

Psychology extended essay

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Extended essay

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For grade boundary information, please refer to the Grade boundaries for Diploma programme coordinators document available on the PRC.

Extended essay

The range and suitability of the work submitted

There was a good range of research questions this session, with topics ranging from sport psychology, to etiologies and treatment of disorders, to health psychology.

Many candidates chose to write about the effects of COVID-19. This was often limited as a topic because so little psychological research has been done on the pandemic. Often candidates chose theories and applied them to the situation, which is not an appropriate strategy.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

The key to a focused essay is a focused research question. Although there were many very good questions, weaker essays had overly complex questions or, in fact, more than one question. Each aspect of the essay must be directly linked to the research question. Some essays spent too much time describing concepts and/or theories before actually directly answering the question by using relevant research.

Some essays lost focus by discussing topics that were not relevant to the question. For example, when discussing the sociocultural origins of a disorder, then having a section devoted to treatments.

Introductions should be not about a candidate's personal interest in the topic. This belongs in the reflections.

Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

Stronger essays explained key terms and research relevant to the research question. Weaker essays used terminology with no clarification of its link to the research or question. For example, saying that a study had low instrument bias with no clear explanation as to why this was true. There were several errors with the use of terms like external and internal validity and identification of research methods.

Criterion C: critical thinking

Candidates must describe, analyze, and evaluate the key research that is used in their essays. Several essays were solely descriptive, presenting a list of multiple studies, often without any explanation of how they are linked to the research question. Stronger essays provided evidence to counter their argument and then explained why their main argument was stronger.

Several essays took a mechanical approach to evaluation and made errors in evaluation – for example, **claiming that a study had “no ecological validity” because it was carried out in a laboratory. This is not a clear explanation.** In addition, generalizability was a common, and poorly used strategy. Stronger essays were able to identify the factors in the sample that would make it difficult to generalize.

Many candidates attempt to compare the effectiveness of two treatments with limited success. In order to do this, research must be used that directly compares the treatments. Discussing the effectiveness of each therapy and then drawing a conclusion is not an appropriate strategy.

Criterion D: presentation

Although citation is not directly assessed, many essays had very poor citation. It is highly recommended that candidates do not use footnotes for anything other than referencing, as it often disrupts the reading of the essay when presentation should aim to facilitate it.

The key to presentation is that the text is readable. Spacing is a problem for many essays. Candidates should either indent their paragraphs or they should skip a line between paragraphs. Many candidates are not indenting and not skipping lines, impairing the reading of the essays. Some candidates also used poor paragraphing, with some paragraphs being three to four pages long.

Essays must be double spaced.

Criterion E: engagement

Strong reflections were able to present the candidate's research journey and growth as a researcher. These reflections explained the candidate's ability to recognise challenges, incorporate changes where required and their reflexivity during the research and writing process.

Weaker reflections documented meetings with the supervisor, repeated the findings of the essay, or discussed their love for their subject.

Choosing a single aspect of their research journey to explain and evaluate in each reflection would be a better approach than trying to address all aspects of their research.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- Keep the questions simple. They do not need to specify a demographic and they should not have a compound question. Have students evaluate sample questions before beginning the process of developing their own research questions.
- More time needs to be spent discussing how to link a study back to the research question.
- **Help candidates to develop a "toolbox" for critical thinking that will allow them a breadth of strategies,** rather than limiting themselves to repeating the same points
- Choosing a single aspect of their research journey to explain and evaluate in each reflection would be a better approach than trying to address all aspects of their research.
- Citation needs to be taught and practiced. All citations should be checked before submitting their essay for assessment