Higher Psychology: guidance on creating assessments

This edition: January 2024 (version 1.0)

Contents

Introduction and purpose

This document provides guidance to help teachers and lecturers delivering Higher Psychology to prepare assessments for their learners. You should read this guidance alongside SQA's guidance on evidence for estimates. You should also refer to the course specification and course support effective for the current year, which you can find on the Higher Psychology subject page on SQA's website.

Assessments may have several purposes, but they will most likely be used for:

♦ diagnostic information, which helps to inform teaching and learning
♦ predictive information, which helps in decisions on course estimates
♦ practice for candidates in an external assessment context
♦ evidence for exceptional circumstances, should it be needed

Where evidence is used for predictive purposes or as evidence for exceptional circumstances, it is important that the assessments used are as close to the structure and format of the final exam as possible. This document provides guidance on how to meet these criteria; however, different forms of assessment may be appropriate for other purposes.

What are prelims?

Prelims are practice or trial exams that candidates take to prepare for the final exam. They are used to help candidates become familiar with the material and the exam format. Prelims also provide feedback to the candidate and the teacher or lecturer about how well the candidate has understood the material and can apply the skills required. You also use prelims to inform the estimates you make of how the candidate will perform in their course assessments.

A prelim or mock exam is carried out under the same conditions as the final exam. It should be clearly aligned to the course specification, content, and level of demand as exemplified in the specimen question paper and past papers. Because specimen question papers and past papers are in the public domain, and candidates can readily access them, they should not be used in their entirety. However, you can incorporate individual questions from past papers into prelims or mock question papers. Alternatively, you can create your own questions.

No matter how you create prelims, to make them valid, reliable, practicable and fair, they must be grounded in a firm understanding of the course assessment requirements and standards.

Understanding course assessment requirements and standards

To create valid, reliable, practicable and fair assessments, it is important to have a clear understanding of:

♦ the range of skills, knowledge and understanding the question papers cover
♦ the assessment requirements and the structure of the question papers
♦ the grade descriptions for the course

Information on these aspects is available from the course specification, specimen question papers, past papers, and [Understanding Standards](#) materials for each course. The [course specification](#) provides detailed information on the purpose of the question paper. This includes the mandatory skills, knowledge and understanding assessed in the question paper, as well as the structure and broad mark allocations.

The Higher Psychology Course Specification also provides the following information:

Range of skills, knowledge and understanding

The skills, knowledge and understanding sampled for the Higher Psychology question paper are:

♦ analysis and evaluation of psychological concepts, theories, and evidence
♦ application of knowledge and understanding of psychology to analyse and explain human behaviour
♦ understanding of the research process in psychology, including the ability to evaluate methods and explain ethical and scientific standards
♦ using research evidence to explain human behaviour

Assessment requirements and the structure of the question paper

Assessments should contain approximately 30% grade A marks that require candidates to demonstrate a consistently high performance in relation to the skills, knowledge, and understanding for the course. Grade A marks relate to the level of demand of a question rather than the difficulty candidates may have with a question. This usually involves questions testing more complex higher-order skills.

In the Higher Psychology question paper, higher-order skills questions are normally those that use the command words:

♦ analyse
♦ explain … with reference to … (requiring candidates to apply the skill of application to a new situation)

The remaining questions are accessible to most candidates, with the range and depth of answers differentiating between grade B responses and grade C responses.

All of the marks available for questions with the command word 'describe' can be awarded to C-type responses, but there should be few questions with this command word in Higher question-paper type assessments.

You should also consider the following when creating a Higher Psychology prelim:

♦ If you use past papers as a source, the prelim should be composed of questions drawn from at least three past papers and avoid drawing consecutive questions en-bloc from a single past paper.

♦ If you adapt questions from past papers, or if you devise your own questions, or a mix of these, the questions must meet the assessment requirements detailed in the course specification.

♦ Marks should be proportional to the areas you cover. For example, if examining one full topic area but only half the content of another topic area, it would not be appropriate to represent these areas equally in the paper.

♦ Each question assessing knowledge should focus on the content listed in the course specification and assess only what is listed there (see the 'Course coverage' section). The context of the question, however, may be unfamiliar to candidates (if asking 'explain …with reference to…' questions, which test the skill of application).

♦ Approximately 30% of the marks should be A-type, 20% B-type and 50% C-type.

♦ The prelim should mirror the structure, format, and language of an SQA question paper.

♦ You should not include questions that are either too short or too long. The number of marks allocated to each question or sub-question should be similar to those allocated in past papers.

Conditions of assessment

Ideally, centre-created assessments should replicate SQA exams as closely as possible. This means that they should be closed book (without notes), supervised, and timed. The length of time given to answer should correspond to the time allowed for the SQA Higher Psychology question paper. A prelim covering both mandatory topics and one optional topic worth 60 marks in total should take 2 hours. You should maintain the same minutes to marks ratio if an assessment is covering fewer topics, where possible, that is 2 minutes per mark. Therefore, an assessment covering one section only would be worth 20 marks and last for 40 minutes: where two topics are covered, this should be worth 40 marks and last 1 hour 20 minutes.

Timing (when assessment is carried out)

Assessments carried out earlier in the course of study are likely to be less useful in terms of exam preparation or generating evidence of likely success than evidence generated later. Other reasons for carrying out assessments later in the course include, for instance, to ensure theories and/or concepts and research are understood. If early assessments are used, further evidence from assessments later in the academic year may demonstrate a candidate's progression and be more useful in building a profile and preparing for the final exam.

Guidance for writing assessment questions

Questions must have a clear command word. You can take these from the course specification. The most commonly used command words in Psychology are:

- **Describe**: requires candidates to provide a statement or structure of characteristics and/or features. This will be more than an outline or a list. It may refer to, for example, a concept, process, experiment, situation, or facts.
- **Explain**: requires candidates to apply their psychological knowledge and understanding to give further information about the meaning of something, to give reasons, or show connections.
- **Explain with reference to a theory or concept**: requires candidates to give reasons or show connections. The theory must be used to explain the behaviour in the scenario.
- **Explain how knowledge of (a psychological concept or theory) can be (applied to a real-life issue)**: requires candidates to give the judgement or evaluation criterion, then explain why this creates a strength or weakness. Candidates are expected to apply their knowledge and understanding to explain the behaviour in a scenario.
- **Evaluate**: requires candidates to make a judgement based on criteria to determine the value of something.
- **Analyse**: requires candidates to make points that identify parts, the relationship between them, and their relationship with the whole; draw out and relate implications; and analyse data (possibly including calculations and/or a conclusion). Candidates can gain analysis marks where they provide, for example:
  — implications
  — links to theories and/or studies
  — implications of strengths and/or weaknesses of processes
  — applications of processes, theories or studies, perhaps based on an evaluation
- **What conclusions can be reached**: requires candidates to draw out and relate conclusions, which relates to the skill of analysis.

Note that this list is not exhaustive and, on some occasions, it may be necessary to ask a different question to avoid complicated wording. You should never start a question with 'How …', as this can easily be misinterpreted, although it is okay to use it after a command word, for example 'Describe how …' or 'Explain how …'.

It is important not to use double commands in a sentence, such as 'describe and evaluate', as this can be problematic for candidates if they miss one of the commands. It is much better to go for the usual Psychology approach of 'Describe … ' followed by 'Evaluate … ' on a new line.

You should also consider the following points:

♦ Avoid too much information in one sentence — if necessary, break up text into separate paragraphs.

♦ Be careful with contexts and scenarios. If you are having to write a large amount of information to explain the context to candidates, then it is probably too complicated.

♦ Try to pick contexts and scenarios that most candidates will be aware of or familiar with, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, economic circumstances and geographic location.

♦ When writing a multipart question, try to lead the candidate through the question.

♦ Temporal sequencing in a question is important. Do not ask about a theory, concept or study, change the theory, concept or study, then revert to the original theory, concept or study.

♦ Do not use 'pupils'; it is always 'students'.

Creating an assessment

Centre-created assessments that closely replicate those used by SQA are most likely to prepare candidates well for the final exam.

To produce an assessment, you should consider a number of elements:

Course coverage

You can ask about any part of the course content in the exam, but only a sample of the course is assessed in any question paper. Centre-created assessments should aim to replicate this by sampling from across the course, and should do so in a manner that mirrors the approach taken in SQA assessments.

There are two areas of the course that are assessed in the question paper: individual behaviour and social behaviour. You should cover both areas in an assessment, to give candidates an experience similar to sitting the SQA question paper. Within these sections of the question paper there are a number of elements that may be assessed, and you should select from these to provide coverage that is broad without duplication.

You should take care to avoid questions that invite learners to use the same material when answering different questions. For example, in the 'Individual behaviour: sleep and dreams' section, the following questions would both be suitable; however, they should not appear in the same assessment as there would be overlap in the answers:

1   Explain the role of the brain in sleep.
2   Explain Oswald's restoration theory of sleep.

Avoid over-sampling from one aspect of the course and do not include combinations of questions that would allow candidates to gain marks in different questions using similar answers. Please note that, although these examples are from the 'Individual behaviour: sleep and dreams' section, this advice equally applies to other areas of study.

You can only assess the topics that are covered in the course specification. For each of the three sections, this means:

Individual behaviour

Candidates must be able to:

♦   explain, evaluate and analyse psychological theories, concepts, research evidence and terminology when explaining human behaviour
♦   give psychological explanations, evaluations and analysis of content from the mandatory topic of sleep and dreams

Sleep and dreams

Skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment can include:

♦ biological processes relating to sleep and dreams, which must include:
— the role of the brain in sleep
— circadian rhythms
— non-REM and REM sleep and dreaming
— Oswald's (1966) restoration theory of sleep
— the aims, methods, results and conclusions of Dement, W. and Kleitman, N. (1957). The relation of eye movements during sleep to dream activity: an objective method for the study of dreaming. *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 53, 339–46

♦ cognitive processes relating to sleep and dreams, which must include:
— sleep to facilitate information processing
— Crick and Mitchison's (1986) reorganisational theory of dreaming
— the aims, methods, results and conclusions of Czeisler, C. A., Johnson, M. P., Duffy, J. F., Brown, E. N., Ronda, J. M. and Kronauer, R. E. (1990). Exposure to bright light and darkness to treat physiologic maladaptation to night work. *New England Journal of Medicine* 322, 1253–59

♦ psychodynamic processes relating to sleep and dreams, which must include:
— conscious and unconscious processes
— manifest and latent content of dreams
— defence mechanisms

♦ factors affecting sleep, which must include:
— impact of drugs
— impact of light

Social behaviour

Candidates must be able to:

♦ explain, evaluate and analyse psychological theories, concepts, research evidence and terminology when explaining human behaviour
♦ give psychological explanations, evaluation and analysis of content from the mandatory topic of conformity and obedience

Conformity and obedience

Skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment can include:

♦ types of conformity, which must include:
— identification
— compliance
— internalisation

- factors affecting conformity, which must include:
  — normative influence
  — informational influence
  — individual factors: gender, self-esteem
  — situational factors: group size, group unanimity, task difficulty
  — cultural factors: collectivist and individualistic cultures
- the aims, methods, results, evaluation and conclusions of Mori, K., and Arai, M. (2010). No need to fake it: Reproduction of the Asch experiment without confederates. *International Journal of Psychology* 45 (5), 390–97
- factors affecting obedience, which must include:
  — perceived legitimate authority
  — socialisation
  — authoritarian parenting
  — autonomous and agentic levels of behaviour
  — situational factors: proximity, location, wearing a uniform
- the aims, methods, results, evaluation and conclusions of Milgram, S. (1963). Behavioural study of obedience. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67, 371–78, and relevant knowledge from Milgram's subsequent related studies

Additional topic

Candidates must be able to:

- explain, evaluate and analyse psychological theories, concepts, research evidence and terminology when explaining human behaviour
- give psychological explanations, evaluations and analysis of content from **one** of the optional topics of either depression, memory, stress, prejudice, social relationships, or aggression

Depression

Skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment can include:

- major depressive disorder and persistent depressive disorder (DSM-V — 2012 revision)
- biological causes for depression, which must include:
  — the role of neurochemistry
  — the role of hormones
  — the role of diathesis–stress
- biological treatments for depression, which must include:
  — selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs); tricyclics; serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs); monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs); electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)
- the aims, methods, results, evaluation, and conclusions of one study into the biology of depression

- ♦ Beck's cognitive theory, which must include:
  - — the cognitive triad
  - — negative self-schema
  - — faulty information processing
- ♦ the aims, methods, results, evaluation, and conclusions of one study into cognitive causes or treatment of depression

Memory

Skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment can include:

- ♦ the multi-store model of memory, which must include:
  - — sensory register, short-term memory and long-term memory
  - — features and functions of each store in terms of coding, capacity and duration
  - — the aims, method, results, evaluation and conclusions of one study relating to the multi-store model of memory
- ♦ the working memory model, which must include:
  - — central executive
  - — phonological loop
  - — visuo-spatial sketchpad
  - — episodic buffer
  - — features and functions of each of the above in terms of coding and capacity
- ♦ the aims, method, results, evaluation and conclusions of one study relating to the working memory model
- ♦ explanations of forgetting, which must include:
  - — trace decay
  - — interference
  - — forgetting due to the absence of cues (context and state)
  - — forgetting due to brain damage

Stress

Skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment can include:

- ♦ the physiology of stress, which must include:
  - — the general adaptation syndrome
  - — the sympathetic medullary system
  - — the hypothalamic pituitary–adrenal system
  - — the role of cortisol
  - — the role of immunosuppression on physical health
  - — the aims, methods, results, evaluation and conclusions of one study into the physiology of stress

- sources of stress, which must include:
  — life changes and daily hassles
  — the effects of workload and control on workplace stress
- individual differences in the stress response, which must include:
  — Type A and Type B personality types
  — hardiness
- the aims, methods, results, evaluation and conclusions of one study into individual differences in the stress response
- types of coping strategies, which must include:
  — drug therapy
  — stress inoculation therapy
  — social support, including instrumental and emotional

Prejudice

Skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment can include:

- types of discrimination, which must include:
  — direct and indirect
  — racial
  — age
  — gender
- explanations of prejudice, which must include:
  — authoritarian personality
  — stereotyping
  — realistic conflict theory
  — scapegoat theory
  — social identity theory
- the aims, methods, results, evaluation and conclusions of one study into an explanation of prejudice
- ways of reducing prejudice, which must include:
  — the jigsaw technique
  — media's ability to challenge stereotypes
  — education
  — affirmative action
- the aims, methods, results, evaluation and conclusions of one study into ways of reducing prejudice

Social relationships

Skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment can include:

♦ theories of romantic relationships, which must include:
— evolutionary theory
— filter theory
— social exchange theory
— Rusbult's investment theory
♦ the aims, methods, results, evaluation and conclusions of one study into a theory of romantic relationships
♦ virtual relationships in social media, which must include:
— gating
— Sproull and Kiesler's reduced cues theory
— Walther's hyperpersonal theory
♦ the aims, methods, results, evaluation and conclusions of one study into virtual relationships in social media
♦ parasocial relationships, which must include:
— levels of parasocial relationships
— the absorption–addiction model
— attachment theory

Aggression

Skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment can include:

♦ biological influences on aggression, which must include:
— neural and hormonal
— genetic
— evolutionary
— ethological
♦ the aims, methods, results, evaluation and conclusions of one study into biological influences on aggression
♦ social psychological explanations of aggression, which must include:
— social learning theory
— Sykes' deprivation model
— dysfunctional institutions
— the importation model
♦ media influences on aggression, which must include:
— computer games
— cognitive priming
— disinhibition
♦ the aims, methods, results, evaluation and conclusions of one study into media influences on aggression

Writing inclusive questions

The best way to make sure that you write inclusive questions is to use the wording of the 'Course content' section of the course specification. The wording of the course specification should be familiar to candidates and using it will help them to decode the question more quickly and focus on their response.

Furthermore, you should follow the guidelines below:

♦ Write questions that are clear, precise, and easy to understand. Apart from appropriate psychological terminology, avoid using jargon or difficult language.
♦ Use terminology that is familiar to all candidates.
♦ Consider the impact of cultural and linguistic issues when writing questions.
♦ When constructing scenarios or arguments, avoid stereotyping. For example, think about using a female name when creating a scenario that includes a stereotypical male role or occupation, and vice versa. Or use gender-neutral names.
♦ Use names that reflect the cultural diversity of the community of your centre, and of Scotland.
♦ As much as possible, try to make questions concise and easy to read.

You'll also find a checklist to help you create prelims that are valid, reliable, practicable and fair in Appendix 2.

Marking reliability

You should be familiar with the general marking principles for Higher Psychology (see Appendix 1) and the published marking instructions that accompany SQA past papers, as these demonstrate the required marking standard.

It is good practice to prepare marking instructions at the same time as you construct the assessment. You can then refine marking instructions considering candidate responses. They should be agreed between all markers and applied consistently.

Cross-marking of a sample of each marker's work ensures the marking instructions have been applied accurately and consistently. If you are the only person delivering Psychology within your centre, it will be useful for you to collaborate with teachers and lecturers from other centres delivering the same qualification, to enable quality assurance and standardisation to take place.

Some common marking issues include:

♦ inconsistent application of the marking instructions
♦ markers being over-lenient or too harsh
♦ inaccurate marking of skills (for example giving marks for the skill of explanation where the skill of description only is evident; giving marks for analysis, where the skill of evaluation only is evident)

It would be great if all candidates used the same words as the marking instructions, but it is more likely that they will use their own words, and it is possible that many will give responses that are not incorrect, but may not sufficiently answer the question.

In these cases, there are two dangers for the marker:

♦ Concluding that the answer is not exactly the same as the stated marking instructions and therefore giving less credit than that answer is worth: this would be unfair to candidates who have given good psychology responses in their own words.

♦ Subconsciously 'filling in the gaps' in the candidate's answer and therefore giving more credit than the answer is worth: this would be unfair to other candidates who answered fully and correctly. Markers should not adopt the strategy of 'I know what they meant, so I'll award the mark'.

Marks should only be allocated based on the written response and not what the response infers.

Appendix 1: general marking principles for Higher Psychology

You should always apply these general principles. Use them in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidates' responses.

a) Always use positive marking. This means candidates accumulate marks for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; marks are not deducted for errors or omissions.

b) If a candidate response does not seem to be covered by either the principles or detailed marking instructions, and you are uncertain how to assess it, you must seek guidance from your team leader.

c) The term 'or any other relevant response' allows for possible variation in candidates' responses. Always award marks according to the accuracy and relevance of an answer.

d) 'Describe' requires candidates to provide a statement or structure of characteristics and/or features. This will be more than an outline or a list. It may refer to, for example, a concept, process, experiment, situation, or facts.

e) 'Explain' requires candidates to relate cause and effect and/or make relationships between things clear.

f) 'Analyse' requires candidates to identify parts, the relationship between them, and their relationship with the whole; draw out and relate implications; and analyse data (possibly including calculations as well as a conclusion).

g) 'Evaluate' requires candidates to make a judgement based on criteria to determine the value of something.

h) A development of a point (of description, explanation, analysis or evaluation) will provide further related information and might include exemplification of the point.

i) Candidates gain marks by responding to questions using psychological knowledge and understanding. Do not award marks for personal opinion that is not supported by psychological knowledge and understanding.

j) There may be some flexibility in the way that marks are awarded in a question. This is clearly noted in the specific marking instructions for that question.

Appendix 2: checklist for prelim writing

Yes or No	Checklist
	Contains questions drawn from at least three past papers or specimen question papers (if using).
	Approximately 30% of marks are A-type and 20% are B-type.
	All questions have marks that are available for C-grade skills.
	Each question assesses only what is listed in the course specification.
	Paper structure, format, and language mirrors that of an SQA question paper.
	Questions and scenarios are inclusive.

Administrative information

Published: January 2024 (version 1.0)

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date

Note: please check SQA's website to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.