

# Exams & Assessment: AO2 Terms & Skills



This handout will help you to:

- Understand what the AO2 assessment criterion is.
- Identify AO2 exam terms
- Distinguish between different types of AO2

The AQA-A AS specification you are studying assesses your Psychology skills in two different ways. These are:

- Assessment Objective 1 (AO1): knowledge and understanding.
- Assessment Objective 2 (AO2): commentary, criticism and evaluation.

## Assessment Objective 2 (AO2)

At AS, just under half your marks are earned by demonstrating AO2 to the examiner. AO2 is what you are doing when you move beyond simply describing ideas, theories and studies (which are all AO1), and start writing about them in terms of what they tell us and whether or not they are any good as examples of psychological thinking or research.

### AO2 Terms

The examiners use several different terms to indicate that they want you to demonstrate AO2. Some of these are evaluate, consider and assess. These terms only appear in the essay (part 'c') questions on AS papers. These terms indicate that you could use a range of different AO2 approaches. For example:

Approach	You do this when you...	For example...
<b>Comment</b>	Present an <b>interpretation</b> of a psychological theory or finding	Asch's (1951) study shows that people will conform to a majority influence even if this requires them to go against their own judgment. Conformity of this type is motivated by the need to fit in with a social group, or normative influence.
<b>Criticise</b>	Draw attention to the <b>strengths and/or weaknesses</b> of a theory or research study	One problem with Sherif's study is that the PPs may have been going along with what they thought the experimenter wanted, rather than really conforming to the group. The fact that they were asked to estimate twice might have suggested to them that their first answer was wrong and this, rather than group pressure, might explain their behaviour.
<b>Evaluate</b>	Present an overall conclusion about the <b>value</b> of a particular concept, theory, study or area of research	Research into majority influence has generated some important insights into social behaviour, for example, the difference between normative and informational influences and the effect of factors like unanimity and social support on conformity. However, the research tends to be affected by a lack of ecological validity and the presence of obvious demand characteristics, which means that the relevance of the research to real-life situations is sometimes questionable. In addition, researchers have generally seemed to assume that conformity is necessarily a bad thing whereas it could be argued that conformity is a process that underpins many positive features of our society. In conclusion, majority influence research has made an important contribution to Psychology but can not be regarded as embodying the 'whole truth' about how we respond to group pressure.

Evaluate means more than just list the strengths and weaknesses. You need to draw a **conclusion** too.