

## **Assessment Objectives in AQA A-Level Psychology**

In AQA A-Level Psychology, exam questions are marked using three assessment objectives:

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### **AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding**

**What it is:**

AO1 assesses your ability to **demonstrate knowledge and understanding** of psychological concepts, theories, studies, methods, and terminology.

**You should be able to:**

- Accurately describe theories, models (e.g. multi-store model), and studies (e.g. Zimbardo, Loftus).
- Use appropriate psychological terminology.
- Present clear, relevant facts and definitions.

**Typical command words:**

“Describe,” “outline,” “what is meant by...”

**Example in practice:**

*“Outline the working memory model”* – you’d need to describe the components like the central executive, phonological loop, and visuospatial sketchpad using correct terminology.

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### **AO2 – Application**

**What it is:**

AO2 assesses your ability to **apply your knowledge** to a **context or scenario** – often a mini case study or a real-world situation.

**You should be able to:**

- Take psychological theories and apply them to specific situations.
- Tailor your knowledge to fit the people or events described in the question.
- Link theory and research to the details in the scenario.

**Typical command words:**

“Apply,” “explain using your knowledge of...”

**Example in practice:**

*“Using your knowledge of the multi-store model of memory, explain why Alex may forget the shopping list.”* – Here, you must mention MSM components like rehearsal and STM/LTM capacity, but applied specifically to “Alex” and his situation.

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### **AO3 – Evaluation and Analysis**

**What it is:**

AO3 assesses your ability to **analyse, interpret, and evaluate** psychological concepts, theories, methods, and research.

**You should be able to:**

- Critically assess theories and studies (strengths, weaknesses, comparison with alternatives).
- Evaluate research methods (e.g. validity, reliability, ethical issues).
- Support your points with evidence and logical reasoning.
- Offer counterpoints and balanced arguments.

### Typical command words:

“Evaluate,” “discuss,” “to what extent...”

### Example in practice:

“Evaluate Bowlby’s *monotropic theory*.” – You’d need to consider supporting evidence (e.g. Lorenz, Bailey et al.), criticisms (e.g. monotropy is socially sensitive), and maybe comparisons with learning theory.

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### How AO1, AO2 and AO3 Work Together in Exams

Depending on the question, the mark allocation between AO1, AO2, and AO3 varies:

- **Short-answer questions** (1–6 marks): Usually test **AO1** or **AO2**.
- **Application questions** (4–6 marks): Mainly **AO2**, sometimes with AO1.
- **Extended questions/Essays** (8–16 marks): Use a combination of **AO1 (describe)**, **AO2 (apply)**, and **AO3 (evaluate)**. Higher-mark questions demand balance across all three.

### Example for a 16-mark question:

- **AO1 (6 marks)** – Describe the theory (e.g. learning theory of attachment).
- **AO3 (10 marks)** – Evaluate it using studies and counterarguments.

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### Tips for Maximising Each AO:

#### AO1:

- Be concise and accurate.
- Use key terms.
- Learn definitions and studies thoroughly.

#### AO2:

- Read the scenario carefully.
- Refer directly to the people/situation mentioned.
- Use theory to explain behaviour in the scenario.

#### AO3:

- Use evidence (studies, findings).
- Structure your evaluation clearly: point → explain → evidence → counterpoint.
- Aim for balance – include strengths and weaknesses.