

Exams and the PosPsy course

In general, one of the marking criteria for all psychology finals papers is displaying critical thinking. In PosPsy, this is even more important, but there is probably more easy scope for it (since many topics are associated with un-refereed claims as well as with published papers, and because there are relatively few studies in many topics so the ideas are quite likely to need further development).

In general, in all level 4 options we have been encouraged to set general questions that on the one hand allow a student to pick the topics within the course they know about to use in their answers, and on the other hand mean that it will be useful to a student to have a personal overview and framework for the subject of the course as a whole against which to organise their in-depth knowledge. In PosPsy, this is even more important because of the great variety within the scope of PosPsy today.

Exam questions will be general questions. You will want to illustrate them with more than one topic. All the topics in the lectures, the wikis, and in fact anything that is within the field of PosPsy is legitimate. Unless it says or implies otherwise, read all exam questions for this course as if they contained the extra text "Take 2 or more topics in positive psychology, e.g. from the 12 assigned to groups as coursework in the 2009-10 moodle course, or any other topics that can reasonably be claimed to be part of PosPsy; and discuss the issue in the question, illustrating both sides of it (i.e. for and against any claim) with examples from those topics". (The topics assigned this year, in the 20010-11 moodle, were mostly designed to themselves require discussing and contrasting several topics; just as the exam questions mostly do.)

In answering a given question, choosing to mention topics that are strongly contrasting with each other will often make for a better answer even though it is not essential. E.g. in answering "To what extent is positive psychology just a translation / relabelling of ancient religious and cultural practices?", while you may for this question want to emphasise good examples of it being a relabelling, you probably would be best off also saying something like "for some topics in PosPsy e.g. T there doesn't seem any such connection, however".

As regards organising your revision, one tactic might be to think of several questions or dimensions, and select a good example of a good and a bad topic for each. (Obviously any one topic is likely to feature in several dimensions; or to put it another way, for each topic you know a lot about, where does it fall on each such organising dimension?) E.g.

1. What is an example of an empirically very well supported topic, and a poorly supported topic in PosPsy?
2. An example of a topic with a good personal exercise that individuals may carry out, and one where there isn't a good exercise associated with it?
3. Strong clinical relevance, and little clear clinical relevance?
4. Big association with popular self-help advice, and little such association?

In the revision session in 2009-10, I spent all the time on getting those who attended to sketch outline answers to exam questions for two reasons. Firstly, because active practice is the best revision, and hearing peers' different (or similar) answers is the most interesting feedback. But secondly, and more specifically in line with the nature of this course and exam, because I wanted to illustrate the spirit of rapid fire "playing" with the ideas: reconfiguring what students knew on the spot to answer a question they hadn't rehearsed. I was rather pleased with how well that went. It seemed to me that they got better during the session, and that included being critical of a rather poor exam question.

I'd just like to say I was pleased by all the coursework: an excellent foundation for the course. I'm proud of what you achieved, and have opened the wiki pages for inspection by outsiders. I'm looking forward to being impressed by the arguments you make in the exam.