

## Psychology Comprehensive Examination Guidelines

The comprehensive examination in Psychology for the class of 2016 will consist of a single, 7- to 8-page essay that demonstrates integration of three different areas, to be submitted during the official comprehensive examination period immediately following spring break.

In order to be eligible to take the exam, a student must have a psychology course cumulative g.p.a. of at least 2.00 at the end of the fall semester 2015 and anticipate completing the degree by the end of spring term 2016.

The examination requires students to demonstrate their integrated understanding of three areas in psychology. Since the question is provided about two months in advance, expectations of quality are markedly higher than for an examination where specific questions are not known ahead of time. Faculty will be available to discuss possible options you are considering for your essay.

### Integrative Essay

The goal is an essay responding to one of the provided questions that explicitly integrates three different areas of psychology. “Integrative” means that you describe the distinctive contributions from each area, but in a way that indicates how one area *informs* the research and theories in another area. For example (when social and developmental are two of the areas), in writing about the social material include what one needs to know from developmental research and/or theories to more fully understand the phenomena.

To avoid the excessive time devoted to “take-home” essays by some in the past, you will be given the possible questions about two months prior to submission. About five days after the questions are distributed, you must inform the Department of the question you prefer to answer.

You must submit your choice of question by the specified deadline. Once you notify us, you **may not change** to a different question.

For purposes of the comprehensive examination, the areas of psychology are:

**abnormal behavior**  
**neuroscience**  
**cognitive psychology**  
**community psychology**  
**developmental psychology**  
**diversity of human behavior (including race, ethnicity & gender)**  
**industrial / organizational psychology**  
**personality psychology**  
**health psychology**  
**positive psychology**  
**pseudopsychology**

## social psychology

While you should consider the three areas you are likely to use when selecting your question, you may change the three areas at any point prior to submission of the final essay. This is to permit you to modify the specified task should you realize that you are actually making more use of an area not included in your original selection. However, we urge you to *minimize changing areas* ... and urge you not to make any area changes later than one week after receiving comments on your outline.

## Evaluation Procedures

This is a departmental examination; thus a student will not be informed ahead of time as to which faculty members will read her or his outline. Each of the six full-time members of the Department (Bateman, Bardi, Nelson, Tiernan, Trosi & Yu) is prepared to discuss – in general terms– your approach to your selected question.

Each student's outline will be evaluated independently by two randomly selected members of the Department. The primary purpose of the outline is for the faculty to provide **general** comments about the quality of work at an intermediate stage. The names of the two readers will be included so a student may discuss the conversion of the outline to an essay with the evaluators. Be aware, however, that the faculty will decline to respond to questions about details, e.g., whether including a specific study is appropriate; whether a specific theory is correctly applied; whether a specific name/date citation is correct. One-on-one conversations about the essay will be at the same "macro-level" as the comments on the outline.

The outline will be evaluated as either Pass or Fail. "Pass" means that there was a *bona fide effort* to provide a *detailed* outline suggesting not only the overall approach to the question but also specific theories and published research that will be offered in support. "Fail" is assigned when there is little indication of work in developing the outline, when supporting material is scant. "Fail" requires the resubmission of an appropriate outline by the date specified in the comments as well as delaying the submission of the essay until the third comprehensive examination period of the semester.

Each student's essay will be evaluated independently by the same two members of the Department who evaluated the outline.

In the rare case where the two readers disagree on the grade, a third member of the Department –who is aware of the disagreement but not of the specific grades– will read the essay.

Each essay will be evaluated as Distinction, Pass, Fail.

A student whose essay is evaluated as "Fail" will be informed of that fact along with suggestions for improvement. In accord with College rules, the student may resubmit the essay during the official comprehensive examination period at the end of the semester.

## Calendar Summary 2015-2016

Nov 2015 ... distribution of these guidelines to majors in the class of 2016; post on psychology.sewanee.edu

Tuesday, **January 12, 2016** ... required meeting to discuss comprehensive examination procedures, **6 p.m., Woods Lab 324**

➔ includes distribution of the two or three possible essay questions ←

Monday, **January 18, 2016** ... **by 8:00 a.m.**,

send an e-mail to **PsychComp@sewanee.edu**

» *Subject:* line must read: PsychComp: <your name>

The body or message must include

[a] which essay question you will answer (give the number)

NOTE: Once submitted, the choice of essay question **cannot** be changed

note:- failure to submit the question by the 8 a.m. deadline means that you have forfeited the privilege of selecting the essay question; the Department will select the question for you using a random process.

Monday, **February 8, 2016** ... **by 8:00 a.m.**,

send an e-mail to **PsychComp@sewanee.edu**

» *Subject:* line must read: PsychComp: <your name>

The body or message must include

[a] which essay question you selected in January (give the question number)

[b] the three areas of psychology you are including in your essay outline

Attach your *outline* as a Word file (.doc or .docx)

➔ **on the first line in the Word file** include [a] your name [b] question number [c] the three areas of psychology you are using ←

note:- failure to submit an outline judged to be a *bona fide* effort will require (a) resubmission of an outline deemed acceptable and (b) delaying submission of the essay until the third official comprehensive examination period of the spring term

Monday, February 15, 2016 ... you will receive suggestions based on your outline from the two faculty evaluators, including the designation "Pass" or "Fail"

Friday, **April 1, 2016** ... **by 8:00 a.m.**,

send an e-mail to **PsychComp@sewanee.edu**

» *Subject:* line must read: PsychComp: <your name>

The body or message must include

[a] which essay question you selected in January (give the question number)

[b] the three areas of psychology included in your essay

Attach your essay as a Word file (.doc or .docx)

➔ **on the first line in the Word file** include [a] your name [b] question number [c] the three areas of psychology you are using ←

➔ **do not use any headers, footers, or footnotes in the Word file** ←

note:- failure to submit the essay by the 8 a.m. deadline means that you may not submit your essay until the third official comprehensive examination period of the spring term

➔ **early submission is acceptable; late submission is not** ←

## ➔ serious consequences for missing an 8:00 a.m. deadline ←

- Jan. 18 question selection: the Department selects the question for you
- Feb. 8 outline submission: we will not accept your essay until the end of April, thus you will not know if you passed until during finals
- Apr. 1 essay submission: we will not accept your essay until the end of April, thus you will not know if you passed until during finals

### e-mail submission

On rare occasions e-mail goes astray. The staff member who processes the material will acknowledge receipt within one work-day. **It is your responsibility** to be sure that the e-mail was received; i.e., you have an acknowledgement by 3:00 p.m. on the submission day.

### Procedural questions

The answer to your questions on psychology comprehensive examinations is probably contained in this document. If you are unable to locate it, contact the Psychology Chair, Al Bardi (Woods Lab. 303A, cabardi@sewanee.edu).

➔ as Chair, Dr. Bardi will respond to procedural (**not** content) questions ←

### Standards for Evaluation of the Outline

An outline consists of phrases and clauses arranged in a way that reveals

[a] the thesis of the essay

[b] each main point or principle that will be developed in the essay

[c] the logical sequence of the points/principles so that the thesis is supported

[d] the main evidence from one/two/three areas that support each point/principle (not all three areas will bring data/theories to any one point, but—depending on the question and the areas—there likely will be a few to many that draw from all three areas; very few points, if any, should have evidence from only one area)

You need to describe the supporting evidence in sufficient detail that it is clear when data/theory from one area contribute to the understanding of data/theory in a different area.

Do cite your sources in the outline using the customary APA name/data form

Do not include a list of References (items cited in the body of the outline).

Do not include a Bibliography (all works consulted whether or not included in the outline).

Do not include a cover page.

Do not include an abstract.

## Standards for Evaluation of the Essay

### *Length*

Quality and thoroughness of the answer is the primary basis for evaluation. However, the order-of-magnitude of the task is perhaps best expressed as an essay of 2,000 to 2,300 words ... approximately 7 to 8 pages, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, typical font.

### *Content*

Since you have the question about two months ahead, we expect that your facts will be accurate and that technical terms and names of psychologists will be spelled correctly. Support your comments with specific facts and concepts. Depending on the circumstances, that might range from briefly mentioning a particular experiment (using the customary name/date system of psychology) to listing several main points of a research article each of which are close/y related to your point. Similarly, a theory might be referred to in passing by its name or a single-sentence description of its essence, or you might spend a half-page detailing a theory that is particularly germane to your essay.

The task is to write an essay that explicitly integrates three areas of psychology; it is **not** a term paper. While the source of your data-based and theory-based statements should be made clear by in-text (name/date) citations, do not go overboard by citing studies that are only tangential to the basic points you are making concerning the question.

Do include a list of References (items cited in the body of the essay) in APA format.

Do not include a Bibliography (all works consulted whether or not included in the essay).

Do not include a cover page.

Do not include an abstract.

The task is not to locate all published data and theories even remotely related to the question you selected (an “exhaustive review of the literature”). The task is not to present a “cut and paste” summary of work by other people located by PsycINFO or other indexes.

In contrast, the task is not to present a broad answer to the question devoid of supporting research.

The task **IS** to write an essay that demonstrates *your* conceptual mastery of the question posed, showing us **your understanding** of the concepts ... with selective presentation of the data and theories that support your perspective. Use the 7 to 8 pages carefully ... be sure that *each* study or theory you cite contributes to your basic conceptual answer.

Be sure that your essay (not “term paper”) demonstrates that a better understanding of the question comes from use of all three areas of psychology ... that work in one area provides depth of understanding to work in another area. *Show* this integration by the logical arrangement of material.

Organize your essay by ideas, principles, and perspectives. While some principles will likely involve all three areas you have selected, other points may have contributions from only two areas (which two varying). One or two perspectives might even be drawn

from only one area.

(An undesirable organization of your essay would be by area: two pages dealing with the question in area 1 followed by three pages using area 2 followed by three pages of material from area 3 ... even if there is a paragraph or two at the end describing interrelationship of the three areas.)

Avoid “glittering generalities” and “common-sense” answers that do not draw upon your knowledge of psychology. The task is markedly different from a casual discussion on the question that might occur in a social setting.

Be sure that you analyze the question carefully, that you answer the specific question asked, using material that is related to it. Avoid discussions of material unrelated to the central question; even if such discussions are technically correct, they weaken your answer.

If a question stipulates you are to take one side of an issue and defend it, do precisely that. Choose the position you can best defend, regardless of whether you think the reader would agree with it. Your answer will be evaluated solely on your argument and not on the particular side you choose to defend. Do not “sit on the fence.”

*Specific standards for evaluating the comprehensive exam:*

1. Responses should reveal a substantive knowledge of psychological concepts, theory, and methods in your three areas. All essay responses should demonstrate an understanding of concepts well beyond the introductory course level. Essays should reflect a detailed knowledge of key studies, concepts, theories, and individuals in the history of psychology with appropriate name/date citations. Compare and contrast both research and theories across areas ... e.g., how does a specific theory from area X change the understanding of a specific study in area Y?

2. You should be prepared to provide evidence of a knowledge-based, critical perspective on controversial issues of psychology. Arguments should be internally consistent and sequentially arranged. Points should be well-formulated and supported with directly relevant psychological material derived from courses in the major and perhaps courses related to the major.

3. The Department members expect students to write in a style consistent with almost four years of extensive undergraduate experience with writing and instructor feedback across various disciplines. We expect a well-written, scholarly essay. More specifically, essays should have the following qualities:

- a) cohesive organization among sentences and within paragraphs and sections of the essay (including a topic sentence in each paragraph)
- b) a clear focus or pattern of reasoning that is logically developed and maintained throughout the essay
- c) effective introductions and conclusions
- d) awareness of the audience
- e) concise and precise wording
- f) correct grammar, syntax, punctuation, and spelling; avoidance of awkward phrasing

## **Assistance**

Initially you may discuss the questions and related ideas with others, including psychology faculty. When you move from idea gathering to the actual writing of your outline, you may no longer discuss the question with other students.

Each student should ultimately develop and write his or her own essay. Put another way, consulting with other students is acceptable only in the early stages of preparing your outline; once you begin writing the sentences that will appear in the submitted essay, you must work alone.

You may consult with the Writing Tutors and psychology faculty at any point in the process.

## **Honor Code**

Sewanee's Honor Code governs this comprehensive examination. If you have any questions about how the Honor Code applies, please ask for clarification. Uncertainty about the application of the Honor Code does not excuse a violation.

## **Degree coursework completed in December 2015**

Students who complete their degree in December are entitled to take the comprehensive examination during the fall 2015 semester. Please notify the Department Chair, Al Bardi, that this is your situation at the earliest possible time.

Individual arrangements will be made following discussion of the situation and confirmed in writing (usually e-mail). All provisions, except for the dates, are the same as for students taking the examinations in the spring term.

## **Double Major**

If you are also majoring in a department that customarily has its comprehensive examination during the official comprehensive examination period following spring break, please notify the Department Chair, Al Bardi, that this is your situation at the earliest possible time.

Individual arrangements will be made following discussion of the situation and confirmed in writing (usually e-mail).