). e.g., 2 marks: assumption We all begin life as a blank slate. Experiences and interactions with the environment shape our behaviour and these changes are directly observable. We learn through the processes of operant conditioning, classical conditioning, and social learning (at least 2 mentioned). This can be understood using the stimulus-response model. e.g., 1 mark: assumption We all begin life as a blank slate. We learn through the processes of operant conditioning, classical conditioning, and social learning (just one of these). e.g., 1 mark example The children <u>imitated</u> some of the aggression against the Bobo Doll as they had <u>observed</u> it.	**3**	The example mark can only be awarded if **one** component of SLT is explicitly stated. If the assumption is incorrect, but the example does identify a component of SLT then the example mark can be awarded. ✓e = example mark. Do **not** accept an assumption being observing/imitating (however, the example mark can still be awarded).

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
4(b)	**Outline <u>one</u> methodological strength of the study by Bandura et al. (aggression).** 1 mark for identifying the methodological strength. 1 mark for example from the study by Bandura et al. e.g., The procedure was standardised so could be replicated/tested for reliability (1 mark). For example, all children were observed for 20 minutes in the final room (1 mark link). There are other creditworthy responses including inter-observer reliability, use of a one-way mirror and control of extraneous variables as lab.	**2**	Do **not** credit any ethical strength. Standardisation by itself = 0 Control by itself = 0

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
5	**Suggest <u>two</u> applications to everyday life of the study by Hölzel et al. (mindfulness and brain scans). Your suggestions <u>must</u> be ethical.** 1 mark for what the application is (clearly based on Hölzel et al). 1 mark for how it will be achieved. e.g., The study showed that participating in mindfulness increased grey matter concentration (1 mark: what via a finding) so meditation programmes could be introduced to populations who are <u>experiencing cognitive decline</u> to help them (1 mark: how) / people with TPJ impairments could be encouraged to participate in yoga/meditation (1 mark: alternative how). Mindfulness can be used in the workplace to help reduce stress/anxiety (1 mark: what). There could be yoga/meditation sessions as part of the everyday working environment (1 mark: how). Meditation centres can be set up / could help people who have anxiety/stress-related disorders (1 mark: what) so patients can engage in meditation/body scans/yoga to help reduce stress/anxiety (1 mark: how). Schools could introduce mindfulness into the school curriculum/schedule (1 mark: how) to help students relax / lower stress after competitions/examinations (1 mark: what). MRI scans can be used more to identify structural problems in the brain (1 mark: how). The study reported that completing homework did <u>not</u> improve FFMQ scores/increase grey matter concentration (1 mark: what via a finding), so schools that are heavily focused on homework can reduce the amount given / increase class participation (1 mark: how). There are other creditworthy applications.	**4**	Annotate in the following way: ✓ = what + = how For this instance, the what can be <u>what was found in the study (e.g. a result)</u> and then credit how that knowledge can be used. Two different 'therapeutic applications' are fine but the 'what' part cannot be the same finding or idea. Mindfulness/MBSR by itself cannot be the 'how'. Applications linked to specific areas of interest in the brain are creditworthy. If the population is 'people who are stressed' then max 1 (only award the how). The population needs to be explicitly stated to be considered for maximum credit. Any application in relation to use of brain scans <u>must</u> mention MRI, otherwise = 0 marks. Go with the intention of the candidate.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
6(a)(i)	**From the study by Pozzulo et al. (line-ups):** **Explain whether each ethical guideline below was broken:** **consent** 1 mark for explaining the guideline. 1 mark for an example from the study (showing broken or not). e.g., guideline This is when a participant is given enough information before a study begins so they can decide whether they would like to participate (or not). e.g., example from study For the child participants, their parent/guardian completed a written consent form (about a study related to memory). The children did <u>not</u> give their own consent.	**2**	No mark can be awarded for simply stating 'broken / not broken'. Do **not** credit 'children gave consent'. Ignore tautological explanations, e.g., consent is to gain consent from a participant. Do credit 'permission from Ps' for the explanation mark.
6(a)(ii)	**minimising harm** 1 mark for explaining the guideline. 1 mark for an example from the study (showing broken or not). e.g., guideline Participants should leave a study in the same mental/physical state as entering. In a study participants should not be exposed to more harm than they would in everyday life. e.g., example from study The children were allowed to engage in crafts before the task to help reduce any stress levels / the children were tested for anxiety and stress levels. They were only looking at cartoons / adults engaged in mundane tasks so no harm. The children were given crayons / colouring book at the end of their participation.	**2**	Ignore tautological explanations, e.g., minimising harm is about keeping harm to a minimum. Accept 'no real criminals' or 'no crime' as an example. Do **not** accept 'feeling stressed when trying to point at the <u>criminal</u>'.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
6(b)	**Explain how the ethical guideline of confidentiality was followed.** 1 mark for outlining the guideline of confidentiality. 1 mark for an example showing how the study adhered to confidentiality (must have some generic detail about the sample). Any data should not be identifiable as a single participants' responses / participants' data must not be named as theirs (outline). All we know is that the children were from a (pre)kindergarten in Eastern Ontario / the adults were from a participant pool in Eastern Ontario (how).	**2**	Do **not** credit any reference to privacy (different guideline). They used initials = 0. There must be something identifiable about the sample to be given the example mark.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
7	**The debate about individual and situational explanations relates to the study by Fagen et al. (elephant learning).** **Outline what is meant by this debate, including <u>one</u> example of the individual explanation and <u>one</u> example of the situational explanation.** **Both examples <u>must</u> be from the study by Fagen et al.** 1 mark for outlining individual explanation **plus** 1 mark for an example from Fagen et al. 1 mark for outlining situational explanation **plus** 1 mark for an example from Fagen et al. e.g., individual The individual side refers to behaviours from factors within the person (dispositional) (1 mark). All the juvenile elephants passed the full trunk wash, but the older adult elephant did not (1 mark: example). The older elephant found it difficult to learn the trunk wash due to poor eyesight/abscess of foot (1 mark: example). e.g., situational The situational side refers to behaviour from factors in the external environment (1 mark). The elephants were rewarded with bananas to encourage them to repeat the trained behaviours (1 mark: example). The older elephant did not train well as a calf from the next stable kept visiting/interrupting (1 mark: example). There are other creditworthy examples.	**4**	Ignore tautological definitions including “individual differences or individual factors”. ✓e = example mark. Go with the intentions of the candidate.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
8	**Describe the background to the study by Piliavin et al (subway Samaritans).** 1 mark per correct point made. e.g., Previous studies had shown that bystanders might derogate the characters of victims. People may even show diffusion of responsibility where they believe other people in a group will help. This was shown in a real-life crime involving Kitty Genovese. 38 people witnessed her being murdered and no one intervened. Darley and Latane reported that bystanders hearing some having an epileptic fit were less likely to help if they thought others were around. Latane and Rodin reported that people were less likely to help someone who had fallen if the group members were strangers. Bryan and Test reported that people were more likely to help someone if they had just witnessed someone else doing the same. A lot of the work on bystander intervention had been conducted in the laboratory. Psychologists had proposed that people who are partly responsible for their plight would receive less sympathy/helping. Previous research had tended to test emergencies that were only heard and not seen. There are other creditworthy points.	**5**	Ignore any reference to what Piliavin et al. did or found as this is about information prior to the study. Two marks **max** for a description of the case of Kitty Genovese (1 to identify her and 1 for one part of the case). Definitions of diffusion of responsibility and bystander apathy can be awarded credit. Do **not** credit cost-reward matrix as this was only discussed after the study.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
9(a)	**Describe the housing conditions for the rhesus monkeys in the study by Hassett et al. (monkey toy preferences).** 1 mark per correct point. In natal/family groups/troop together for 25 years. 25mx25m <u>outdoor</u> compounds. Temperature-controlled <u>indoor</u> quarters. Water was (continuously) available. Fed monkey chow twice per day. Fed fruit/vegetables (once per day).	**4**	List is definitive. For measurement of outdoor compound, tolerance of 2m. Do accept that the enclosure represented a natural/typical/normal/familiar environment, or that it was natural looking (1 mark max for any of these).

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
9(b)	**Explain <u>one</u> similarity and <u>one</u> difference between the study by Hassett et al. (monkey toy preferences) and the study by Saavedra and Silverman (button phobia). Do <u>not</u> refer to the sample <u>or</u> approaches in your answer.** Use the marking grid below. 4 marks for the similarity, e.g., quantitative data collection, ethics. 4 marks for the difference, e.g., qualitative data collection, ethics, research method used, focus on nature-nurture. e.g., similarity 4 marks Both studies collected quantitative data. This allowed direct/statistical comparisons to be made across groups and therapy sessions (explanation). In the Hassett study the frequency of play was measured for both types of toys to see a difference in plush-wheeled play. In Saavedra and Silverman, the boy rated buttons on a Feelings Thermometer so progression across therapy sessions could be compared. 3 marks Both studies collected quantitative data. In the Hassett study the frequency of play was measured for both types of toys to see a difference in play. In Saavedra and Silverman, the boy rated buttons on a Feelings Thermometer. 2 marks Both studies collected quantitative data. In the Hassett study the frequency of play was measured for both types of toys to see a difference in play. 1 mark Both studies collected quantitative data.	**8**	Award L1–L4 for similarity. Award L1–L4 for difference. For Level 4 there must be some attempt at *explaining* the similarity or difference. Max Level 3 can be awarded if the answer is just description with no explanation. Max Level 2 if the similarity/difference is **not** explicitly stated by the candidate. Do **not** credit any responses linked to the sample, generalisations from the sample or assumptions. Different species = L0 as sample. Different aim = L1 Different levels of reliability = L2 max Different ethical guidelines = L3 max Note: Saavedra and Silverman is **not** a laboratory experiment and is **not** an observation. Also, Hassett is **not** a laboratory experiment. For research methods being a difference, **both** must be correct or L0.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
9(b)	e.g., difference 4 marks The studies used different (main) research methods. The Saavedra and Silverman study was a case study and used rating scales/self-reports to help track the progress of the boy in the therapy sessions. Hassett mainly used a structured observation to investigate the toy choices of the rhesus monkeys. Therefore, Saavedra had direct contact with the participant whereas the observers in the Hassett study did not (explanation). 3 marks The studies used different (main) research methods. The Saavedra and Silverman study was a case study and used rating scales/self-reports to help track the progress of the boy in the therapy sessions. Hassett mainly used a structured observation to investigate the toy choices of the rhesus monkeys. 2 marks The Saavedra and Silverman study was a case study and used rating scales/self-reports to help track the progress of the boy in the therapy sessions. Hassett mainly used a structured observation to investigate the toy choices of the rhesus monkeys. 1 mark The studies used different research methods / Saavedra was a case study / Hassett was mainly an observation.		

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<tr><td>9(b)</td><td>
<table>
<tr><th>Mark/ Level</th><th>Description</th></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>The similarity/difference is well explained using both studies as examples.</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>The similarity/difference is well explained but only one study is used as an example OR
both studies are used briefly.</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>The similarity/difference is brief with an attempt at using at least one study as an example OR
The similarity/difference is well explained but there is no study evidence.</td></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>The similarity/difference is brief with no attempt at using the studies as examples.</td></tr>
<tr><td>0</td><td>No creditable response.</td></tr>
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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
10	**Evaluate the study by Milgram (obedience) in terms of <u>two</u> strengths and <u>two</u> weaknesses. At least one of your evaluation points <u>must</u> be about reliability.** Strengths include reliability, standardisation, quantitative data, observations, realism (validity). Weaknesses include validity (external), sample, ethics. Example: in detail There was a standardised procedure. For example, the prods were always the same and the feedback from the learner never changed (it was recorded). This increases the reliability of the study and makes it easier for someone else to replicate the study to test for comparable findings. Example: brief but in context The study broke the ethical guideline of deception. Participants were led to believe they were administering electric shocks to a stranger. Example: no context What the Ps had to do is not an everyday task so lacks mundane realism.	**10**	

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<tr><th>Question</th><th>Answer</th><th>Marks</th><th>Guidance</th></tr>
<tr><td>10</td><td>
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<tr><th>Level</th><th>Description</th><th>Mark</th></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td>• Very good evaluation including the named issue.
• Thoroughly addresses both strengths and both weaknesses in detail.
• Selection of evidence is very thorough and effective.</td><td>9–10</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>• Good evaluation including the named issue.
• Addresses strengths and weaknesses but may include three or four points. The majority of the points are in depth.
• Selection of evidence is thorough and effective.</td><td>7–8</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>• Mostly appropriate evaluation but may not include the named issue.
• Addresses either two strengths or two weaknesses in detail or one of each in detail or all four briefly.
• Selection of evidence is mostly effective.</td><td>5–6</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>• Weak evaluation and may not include the named issue.
• Addresses either a strength or a weakness. Evaluation points are brief.
• Some points may have no context.
• Selection of evidence is sometimes appropriate.</td><td>3–4</td></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>• Little or no evaluation.
• Discussion of strengths and weaknesses is absent or superficial.
• Selection of evidence is limited.</td><td>1–2</td></tr>
<tr><td>0</td><td>No creditable response.</td><td></td></tr>
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