

AQA A-LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY • 7182

PSYCHOLOGY



EXAM QUESTION PACK

3.3.1 IDIOGRAPHIC AND NOMOTHETIC APPROACHES

SCORE

/10

PERCENTAGE

%

STEMUP

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Q1.

What is a 'nomothetic approach'? Suggest **one** limitation of a nomothetic approach.

(Total 2 marks)

Q2.

Which of the following best describes an idiographic approach in psychology?
Write **A**, **B**, **C**, or **D** in your answer book.

- A** Studying individuals in order to establish general laws of behaviour.
- B** Studying individuals without intending to establish general laws of behaviour.
- C** Studying large samples in order to establish general laws of behaviour.
- D** Studying large samples without intending to establish general laws of behaviour.

(Total 1 mark)

Q3.

Read the item and then answer the question that follows.

A prison psychologist used an idiographic approach to study offending. He asked two offenders to record their thoughts about their childhood and their offending behaviour in a journal over a period of four weeks.

Qualitative analysis of the journals showed that the offenders often thought about sad childhood events and believed that their childhood experiences had influenced their offending.

Findings from idiographic research like the study described above are often used as a basis for other investigations.

Explain how the researcher might develop the above investigation through taking a nomothetic approach.

(Total 6 marks)

Q4.

Which of the following statements best describes a nomothetic approach in psychology?
Shade **one** box only.

Psychologists taking a nomothetic approach...

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| A study single cases and do not formulate general laws. | ☐ |
| B study groups of people and do not formulate general laws. | ☐ |
| C study groups of people and formulate general laws. | ☐ |
| D study single cases and formulate general laws. | ☐ |

(Total 1 mark)

Mark schemes

Q1.

[AO1 = 1 AO3 = 1]

1 mark for a brief, clear definition: a nomothetic approach involves studying a sample in order to formulate general laws / principles of behaviour (or similar).

Plus

1 mark for a brief, coherent limitation.

Possible limitations:

- cannot find out rich / in-depth information about single cases
- less meaningful as tends to use quantitative measures.

Credit other relevant limitations.

[2]

Q2.

[AO1 = 1]

1 mark

B

Q3.

[AO3 = 6]

Level	Marks	Description
3	5 – 6	Proposals for developing the research by taking a nomothetic approach are clear and appropriate. Explanation is mostly effective. Specialist terminology is mostly used effectively. There is clear focus on the question.
2	3 – 4	Proposals for developing the research by taking a nomothetic approach are apparent and mostly appropriate. Explanation is partly effective. The answer lacks clarity, accuracy and organisation in places. Specialist terminology is used inappropriately on occasions.
1	1 – 2	There is some useful proposal of how the researcher could develop the research by taking a nomothetic approach. Explanation is limited and / or poorly focused. The answer as a whole lacks clarity, has inaccuracies and is poorly organised. Specialist terminology is often used inappropriately.
	0	No relevant content.

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Explanation possible points:

- taking a nomothetic approach would involve the researcher testing a larger sample of offenders
- sampling should involve a method of sample selection to give representativeness of a larger population, eg random sampling of the prison population
- the researcher would probably use a testable hypothesis, eg violent offenders have more negative thoughts about childhood than non-violent offenders
- taking a nomothetic approach would involve collection of a large amount of data
- analysis would probably involve quantitative methods, eg statistical testing and the drawing of conclusions in relation to a wider population
- credit also comparison of the worth of idiographic and nomothetic approaches, eg how idiographic investigations yield information that is rich, in-depth (journals inform about the precise nature of the negative thoughts enabling greater insight) whereas nomothetic investigations enable the formulation of general laws, eg offenders have a more negative view of their childhood.

Credit other relevant explanatory points.

Q4.

[AO1 = 1]

C

Examiner reports

Q1.

Definitions were not always clear and there was often confusion with generalisation. Mere statements that the nomothetic approach did not take account of individual differences were not sufficient as a limitation without some explanation.

Q2.

This question was answered correctly by 71% of students.