



National
Qualifications

Psychology

Assignment

General assessment information

This pack contains general assessment information for centres preparing candidates for the assignment Component of Higher Psychology Course assessment.

It must be read in conjunction with the specific assessment task for this component of Course assessment which may only be downloaded from SQA's designated secure website by authorised personnel.

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Introduction

This is the general assessment information for the Higher Psychology assignment.

This assignment is worth 40 marks out of a total of 100 marks. This is 40% of the overall marks for the Course assessment. The Course will be graded A-D.

Marks for all Course Components are added up to give a total Course assessment mark which is then used as the basis for grading decisions.

This is one of two Components of Course assessment. The other Component is a question paper.

This document describes the general requirements for the assessment of the assignment Component for this Course. It gives general information and instructions for assessors.

It must be read in conjunction with the assessment task for this Component of Course assessment.

Equality and inclusion

This Course assessment has been designed to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to assessment. Assessments have been designed to promote equal opportunities while maintaining the integrity of the qualification.

For guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs, please follow the link to the Assessment Arrangements web page: www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/14977.html

Guidance on inclusive approaches to delivery and assessment in this Course is provided in the *Course Support Notes*.

What this assessment covers

This Component contributes 40% of the marks for the Course.

This assessment will assess the skills, knowledge and understanding specified for the Higher Psychology assignment in the *Course Assessment Specification*. These are:

- ◆ using research skills to generate, select, organise, interpret, analyse and evaluate information in psychology
- ◆ using communication skills to present information, including a report on psychological research

In the Higher Psychology Course assessment, added value will focus on the following:

- ◆ breadth – drawing on knowledge and skills from across the Course
- ◆ application – requiring application of knowledge and skills

Ethical guidelines

It is essential that all assessors and candidates are familiar with the most recent version of the 'BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct' which applies to ALL psychological research: www.bps.org.uk.

The BPS Code establishes four ethical principles: **respect, competence, responsibility, integrity**. These principles are relevant for the Higher Psychology assignment. It is important to ensure that the research conducted is ethical. Ethical issues should be addressed *before* conducting the psychological research.

Assessment

Purpose

The purpose of this assessment is to generate evidence for this Component of the added value of this Course by means of an assignment.

Assessment overview

In this assessment the candidate will have to carry out a piece of primary research. This will be based on a topic they have studied. Briefs will be provided relating to each unit to guide candidates towards selection of a research topic. The candidate will carry out primary research and compile a report on that research. The aim of the assignment is to enable the candidate to apply skills, knowledge and understanding from across the Course. The completed report is the assessment evidence for the Higher Psychology assignment.

The assignment has six stages. These are to:

- 1 Review the Psychology research briefs provided by SQA
- 2 Choose a topic for research
- 3 Carry out background research on the topic
- 4 Plan primary research according to the topic, implementing British Psychological Society (BPS) ethical guidelines
- 5 Carry out primary research according to the research plan and implementing BPS ethical guidelines
- 6 Produce a report that conforms to the style and format of a psychology research report

The assessor will decide when the candidate is ready to start the assignment. The candidate will be ready when he/she knows how to use appropriate research methods to carry out primary research on topics in psychology and understands the need to follow ethical guidelines. The assessor should ensure that the candidate has skills in carrying out background research using a range of resources. The candidate should be able to use skills to describe, explain, analyse and evaluate information and use psychological terminology. The candidate will draw on knowledge and understanding from the Units of the Higher Psychology Course, in particular the *Research* Unit. The assessor should ensure that the candidate knows how to conduct and report on primary research, as the candidate will need to be able to produce a research report that conforms to standards for report writing in psychology. The assessor and candidate must both know and comply with BPS ethical standards for psychological research.

Once the candidate has selected their topic, they can work in a group or independently when planning and carrying out their research, however the analysis of their results and production of the report must be done independently.

The assessor will offer advice on available resources or materials and clarification regarding the assignment instructions.

When the candidate is ready to start the assessment they need to:

- 1 **Review the Psychology research briefs provided by SQA**
SQA will provide Psychology research briefs which candidates should review to guide them towards selection of a research topic.
- 2 **Choose a topic for Primary Research**
The assessor is expected to support the candidate to choose a suitable research topic. The assessor will need to consider the suitability of the topic and the resources available to enable the candidate to complete the assignment.
- 3 **Carry out background research on the chosen topic**
Once the candidate has chosen the research topic they must carry out background research. The background research is needed to enable the candidate to set their own research in a psychological context. They will need to show how their own primary research study relates to psychological theory, concepts or relevant classic and/or contemporary research studies. They will use this background research to help them to decide on the aim for their own research and to devise the experimental or alternative hypothesis. The candidate should keep a note of references of their information, as they will need to use this in their report.
- 4 **Plan primary research according to the topic you have chosen, following ethical guidelines**
Working in a group or their own, candidates must plan their research according to the topic chosen. When the candidate has identified an aim and a hypothesis, they need to decide on the most suitable research method to use.

If they have chosen an experimental method they will need to decide the design of their study, specifying whether they will use independent measures, repeated measures, matched pairs or correlational. Candidates should define the variables under investigation. For example, independent variable (IV), dependent variable (DV) or variables to be correlated should be operationally defined. This should include conditions of the IV where the study is experimental and the meaning of DV scores.

Candidates should also consider the control of extraneous and/or confounding variables. They need to identify the sampling method and the sample group/participants for their research. They will need to gather the materials required for the primary research study. Candidates also need to develop a detailed account of the procedure to be followed when conducting the research, so that it could be replicated, and to demonstrate they have implemented ethical guidelines.

The assessor must check the research plan with the candidate to ensure that the BPS ethical guidelines are being implemented and there are no ethical breaches.

No participants under the age of 16 are to be used in the research.

5 Carry out primary research according to the research plan and implementing ethical guidelines

Working in a group or on their own, candidates must carry out primary research on the topic according to the research plan and collect data. Ethical guidelines must be upheld at all times. On their own the candidate will need to choose appropriate statistical procedures to analyse the results and decide how to present these results in their report. These results will be used in the report to show the outcome of the research and if the hypothesis can be supported or refuted.

6 Produce a report that conforms to the style and format of a psychology research report

The psychology research report is the assessment evidence that all of the assignment stages have been undertaken.

The candidate must produce the report in the style and format of a psychological report. The format of the report should follow a conventional style, ie title, contents page, introduction, methods, results, discussion, references and appendices. For this assignment an abstract is not required.

The voice used throughout should be passive: it should be written in the third person and in the past tense. **The candidate must preserve the anonymity of participants and maintain confidentiality.**

The report may be produced in written form or be word-processed. Whichever is used, the assignment should be submitted on paper to SQA for marking.

The report should be between 2,000 and 2,500 words long, excluding references, footnotes and appendices. The candidate must provide the word count for the completed report, excluding appendices, footnotes and references. If the word count exceeds the maximum by 10%, a penalty will be applied.

The candidate must provide a list of references for sources referred to in their report. The references can be provided in any format that enables another person to find the source of information.

The candidate must include appropriate appendices in their report. These could contain calculations or research materials, such as a questionnaire, a list of items to be remembered or a photograph of apparatus used in their research. Appendices should only contain essential information relevant to the report. They should not contain information which identifies research participants in order to protect their confidentiality and comply with BPS ethical guidelines.

Assessment conditions

This assessment will be carried out over a period of time. The candidate should start at an appropriate point in the Course. This would normally be when they have completed or are nearing completion of the *Psychology: Research* Unit.

The assessor should allocate sufficient time for the candidate to carry out their research of the topic and to compile their final report.

Evidence which meets the requirements of this Component of Course assessment will be between 2,000 and 2,500 words long, excluding references, footnotes and appendices. The candidate must provide the word count for the completed report, excluding appendices, footnotes and references. If the word count exceeds the maximum by 10%, a penalty will be applied.

There are no restrictions on the resources which candidates may have access to when undertaking this assignment. Candidates need appropriate resources to enable them to carry out background research and any materials needed for the research assignment. The assessor should advise the candidate on the availability of materials for research assignment so that the candidate is realistic when planning their own primary research. The research method, including sample size and variables, should be practicable. The sample size should enable the candidate to effectively demonstrate statistical procedures and draw a conclusion based on their research aim and hypothesis.

British Psychological Society (BPS) ethical standards must be upheld at all times in research.

Reasonable assistance may be given on a generic basis to a class or group of candidates, for example, advice on available resources or things to consider when making decisions about the research method or sample group/participants. Reasonable assistance may also be given to candidates on an individual basis. When reasonable assistance is given on a one-to-one basis in the context of something the candidate has already produced or demonstrated, there is a danger that it becomes support for assessment, and assessors need to be aware that this may be going beyond reasonable assistance. The term 'reasonable assistance' is used to try to balance the need for support with the need to avoid giving too much assistance. If any candidates require more than that which is deemed 'reasonable assistance', they may not be ready for assessment or it may be that they have been entered for the wrong level of qualification.

Clarification may be sought by candidates regarding the assignment instructions if they find them unclear. In this case, the clarification should normally be given to the whole class.

At any stage in the assignment, reasonable assistance does not include:

- ◆ providing model answers
- ◆ providing any feedback on drafts, including marking

Assessors must exercise their professional responsibility in ensuring that evidence submitted by a candidate is the candidate's own work.

The assignment will be conducted under some supervision and control. This means that although candidates may complete part of the work outwith the learning and teaching setting, assessors should put in place processes for monitoring progress and ensuring that the work is the candidate's own and plagiarism has not taken place.

Assessors should put in place mechanisms to authenticate candidate evidence. For example:

- ◆ regular checkpoint/progress meetings with candidates
- ◆ short spot-check personal interviews
- ◆ checklists which record activity/progress
- ◆ photographs, film or audio evidence

Evidence to be gathered

The following candidate evidence is required for this assessment:

- ◆ the research report for the Higher Psychology assignment

The word count for the report, excluding references and appendices, should be included.

The report may be produced in written form or word-processed. Whichever format is used, the report should be submitted on paper to SQA for marking.

Marking Instructions

In line with SQA's normal practice, the following general Marking Instructions are addressed to the Marker. They will also be helpful for those preparing candidates for Course assessment.

Evidence will be submitted to SQA for external marking.

All marking will be quality assured by SQA.

General marking principles for the assignment

This information is provided to help you understand the general principles you must apply when marking candidate responses to this assignment. These principles must be read in conjunction with the detailed Marking Instructions, which identify the key features required in candidate responses.

- (a) Marks for each candidate response must always be assigned in line with these general marking principles and the detailed Marking Instructions for this assessment.
- (b) Marking should always be positive. This means that, for each candidate response, marks are accumulated for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding: they are not deducted from a maximum on the basis of errors or omissions.
- (c) The term 'or any other acceptable response' is used to allow for the possible variation in candidate responses. Credit should be given according to the accuracy and relevance of evidence.
- (d) Marks for *describing* are based on the candidate's ability to provide a statement or structure of characteristics and/or features. This will be more than an outline or than a list and may refer to, for instance, a concept, process, experiment, situation, or facts.
- (e) Marks for *explaining* are based on the candidate's ability to relate cause and effect or make the relationship between things clear.
- (f) Marks for *analysing* are based on the candidate's ability to identify parts, the relationship between them, and their relationships with the whole; draw out and relate implications; analyse data (possibly including calculations).
- (g) Marks for *evaluating* are based on the candidate's ability to make a judgement based on criteria, or determine the value of something.
- (h) Marks for *concluding* are based on the candidate's ability to draw conclusions based on a set of information or data.
- (i) The report should be between 2,000 and 2,500 words long, excluding references, footnotes and appendices. The candidate must provide the word count for the completed report, excluding appendices, footnotes and references. If the word count exceeds the maximum by 10%, a penalty will be applied.

Detailed Marking Instructions for the assignment

Report section	Overview of marking	Mark range	Marking instructions
INTRODUCTION	<p><i>Accurate and relevant descriptions</i></p> <p>The candidate is expected to carry out and interpret background research.</p> <p>Based on their background research the candidate is expected to describe the aim and hypothesis of their primary research.</p>	0-10	<p>Up to 8 marks can be awarded in a variety of ways for using background research to describe the psychological context for the candidate's own primary research study.</p> <p>For the full 8 marks the candidate must include a description of a relevant psychological approach/theory/concept and a minimum of two related background research studies.</p> <p>Up to 4 marks can be awarded if no research studies are provided (ie only descriptions of concepts/theories are provided).</p> <p>Up to 6 marks can be awarded if only one research study is provided.</p> <p>Up to 2 marks are specifically awarded for the aim and hypothesis.</p> <p>For the full 2 marks the aim must clearly relate to the background research and the hypothesis must be operationalised with clear expression of the research variables – this can be any hypothesis that is correct from experimental/null/alternative/correlational).</p>

METHOD	<p><i>Accurate and sufficient descriptions</i></p> <p>The method used for the candidate's own research is expected to be accurately and sufficiently described to enable replication. This includes identification of the design (if applicable), and descriptions of sampling, materials and procedure.</p>	0-10	<p>10 marks can be awarded for the method section.</p> <p>All relevant information for the method used in the candidate's primary research must be included in this section of the report; however the candidate may refer to appropriate supplementary information contained in the appendices. Description must be sufficient to enable the research to be replicated.</p> <p>Up to 6 marks will be awarded for accurate description of the method, which includes identification of design (where appropriate), research variables, extraneous/ confounding variables, description of sampling method and participants. Procedure and all materials should be fully described (which must be included in the appendix section to enable replication).</p> <p>For these 6 marks to be awarded the candidate must include all of the above information.</p> <p>Up to 4 marks can be awarded for a description of how BPS ethical guidelines have been implemented and ethical breaches, such as deception, breach of confidentiality, risks have been avoided.</p> <p>0/4 marks will be awarded for general comments about ethics not related to the candidate's research or for unethical research which has breached the BPS ethical standards or if participants under the age of 16 have been used.</p>
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RESULTS	<p><i>Interpreting and presenting data/results in an appropriate format</i></p> <p>The candidate is expected to use appropriate statistical procedures and to present their own data/results in a suitable format.</p>	0-6	<p>Up to 6 marks can be awarded for interpreting and presenting data/results in an appropriate format. All relevant results must be included in this section of the report; however the candidate may refer to appropriate supplementary information contained in the appendices.</p> <p>Each of the 6 marks must be awarded in the following way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 1 mark for choosing appropriate statistical procedures to analyse the data. ◆ 1 mark for describing how the collected results have been analysed. ◆ 1 mark for accurately carrying out appropriate statistical procedures, as demonstrated in their calculations. ◆ 1 mark for choosing an appropriate format(s) to present the data, including a relevant table and/or appropriate graph. ◆ 1 mark for using the chosen format(s) correctly, including legend and any labelling and providing enough information to enable interpretation. ◆ 1 mark for an accurate statement on whether the results support or refute the hypothesis.
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DISCUSSION	<p><i>Relevant points of analysis</i></p> <p>The candidate is expected to provide an analysis of their results in relation to relevant psychological approaches/theories/concepts and previous research referred to in the introduction to their report.</p> <p>Points of analysis can be made anywhere within the discussion.</p> <p>Analysis requires the candidate to identify parts, the relationship between them, and their relationships with the whole. Analysis can involve drawing out and relating implications and drawing conclusions.</p>	0-8	<p>Up to 8 marks can be awarded in a variety of ways for the analysis of results.</p> <p>Marks can be awarded for each relevant analytical point made anywhere within the discussion section of the report.</p> <p>Points of analysis must explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ analysis of results as candidate interprets them ◆ how the candidate’s results confirm or refute their research hypothesis ◆ the possible influence of variables, other than the research variables ◆ how the candidate’s primary research results relate to the psychological approach/theory/concept and the two previous research studies presented in their introduction ◆ the implications of the candidate’s primary research findings in terms of real world application or suggestions for new research within this topic (new research must be substantially different to the candidate’s primary research) ◆ the candidate’s conclusions, including statistics (with the exception of correlation where an accurate comment about direction or relationship must be included), where appropriate ◆ any other acceptable response
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	<p>Relevant points of evaluation</p> <p>The candidate is expected to evaluate their research.</p> <p>Points of evaluation can be made anywhere within the discussion.</p> <p>To evaluate, the candidate must make a judgement based on criteria or determine the value of something.</p>	<p>0-4</p>	<p>Up to 4 marks can be awarded in a variety of ways for evaluation of the candidate's own primary research.</p> <p>1 mark can be awarded for each relevant point of evaluation. Evaluation must be specific to the candidate's primary research and supporting reasons must be provided for evaluative points made, eg '<i>this is unreliable because</i>', or '<i>this is a strength because</i>'.</p> <p>A point of evaluation could include making a judgement about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ the design (if appropriate) and research method ◆ extraneous variables that should have been controlled ◆ validity and reliability ◆ method of data collection ◆ any other relevant information
OTHER	<p>Appropriate presentation and style</p> <p>The candidate is expected to present the research report in the appropriate style and format.</p>	<p>0-2</p>	<p>Up to 2 marks can be awarded for presentation and style.</p> <p>For full marks:</p> <p>The candidate must present their research in the style and format of a psychological research report. The whole report must be organised correctly, including a title and all sections in order with all appropriate information in the correct section. The candidate must use appropriate terminology and the correct tense throughout.</p> <p>References must be organised in such a way as to enable a third party to locate information.</p>
	<p>Total marks</p>	<p>40</p>	

[END OF MARKING INSTRUCTIONS]

Administrative information

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History of changes

Version	Description of change	Authorised by	Date
2.0	<p>Marking instructions amended, allocation of marks within some sections changed, overall mark allocation unchanged.</p> <p>Additional assignment stage added and guidance to clarify the flexibility of the Psychology briefs.</p> <p>Clarification that candidates can work in a group or independently when planning and carrying out their research, however the analysis of their results and production of the report must be done independently.</p> <p>Text regarding reasonable assistance amended.</p> <p>Additional information added to candidate instructions, text amended regarding word count penalty and reasonable assistance.</p>	Qualifications Manager	September 2015
2.1	<p>'Assessment overview' section: some small changes made to wording for clarification purposes only.</p> <p>Minor changes made to the Detailed Marking Instructions: no changes made to mark allocation in specific sections or overall.</p>	Qualifications Manager	September 2016
3.0	<p>Detailed Marking instructions – minor changes made to several sections for marking clarification purposes only. No change to mark allocation in specific sections or overall.</p>	Qualifications Manager	September 2017

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