



National 5 Psychology: guidance on creating assessments

The information in this publication may be reproduced in support of SQA qualifications only on a non-commercial basis. If it is reproduced, SQA must be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be reproduced for any other purpose, written permission must be obtained from permissions@sqa.org.uk.

This edition: January 2024 (version 1.0)

© Scottish Qualifications Authority 2024

Contents

Introduction and purpose	1
What are prelims?	2
Understanding course assessment requirements and standards	3
Range of skills, knowledge and understanding	3
Assessment requirements and the structure of the question paper	3
Conditions of assessment	4
Timing (when assessment is carried out)	4
Guidance for writing assessment questions	5
Creating an assessment	6
Course coverage	6
Writing inclusive questions	10
Marking reliability	10
Appendix 1: general marking principles for National 5 Psychology	12
Appendix 2: checklist for prelim writing	13
Administrative information	14
History of changes	14

Introduction and purpose

This document provides guidance for practitioners delivering National 5 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 [National 5 Psychology subject page](#) on SQA's website.

Assessments may have several purposes, but they will 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 National 5 Psychology Course Specification also provides the following information:

Range of skills, knowledge and understanding

The skills, knowledge and understanding sampled for the National 5 Psychology question paper are:

- ◆ application of knowledge and understanding of psychology to explain human behaviour
- ◆ explaining psychological concepts, theories and terminology
- ◆ using research evidence to explain human behaviour
- ◆ interpreting basic descriptive statistics in psychological research, including the ability to calculate the mean, median and mode

Please note that other skills, knowledge and understanding are assessed in the assignment component of the course assessments. These are not assessed in the question paper, and can be found in the course specification.

Assessment requirements and the structure of the question paper

Prelims 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 National 5 Psychology question paper, questions for grade A and B responses normally contain the command words:

- ◆ explain strengths and/or weaknesses of a theory, concept or research study
- ◆ using your knowledge of ... explain ... (requiring candidates to apply the skill of application to a new situation)

The remaining 70% of marks 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 for questions that begin with 'describe' are normally available for grade C responses.

You should also consider the following when creating a National 5 Psychology prelim:

- ◆ If you use past papers as a source, you should compose the prelim 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 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 you examine 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, can be unfamiliar to candidates (if asking 'explain ... using ...' 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, for example in each section the mandatory topic will have a total marks allocation of 15 or 20, and the optional topics will also have a total marks allocation of 15 or 20. The total marks allocation for each section must be 35. It is important to be mindful of this if prelims are being taken at different times using discrete prelim sections.
- ◆ 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 National 5 Psychology question paper. A prelim covering both mandatory topics and two optional topics worth 70 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, for example 1.7 minutes per mark. Therefore, an assessment covering one section only would be worth 35 marks and last for 1 hour.

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, for instance. 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.
- ◆ **Using ... explain ... :** requires candidates to give reasons or show connections. The theory must be used to explain the behaviour in the question.
- ◆ **Explain how knowledge of (a psychological concept or theory) can be applied to (a real-life issue):** requires candidates to apply their knowledge and understanding to explain behaviour in a scenario.

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 'Explain strengths and weaknesses of ...' 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 Describe REM and non-REM sleep.
- 2 Describe the Restoration Theory of Sleep (Oswald 1966).

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 two sections, this means:

Individual behaviour

Candidates must be able to:

- ◆ explain and use psychological theories, concepts, research evidence and terminology when explaining human behaviour
- ◆ give a psychological explanation of two topics relating to individual behaviour, including the topic of sleep and dreams, and one other from the topics of either personality or phobias

Sleep and dreams

For the topic of sleep and dreams, candidates must be able to:

- ◆ describe and explain REM and non-REM sleep
- ◆ describe and explain the Restoration Theory of Sleep (Oswald 1966)
- ◆ explain one strength and one weakness of the Restoration Theory of Sleep
- ◆ describe the main aims, method/procedure and results of Dement and Kleitman's study (1957)
- ◆ describe and explain the psychoanalytic (Freudian) theory of dreams, which must include:
 - conscious
 - pre-conscious
 - unconscious
 - manifest content of dreams
 - latent content of dreams
- ◆ describe the aims, method/procedure and results of Freud's (1909) study of Little Hans
- ◆ explain one strength and one weakness of the studies used

Candidates will also be assessed on one other topic relating to individual behaviour, chosen from personality or phobias.

Personality

For the topic of personality, candidates must be able to:

- ◆ describe what is meant by personality in psychology
- ◆ describe and explain Eysenck's type theory of personality, which must include:
 - introversion/extraversion
 - neuroticism/stability
 - psychoticism/sociability
- ◆ explain one strength and one weakness of Eysenck's type theory of personality
- ◆ describe personality scales, which must include:
 - EPQ-r (Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-revised)
 - Big 5
- ◆ describe the characteristics of anti-social personality disorder (APD) (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V) — 2012 revision)
- ◆ describe and explain the causes of APD, which must include:
 - biological
 - situational
- ◆ describe the main aims, method/procedure and results of a research study into:
 - the situational causes of APD
 - the biological causes of APD
- ◆ explain one strength and one weakness of the research studies used

Phobias

For the topic of phobias, candidates must be able to:

- ◆ describe what is meant by phobias
- ◆ describe the characteristics of agoraphobia, specific phobia, and social anxiety disorder (DSM-V — 2012 revision)
- ◆ describe and explain the role of genetic inheritance, and the two-process model (classical conditioning and operant conditioning, Mowrer, 1947) in the creation of phobias
- ◆ describe and explain therapies for phobias, which must include:
 - systematic desensitisation
 - social skills training
- ◆ explain one strength and one weakness of systematic desensitisation
- ◆ describe the main aims, method/procedure and results of a study into:
 - the two-process model of phobias (classical or operant conditioning)
 - the genetic inheritance of phobias
- ◆ explain one strength and one weakness of the studies used

Social behaviour

Candidates must be able to:

- ◆ explain and use psychological theories, concepts, research evidence and terminology when explaining human behaviour
- ◆ give a psychological explanation of two topics relating to social behaviour, including the topic of conformity, and one other from the topics of either altruism or non-verbal communication (NVC)

Conformity

For the topic of conformity, candidates must be able to:

- ◆ describe what is meant by conformity
- ◆ describe and explain the concepts of:
 - informational and normative social influence
 - compliance and internalisation
 - individual, situational and cultural factors
 - minority and majority influence
- ◆ describe the main aims, method/procedure and results of Asch's (1951), and Mori and Arai's (2010) studies
- ◆ explain one strength and one weakness of the studies used

Candidates will also be assessed on one other topic relating to social behaviour, chosen from either altruism or non-verbal communication (NVC).

Altruism

For the topic of altruism, candidates must be able to:

- ◆ describe what is meant by altruism
- ◆ describe and explain the concepts of bystander apathy, diffusion of responsibility and pluralistic ignorance
- ◆ describe and explain:
 - the kin-selection theory of altruism
 - the empathy-altruism theory
 - cultural differences in altruism
- ◆ describe the main aims, method/procedure and results of a study relating to the kin-selection theory of altruism
- ◆ describe the main aims, method/procedure and results of a study relating to the empathy-altruism theory
- ◆ explain one strength and one weakness of the studies used

Non-verbal communication (NVC)

For the topic of non-verbal communication (NVC), candidates must be able to:

- ◆ describe types of NVC, which must include the functions of:
 - eye contact
 - facial expression
 - body language
- ◆ describe and explain the contribution of nature and nurture to NVC, which must include:
 - personal space
 - cultural differences
 - universal types of NVC
 - gender differences
 - status differences
- ◆ describe the main aims, method/procedure and results of a study relating to:
 - nature in NVC
 - nurture in NVC
- ◆ explain one strength and one weakness of the studies used

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, along with the command word. 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 National 5 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 description, where the skill of identification 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, 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 National 5 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) You must always assign marks for each candidate response in line with these general marking principles and the detailed marking instructions for the assessment.
- d) We use the term 'or any other acceptable answer' to allow for the possible variation in candidates' responses. You should give credit according to the accuracy and relevance of candidates' answers. The skill of using appropriate psychological terminology and relevant research evidence is reflected in exemplar responses. However, at this level, candidates may be awarded marks where the answer is accurate but expressed in their own words.
- e) Questions that ask the candidate to 'describe' require the candidate to make a point and then develop this point by giving further information. For example, if 2 marks are available, award a mark for making the main point and a further mark for developing the point by giving additional or related information.
- f) Questions that ask the candidate to 'explain' or 'use' require the candidate to apply their psychological knowledge and understanding to give further information about the meaning of something, to give reasons or show connections. This may include explaining features of a theory, or explaining behaviour using approaches, concepts or theories, or relating a theory to a scenario. For example, if 3 marks are available for an 'explain' question, award 1 mark for making a key point of explanation and a further mark for each additional correct key point of explanation.
- g) For credit to be given, points must relate to the question asked. If within a structured question of, say, two or three parts, a candidate gives more information in the first part than is required and inadvertently has given the answer to the second part, then although the candidate has given the answer for part (b) in part (a), you should award the marks if the answer is relevant and correct.
- h) Each question is structured to assess the candidate's breadth of psychological knowledge and understanding and their skill in using this. Within the structure of some questions, short stimulus pieces or scenarios are used, requiring the candidate to use their skills, knowledge and understanding in unfamiliar contexts. The candidate can respond by drawing on learning where personalisation and choice have been exercised. If you are not familiar with the topic chosen, you must seek guidance from your team leader.

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.