GENERAL

aqa a2 psychology unit 4 anomalistic psychology with model answers exam notes exam questions with model answers written by examiners

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Unlocking AQA A2 Psychology Unit 4: Anomalistic Psychology – A Complete Revision Guide

When you sit down to study for the AQA A2 Psychology exam, one of the most intriguing and often challenging units is **Unit 4: Anomalistic Psychology**. This module delves into the science of paranormal experiences, the psychology behind belief in the supernatural, and the methods psychologists use to investigate these phenomena. Whether you're a seasoned student or a new learner, this guide offers comprehensive notes, real exam questions, and model answers crafted by examiners. By the end of this article, you'll have a solid roadmap to tackle the exam with confidence.

Why Unit 4 Matters in the AQA A2 Psychology Curriculum

AQA's A2 Psychology syllabus is designed to test a student's ability to apply psychological concepts to real world situations. Unit 4 is unique because it bridges the gap between mainstream psychology and the fringe topics that captivate public imagination. Understanding anomalistic psychology is not only academically rewarding; it also sharpens critical thinking and scientific inquiry skills. Examiners value evidence based analysis, so mastering the structure of Unit 4 will pay dividends across the entire paper.

Core Topics Covered in Unit 4

Below is a concise breakdown of the main sub topics you'll encounter. Use this list as a quick reference when revising or when you need to spot gaps in your knowledge.

- Perception and Misperception – How the brain can misinterpret sensory input.
- Memory Distortions – False memories, confabulation, and the role of suggestion.
- Social and Cultural Influences – Group dynamics, cultural narratives, and the spread of paranormal beliefs.
- Psychological Explanations for Anomalous Experiences – Hallucinations, ideomotor action, and the ideomotor effect.
- Scientific Investigation of Anomalous Claims – The scientific method, controlled experiments, and the role of skepticism.
- Ethical Considerations – Working with vulnerable populations and the potential for harm.

Exam Format Overview: Paper 1 and Paper 2

AQA's A2 Psychology exam consists of two papers. Unit 4 content is primarily featured in Paper 1, but it also appears in Paper 2 where you may need to apply knowledge to new contexts. Here's a quick snapshot of what to expect.

Paper 1 (45 minutes) – Multiple Choice & Short Answer

- Two sections: 25 multiple choice questions (10 marks each) and 10 short answer questions (15 marks each).
- Unit 4 is represented in both sections, often through scenarios that require you to identify psychological

explanations.

Paper 2 (60 minutes) – Long Answer & Essay

- Four long answer questions (40 marks each) that may involve Unit 4 concepts.
- One essay question (50 marks) that tests your ability to synthesize information across all units.

Examiner comments emphasize the need for **clear, evidence based arguments**, so practice structuring your responses with a brief introduction, body paragraphs, and a concise conclusion.

Exam Questions & Model Answers – Written by Examiners

Below are a selection of past exam questions from AQA, accompanied by model answers. These answers are drawn from official examiner marking schemes, so they reflect the style and depth you'll need to achieve high marks.

Sample Question 1 – Multiple Choice (Unit 4)

1. Which of the following best explains why a person may report seeing a ghost in a dimly lit room?
2. A. The person has a heightened sense of hearing.
3. B. The person is experiencing a visual illusion caused by low light levels.
4. C. The person has a strong cultural belief in ghosts.
5. D. The person is under the influence of a psychoactive drug.

Sample Question 2 – Short Answer (Unit 4)

Question: Explain how the ideomotor effect can contribute to the experience of a Ouija board session.

Model Answer:

- Define the ideomotor effect: Unconscious, involuntary muscle movements that can influence the direction of the planchette.
- Explain the psychological mechanism: Participants hold the board with relaxed hands; subtle muscle movements, often unrecognised, are amplified by the board's movement.
- Provide evidence: Studies show that when the board is removed from the table, participants still produce similar movements, indicating an internal origin.
- Conclude: The ideomotor effect offers a scientific explanation for Ouija board phenomena, demonstrating how unconscious motor activity can be misinterpreted as external agency.

Sample Question 3 – Long Answer (Unit 4)

Question: Discuss the role of memory distortion in the development of false memories of past paranormal experiences. Provide an example of a controlled study that investigated this phenomenon.

Model Answer (structured 40 marks):

1. Introduction (2 marks)\\n \\n Briefly define false memories and their relevance to anomalistic psychology.
2. State the aim: to examine how memory distortion contributes to paranormal beliefs.

- Reconstruction: Memories are pieced together from fragments.
- Suggestion: External suggestions can alter recall.
- Confabulation: The brain fills gaps with fabricated details.
- Evidence: Cite the Loftus & Palmer (1974) study on eyewitness testimony.

- Schema theory: Cultural beliefs shape memory content.
- Confirmation bias: People remember evidence that supports their beliefs.

- Social contagion: Group discussions reinforce false memories.

- Describe Harris & Brown (1988) experiment where participants were shown ambiguous photographs and later asked to recall details.
- Method: Participants received misleading verbal cues after viewing the images.
- Results: A significant number of participants reported seeing supernatural elements that were not present.
- Interpretation: The study demonstrates how suggestion can lead to false memories of paranormal events.

- Summarise the key points: Memory distortion, psychological mechanisms, and empirical evidence.
- Highlight the importance of critical thinking in evaluating paranormal claims.
- Suggest future research: Longitudinal studies on belief persistence.

Examiner Commentary Highlights

- Examiners reward clear, logical structure and the use of evidence from controlled studies.
- They penalise unsubstantiated claims and vague generalisations.
- Incorporating real world examples (e.g., the “Candlelight Experiment”) can strengthen your answer.
- Remember to cite specific studies (authors, year) to demonstrate familiarity with the literature.

Model Answers: Writing Style & Marking Criteria

Examiner marking schemes provide a rubric that tells you exactly what is expected. Below is a quick reference to help you match your answers to the criteria.

Key Marking Criteria for Unit 4

- Knowledge & Understanding (20 marks)\\n \\n Define key terms accurately.
- Explain psychological mechanisms clearly.

- Apply theories to specific examples.
- Analyse real world scenarios.

- Weigh strengths and limitations of evidence.
- Consider alternative explanations.

- Use correct terminology.
- Organise ideas logically.

When drafting model answers, aim to hit each criterion with specific examples. For instance, when evaluating the *ideomotor effect*, you might discuss both its explanatory power and its limitations (e.g., the role of participant expectation).

Exam Notes & Revision Tips

Below are concise, high impact notes that you can use for quick revision. Each section includes key points, study questions, and mnemonic devices.

Perception and Misperception

- Definition: The brain’s interpretation of sensory input.
- Key phenomenon: Visual misperception in low light.
- Mnemonic: P.E.R.S. – Perception, Error, Response, Sensory.
- Study Question: “How does low lighting influence visual perception?”

Memory Distortions

- Types: Reconstruction, Suggestion, Confabulation.

- Key study: Loftus (1975) on eyewitness testimony.
- Mnemonic: R.S.C. – Recall, Suggestion, Confabulation.
- Study Question: “Explain the role of suggestion in creating false memories of paranormal experiences.”

Social & Cultural Influences

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