

HL psychology paper 3: additional teacher support material

Introduction

The HL psychology paper 3 requires candidates to demonstrate knowledge of qualitative research methods and analyse a stimulus material using this knowledge. Each exam paper includes

- a brief description of a qualitative research study (the stimulus material). The stimulus material is intended to serve as a starting point for answering the questions to demonstrate knowledge of qualitative research methods relevant to the specific study in the stimulus material.
- three short answer questions taken from the learning outcomes from part 3 of the syllabus. All questions must be answered.

Paper 3 is based on short answer questions

Candidates in the examination are supposed to write short answers to the questions. Teaching towards paper 3 (part 3 in the syllabus) should focus on addressing each question in a straightforward manner and avoiding filling in with general knowledge of qualitative research methods that is not directly relevant to the question asked. A focused answer could, in the case of a question on a sampling method, include a brief description of characteristics of the relevant sampling method that are then used in the analysis, for example explaining why this sampling method was chosen. Candidates should not write a general introduction to sampling in research or describe all they know about various sampling methods in qualitative research, as this is not credited. The point is to answer the question asked and relate this to the stimulus material. The assessment criteria for paper 3 give guidance on requirements for this paper. Teachers are recommended to explain what these criteria mean and show students how to apply them to sample answers to increase their understanding.

Distinction between quantitative and qualitative data

Since paper 3 is testing candidates' knowledge and understanding of qualitative research methods it is important to teach them the fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative data	Qualitative data
Data in quantitative research: numbers	Data in qualitative research: text (transcripts and field notes but could also be pictures) → Rich data (or open-ended, that is, open for interpretation) and use of participants' quotations to support interpretations.
Analysis of data easy and quick: descriptive and inferential statistics (mean, standard deviation, percentages, correlations, significance of data).	Analysis of data often difficult and time consuming: no single approach to data analysis (but for example, thematic analysis or grounded theory) → "pattern recognition" with coding and organization in themes and a focus on credibility/trustworthiness.

Qualitative research methods are used in many areas of psychology and it is important that students come to understand why these methods are preferred over quantitative in some cases. Knowing and understanding strategies used by qualitative researchers, such as triangulation and reflexivity, to ensure scientific rigour as well as credibility/trustworthiness is also important. If analysis of qualitative research is based on knowledge from quantitative research only (for example referring to lack of significance of results or too few participants in a purposive

sample) candidates demonstrate limited knowledge and understanding of the basic principles of qualitative research.

Concepts and vocabulary related to qualitative research

It is strongly recommended that candidates do not use the term “experiment” as a generic term for an empirical study in paper 3. Unfortunately a large number of candidates do this as well as using terms from quantitative research, for example talking about hypotheses as well as independent and dependent variables when answering the questions. It is obvious that in many cases knowledge used to evaluate research in responses to paper 3 comes from the internal assessment (IA). To avoid this quantitative approach it is important that all students come to understand the difference between a qualitative and a quantitative approach to research. Therefore teachers are encouraged to integrate epistemological considerations as well as a number of studies based on qualitative methods in the levels of analysis and the options as they go along in the course. This could also be used in relation to TOK.

Higher level students should be particularly trained in qualitative research so that they become familiar with the methods and vocabulary associated with qualitative research in general. They should also have the opportunity to practise "what it is like to be a qualitative researcher" as a contrast to doing quantitative research (as in the IA). Teachers could start teaching part 3 with a small research project like in activity 1 (appendix 1), which is sure to generate rather different answers. This could point not only to the issue of “subjective experience” in a qualitative study but also raise awareness of methodological issues in conducting a qualitative interview. As teaching part 3 progresses, students can be encouraged to reflect on what they would do differently now that they know more, for example with regard to reflexivity and the fact that they are IB students themselves.

Exposure to qualitative research articles

Teachers are recommended to include a few qualitative studies in their teaching of part 3 to give students more opportunity to understand the philosophy of qualitative research. It is recommended that students are given research articles using a qualitative interview, an observation and a case study. The optimal strategy is to have students conduct small research projects as activities using each of the methods in the guide in order to get an insight into the reasoning of a qualitative researcher in relation to these methods. Such activities could also encourage critical thinking about preparation of research, ethical considerations, transcription and analysis of data, as well as strengths and limitations of each method so that students gain a real understanding of this instead of just memorizing it for exams.

Brief link to TOK

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, **epistemology** is the study of knowledge and justified belief. Some of the questions raised in relation to generation of knowledge could be

- How do we come to know about the world in psychology?
- What can be counted as valid knowledge in psychology?
- What are the sources of knowledge in psychology?
- Is knowledge objective or is it dependent on human perceptions and interpretations? (Ontology)

Qualitative research is based on the assumption that a qualitative approach can

- Give an authentic account of the subjective experiences of participants in the research.
- Document the world from the point of view of the people studied.

Relationship between the researcher and the researched in qualitative research

The researcher is seen as an *instrument* and s/he should be able to document the phenomenon under study as it is experienced by those who experience it.

Exposure to past exam papers and feedback to students using the assessment criteria

It is important that students are trained using previous exam papers to familiarize them with the requirements of paper 3. Teachers could start the course for paper 3 by showing students a past exam paper so that they can see for themselves what this paper looks like. One challenge for students is to understand the command term used in the question; another is using the stimulus material appropriately. Using previous exam papers will give students an opportunity to better understand how to apply relevant knowledge and understanding of qualitative research methods to the study mentioned in the stimulus material. Every fifth line in the stimulus material is numbered so that candidates may refer to the lines without having to use extensive quotations. This could be used more effectively in the responses. Teachers should show students how to find relevant parts of the stimulus material that could support explanation or discussion of qualitative research methodology.

Feedback on students' responses should always be based on the assessment criteria for paper 3. It is also encouraged that students use the assessment criteria to mark responses themselves in class. This can be achieved by using sample answers from previous years or by students marking each other's papers using the assessment criteria and then discussing this in class.

How to approach the stimulus material

Teaching part 3 should include training in making clear descriptions, balanced evaluations and discussions in order to avoid claims and speculations with limited relevance to the questions asked. Teaching students how to use the stimulus material properly to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding will help them avoid discussing the content of the stimulus material with little reference to relevant qualitative research methods; or showing their knowledge of qualitative research methods without connecting it to the study in the stimulus material.

Summing up, students should be prepared in such a way that they have

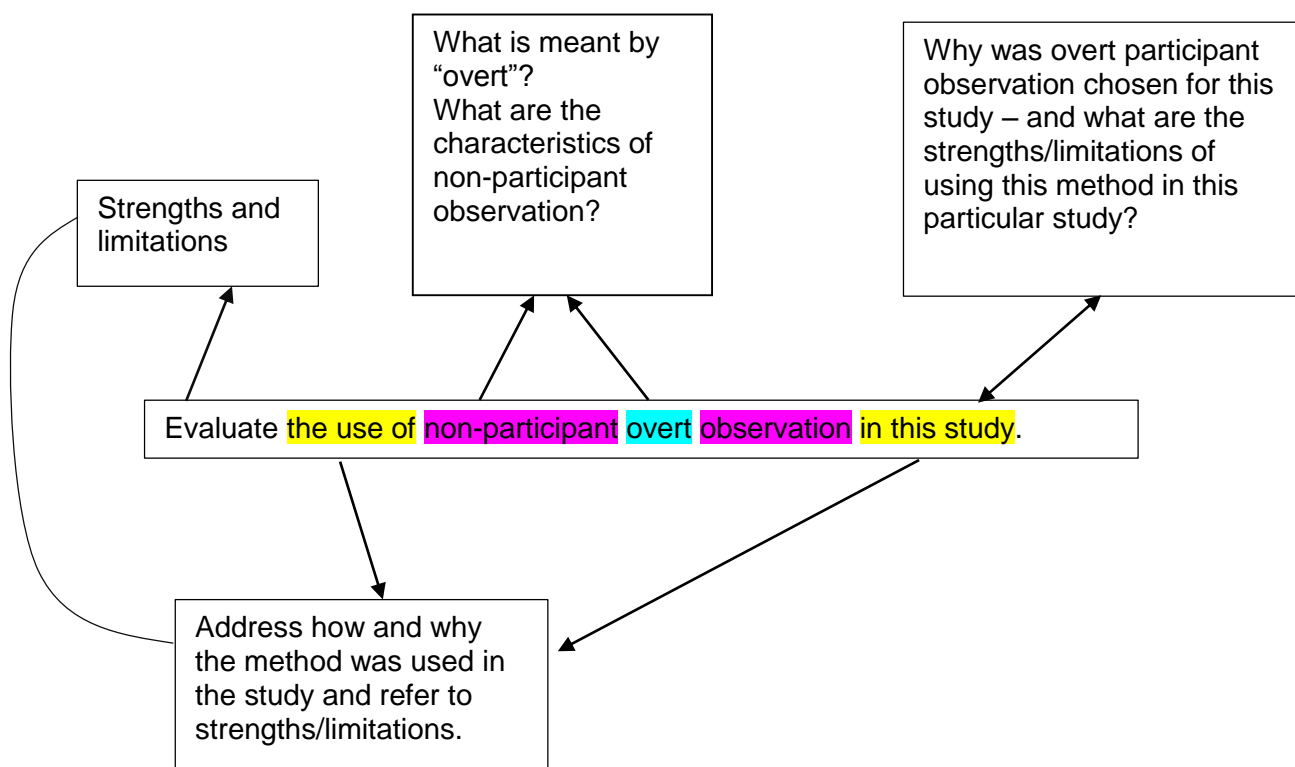
- a general knowledge of qualitative research methods as outlined in the guide
- competence in applying this knowledge in relation to the stimulus material
- competence in using appropriate terms and concepts from qualitative research methods.

Below is an outline of a systematic approach to “unpack” a question in paper 3 and get an idea of what is required in the question. This is intended for students.

How to understand what is required in a question

1. Read through the stimulus material and try to get an idea of the aim, procedure, and findings.
2. Check the questions – what knowledge is needed to answer them? Write that down, for example:
 - non-participant observation
 - ethical considerations in qualitative research
 - reflexivity in qualitative research.
3. Read the stimulus material again – underline what could be relevant to include from the stimulus material for each of the questions.
4. Check the command terms - what level is each one? Level 3 command terms need more attention. Learn what is expected for each command term; for example, “evaluate” requires that you address strengths and limitations.
5. Put on your “qualitative researcher hat” – you need to reason as a researcher when you answer the questions. Use your knowledge and apply that to your analysis of the stimulus material. You may have to “speculate” on what could be reasonable to mention – but beware of speculating to the point where your response has little or nothing to do with the question asked.

This example is based on one of the questions in the exam paper from November 2012, which was related to young people's development of identity on a social networking website.



Examples of responses in the upper markband from the exam paper November 2012

Question 1: Explain considerations that the researcher could have taken both before and after the interviews in this study.

Understanding the question: This means that at least two considerations should be explained, for example, one or two considerations related to methodology; or one consideration related to methodology and one to ethical considerations. More considerations could be addressed so that the result is focused on breadth rather than depth. If the question is not specifically asking for ethical considerations, be sure to include at least one methodological consideration. It is also important to address both before and after the interview. Always explain why these considerations are relevant in the study in the stimulus material. In this example of a candidate response it is demonstrated that “before and after” does not have to be evenly balanced.

Considerations that were taken or could have been taken before the interview in this study relates to participants and sampling. Firstly, given that the aim was to investigate how young people develop identities on a social networking site (lines 4–5), a purposive sample of young people being active on social networking sites would be appropriate, because they would fit the aim of the study. The researchers actually selected 10 participants from an online website at an American university and ensured that they were young with a mean age of 20 years (line 6). Another consideration in regard to sampling could be to include both females and males (lines 5-6) and to take ethnicity into consideration. This was done in this study by choosing a multi-ethnic sample (line 5). These considerations related to sampling

were probably taken with regard to the possibility of generalization of results but it could also be to avoid gender and ethnicity bias. A last consideration before the interview relates to ethics and the fact that the narrative interviews were videotaped (line 11). It is very important that informed consent was obtained before starting the interview and that participants are informed about all procedures, for example, how the videos are being used and how the personal material on the participants' profiles will be used.

Considerations after the interview could relate to the process of analysing the data as well as debriefing including assurance of anonymity (for example, by destroying the videos and changing the names of participants in the final report) and access to the results of the research. This is always important but perhaps it is particularly important in a study like this where personal material is analysed in order to see how the young people used their profile on a social network to construct their identity.

Question2: Explain how reflexivity could be used in the context of this study.

Understanding the question: To answer this question, a brief characteristic of reflexivity and its role in qualitative research to prevent researcher bias and thus contribute to credibility would be appropriate. There is no specific reference to how reflexivity was applied in the stimulus material so candidates would have to suggest how it could be used in this particular study and give reasons and causes for why it could be relevant.

In qualitative research reflexivity is often used if a researcher investigates something of personal interest or just because it is important in qualitative research that a researcher is aware of his own contribution to the research process. Applying reflexivity allows the researcher to reflect on all sorts of ways that could bias the study, for example looking into whether personal beliefs about creating identities on social networking sites (lines 4–5) can influence the way the research is done. There is nothing in the stimulus that indicates that the researcher has any specific beliefs about social networking but it cannot be ruled out that the researcher has personal experiences with social networking. Such experiences could be included in a “reflective journal” during the research so that other researchers could check how he arrived at his conclusions and if his own experiences and attitudes to social networking had biased collection and interpretation of the data. The researcher could also reflect on whether the use of narrative interviews (line 9) was the most useful to study “constructions of identity” (line 4) or whether he should have used a focus group with the 10 participants instead to hear how they discussed their profiles and why photos apparently were more used than text (lines 19–20). In conclusion, it would be possible for the researcher in this study to apply both personal and epistemological reflexivity because this would provide an understanding of both the phenomenon under study (i.e. ways of constructing identities on a social networking site) and the research process itself.

Question 3: Evaluate the use of narrative interviews in this study.

Understanding the question: To answer this question, a brief summary of characteristics of the narrative interview could be appropriate before evaluating its use in the study. Then apply identified strengths and limitations of the narrative interview to the stimulus material.

This study used the narrative interview to collect data. The narrative interview is based on the assumption that humans are storytellers and understand the world through narratives. These narratives are a mix of facts and interpretations – and this is used as a starting point for the narrative interview in this study where participants present pictures and postings on their profile (lines 9–11) and talk about it to the researcher.

A main advantage of the narrative interview in this study is the depth and insight into how the young students use pictures, images and stories (lines 14–18) on their profile to present themselves. The narrative interview generally generates rich data and this is also the case here. Another advantage is that participants can use their

own language and talk without interruption in the narrative interview. Since the aim of the study was to gain insight into identity formation through the participants' profiles this is an important strength of this approach to data collection. It is more likely to give an insight into the young people's perspectives and how they develop identity (lines 4–5) because the interviewer is primarily listening to the participants' stories without interruption as the focus is on their individual accounts. This is giving more space to the participants than a structured interview and it is also a way to limit researcher bias.

There are limitations to the use of narrative interviews, primarily around data collection and analysis. Because the narrative interview generates large amounts of rich data it is time-consuming to transcribe and analyse. This could also be the case here even though only ten participants were in the study. Another disadvantage in using the narrative interview is that since it is the participants who choose what to tell it could be that not all data is useful to the aim of the study. However, it was seen that the researcher was able to establish three major themes of identity in the data (lines 14–17) and therefore meet the aim of the study so the use of narrative interviewing was justified. The study also found that the use of images and pictures to construct identity for the young people was more important than verbal accounts (lines 19–21) and these findings may not have been possible if the narrative interview had not been used.

Appendix 1

Activity 1

Small research project (interview) in groups of three students: *What does it mean to you to be an IB student at this school?*

Planning the research

Make an outline of things to consider when planning a qualitative study (for example, finding participants, ethical issues, data collection). For each point, discuss how and why it could be relevant to your own research.

1. Topics of relevance in your research
2. Participants and sampling
3. Ethics
4. Data collection (for example, using semi-structured interviews; recording, taking notes during the interview, transcription)
5. Data analysis
6. Potential sources of bias – and how to control for them
7. How to increase credibility
8. How could reflexivity be applied in your study? And why would it be worth considering?
9. What would be the strengths/limitations of a qualitative approach compared to a quantitative approach? (questionnaires)