

ACCAC**CCEA****QCA****GCE ADVANCED SUBSIDIARY (AS) AND ADVANCED LEVEL (A)
SPECIFICATIONS****SUBJECT CRITERIA
FOR
PSYCHOLOGY****1. Introduction**

- 1.1 AS and A level subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject. They provide the framework within which the awarding body creates the detail of the specification.

Subject criteria are intended to:

- help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies;
- define the relationship between the AS and A level specifications, with the AS as a subset of the A level;
- ensure that the rigour of A level is maintained;
- help higher education institutions and employers know what has been studied and assessed.

Any specification which contains significant elements of the subject Psychology must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

2. Aims

- 2.1 AS and A level specifications in Psychology should encourage students to:
- study psychological theories, research, terminology, concepts, studies and methods;
 - develop skills of analysis, interpretation and evaluation;
 - develop an understanding of different areas of psychology;
 - design and report psychological investigations, and analyse and interpret data;
 - develop an understanding of ethical issues in psychology, including the ethical implications of psychological research.

- 2.2 In addition, A level specifications in Psychology should:
- include the study of psychological principles, perspectives and applications;
 - enable students to explore and understand the relationship between psychological knowledge, theories and methodology and their relationship to social, cultural, scientific and contemporary issues;
 - enable the study of cognitive, social and physiological psychology;
 - enable the development of critical and evaluative skills in relation to theory, empirical studies and methods of research in psychology;
 - enable candidates to have an understanding and critical appreciation of the breadth of theoretical and methodological approaches in psychology.

3. Specification Content

- 3.1 There are no prior knowledge requirements for AS and A level specifications in Psychology.

3.2 Knowledge, Understanding and Skills

AS and A level specifications should require candidates to have a basic understanding of the breadth of different approaches in psychology.

AS level specifications should require candidates to develop knowledge and understanding from at least two of the following areas of psychology: cognitive, social, developmental, individual differences and physiological psychology.

These should relate to the following as appropriate:

- special vocabulary and terminology;
- psychological theories, concepts and studies;
- ethical issues in psychology and research methodology;
- the scientific nature of psychology;
- quantitative and qualitative methods of investigation in psychology;
- the contribution of psychology to an understanding of individual, social and cultural diversity.

- 3.3 In addition, A level specifications should require candidates to develop knowledge and understanding of the core areas (from cognitive, social developmental, individual differences and physiological psychology) not covered in the AS specification. Knowledge and understanding should be related to the following:

- the strengths and weaknesses of methods of research and investigation in psychology;

- the applications of psychology to cultural, social and contemporary issues;
- the inter-relationship between different areas of psychology and related disciplines.

3.4 AS and A level specifications should require candidates to develop the following skills:

- select and apply knowledge and understanding of theories, concepts and approaches to the solution of problems;
- identify and evaluate some of the social, cultural and ethical implications of psychology;
- design and report investigations and draw valid conclusions from them.

3.5 In addition, A level specifications should require candidates to develop the following skills:

- the use of quantitative and qualitative methods;
- the selection and application of knowledge and understanding of principles and perspectives;
- the identification and evaluation of some of the social, cultural and ethical implications of the applications of psychology.

4. Key Skills

4.1 AS and A level specifications in Psychology should provide opportunities for developing and generating evidence for assessing the Key Skills listed below. Where appropriate, these opportunities should be directly cross-referenced, at specified level(s), to the criteria listed in Part B of the Key Skills specifications.

- Communication;
- Information Technology;
- Application of Number;
- Improving Own Learning and Performance;
- Working with Others;
- Problem Solving.

5. Assessment Objectives

5.1 All candidates must be required to meet the following assessment objectives. The assessment objectives are to be weighted in all specifications as indicated.

At A level candidates are required to demonstrate both their knowledge and understanding and their ability to analyse in greater depth and to a wider range of content than at AS level.

Knowledge, understanding and skills are closely linked. Specifications should require that candidates demonstrate the following assessment objectives in the context of the content and skills prescribed:

Assessment Objectives		Weighting		
		AS	A2	A level
AO1	<p>knowledge and understanding of psychological theories, terminology, concepts, studies and methods in at least two of the areas of psychology (cognitive, social, developmental, individual differences and physiological psychology), and communicate their knowledge and understanding of psychology in a clear and effective manner.</p> <p>In addition A level candidates should be able to: show knowledge and understanding of psychological principles, perspectives and applications in knowledge and understanding of the areas of cognitive, social development, individual differences and physiological psychology not covered in the AS specification.</p>	45-55%	35-45%	40-50%
AO2	<p>analyse and evaluate psychological theories, concepts, studies and methods in at least two of the areas of psychology (cognitive, social, developmental, individual differences and physiological psychology), and communicate their knowledge and understanding of psychology in a clear and effective manner.</p> <p>In addition A level candidates should be able to: analyse and evaluate psychology principles, perspectives and applications in the areas of cognitive, social, developmental, individual differences and physiological psychology not covered in the AS specification.</p>	35-45%	45-55%	40-50%
AO3	<p>design, conduct and report psychological investigation(s) choosing from a range of methods, and taking into account the issues of reliability, validity and ethics, and collect and draw conclusions from data.</p>	10-20%	10-20%	10-20%

A higher weighting must be given to AO2 in the full A level than in the AS level.

6. Scheme of Assessment

6.1 Internal Assessment

A level specifications in Psychology may have a maximum internal assessment weighting of 30% and should have a minimum weighting of 15%.

6.2 Synoptic Assessment

All specifications should include a minimum of 20% synoptic assessment. All synoptic assessment units should be taken at the end of the course and be externally assessed.

The synoptic element will be assessed through assessment objectives 1 and 2 in both the internally and externally assessed components.

The definition of synoptic assessment in the context of Psychology is as follows:

Synoptic assessment is taken to mean candidates having an understanding and critical appreciation of the breadth of theoretical and methodological approaches in psychology. In particular this means:

- links between different approaches and perspectives in psychology, and/or psychological applications;
- appreciation of the appropriateness of different methodologies in psychology to the investigation of issues and problems.

Examples of synoptic assessment tasks might include:

- a piece of empirical work which the candidates conduct and report on, and in which they consider a range of available methods giving a rationale for their own selection, and in which they also consider a range of theoretical approaches. For example, they might design and conduct some empirical work on human memory, evaluating the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative methods, and consider the behavioural, cognitive, environmental and effective influences on recall;
- a piece of written work, assessed internally or through external examination in which the candidates draw on a range of theoretical approaches to consider a contemporary debate in psychology, for example, the issues of free will and determinism, or the controversies surrounding behavioural genetics;
- a piece of written work, assessed internally or through external examination in which the candidates use their knowledge and understanding of a range of psychological applications and concepts to suggest how a novel problem might be explained or dealt with, for example they might consider what psychology can contribute to our understanding of car accidents;

- a piece of written work, assessed internally or through external examination in which the candidates consider a piece of psychological research and critique it by considering a range of other theoretical or methodological approaches to the same research issue. The critique might consider the connections and contrasts between a number of different approaches in psychology.

6.3 **Key Skills Assessment**

The Key Skill of Communication must contribute to the assessment of Psychology at AS and A level as stated in paragraph 13 of the *Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced level qualification-specific criteria*.

The requirement for all AS and A level specifications to assess candidates' quality of written communication will be met through Assessment Objective 1.

7. **Grade Descriptions**

7.1 The following grade descriptions indicate the level of attainment characteristic of the given grade at A level. They give a general indication of the required learning outcomes at each specified grade. The descriptions should be interpreted in relation to the content outlined in the specification; they are not designed to define that content. The grade awarded will depend in practice upon the extent to which the candidate has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of the examination may be balanced by better performances in others.

7.2 **Grade A**

Candidates demonstrate and communicate clearly relevant, accurate and detailed knowledge and critical understanding of a range of psychological concepts, theories, studies, research and applications and the links between them. They show effective analysis and evaluation when considering psychological concepts, theories, studies, research and applications. If required, they demonstrate that they are able to use these attributes by applying them appropriately to unfamiliar situations. Candidates demonstrate an ability to design and report on psychological investigations using and explaining the methodology selected in an effective manner and come to balanced conclusions as a result of well constructed discussion.

7.3 **Grade C**

Candidates demonstrate and communicate clearly relevant knowledge and understanding of a limited range of psychological concepts, theories, studies, research and applications and links between them. They analyse and attempt to evaluate when considering a range of psychological concepts, theories, studies, research and applications. They make appropriate use of psychological terminology. Candidates demonstrate an ability to design and report on psychological investigations using an appropriate methodology and come to some conclusions as a result of their discussions.

7.4 **Grade E**

Candidates demonstrate and communicate some knowledge and understanding of appropriate psychological concepts, theories, studies,

research and applications and may identify links between them or they may demonstrate a limited combination of the above knowledge and understanding and analysis or evaluation. They make some appropriate use of psychological terminology. Candidates demonstrate that they have designed psychological investigations and have come to simple conclusions.