Interpreting the Assessment Criteria

**Criterion A: research question**

The research question may be written in the form of a question, proposition or statement. It should be focused on a topic that is clearly relevant to psychology, deals with behaviour and is able to be addressed consistently throughout the extended essay.

**Criterion B: introduction**

This section should place the research question in the context of existing knowledge and understanding of the topic. The student‘s personal experience or views should not appear in this section. Previous psychological studies that can be related to the research question should be considered. The studies that are introduced here may be generally supportive but they are unlikely to answer the research question in an entirely satisfactory manner. It is part of the student‘s task to identify strengths, weaknesses and omissions of past work, and to show how his or her essay could help to resolve some of the problems that have been identified.

**Criterion C: investigation**

There is a wide range of resources available for questions that are likely to be raised in extended essays related to psychology. These include textbooks, academic journals, films, television, radio, newspapers and Internetbased sources. Film, television, radio, newspapers and Internetbased sources should be treated with considerable caution since the material they contain may be neither accurate nor valid. The essay should present findings and theories from these sources in an evaluative context and students should not necessarily accept their findings at face value. A healthy and informed scepticism should be maintained towards material from film, television, radio, newspapers and Internetbased sources, until authoritative judgment allows their findings or theories to become accepted. Although the argument presented in the essay may be supported by the student‘s own observations, the presentation or analysis of such material should be used for illustrative purposes only and should form no more than a very minor part of the evidence used.

**Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied**

Evidence and findings from empirical studies and their related theories should be an integral part of extended essays for psychology. Such material may refer to human or nonhuman animals and their associated behaviours. Where appropriate, students should draw on cultural, ethical, gender and methodological considerations; they should show how these aspects may affect the interpretation of the research question that is the focus of the essay.

**Criterion E: reasoned argument**

The research question should be the central focus of the argument as it is developed throughout the essay. As the argument is constructed, it often creates conflict between varying theories and findings from studies. The student should explain and analyse these different views and marshal those essential points that support the argument that is being advanced. It is the task of the student to persuade the reader of the reasons for, and validity of, his or her view. This is best accomplished by using a logical approach where successive salient points are built up, one upon the other.

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

Demanding cognitive effort is needed to apply analytical and evaluative factors created by the student. The analysis and evaluation need to be covered in depth since these will lead to the crux of the argument. There is also an opportunity for the student to use reflexivity—a consideration of his or her own experiences and views that have contributed to the methods used in the investigation and the interpretation of points that have arisen.

**Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject**

Psychology is a subject that uses its terminology in a specific manner and students are expected to show this in their essays. Students who have not studied psychology as a specific part of an academic course are strongly urged to become thoroughly acquainted with the language used by psychologists and how it is applied within the discipline.

**Criterion H: conclusion**

The conclusion is a synthesis of the argument that has preceded it. It is the end point of a logical process that has been established by employing a succession of psychological studies and theories to justify the case that has been presented.

**Criterion I: formal presentation**

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to academic standards about the way in which research papers should be presented. The presentation of essays that omit a bibliography or that do not give references for quotations is deemed unacceptable (level 0). Essays that omit one of the required elements—title page, table of contents, page numbers—are deemed no better than satisfactory (maximum level 2), while essays that omit two of them are deemed poor at best (maximum level 1).

**Criterion J: abstract**

The abstract is judged on the clarity with which it presents an overview of the research and the essay, not on the quality of the research question itself, nor on the quality of argument or the conclusions.

**Criterion K: holistic judgment**

Qualities that are rewarded under this criterion include intellectual initiative, insight, and breadth and depth of understanding. Ways of demonstrating such qualities include:

* ∙ choice of a relevant research question that extends the student‘s thinking but is also feasible within the time available
* ∙ location and judicious use of resources
* ∙ analysis and evaluation of psychological material to produce salient points for the argument ∙ use of a reflexive approach that involves the views and imagination of the student to make a unique contribution to understanding the topic.