

Comprehensive Examination Guidelines

A good comprehensive examination answer should exhibit strength in three areas.

Conceptual Skills

- Relevant theories are identified and used as support, where appropriate.
- Recognizes current state of knowledge and theory in a broad area of research, distinguishing between what is known and what would be desirable to know
- Provides careful consideration of would take to address current gaps in the literature.
- When appropriate, answer goes beyond information in clinical psychology. Because most problems do not respect disciplinary boundaries, good answers integrate across areas. These areas might be animal work, cognitive psychology, social psychology, neuroscience, computer science... even meteorology if your math is really that good.
- Shows creativity and innovation in generating and applying novel ideas, theories, or methods to a current body of literature. Clearly distinguishes when one is making one's original argument as opposed to citing that of others.

Methodological Skills

- Critically considers methods across studies and is able to weight strengths and limitations within a body of work
- Answer demonstrates understanding of internal validity issues (research design, measurement issues) in research.
- Answer demonstrates understanding of external validity (generalizability, maintenance) in research.
- It able to identify and articulate methodological advances that would help strengthen a body of research

Writing Skills

- Ideas are integrated by theme and idea, not simply "idea stacking" or list of studies.
- Demonstrates good organization, as evidenced by clear idea flow between paragraphs
- Uses appropriate headings and subheadings to further organize text.
- Ideas were focused and easy to follow logically
- Conclusions are appropriately supported with theory or research; speculations are clearly marked as such.
- Proper use of in-text citations
- Ideas are expressed efficiently; no needless redundancy.
- Answer uses correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation