

Writing an analysis essay

One of the rarer types of essay question is the analysis essay. Students often get thrown by them but they're actually straightforward once you're clear on the requirements. They occur in cognitive psychology in PSYB2 but are also quite likely in the bio-psychology section of PSYB1. They aren't always essays – often they are worth 3-4 marks but if you can write an analysis essay you can write the shorter type very easily.

The essay analysis question you are attempting is this:



Analyse this picture in terms of the monocular depth cues it contains (10 marks).

Recall that before you start answering a question you need to ask yourself:

1. What topic am I writing about?
2. What do I have to do with my knowledge of this topic?

OK, so what can we work out from the question? The topic is identifiable because the wording comes from the specification:

Analyse this picture in terms of the monocular depth cues it contains.

Once we've identified that then it's fairly clear that what we need to do with it is:

Analyse this picture in terms of the monocular depth cues it contains.

Those are the question's requirements then. What we must do now is work out how the marks are going to be awarded by the examiner. Recall that an essay is assessed on two main objectives:

knowledge and understanding (AO1) and commentary, analysis, criticism and evaluation (AO2). On PSYB2 a ten mark essay can earn 5 AO1 and 5 AO2 marks. So we can work out that you need to:

- **Describe monocular depth cues.** The AO1 marks are for knowledge and understanding of monocular depth cues. It doesn't explicitly state that you have to describe them but because it's an essay you know that those 5 AO1 marks have to come from somewhere. You'll be earning AO1 marks every time you show knowledge and understanding of monocular depth cues by defining what they are, identifying them and explaining how they work in depth perception.
- **Analyse this picture.** 'Analyse' is an AO2 term that means 'pull it apart to find out what it's made of'. So you will get AO2 marks for showing how different monocular depth cues operate in the picture to allow us to see it as a 3-dimensional representation.

OK, so what can we include and what must we exclude from our answer? There are two things to consider here. First, the question explicitly states monocular depth cues so other sorts (i.e. binocular depth cues) will not attract any marks. Second, you have to analyse the picture in terms of the cues, so any cue you include in your essay must be present in the picture. So the material we could include here would be:

- Monocular depth cues including relative size; occlusion/overlap; linear perspective; aerial perspective; texture gradient; height in horizontal plane.

Fortunately that gives us six different monocular cues. If you choose five of them, describe each and analyse how it conveys depth in the picture that should ensure you get all the marks. That's going to make this essay quite straightforward to plan and write.

The AO1 skill we're practicing here is the skill of **explaining processes** accurately and in detail. You'll be doing this well when you can present, in your own words, an account of how a psychological process operates to produce a particular outcome (in this case, depth perception). Here's an example of how this might be done for height in horizontal plane:

One monocular depth cue is height in the horizontal plane. To use this cue we take in information about the positions of objects relative to the horizon. If the base of an object is vertically close to the horizon line we perceive it as being further from us than if it is vertically more distant from the horizon.

The AO2 skill we're practicing here is **analysing unfamiliar material** using psychological concepts. You'll be doing this well when you can explain how the depth cues operate with specific reference to the features of the picture. Here's how it could be done for height in the horizontal plane:

We can see this depth cue in the picture by looking at the trees in the bottom left corner and the church in the centre. The trees are at the bottom of the picture, further from the horizon line than the church, which is higher up in

the horizontal plane. This tells us that the trees are closer to our vantage point than the church is.

It's important that the examiner knows we're analysing and not just describing. For this reason you have to make a clear reference to specific, identifiable features of the picture. Otherwise the examiner may take the view that you're just describing and not give you any AO2 marks. You should also try to use the technical terms in relation to the thing you are analysing. In the example above, the student writes 'the church, which is *higher* up in the *horizontal plane*': this makes a clear connection between the knowledge and understanding (AO1) and the analysis of the picture (AO2).

So what should you put in your essay? This time we're looking for you to apply those two skills to five monocular depth cues. Your essay will be assessed using the criteria below. The first three are compulsory. If you're confident with them you can have a go at the fourth. In order to do this you will need to do some additional thinking about the difference between monocular and binocular depth cues.

Assessment objective	What I'm looking for...	Have you done this?
AO1 - knowledge and understanding of monocular depth cues.	A brief introduction defining monocular depth cues and indicating which will be address in the essay. Definition is technical and referenced, and correct terminology is used.	
AO1 - knowledge and understanding of monocular depth cues.	Accurate identification and explanation of five monocular depth cues <i>excluding</i> height in the horizontal plane. Descriptions/explanations indicate how each cue is used to convey depth/distance	
AO2 - analysis of stimulus material in terms of psychological concepts.	Analysis of the picture in terms of the five different depth cues described. A clear link is drawn between the depth cues and specific, identifiable features of the picture. Technical terms are used.	
AO2 – assessment of the limitations of psychological processes (OPTIONAL)	Assessment of what monocular depth cues cannot tell us about depth/distance in the picture and explanation of why.	

You will need to deal with one depth cue at a time so the above grid isn't an essay plan – it's there to help you plan more effectively by ensuring you include all the material you need to address. A plan would look more like this:

AO1

HHP

Close to horizon - far

Far from horizon - near

AO2

Trees vs. church

Trees close to bottom of picture - nearer

Church - higher so further

IMPORTANT

You must write a plan and submit it with your essay. If there is no plan your work is incomplete and will receive a mark of zero.

The other way to get a mark of zero is to plagiarise. You are plagiarising if you copy from or paraphrase straight from a textbook, web site or other source without attribution. If you are quoting directly from a source you must cite the name(s) of the author(s) and the date of publication. Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and if you do it at university you get thrown out.

Essays that simply paraphrase the textbook, Wikipedia or whatever will be rejected and a mark of zero recorded.