

# **OCR Psychology A-level**

## **Paper 1: Research Methods** **Psychological Reports**

## PSYCHOLOGICAL REPORT:

A psychological report is a report written as part of psychological research that contains the information needed to be published. It ensures that psychologists are able to publish their findings in a standardised way that allows other researchers to replicate the study (to ensure reliability) and provide evidence for their important new findings. A report contains:

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Method
- Results
- Discussion
- References
- Appendices



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## ABSTRACT

The first part of a written report is the abstract. The abstract summarises the entire study, outlining the aim of the research, the participants used, the tests conducted and the hypothesis that was accepted (the significance of the results), alongside conclusions. The abstract must be a maximum of 200 words and is written last, when all the information from the study has been analysed. It is very useful to other psychologists or readers who want to know the purpose of the research before they read it, as the report itself will be very detailed and contain complicated information.

The following abstract is taken from Simon Baron-Cohen's psychological report titled "**Does the autistic child have a theory of mind?**". You will come across this research in the core studies component of the exam.

*"We use a new model of metarepresentational development to predict a cognitive deficit which could explain a crucial component of the social impairment in childhood autism. One of the manifestations of a basic metarepresentational capacity is a 'theory of mind'. We have reason to believe that autistic children lack such a 'theory'. If this were so, then they would be unable to impute beliefs to others and to predict their behaviour. This hypothesis was tested using Wimmer and Perner's puppet play paradigm. Normal children and those with Down's syndrome were used as controls for a group of autistic children. Even though the mental age of the autistic children was higher than that of the controls, they alone failed to impute beliefs to others. Thus the dysfunction we have postulated and demonstrated is independent of mental retardation and specific to autism."*

[http://autismtruths.org/pdf/3.%20Does%20the%20autistic%20child%20have%20a%20theory%20of%20mind\\_SBC.pdf](http://autismtruths.org/pdf/3.%20Does%20the%20autistic%20child%20have%20a%20theory%20of%20mind_SBC.pdf)

You will not be expected to write an abstract in the exam, but it is important you understand and explore the information included in them as this frequently appears in the multiple choice section.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The introduction in a psychological report is the section that outlines the background to the study - such as theories and existing studies - in order to provide a logical context for the aim and hypothesis of the experiment being carried out. The introduction should allow the reader to understand the importance and motivation behind the research being carried out. It should include a general theory or topic, specify the relevant existing studies, progress to an outline of the aims and hypothesis and showcase the logical reasoning behind them, and then explain the general expectations of the experiment. The introduction should clearly contain the alternate and null hypothesis.

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## **METHOD**

In a psychological report, the method is a highly important section as it requires thorough standardisation, instructions and details in order to make the study fully and accurately replicable if required. The four key sections are **Design**, **Apparatus/Materials**, **Participants** and **Procedure**. These areas require the features that you learn in the research methods part of this exam, in terms of the experimental design, sampling methods and a logical, coherent procedure.

- The design section must be clear - explain the type of design (independent measures, repeated measures ect.) and how the participants will be allocated to each condition.
- The sample must then be explained, with numbers, location, age range, and gender or any other relevant characteristics to the study specified. It must be clear how this sample represents your target population.
- The materials and apparatus section must specify what equipment or objects are needed to carry out the experiment - this must be fully operationalised (defined) in order to make any replications of the study accurate. For example, if questionnaires, pens, food, posters, or any other such items are involved, these must be included in this section.
- The procedure must outline each step of the experiment, from preparation to the participant's involvement. The procedure for each condition in chronological order must be written, ensuring that any ethical considerations such as providing a brief, debrief or consent forms is also included. The exact location of the study and timings are also important, such as room names inside a university or school.

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## **RESULTS**

The results section of a psychological report must include a summarised account of the data using statistics and graphs, such as the mean, median, mode and statistical results such as the correlation coefficient or outcome of inferential statistics tests like Mann Whitney U.

However, **NO** raw scores are included (raw scores are the data that was collected directly from the experiment, such as tally marks or computer recordings).

The results section is there to highlight the key findings of the study after analysis, but **NOT** to explain why.

## DISCUSSION

It is in the discussion that an explanation of the results seen in the previous section is provided. The discussion must also link back to the studies referenced in the introduction to highlight similarities, differences and discuss whether the results were as expected or not. It is also important to communicate the possible weaknesses of the experiment or problems encountered whilst carrying out the investigation. Possible modifications or ideas for follow up research, perhaps to investigate the variable causing a correlation can also be included. The discussion will generally feature an overall conclusion to the study, identifying which hypothesis was accepted - the alternate or null - backed up by the statistical analysis provided in the results section.

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## REFERENCES

The references included must give acknowledgement of other research and psychologist's used in your own research. Any models, theories or studies discussed earlier on in the report must here be officially referenced as this work is not your own. Harvard Referencing is the system used to officially reference books or journals and their authors in a standardised and academically accepted manner.

➤ **To reference a book/ multiple books:**

- List the books in alphabetical order
- Authors surname followed by initials
- Year of publish
- Title of book
- Location of publish
- Publisher
- Page numbers used

Example:

"Boring, E. G. (1929) A History of Experimental Psychology, New York: Century. Page 20."

➤ **Similarly, to reference a psychological journal:**

- Head psychologist to publish the study (surname, first initials)
- Other psychologists involved
- Year the study was conducted
- Title of research (name of the article in the journal)
- Name of journal (*italics*)
- Journal volume number
- First and last page numbers

Example:

"Sperry, R. W. (1968) Hemisphere disconnection and unity in conscious awareness. *American Psychologist*, 23, 723–733."

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## APPENDICES

The appendices section is the section within the psychological report where all other important documents, details and mathematical calculations are presented. Generally, the information included is as follows:

- Copies of the **consent forms** given to the participants

- **Standardised instructions sheets** - either as a script transcript read by a researcher or the instruction sheet the participants read directly.
- **Statistical analysis and calculations**
- **Raw data** in tables and tallies obtained for each condition and participant, before any calculations were applied.
- **Materials** not included in the method, such as words used in a memory test or powerpoint slides given to participants in the brief.
- Proof of **ethical consideration** that outline the ethical considerations and evidence they have not been breached.

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**PEER REVIEW** - It is important that other researchers get to read studies and published reports in order to understand new developments as well as provide their own assessment for the validity and success of the experiment. Peer reviews also help to avoid unethical, bias or low quality research getting published to the public domain, as errors like this can cause misunderstandings through media, for example.

The problem is, peer reviews themselves may be biased by the individual, the topic of study or even the institution. Receiving such bias criticism may not actually be beneficial - if the study was standardised and produced valid, meaningful results, it may be important that they're published just to enhance scientific understanding. Therefore, it is important that the research is analysed by experts in the field, without knowing details of the researcher (to avoid gender or institution bias).