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Psychology

How to get a 45+ (without a private tutor!)



by **Liora S.**

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As you would probably know, psych cops a lot of scorn by all the bio, chem and physics kids for supposedly not being a real science and being super easy. But if you're like me, then you would also know that psych is one of the most fascinating and engaging subjects and is by no means an "easy 50". If you have a knack for analysing human behaviour, then with a few more steps and diligent studying, you'll walk into the exam confident and ready to shine with your knowledge.

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How do I study for SACs?

Whilst the final exam makes up 60% of your study score, SACs are crucial for determining your ranking and ensuring you walk into the exam already in a good place. That is why I tried to keep my SAC study varied and interactive in order to hold my interest in all the topics we were learning, and that way I felt more confident in my ability to handle all styles of questioning.

► Make Your Own Notes

Throughout the year, I made my own notes covering every dot point of the study design. I made sure to use:

- Diagrams
- Colour coding key terms
- Bolding key terms
- Different headings & subheadings

While I made my own notes, I checked other notes to make sure I hadn't missed out on anything important, and to see if there was a better way of explaining, phrasing or organising my notes. Something else that I found useful was referring to the notes of a student who received top marks in the previous year, and other company guide books such as A+ Notes. You should find a way to make notes in a way that works for you! Make sure you write in your own words rather than copying and pasting from a textbook, it'll really help you get on top of the content and establish a natural understanding.



► Worksheets and Quizzes

Sometimes completing practice tests can become monotonous, so in order to maintain motivation my teacher assigned quick worksheets and quizzes with a range of different activities to help revise. This can even be made fun by using...

- [word searches](#)
- [crosswords](#)
- [matching terms with definitions](#)
- [multiple choice questions](#)
- [scenarios](#)

You can try the subject quizzes and videos on Studyclix for a quick and interactive studying method. I found it beneficial to alternate practising my written answers to sample SAC questions with quick quizzes that I made on Quizlet, as well as watching short videos to go over theory.

► Past SAC Questions

Of course, while multiple choice and definitions are straightforward, pretty much every SAC will require you to explain concepts and relate to scenarios in full sentences, using the relevant terminology.

You should practise past SAC questions or questions similar in style to what will be on your SAC, under timed conditions.

Personally, about 2 weeks before a SAC, I liked to start answering questions with my notes in front of me, to make sure I used all the correct terminology and explanations. As I became more confident, I ensured I completed at least one practise test, under exam-like conditions.



How do I study for the Exam?

In order to prepare myself aptly for the exam I focused on three main areas...

1. Terminology

Like any VCE subject, Psych has a bank of specific vocabulary that you need to understand and know how to use, as one word can make or break your mark! For every topic I created Quizlets of all the key terms and their definitions, and once I became familiar with the words, I was able to confidently practise my written answers to exam questions. I highly recommend making flashcards or using online forums like Studyclix and Quizlet to go over terminology. Once you've grasped the words, understanding scenarios and being able to tackle the exam will be a lot easier.

2. Exam Question Practice

If you leave all your exam practise until after SACs are finished, you'll probably be overwhelmed. I used the Cambridge Checkpoints book before each SAC to become accustomed to the style of VCAA questions and how to answer them. This means that when it came to the end of year study period, I already knew how to approach exam questions, and because I also understood the terminology from constantly quizzing myself, I could just focus on getting through as many trial exams as possible. You could also practise answering past VCAA questions for particular topics on Studyclix where past exams are already divided into each topic.



3. Practise Full Exams

It probably goes without saying that one of the most important ways to prepare for the exam is to complete numerous trial papers. At the start of the exam study period, I found it really useful to take a random company paper and sit it under exam conditions, so that when I marked it I could see what I already knew and what I needed to focus on. I think this is a great way to initially approach the exam so that you don't waste time going over things you are already confident with. Like I did when studying for my SACs, I found it really helpful to first complete trial exams with my notes in front of me, and then once I recognised and understood the key aspects of each question type, I could do exams under exam conditions. Make sure you prioritise all VCAA questions, even the ones from old exams that still apply to the current study design.



The exam is made up of 3 main sections:

1. Multiple Choice

- This section makes up about 42% of the exam, and it's a pretty easy 50 marks to secure yourself if you have the right approach. Something I was told is that multiple choice is really just a choice between two options, and I found this to be really helpful advice; most of the time you can cross out two options straight away so that you're left with the other two. You should also keep in mind that multiple choice asks for the best answer out of the available options, not necessarily the correct answer. And of course, if you can't decide, need to think about it or need to guess, shade a bubble and come back to it if you have time, you have a 1 in 4 chance of being right!

2. Short Answers

- When it comes to the short answer questions, the best thing to do is look at the mark allocation, as this gives you an indication of how many points you have to make. Also get used to the different command terms, such as "state", "explain", "evaluate" etc, as these tell you in what way to answer the question. If there is a lot of information given, like in a scenario, I always found it helpful to highlight key terms that I needed to pay attention to so that they stood out on the page. For any question worth more than 1 or 2 marks, you should try to always relate



back to the scenario where applicable, so you can show that you know how to use your general knowledge of the content and also apply it to different specific situations. Don't forget that it's also perfectly acceptable and sometimes even better to answer in dot points so you keep your answer succinct, clear and easy for the examiner to follow!

3. The 10 Marker

- This is probably the hardest part of the exam to prepare for and handle on the day. I would simply say to just practise as many as you can, especially different question types. In this section you are expected to relate to the scenario all the time, so every time you explain content, give an example and link back to the scenario given to you. You should take note of the requirements you have to write about and make sure you answer all of those first, and then if you have extra time, I recommend adding in extra information that applies from other parts of the course, so you can really show off your knowledge. Unlike in short answer, there is more room for writing about everything you know that relates to the topic given to you, so don't be afraid to have fun with the question and answer with confidence and passion.



How do I handle the exam?

Time Management

Like any exam you will ever sit, part of doing well involves being able to efficiently manage and divide your time and complete each section properly without rushing. My personal strategy was...

- ▶ Complete multiple choice in around 30 minutes
- ▶ Spend just under 2 hours on short answers
- ▶ Spend 30 minutes on the 10-marker
- ▶ Any remaining few minutes should be used to check over the paper and make sure you've answered everything to the best of your ability

It's also really important to **take advantage of the 15 minutes of reading time.**

I always started by reading the 10 marker and starting to dissect it in my head, so I could have ideas in the back of my mind while I was doing the rest of the exam. I would then read the short answer questions and decide if there was any I was super confident with that I would answer straight away, or which ones required more thinking that I would complete later.

I don't recommend trying to read the multiple choice during reading time as there are far too many, however if you have enough time after reading the rest of the paper, you can start answering the first few in your head to get a bit of a headstart once writing time begins.



Order of the Exam

Everyone has different strengths in Psych, so the order you do the exam depends on your personal abilities.

I'm an orderly person, so I preferred to follow the order of the exam when I was studying.

Generally, I would say:

- ▶ **I think it makes sense to start with multiple choice questions;** because you are able to warm up your skills and retrieve your knowledge, and then have it ready for short answer where you have to explain concepts properly
- ▶ **If during reading time you decide you are really confident with the 10 marker, by all means start with that;** but just make sure you don't spend longer than 30 minutes on it.
- ▶ **The same principle applies to short answer, especially easy 1 markers;** if during reading time you find questions you can immediately answer without much thought, go for it! The most important thing is to get as many marks as you can, so decide on the best way for you to do this, and practise your techniques during your studying.



Some Final Tips

❖ Define and Link Mantra

From the first lesson, my teacher taught my class to always ‘define and link’. For any question worth more than 1 mark, you first define or explain the relevant concept or term from the course, and then give an example that links back to the specific scenario or question given to you. If you follow this, you can’t really go wrong in any question. It also works really well in the 10 marker, as my teacher always said that the 10 marker involves repeatedly defining and linking. Keep this mantra in the back of your mind and approaching any question will be that much easier.

❖ Be Organised

I spent the last few days of the summer holidays preparing all my notes for the research methods section, so I already had a basic understanding and could focus on making my notes for the rest of the content throughout the year. I definitely recommend getting a little head start before the school year begins, so you don’t end up too stressed or overwhelmed. I think a lot of students also forget about constantly referring back to the study design and the examiners’ reports. Have the study design saved in your documents and printed out so you can easily access it at all times. The exam reports are also gold mines for ways to answer certain questions, so read them multiple times and even add the sample answers into your notes!



❖ Use Your Teacher

Your teacher is the best resource you have. Every time I had questions about something I didn't understand or needed to clarify, I made a time to meet with her and go through everything. Don't be afraid to ask questions, you will only gain and never lose. I was also always asking for more practise material to help me revise and keep all the content fresh. While lessons are where you establish your knowledge, it's super important to consolidate anything you aren't sure of by speaking to your teacher.

❖ Enjoy the Lessons

My final piece of advice is to simply enjoy the year and all of the fascinating concepts that Psych has to offer. Part of remembering the content, being able to apply it to any question and scoring highly on the exam is actually engaging in class and having fun with your revision. Psych lessons were my definite favourite part of the day. The content is so relatable, and you might find yourself doing what I did and accidentally analysing everyone around you without even realising how much you have learnt. Ask questions, talk to your peers and be passionate, the first step to success is a positive attitude





Best of luck in the exam! You will be great. 😊

