



## A4 Academic Workshop: Timed Essay Writing

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### Timed Essay Writing: The Same Process as Normal Essay writing – Except without Research!

#### *Introduction*

The second year of your BSc Psychology builds on the skills and knowledge that you learned in Year 1. One example of this is the introduction of online **timed essay-based assessments**. This includes:

1. PSY211 Cognitive Psychology Midterm Assessment in Week 6
2. Essay-based Final Exams in the January and May exams period

Fortunately, you have support to excel at these essay-based exams! Indeed, your learning journey is designed to help you succeed at this new style of assessment. The training and support you have *already* received includes:

#### *Year 1*

1. Learn how to write an essay and critically appraise material in PSY100 Essential Skills for Psychologists
  - a. Write a formative essay outline, and received *feedback* on your outline to help you improve
2. Write an Essay in Semester A, and received *feedback* on your submission to help you improve
3. Write additional coursework throughout the year to build your writing skills, including summarizing research, using evidence-based reasoning, and engaging in critical appraisal – all important skills!
  - a. Coursework includes: PSY124 Literature Review, PSY108 Observational Report, PSY125 Critical Analysis, PSY121 Researcher Profile, PSY127 Research Summary, PSY100 Lab Report
    - i. Received *feedback* on your submissions to help you improve
4. Practice synthesizing information and writing short-answer questions in a timed-exam format in your Programme Level Exams

The training and support you have *will/have already* received in Year 2 includes:

#### *Year 2*

1. Week 3 Workshop on PSY211 Cognitive Psychology Midterm
2. **Week 4 Tutorial on timed essay-based exams, with a practice essay topic (this tutorial!)**
3. PSY211 Cognitive Psychology midterm
  - a. Exposure to the timed-essay format in summative assessment
  - b. Grade and *feedback* on your submission that you can apply to your final exams
4. Module-specific support and guidance for how to approach revision and the final exam
  - a. Sample exam questions and revision sessions

With this support and training, you will be prepared and able to succeed in your timed essay-based exams!



## **What is it like to write an online essay-based exam?**

Timed essay-based exam procedure & structure:

1. **Online** exam, 2 hours
2. Exam will open at set time (Local London time)
3. Choice of 1 of 2 question options to answer, 1000-word essay
4. Exam instructions and question options will be in a **Word document**
  - a. Download the exam paper, open & read it
  - b. Write your answer in a word document
  - c. When complete, **upload your answer** in a word document to QMPlus submission portal
    - i. Recommend also emailing a back-up to [sbbs-psych-onlineassessment@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:sbbs-psych-onlineassessment@qmul.ac.uk)
5. **2 hour writing period + 30-minute upload period to submit to QMPlus**
  - a. In practice, this means that you have 2 hours and 30 minutes to submit your exam.

*See video tutorial on how to access and submit online exams [here](#).*

**Note: You will NOT have access to Turnitin prior to submission.**

## **What happens if I submit late?**

We are aware that QMPlus can experience slow-down periods when a cohort of students is uploading documents at the same time. As a result, we allow a full 30 minutes to upload your exam after the 2-hour writing period.

- If your submission is received between 1 second and 10 minutes late, then it will receive a 10-mark penalty
- If your submission is received more than 10 minutes late, then it will receive a zero.

Because of the 30-minute upload period, “QMPlus issues” or “connectivity issues” (or similar) are not considered valid reasons to remove a late penalty.

**Thus, please do not wait until the last moment to upload your submission! Submissions started within 5 minutes of the deadline are very likely to incur late penalties.**

## **Can I use AI in my exam answer?**

**You are not allowed to copy or paraphrase AI output and submit it as your own work in your exam assessments. This constitutes academic misconduct in the same way that copying or paraphrasing from any source is considered academic misconduct.**

For more information on the SBBS Policy on Generative AI, please review the tab “Generative AI and Assessments” on the SBBS Exam and Assessment QMPlus page [here](#).

Please ask your MO if there is specific guidance on how AI can be used in your exams, beyond the SBBS guidance.

All submissions should include an appendix with one of the following statements (you will delete accordingly):

“During the preparation of this assignment, I have not used any AI tool to either find material or help write or translate any portion of the assignment which I am submitting as my own work.”

or

“During the preparation of this assignment I have used AI tool(s). The following information is exhaustive and describes the full extent of AI use. I have used [NAME TOOL / SERVICE] in order to [REASON].”



## How to approach a timed essay-based exam? Before you start

First, let's remind ourselves of the instructions on how to write an essay from PSY100 Essential Skills for Psychologists.

Task 1: Revise PSY100 essay-writing instructions

- a) Please visit the QMUL Archive at <https://archive.qmplus.qmul.ac.uk/>
- b) Click on 2024/2025 Archive, and log in using your current QMUL username and password
- c) Search for PSY100 Essential Skills for Psychologists module for your taught sessions on Essay Writing
- d) Revise the material
- e) Reflect on how you put this into practice in your own writing

Task 2: Review the Psychology Essay-Based Exam Marking Criteria on the Year 2 Workshop QMPlus page:

<https://qmplus.qmul.ac.uk/course/section.php?id=1248614>

- a) Click on "Psychology Essay Marking Scheme" to review the grading criteria
- b) Click on "BSc Psychology Essay-style Marking Scheme Video Walkthrough" to watch detailed video on the mark-scheme, elements that distinguish between a 1:1 and a 2:1 (for example), and note that expectations differ for timed essay-based exams compared to coursework essays.

*QMPlus page, Year 2 Workshops*

Psychology Essay-Style Marking Scheme

**Psychology Essay Marking Scheme**

Please review the Psychology Essay Marking Scheme prior to completing the mock essay exam. This will help you to understand how your lecturers will evaluate your essays, and help you to structure your writing.

Please also watch the video below, where Dr. Gwen Brekelmans describes the Essay-style Marking Scheme in detail.

112.3 KB

**BSc Psychology Essay-style Marking Scheme Video Walkthrough [22 min]**

**You will see in the "Psychology Essay Marking Scheme" points 2 and 6 that the expectations for timed essays are not the same as coursework essays!**

- We do not expect your writing to be perfectly polished
- We do not expect the essay to be perfectly structured
- We do not expect perfect references

**We know that you are writing in 2 hours, so we expect an answer that can be created in that time, with the information that you have in your memory from revision and your module learning.**

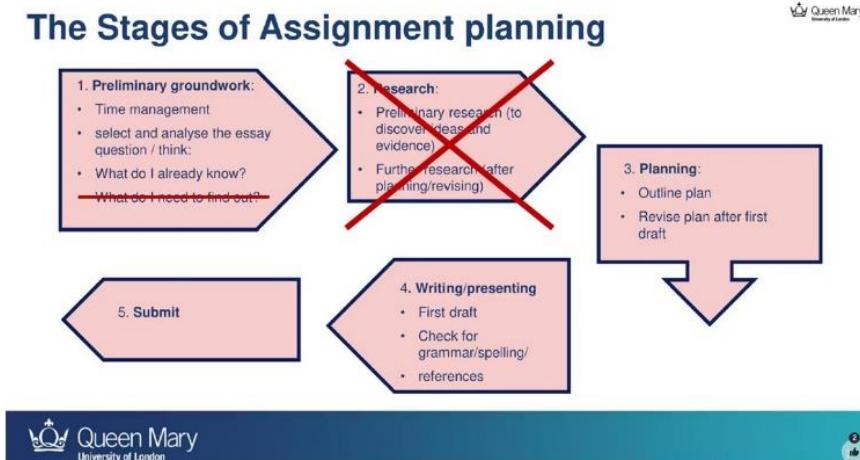


## How does a timed essay differ from a regular essay? It doesn't include research!

In a timed essay, you are not expected to do research to answer the question! You are expected to answer the question *with the knowledge that you have gained from the module and your revision that is readily available in your head.*

This is **why REVISION is extremely important in an online essay-based exam**. You want to be comfortable and familiar with the information that you learned in your module so that you can use it directly in your writing, without researching it first.

## The Stages of Assignment planning



Source image from PSY100 Essential Skills, Week B5 "How to write your first essay"

However, all the other stages of essay planning are the same!

1. Preliminary Groundwork
2. Planning
3. Writing
4. Submission

### 1. Preliminary Groundwork

#### i. Read the question options carefully! (5 min)

- a. This is the most critical part of your essay!
  - i. Look for key terms "describe", "analyse", "compare" and make sure to answer the specific term required in your writing
  - ii. Look for questions with multiple parts, like "What theory could explain X behaviour? Using your learning from this module, what strategies would you recommend to improve X behaviour?" and **make sure that you answer all parts of the question**
    1. Suggestion: **highlight** key terms and multiple questions so that you don't forget!

**Missing parts of the question or not answering the question asked is probably the most frequent reason why students loose marks on an essay!**

- ii. Make brief notes about what you already know about each question, and pick a question to answer that you feel best prepared to write about



## 2. Planning (5 – 20 minutes)

- i. Write an outline for your essay
  - a. Outline the Introduction, Body, and Conclusion of your essay
    - i. Write the topics of each paragraph
    - ii. Add arguments you want to make/theory you want to reference/evidence you want to include
  - b. Plan your paragraphs so that they build in strength to make a persuasive argument
  - c. Go back to the question to make sure that you are answering **each question element**
  - d. Set time for each paragraph to keep you on pace

## 3. Writing (80 minutes)

- I. Add details to your outline!
- II. For each section, add:
  - a. Topic sentence
  - b. Elaboration
  - c. Evidence
  - d. Summary & transition to next paragraph
- III. Set a timer for each paragraph to remind yourself to move on and stick to your schedule

*Recommendation: Do not perfect your writing here! Get the information down, don't worry about sentence structure. It's more important to get your thoughts to paper than have perfect writing.*

## 4. Revision (15 - 20 minutes)

- i. Re-read the question to ensure you answered all parts
- ii. Edit your writing if you have time
- iii. Add references if you have time

### Do I need references in an essay-based exam?

"Good evidence of broad-based reading" is an important criterion for A-grade papers, as described in the *Psychology Essay Marking Scheme*. One possible source of this evidence is in-text citations and a reference list. They're a great way to show that you're using evidence-based reasoning in your writing and that you've expanded on what is taught in the module.

However, please note that citations and references do not need to be formatted perfectly in a timed exam! We know you're under time pressure, so even just a name and/or title is sometimes sufficient to show your source.

*How should I prepare references for an exam?* We recommend creating a reference list "crib sheet" as part of your revision strategy for the exam. Add a note about what the study demonstrates in your crib sheet, and structure the sheet so that you have references/citations for each of the module topics. Look for connections across references/weeks and even across different modules as part of your revision strategy. This will not only help you consolidate your learning for the module, but also give you a tool to use in your exam to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the literature.



## Top tips to help you succeed in timed essay-based exams

### i. Revise the material!

#### a. Revise as if it was a closed-book exam

- i. Avoid re-reading material – this is time consuming and not always helpful for memorization (even though it feels productive!)
- ii. Aim for “active revision” strategies that require you to actively use the information (see PSY100 for more recommendations!). Research shows this is better for learning and memory.
  1. Examples of active revision techniques
    - a. Teach someone else the theory/evidence (or teach a blank wall!)
    - b. Test your recall memory with flash cards
    - c. Sketch “mind maps” to explore relationships amongst concepts/theories
    - d. Complete exercises in textbook to test your understanding
    - e. Think about how the theories could be applied to the real world/case studies (see textbook for examples)
    - f. Practice Active Recall; test to see how well you can recall information without using your notes
      - i. Reflect on what you know well, what needs practice
- iii. Space out your revision: better for your memory than cramming
  1. Set a revision schedule
    - a. Be specific about your goals, i.e., in this two-hour session, I will write flash cards for key theories in the week 2 lecture
  2. Be realistic: set realistic goals, take breaks
    - a. revising little and often is better than a few long sessions

#### b. Have a summary document prepared with key theories, evidence, and references listed for each week as a “quick reference” guide

### ii. Practice writing essays in 2 hours

- a. It takes practice to get used to the timed-writing format!
  - i. At minimum, practice outlining an essay and adding evidence in 20 min
- b. Write your own questions/share with a classmate for practice
- c. Practice writing this question in full!
- d. Practice writing in the same (quiet) location as you will write your exam
- e. Turn off your phone/internet while you practice to minimize distractions



**Want extra support?**

**A. Please visit our new SBBS Exams & Assessment Support page!**

<https://qplus.qmul.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=11857>

Tabs "Improving your Grade", "Grade Improvement Tools" and "Timed Exams" will be particularly helpful!

**B. Please visit our QMUL Library Skills team!**

Visit: <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/library/academic-skills/>

**1. Workshops (book your space to attend)**

Upcoming examples:

- "Writing your first academic essay" October 21/23
- "Developing your writing" November 4/6
- "Using Endnote (November 4)/Mendeley (November 5) to manage your references

**2. Academic Skills Drop-ins**

- a. Mile End: Tuesday, 2 – 4pm, Room 1.24
- b. Whitechapel: Wednesday, 2 – 4pm in The Pod

**3. Bookable one-on-ones for individual support**

- a. Academic Writing Skills: <https://qmul.libcal.com/appointments/acaskills>
- b. Writing advice from Ryal Literary Fund Fellows

**4. "Studiosity" 24/7 Online Feedback on Writing (up to 10 per year)**

<https://www.qmul.ac.uk/library/academic-skills/studiosity-/>



**Now, let's practice!**

**We will share a practice question for your PSY211 Cognitive Psychology Final Exam**

**Group Tasks**

1. Read the question carefully. Highlight key terms and identify sub-questions (if any). (3 min)
2. Write an outline for the essay (5 – 10 minutes)
3. Pair with a partner and compare your essay outlines (5 – 10 minutes)

*Reflection: Do each of your outlines answer the full essay prompt? Are your paragraphs ordered to build persuasive impact? Do your outlines include key points to address in each paragraph? Have you planned the time spent on each paragraph? Is it realistic?*

4. Work together to fill in details to answer the essay prompt. In point form, please add key theories and evidence to support your perspective. (10 minutes)
5. As a group, share your answers, reflect on your experiences, and share your “best practice” for writing essays.