

PSYCHOLOGY

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 36

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Both the range and suitability of essays varied; some of the variation appeared to be associated with the type of assistance and guidance provided by candidate supervisors. Candidates who do not receive formal education in psychology need considerable guidance in many aspects of their essay writing. Candidates and supervisors should be aware of problems that are likely to occur in these circumstances and plan accordingly. Some of the work submitted tended to be mediocre when assessed under the various criteria for extended essays. In contrast there were several examples where candidates rose to the challenge that they had set themselves and produced essays of a remarkable high quality.

The better essays incorporated an argument where the question was amenable to debate. It was not always necessary or even possible to resolve questions that have exercised psychological thinking for many years, but the candidate's own thinking and own interpretation does need to shine through in order to obtain high marks.

Candidate performance against each criterion

A: research question

Usually the aim of the essay was clearly stated but sometimes the question lacked focus or the aim was too ambitious for the candidate to manage at this level.

B: introduction

Significant content was usually produced at this stage by reference to appropriate psychological sources, but there were several instances of candidates using superficial material or using just basic definitions of relevant terms. There is more need for candidates themselves to engage in debate with past research at this stage so that their own research can incorporate and evaluate such ideas.

C: investigation

Better essays were informed by resources obtained from textbooks, academic journals, web based material or from conversations with experts in the field. Anecdotal evidence was often presented in poorer quality work and rarely accompanied by evaluation.

D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Many essays presented relevant psychological knowledge and understanding and also used valid theories and studies. Evaluation was not always provided or tended to be simplistic and superficial. It was rare to find cultural, ethical, gender or methodological considerations.

E: reasoned argument

Several candidates ignored their research question and concentrated instead on the presentation of knowledge. This resulted in a mainly descriptive approach where an argument was either non-existent or very weak.

F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

Evaluation is without doubt the weakest element of extended essays. It can often be formulaic and cursory, especially when the same type of criticism is repeated for a number of different studies or theories.

G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Most candidates were able to use appropriate languages in a clear and effective manner including the provision of good definitions and terms.

H: conclusion

Rather often the conclusions included new material or new thoughts that had not been previously discussed, but there were other essays where conclusions were admirably consistent with work that had previously been presented.

I: formal presentation

Despite clear help provided in the *Extended essay guide* there are still candidates who show difficulty in presenting references, citations and the bibliography or reference section.

J: abstract

Abstracts should contain the three relevant elements of research question, scope of investigation and conclusion, yet candidates often failed to do this relatively straightforward task.

K: holistic judgment

Many candidates tended to write their essays in a routine manner and, disappointingly to the reader, it seemed as though they had failed to generate a feeling of excitement in conducting their own work in this context. It was rare to read an in-depth approach or a section where the author took a reflexive approach to the work. On the occasions when this approach did occur, the deft evaluation and presentation of argument were a joy to read.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Early communications with candidates are most important in negotiating the relevance of the of essay topic. This should preferably involve a theoretical framework against which to explore an explicit research question. Exploration means that the candidate should understand that a debate exists concerning the best ways in which to approach the question. It should not be cut and dried from the beginning, nor should it involve long and detailed descriptions that do not exercise the judgement of the candidate.

The candidate needs to absorb the available material from the sources that are available, to think hard about these so that at least some of the information can be internalised, reflected upon and set against a debate that has already begun.

An interpretation of what has been considered by the candidate's own previous experiences and understanding should then start to emerge in his or her own thinking. This is the stage when excitement builds, when both candidate and supervisor realise that a creative mind is engaged upon a worthwhile enterprise.