

# 11.2

## Writing essays – paper 1 section B and paper 2 (options)

### Reminder:

SL students must write two essays (one in paper 1 and one in paper 2).

HL students must write three essays (one in paper 1 and two in paper 2, one from each of the prepared optional topics).

### Format of the essay

The conventional format of an essay is:

- **Introduction:** This introduces the essay question and your line of argument (e.g. your thesis statement, what you are going to address, and why). This part of the essay is short and focused.
- **Main body:** This is the development and is divided into about five or six paragraphs. The essay question directs you to what psychological knowledge could be relevant and the command term tells you what to do with the knowledge. In this section it is most important to present a clear argument supported by relevant knowledge.
- **Conclusion:** This must relate directly to the essay question and it should follow logically on from your argument in the main body.

The essay is testing three things:

- **Knowledge and comprehension of psychology** (i.e. your knowledge of psychological theories, empirical studies, key concepts, and that you can use it appropriately).
- **Critical thinking skills** (i.e. that you can apply and evaluate the knowledge appropriately and use it in the analysis of psychological phenomena).
- **Organizational skills** (i.e. that you can focus on the question and structure the essay so that it appears coherent and logical and that you can build an argument).

The four rules for writing an essay:

- **FOCUS** (on the question and the command term)
- **STRUCTURE** (a clear development from start to end)
- **ARGUE** (substantiate your claim[s] with relevant psychological knowledge)
- Use **CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS** (e.g. evaluate theories and studies and take a critical look at methodology)

Your essays will be assessed according to the following assessment criteria for essays:

### A: Knowledge and comprehension

Mark band	Level descriptor
0	The answer does not reach a standard described by the descriptor below.
1-3	The answer demonstrates limited knowledge and understanding that is of marginal relevance to the question. Little or no psychological research is used in the response.
4-6	The answer demonstrates limited knowledge and understanding relevant to the question or uses relevant psychological research to limited effect in the response.
7-9	The answer demonstrates detailed, accurate knowledge and understanding relevant to the question, and uses relevant psychological research effectively in support of the response.

### B: Evidence of critical thinking: Application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation

Mark band	Level of descriptor
0	The answer does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1-3	The answer goes beyond description but evidence of critical thinking is not linked to the requirements of the question.
4-6	The answer offers appropriate but limited evidence of critical thinking or offers evidence of critical thinking that is only implicitly linked to the requirements of the question.
7-9	The answer integrates relevant and explicit evidence of critical thinking in response to the question.

### C: Organization

Mark band	Level of descriptor
0	The answer does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.
1-2	The answer is organized or focused on the question. However, this is not sustained throughout the response.
3-4	The answer is well organized, well developed, and focused on the question.

## A step-by-step guide to writing good essays in psychology

1. **Read the essay question carefully:** What is the command term? What exactly does the question ask you to do?
2. **Choose the relevant knowledge:** What knowledge could be relevant to answer the question?
  - a. There may be several relevant **research studies** and/or **theories** but make a choice. Don't introduce knowledge which is not directly relevant to the essay question.
  - b. You will probably not need more than three studies, and fewer could be appropriate if you are also presenting a theory. For some essay questions theories may be sufficient but it is nearly always a good idea to introduce a study.
3. **Consider your argument:** What are you going to argue? What are your points and how will you support them?
  - a. Consider counter argument and conclusion based on evidence.
  - b. Try to create a logical flow in your argument by connecting the sentences and paragraphs to each other (e.g. using topic sentences and terms like, "on the other hand", "furthermore", "however", "as a result", and "consequently").
  - c. Avoid stating your own personal opinions unless they are supported by psychological evidence.
4. **Consider critical thinking skills:** How are you going to apply critical thinking?
  - a. The assessment criteria focus on application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, so be sure to introduce some of these in your response.
  - b. For example, when you have described a study, you could "step back" and take a critical look at it and comment on the methodology used in relation to findings or say what the implications of the results are. You could also come up with a study that questions the findings of the first. Or you could analyse how the findings of the two studies each contribute to an overall understanding of a phenomenon.
5. **Plan:** Before you start writing make an outline following the 8 paragraph model to be sure that there is a clear structure to your essay.
  - a. The organization of the essay is assessed on criterion C so try to outline what you will address and in what order. This also has to do with your argument and the knowledge you use to support it.
  - b. Outline introduction (must be short).
  - c. Outline conclusion.
6. **Write:** Use your outline and proceed in the order you have planned.
  - a. Stick to your plan. Something may occur to you while you write but don't just use it. Consider carefully whether it is relevant and would benefit your argument. If not, leave it and focus on what you have planned.
  - b. Be aware that extra marks are given for analysis and evaluation (see point 4 above) and that pure description will not give you many marks from criterion B.
  - c. Use the third person when you write (e.g. "the researcher found that...").
7. **Check the essay for flaws:** Check that your response addresses the essay question, the command term is met, the argument is clear, there is use of critical thinking skills, and the language is clear.

## Essay sample 1 from the biological level of analysis (paper 1, section B)

Discuss how and why particular research methods are used at the biological level of analysis [22 marks].

Psychologists at the biological level of analysis are trying to find specific biological correlates of behaviour. Researchers choose different methods depending on the aim of research but two research methods used at the biological level of analysis could be the experiment and the case study.

Researchers often use the experimental method because it can establish cause-effect relationships between biological variables and behaviour. The researchers deliberately manipulate an independent variable to measure the effect of that on the dependent variable. The experimental method was applied in Newcomer et. al. (1999). The aim of the experiment was to see how different levels of cortisol affected verbal declarative memory when participants recalled parts of a prose text. There were three conditions. Group 1 received a high dose of cortisol (160 mg), which is the same as a person experiencing a major stressor. Group 2 received a low dose of cortisol (40 mg), which is the same as a person experiencing slight stress. Group 3 was the placebo group, which acted as control. After four days the participants were asked to recall the text.

The results showed that the participants on the high cortisol dose performed worst on the verbal declarative memory test. This indicates a relationship between high levels of cortisol and memory. By deliberately manipulating the cortisol levels the researchers could demonstrate its effect on memory.

Some methodological concerns arise, however. The experimental procedure is often said to suffer from low ecological validity due to artificiality. It could therefore be argued that such results do not give insight into how cortisol levels affect memory in real-life

situations. However, since biological processes are assumed to be more or less similar in real life and in the laboratory this argument could be refuted. The use of the experimental method indicates a clear cause-effect relationship between levels of cortisol and memory and this is probably why the researchers chose this method. Another method used at the biological level of analysis is the case study. This is an in-depth study of an individual case (e.g. an individual with brain damage). Case studies are "natural experiments" and researchers can use them to study phenomena that cannot be studied otherwise. In case studies it is only possible to observe what already exists and no cause-effect relationship can be established. One important case study was by Scoville and Milner (1957) of H.M. who suffered from epileptic seizures and eventually underwent experimental surgery to stop them. Scoville removed tissue from the medial temporal lobe, including the hippocampus. The seizures stopped but after some time it became clear that H.M. could not store new explicit memories at all – he suffered from permanent amnesia. H.M. became one of the most extensively studied individuals in the history of cognitive neuroscience. His memory was tested in a number of ways and he was also scanned (Corkin, 2002). This gave a more precise picture of the brain damage and helped researchers to get an even better understanding of H.M.'s memory.

The case study of H.M. was a very important step for cognitive neuroscientists towards understanding the role of the hippocampus in memory and to develop revised theories of memory. Knowledge from this case study was also used to perform experimental surgery on animals to establish the biological correlates of memory more specifically. This shows how case studies can spark off new research and why researchers at the biological level of analysis use them.

On the other hand, there are some ethical and methodological concerns in the use of a case study such as H.M. Ethical concerns are relevant since consent from an individual with amnesia who was not even able to remember what happened 15 minutes ago can be hard to get. However, in the case of H.M. his parents gave consent. It could also be argued that so much knowledge that benefits other humans has been gathered from this case that the extensive use of H.M. in research is justified. A methodological problem is that results from case studies cannot be used to make generalizations about human behaviour because they represent unique individuals. However, similar case studies show that the hippocampus is very important in storage of memory.

In conclusion, researchers within the biological level of analysis use different methods. Case studies such as that of H.M. give invaluable insight into conditions that could not otherwise be studied and the experimental method can establish cause-effect relationships between biological factors and behaviour, so case studies and experiments can complement each other in the study of biological correlates of behaviour.

A: Knowledge and comprehension

Mark band	Level descriptor	Comments
7-9	The answer demonstrates detailed, accurate knowledge and understanding relevant to the question, and uses relevant psychological research effectively in support of the response.	There is accurate and detailed knowledge of the two chosen research methods. This knowledge is integrated with specific studies, which are then used to illustrate the rationale for choice of method at the biological level of analysis. (marks 9/9)

B: Evidence of critical thinking: Application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation

Mark band	Level of descriptor	Comments
7-9	The answer integrates relevant and explicit evidence of critical thinking in response to the question.	The elements of critical thinking in this response are analysis and evaluation. (marks 7/9)

C: Organization

Mark band	Level of descriptor	Comments
3-4	The answer is well organized, well developed, and focused on the question.	There is a clear structure to the essay. The argument is well developed and focused on the question. (marks 4/4)

**Examiner's comment**

*This essay is well focused on the question. The argument is well developed and supported by relevant knowledge throughout. The research studies are highly relevant and they are used effectively to demonstrate how and why two specific research methods are used at the biological level of analysis. Critical thinking skills are demonstrated but a bit mechanical in the evaluation of the methods used although the comments are quite relevant. The response is in the top end and received 20/22 marks.*