

Psychology Comprehensive Exam Guidelines – Class of 2020

The comprehensive examination in psychology for the class of 2020 will consist of a single, 8-page essay that demonstrates integration of three different areas, to be submitted during the official comprehensive examination period immediately following spring break.

To be eligible to take the exam, a student must have a psychology course cumulative GPA of at least 2.00 at the end of the fall (Advent) semester 2019 and anticipate completing the degree by the end of the spring (Easter) semester 2020.

Because the potential essay questions are provided about two months in advance, expectations of quality are markedly higher than for a course examination.

Integrative Essay

Your essay will explicitly integrate three different areas of psychology. “Integrate” 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 the two areas, in writing about social material, include what one needs to know from developmental research/theories to more fully understand the phenomena.

In completing the exam, you will have a sequence of tasks to complete (see dates below):

1. You will receive the possible questions about two months prior to the final essay submission.
2. About five days after the questions are distributed, you will inform the Department of the question you prefer to answer.
3. About three weeks after indicating which question you will answer, you will submit the outline for your essay.
4. About one week later, you will receive feedback on your outline.
5. About 4-5 weeks later, you will submit the final version of your essay.

You must submit your choice of question by the specified deadline (see specific dates on last page). Once you notify us, you may not change to a different question, but you may change your choice of three areas at any time before submission of the final essay

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

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

Evaluation Procedures

The Outline. Students will not be informed ahead of time as to which faculty members will read their outlines. Each of the administratively active tenured or tenure-track faculty members of the Department (Professors Bardi, Bateman, Cammack, Troisi & Yu) will be available to discuss—in general terms—your approach once the questions have been made available.

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. Once the outline has been submitted, students may discuss the conversion of the outline to an essay with the two faculty evaluators. Faculty are at their discretion in assisting you, but generally assistance will be in the form of broad guidance rather than specific, suggestions such as offering a study you might include.

The outline will be evaluated as either Pass or Fail. “Pass” means that there was a *bona fide effort* to provide a detailed outline, indicating 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

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indication of work in developing the outline or supporting evidence is scant. “Fail” requires the resubmission of an appropriate outline by the date specified by the department, as well as delaying the submission of the essay until the final comprehensive examination period of the semester. Please note that a passing grade on the outline does not mean the essay will necessarily pass also. A passing outline merely indicates substantive progress—it is not a guarantee that the essay will earn a passing grade.

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, and d) the main scholarly evidence from one/two/three areas that support each point/principle. All three areas may not bring data/theories to any one point, but—depending on the question and the areas—there will likely be a few points that draw from all three areas. It is also likely that very few points, if any, should have evidence from only one area. Additionally, for the outline, adhere to these criteria:

- Do not cite your sources in the outline using the customary APA in-text name/date form.
- Do not include a list of references (items cited in the body of the outline).
- Do not include a cover page.
- Do not include an abstract.

The Essay. Each student’s essay will be evaluated independently by the same two members of the Department who evaluated the outline. If the two readers disagree on the grade, a third member of the Department—who is aware that the first two readers disagreed, but not the specific grades—will read the essay.

The essay will be evaluated as either Distinction, Pass, or Fail. A student whose essay is evaluated as “Fail” will be informed of that fact and given 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.

Standards for Evaluation of the Essay.

Length. Make your argument in an essay of 2,000-2,300 words, or approximately 8 pages (double-spaced, 1 inch margins, typical 12-point font).

Content. Be sure that your essay 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. Although some arguments you may make will only be supported by one area, it is likely that many of your arguments will be supported by two or three areas you have selected.

Although the source of your data-based and theory-based statements should be made clear by in-text citations (following APA format), do not cite studies that are only tangential to the basic points you are making concerning the question. Support for your arguments may come in the form of briefly mentioning a particular experiment (using the customary APA in-text citation style), to listing several main points of a research article which are *closely* 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.

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.

Additionally, for the essay, adhere to these criteria:

- Do not cite your sources in-text in the essay using the customary APA in-text name/date form.
- Do not include a list of references (items cited in the body of the outline).
- Do not include a cover page.
- Do not include an abstract.

Assistance

When the questions are made available, you may discuss them 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, unless they are an official Writing Tutor. Put

another way, consulting with other students is acceptable 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 a faculty member for clarification. Uncertainty about the application of the Honor Code does not excuse a violation.

Degree Coursework Completed in December 2019

Students who will complete their degree in December are entitled to take the comprehensive examination during the fall (Advent) semester 2019. Please notify the Department Chair, Prof. 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 email). All provisions, except for the dates, are the same as for students completing the comprehensive exam in the spring (Easter) semester.

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, Prof. Al Bardi, that this is your situation at the earliest possible time. If a significant conflict exists, individual arrangements will be made following discussion of the situation and confirmed in writing (usually email).

Grade Notification

Final Comps grades will be distributed to students taking the exam 2-3 weeks following the essay due date. This time allows for any discrepancies between readers to be resolved by faculty.

Procedural Questions

If you have procedural (not content) questions that this document cannot answer, please contact the Psychology Department Chair, Prof. Al Bardi (Woods Lab 303A, cabardi@sewanee.edu).

Final Comprehensive Examination Grade

Grades for the comprehensive exam are provided by email, generally within three weeks of the final essay. This length of time is required in order to employ third readers as necessary.

Calendar Summary 2019-2020

Early December 2019: Guidelines Distributed

Distribution of these guidelines to majors in the class of 2020. They will also be posted on the Psychology website.

Tuesday, January 14, 2020, 7:30pm in location TBA.: Meeting to Discuss Procedures

Required meeting for all students in the class of 2019 to discuss comprehensive examination procedures. At this meeting the three possible essay questions will be distributed.

Monday, January 20, 2020 by 8am: Email Question Selection

Send an email to PsychComp@sewanee.edu. In that email:

-The subject line must read: "**PsychComp: <your name>**".

-The body of the email must include the number of the essay question you will answer.

Note: Once submitted, the choice of the essay question cannot be changed. Also note that failure to submit the question number you desire by the 8am deadline means that you have forfeited the privilege of selecting the essay question. The department will randomly select a question for you.

Monday, February 10, 2020 by 8am: Email Outline Submission

Send an email to PsychComp@sewanee.edu. In that email:

-The subject line must read: "**PsychComp: <your name>**".

-The body of the email must include:

a) The number of the essay question you selected in January.

b) The three areas of psychology you are including in your essay outline.

-Attach your outline as a Word file. 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 at the end of the semester.

Monday, February 17, 2020 by 8am: Outline Feedback Received

You will receive suggestions based on your outline from two faculty members, including the designation of "Pass" or "Fail."

Friday, March 27, 2020 by 8am: Email Comprehensive Essay Submission

Send an email to PsychComp@sewanee.edu. In that email:

-The subject line must read: "**PsychComp: <your name>**".

-The body of the email must include:

a) The number of the essay question you selected in January.

b) The three areas of psychology you are including 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

Note: Do not include any headers, footers, or footnotes in the Word file. Also note that failure to submit the essay by the 8am deadline means that you may not submit your essay until the third official comprehensive examination period at the end of the semester.

Note: Email submissions: The Faculty Technology Coordinator, Jacob McGhee, who processes the material, will acknowledge receipt of emails within one workday. If you have not received confirmation that your materials have been received within that timeframe, please follow up.

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