Individuals and societies

Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

Criterion A: Focus and method
(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

Students should state their choice of topic clearly at the start of the EE.

The research question must be:

1. expressed in question format
2. very precise
3. able to be fully addressed within the word limit.

It should be clear to the reader how the question relates to and is derived from the knowledge and understanding of the topic under consideration.

The introduction should provide the academic context and subsequent justification for the research question. The student should show how and why it is relevant for consideration in an academic context, indicating the current state of research and the discussions raised.

Although their personal interest in the topic is important, students’ personal experiences and opinions are inappropriate here. Students must explain their approach to the topic. Their explanation needs to:

- outline the remit of the essay
- indicate the psychological theories and studies they will use and how
- Indicate the psychological theories and studies they will use and how they enable the reader to see how the focus of the essay is to be maintained.

Psychological journals and books are appropriate resources. Materials from “pop psychology” and items from the media do not offer sufficient depth and academic rigour to develop an informed and balanced argument.

Students must select appropriate resources and make explicit reference to the research question throughout the essay to score highly against this criterion.

Where a student considers neuro-cognitive processing in relation to a behaviour, the focus of their essay should be on its impact on the behaviour or experience of the individual rather than on description of biological processing, however detailed and accurate.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than four marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to psychology essays that are based on the collection of primary data.

**Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding**

(Strands: Context, Subject-specific terminology and concepts)

Students can provide evidence in several ways that they clearly understand the concepts and materials they are using and are able to communicate them effectively.

- Use of an appropriate academic style throughout, with the terminology of psychological research methods accurately and confidently applied.
- Psychological terminology consistently used in a manner that indicates understanding of theories and concepts.
- Considered evaluation of evidence and findings from empirical studies and their related theories, in terms of culture, ethics, gender and methodology. This evaluation informs students’ interpretation of the research question, contributing to perceptive commentary.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than four marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to psychology essays that are based on the collection of primary data.

**Criterion C: Critical thinking**

(Strands: Research, Analysis and Discussion and evaluation)

This criterion is looking for critical engagement with appropriate material. Students must show throughout the essay that they can analyse and evaluate the psychological theory and published research they have selected to answer the research question.

Research should be applied to effectively demonstrate the complex nature of a research question that connects with relevant areas of inquiry in the field of psychology.

Throughout, students must use psychological theory and/or studies to justify points in the construction of their argument. They need to explain the material and explicitly link it to the research question.

The research question should analyse and evaluate different perspectives or approaches to the research question. Their analysis must include:
Their analysis must include:

- the context of the study or research (e.g., a consideration of the nature of participants and materials used)
- an awareness of possible researcher bias and methodological biases.

It is the responsibility of the student to persuade the reader of the reasons for, and validity of, their perspective. Students should evaluate the evidence at the point at which they introduce it rather than in a separate add-on section.

As in-depth treatment is required, essays that are largely descriptive or narrative in nature will not achieve highly against this criterion.

Students are expected to draw conclusions throughout the presentation of their essay and in a summative conclusion at the end. This must be consistent with the argument and evidence presented in the body of the essay. The conclusion is not the place for new evidence. However, it should include unresolved questions that have arisen from the discussion and which could be suitable for further study.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than three marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to psychology essays that are based on the collection of primary data.

**Criterion D: Presentation**

(STRANDS: Structure, Layout)

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to accepted academic standards in relation to how research papers should be presented. It also relates to how well these elements support the reading, understanding and evaluation of the essay.

Students may provide a section and subsection structure to their essays, with informative headings. Subheadings should not distract from the overall structure of the essay or argument presented.

**Use of charts, images and tables**

Any charts, images or tables from literature sources included in the essay must be carefully selected and labelled and referenced. They should only be used if they are directly relevant to the research question, contribute towards the understanding of the argument and are of a good graphic quality.

Graphs or charts drawn from the analysed data should be selected to highlight only the most pertinent aspects related to the argument. Too many graphs, charts and tables will distract from the overall quality of the communication. Only summary data charts of information that is central to the argument of the essay should be included in the body of the essay.

Tables should enhance a written explanation but should not themselves include significant bodies of text. If they do, these words must be included in the word count.

Students must take care in their use of appendices as examiners are not required to read them. All information with direct relevance to the analysis, discussion and evaluation of the essay must be contained in the main body of the essay.

Any material that is not original must be carefully acknowledged, with specific attention paid to the acknowledgment and referencing of quotations and ideas. This acknowledgment and referencing is applicable to audiovisual material, text, graphs and data published in print and electronic sources. If the referencing does not meet the minimum standard as indicated in the
and data presented in print and online sources. If the referencing does not meet the minimum standard as indicated in the guide (name of author, date of publication, title of source and page numbers as applicable), and is not consistently applied, work will be considered as a case of possible academic misconduct.

A bibliography is essential and has to be presented in a standard format. Title page, table of contents, page numbers, etc must contribute to the quality of presentation.

The essay must not exceed 4,000 words of narrative. Students should be aware that examiners will not read beyond the 4,000-word limit, nor assess any material presented thereafter.

**Criterion E: Engagement**

(Strands: Reflections on planning and progress)

This criterion assesses the student’s engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, and is based solely on the candidate’s reflections as detailed on the RPPF, with the supervisory comments and extended essay itself as context.

Students are expected to provide reflections on the decision-making and planning process undertaken in completing the essay. Students must demonstrate how they arrived at a topic as well as the methods and approach used. This criterion assesses the extent to which a student has evidenced the rationale for decisions made throughout the planning process and the skills and understandings developed.

For example, students may reflect on:

- the approach and strategies they chose, and their relative success
- the *Approaches to learning* skills they have developed and their effect on the student as a learner
- how their conceptual understandings have developed or changed as a result of their research
- challenges they faced in their research and how they overcame these
- questions that emerged as a result of their research
- what they would do differently if they were to undertake the research again.

Effective reflection highlights the journey the student has engaged in through the EE process. Students must show evidence of critical and reflective thinking that goes beyond simply describing the procedures that have been followed.

The reflections must provide the examiner with an insight into student thinking, creativity and originality within the research process. The student voice must be clearly present and demonstrate the learning that has taken place.