



A guide to AQA A Level psychology

A simple guide for A-Level Psychology students and parents to help understand how marks are allocated throughout the papers and how to study for AQA A Level psychology.

Written by Grant Henderson

A-Level Psychology Teacher | Examiner

Disclaimer: This guide is independently produced by the author and is not endorsed by or affiliated with AQA. All the information used was composed from materials that can be found by anyone online (e.g. past papers and mark schemes). The author does not write exam papers or use any material in this guide that cannot be found online by anyone; it has been created to make understanding the requirements of the A level more accessible to those that learn it and their parents. This data has been created using a mean average from marks distributed between the 2023, 2024 and 2025 A level papers.

Contents

- **Part 1 – Where Are the Marks?**

Understand how the qualification is structured and where to focus your revision.

- **Part 2 – Understanding Assessment Objectives (AOs) AO1, AO2 and AO3**

Learn the three skills the examiner is assessing.

- **Part 3 – My Essay Planning Method**

A simple strategy to help you prepare for both long and short answer questions.

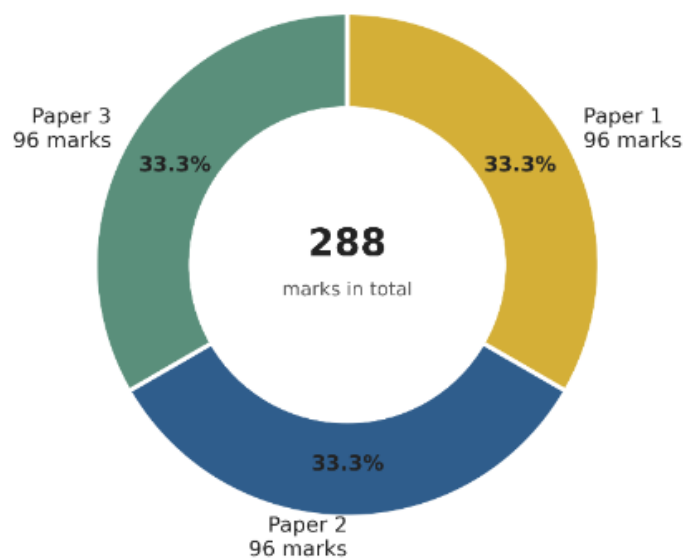
PART 1 – WHERE ARE THE MARKS?

Understanding the qualification

There are **288 marks** available across the A-Level Psychology qualification.

Each paper is worth **96 marks**, meaning all three papers contribute equally to your final grade.

Three papers — equal weighting



Based on the complete AQA A-level Psychology exam series from 2023, 2024 and 2025.

A simple grade guide: As a rough guide, these percentages are useful targets to work towards. Exact grade boundaries change slightly from year to year.

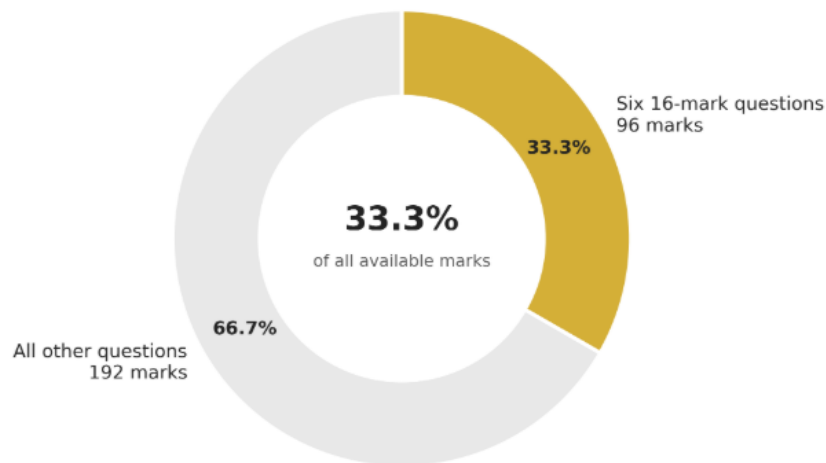
Grade Around (give or take a couple % each year)...

A*	75%
A	65%
B	55%
C	45%
D	35%
E	20%

16 markers: The six most important questions

Across the three papers, there are **six 16-mark questions**. Together, these are worth **96 marks**, meaning they account for **one third of the entire qualification**.

Six 16-mark questions = one third of the A-level

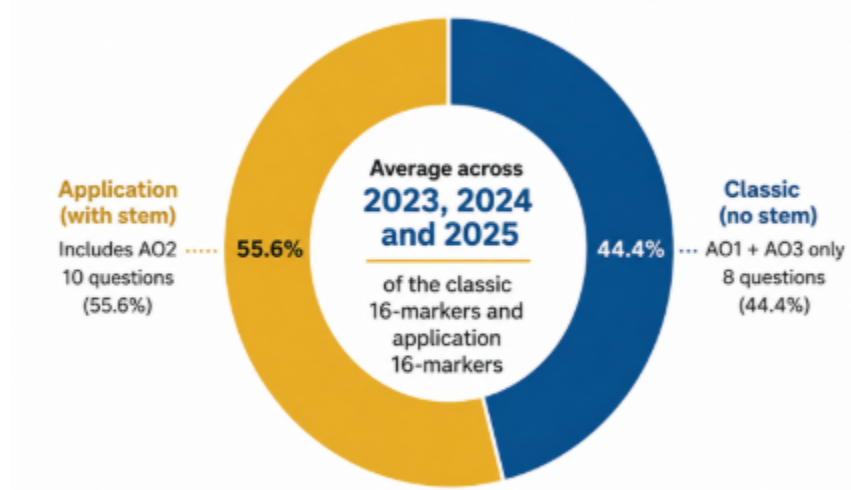


This pattern held across the 2023, 2024 and 2025 complete exam series.

Around half of these questions are classic essays (Ao1 6 marks and Ao3 10 marks) and around half include a scenario (stem/Ao2) that requires application (Ao1 6 marks, Ao2 4 marks and Ao3 6 marks).

In 2023 there were four, 16 markers with a stem and 2 without. This could happen either way round any year

16-mark questions: classic vs application

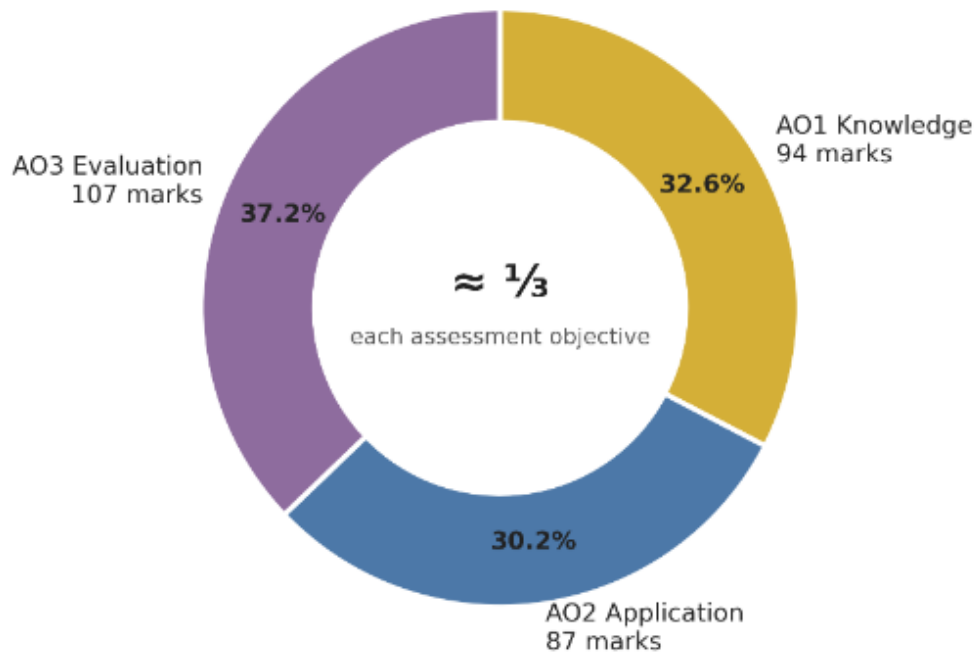


PART 2 –Assessment Objective (AO's) UNDERSTANDING AO1, AO2 AND AO3

Success in A-Level Psychology is about more than just remembering facts.

The exam rewards **three different skills**, each contributing around one third of the available marks.

AO1, AO2 and AO3 — around one third each



Three-year mean (2023–2025). The AO weighting was the same across these three complete exam series.

AO1 – Knowledge

Aim for around 200 words of AO1 when planning a 16-mark essay.

Some topics naturally contain more AO1 than others.

For example, The Approaches unit contains lots of key terms, so reaching 200 words is usually straightforward.

Other topics, such as Memory, contain less AO1 key terms, so you may need to include additional specification knowledge to reach your target or elaborate in more detail with the AO1 you have.

Planning all of your AO1 often takes you beyond 200 words—and that's a good thing because the same knowledge also prepares you for the shorter AO1 questions that appear throughout the exam.

AO2 – Application

AO2 marks come from applying your AO1 to the scenario in the exam. There are no separate AO2 points to memorise as such.

Instead:

- Learn your AO1 thoroughly.
- Practise applying it to different scenarios using past questions.

Top tip: Start your Ao2 answer by referring to the scenario in your very first sentence.

AO3 - Discussion and Evaluation

Aim for **around 300 words** of AO3.

I recommend **3 PEEL paragraphs**.

PEEL 1

- ✓ Strength
- ✓ Support it with research evidence.

PEEL 2 - Counterargument to PEEL 1 - “However”

PEEL 3

- ✓ Additional evaluation, if possible a Limitation

This is a safe structure for most 16-mark essays and also prepares you well for AO3 questions throughout the course.

PART 3 – MY ESSAY PLANNING METHOD

Your goal is not to memorise essays. Understand the psychology well enough to adapt your knowledge to the question you are given. Always answer the actual question!

Step 1 – Build your AO1: Plan the knowledge you need. Use the specification to make sure you cover the key terms.

Step 2 – Apply your AO1 to AO2: Practise applying your knowledge to different scenarios using real past paper questions.

Step 3 – Build your AO3 with PEEL: Practise using PEEL when learning your evaluation:

P – Point: Introduce your strength or limitation.

E – Evidence: Give the supporting fact or research finding.

E – Explain: Explain why it matters – *“This is important because...”*

L – Link: Link directly back to the question using its wording as it is written in the exam

Final advice

Create essay plans for every topic, then practise answering real past paper questions. This prepares you for both long and short questions and teaches you to adapt rather than simply memorise.

Be smart with your studies. Look for research that can support more than one topic. For example, Hazan and Shaver can support both monotropy and the influence of early attachment on adult relationships.

My method for learning studies

1. Reduce it: Write the study in full → a few sentences → a few keywords.
2. Leave it: Come back a few hours later or the next day.
3. Retrieve it: Look only at your key words and try to write the study out again.

Those few trigger words can then go into your essay plan to help you recall the full study in the exam.

I hope you found this guide useful.

Best wishes with your A-Level Psychology studies,

Grant Henderson

A-Level Psychology Teacher | Examiner

PsychologyTutorUK - granthenderson@thepsychologytutoruk.com