FREE PREVIEW

Cambridge International AS & A Level • Psychology 9990 • Paper 4

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY · SECTION B

Planning a Study

Model answer booklet

Every clinical **plan-a-study** question from the 2024–2026 papers and the specimen paper, answered in full and annotated.

June 2026 · Mar 2026 · Nov 2025 · June 2025 · Mar 2025 · Nov 2024 · June 2024 · Mar 2024 · Specimen 2024

14	325	(a)(b)(c)	★
Full-mark model answers	Annotations showing what earns marks	Every part of every question	Examiner tips and mistakes to avoid

Design a study packs for all four options

Clinical · Consumer · Health · Organisational

By Jyotika Sharmani

PAPER 4 · SECTION B · CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

The plan-a-study question is worth 24 marks. This pack shows you how to earn every one.

Every Clinical Psychology plan-a-study question from 2024 to 2026, plus the specimen paper, answered in full and annotated mark by mark.

14	81	325	4
questions	pages	annotations	options available

14

Every question, 2024 to 2026

All 14 Clinical plan-a-study questions, every variant, plus the specimen paper. The most recent paper comes first, including March 2026.

a·b·c

Full answers to every part

Complete plans, psychological knowledge and justified choices, written in full, the way an A* student writes in the exam.

325

Annotations that show the marks

Colour-coded comments point to exactly where each method feature, ethical guideline and reliability step earns credit.

2/2

(c) answers built for both marks

Every (c) answer shows the general point and the applied point that turns one mark into two.

NEW

A guide before you start

Two new pages up front: what each research method needs, and the principles behind a strong plan. Syllabus terms only.

★

Examiner tips and traps

Every question flags the mistakes that cost candidates marks, so you avoid them on the day.

> Most students know the research methods. What they lack is a clear picture of what a **full-mark plan** looks like. Each answer here gives you that picture, then shows you **why** each sentence earns its place.

Jyotika Varmani
Cambridge A Level Psychology teacher and subject expert. Her blog is cited in the official Cambridge teachers' manual.

Get the full pack →

NEW IN EVERY PACK

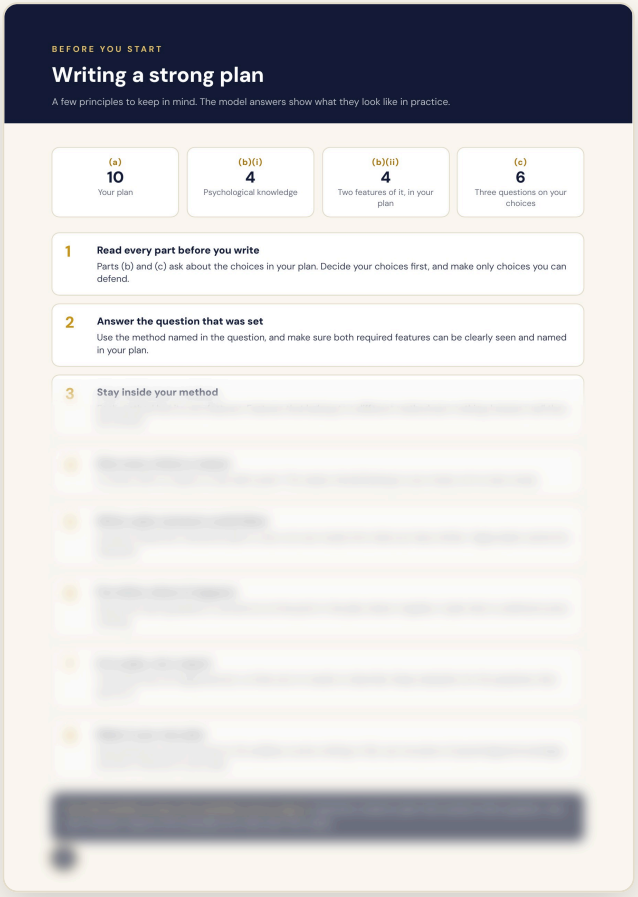
Before you start: a two-page guide

Before the first model answer, two pages set out the standard every plan is marked against. Here is a glimpse.



What every plan needs

The general features, then the features of each of the seven methods, side by side.



Writing a strong plan

How the 24 marks are shared, and eight principles behind a strong plan.

METHOD CARDS IN THE GUIDE

Experiment · Questionnaire · Interview · Observation · Longitudinal study · Case study · Correlation

The full guide is in the pack. Every method card and all eight principles, at the front of the booklet.

Unlock →

ONE SERIES · FOUR OPTIONS

Design a study packs are available for all four options

Whichever two options you are sitting, the same full-mark approach is waiting for you. Every pack covers every plan-a-study question from 2024 to 2026 and the specimen paper.

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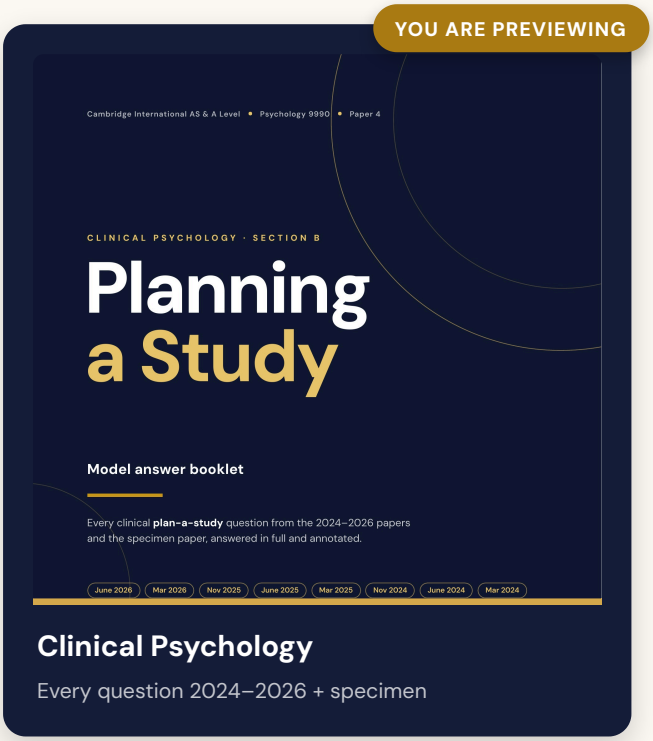
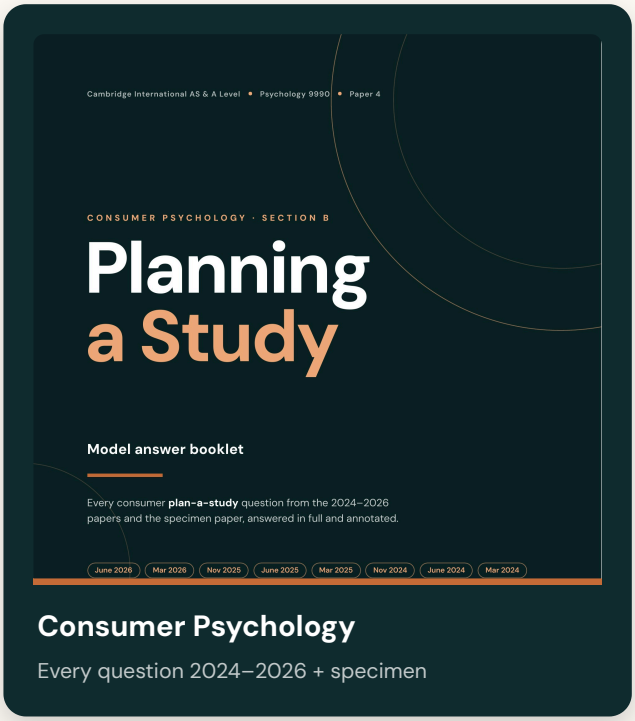


Clinical Psychology

Every question 2024–2026 + specimen



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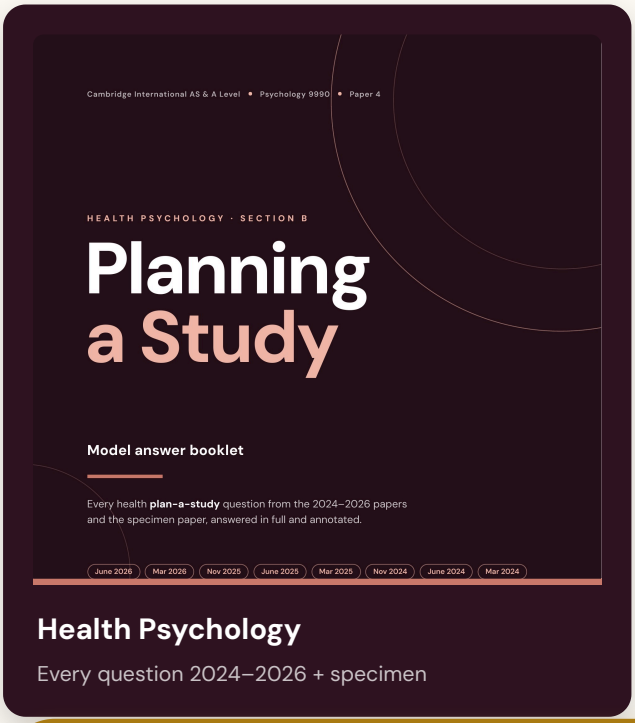

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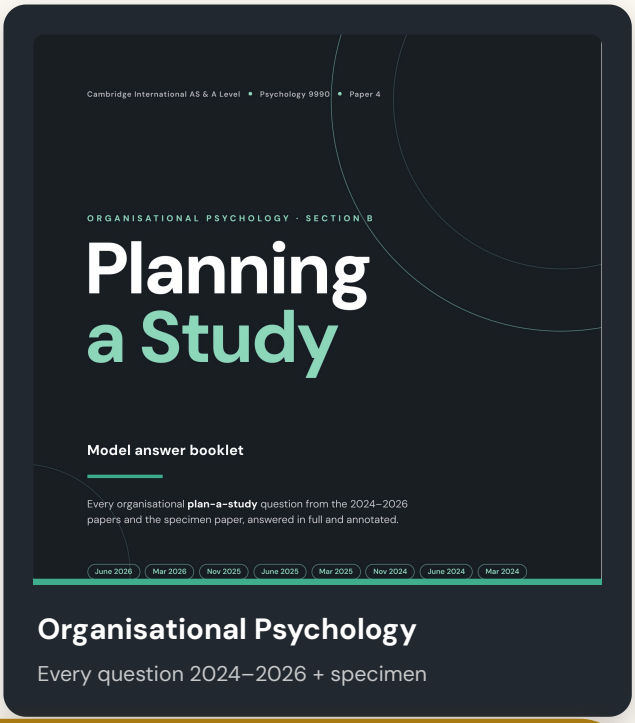

Organisational Psychology

Every question 2024–2026 + specimen

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CONTENTS OF THE FULL PACK

14 questions. Here is what you can see today.

In this preview · Sneak peek · In the full pack

★	New Before you start	What every plan needs · Writing a strong plan Two-page guide	2	Sneak peek pp. 2–3
01	June 2026 Paper 41 & 43	Mental states and virtual reality avatars Experiment	5	In this preview pp. 5–10, partly locked
02	June 2026 Paper 42	Exposure and response prevention for OCD Longitudinal experiment	11	Full pack
03	March 2026 Paper 42	Long-term effectiveness of antipsychotics Interview	16	Full pack
04	November 2025 Paper 41 & 43	Imaginal desensitisation for gambling disorder Structured observation	22	Sneak peek p. 23
05	November 2025 Paper 42	Thoughts about fires in pyromania Questionnaire	27	Full pack
06	June 2025 Paper 41 & 43	Attributional style in depression Postal questionnaire	32	Full pack
07	June 2025 Paper 42	The most common compulsion in OCD Observation	38	Full pack
08	March 2025 Paper 42	Is REBT effective for depression? Online questionnaire	44	Full pack
09	November 2024 Paper 41 & 43	Which antidepressant is more effective? Experiment	50	Full pack
10	November 2024 Paper 42	GAD in university students Open questionnaire	55	Full pack
11	June 2024 Paper 41 & 43	Problems with ECT for schizophrenia Longitudinal experiment	60	Full pack
12	June 2024 Paper 42	Imaginal desensitisation for pyromania Closed questionnaire	65	Sneak peek p. 68
13	March 2024 Paper 42	Covert sensitisation for kleptomania Covert observation	70	Full pack
14	Specimen 2024 Paper 4	Are antipsychotics effective? Experiment	75	Full pack

Page numbers refer to the full pack. Tap a locked row to go to the store.

01

June 2026 · Paper 41 & 43 · Question 9

Mental states and virtual reality avatars

SYLLABUS 1.1 Schizophrenia · 1.1.1 Diagnostic criteria

Experiment

The question

Plan an experiment to investigate gender differences in the words used to attribute mental states to virtual reality avatars.

Your plan must include details about:

- type of data
- dependent variable

a	The plan	10 marks	6
b	Psychological knowledge	8 marks	9
c	Explaining your choices	6 marks	10

Preview · full pack p. 5

a The plan

10 marks

(a) Plan an experiment to investigate gender differences in the words used to attribute mental states to virtual reality avatars. **10 marks**

Your plan must include details about:

- type of data
- dependent variable

The aim is to find out whether men and women differ in the words they use to describe what virtual reality avatars are thinking about them. My hypothesis is non-directional [1]: "There will be a significant difference between men and women in the number of persecutory words used to describe the mental states of neutral avatars."

This will be an **experiment** carried out in a university psychology lab. The IV is the gender of the participant [2] (male or female), so each person can only be in one condition and the design is **independent measures** [3]. The participants will be 60 students aged 18 to 25, 30 men and 30 women, recruited with posters asking for volunteers [4] for "a virtual reality study". Anyone with epilepsy, a history of mental illness or bad motion sickness will not take part.

1. **HYPOTHESIS** **Non-directional**, because there is no strong evidence on which gender will use more persecutory words.
2. **IV** The **IV** is gender (male or female), tested in a lab so conditions are identical.
3. **DESIGN** Nobody can be in both gender groups, so **independent measures** is the only possible design.
4. **SAMPLING TECHNIQUE** A **volunteer** sample, and the poster wording keeps the real aim hidden.

Preview · full pack p. 6

Each participant gives written **informed consent** after being told they will wear a headset for 4 minutes and may feel slightly dizzy. They are told they can press a stop button 5 at any time and leave without giving a reason.

Seated, the participant wears a headset showing a virtual café with six avatars, three male and three female, so the avatars' gender is **balanced** 6. The avatars are programmed to behave neutrally, so any persecutory words come from the participant, which makes the results valid 7. Everyone sees the same café for exactly 4 minutes with the same recorded instructions, so the procedure is standardised.

Afterwards the participant writes for 5 minutes answering "Describe what you think the people in the café were thinking about you." The **dependent variable** 8 is the number of mental-state words in each of three categories: positive, [illegible]ndly",

5 ETHICS The right to **withdraw** is made practical: one press stops the session.

6 CONTROLS Three male and three female avatars, so avatar gender cannot affect men and women differently.

7 VALIDITY Neutral avatars mean any persecutory words come from the **participant**, not the scene.

8 DV ★ The **DV** is operationalised: words counted in three categories, with examples of each.

The rest of this plan is in the full pack

Including the sampling, the ethics and how the conclusion is reached, with every annotation.

Unlock the full pack →

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Partly locked · full pack p. 7

b Psychological knowledge

8 marks

(b)(i) For one piece of psychological knowledge on which your plan is based, describe this psychological knowledge. — 4 marks

Freeman et al. (2003) [13] used virtual reality to study persecutory ideation, a key feature of persecutory delusions in schizophrenia. Non-clinical participants explored a virtual library with avatars programmed to behave neutrally [14], for example breathing and occasionally looking at the participant. Afterwards, most described the avatars as neutral or friendly, but a minority believed the avatars had hostile intentions [15], such as trying to intimidate them. So persecutory thoughts can occur even when nothing threatening happens.

13 THEORY Names the study and links paranoia to **schizophrenia** straight away.

14 THEORY Neutral avatars are the key detail, so any paranoia must come from the **participant**.

15 THEORY The finding: even healthy people read **hostile intentions** into neutral avatars.

See how both features link to the plan

Part (b)(ii) for every question, each feature linked directly to the plan.

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Partly locked · full pack p. 9

C

June 2026 · Paper 41 & 43 · Question 9

Explaining your choices

6 marks

(c)(i) Explain one reason for your choice of type of data. 2 marks

I chose quantitative data because numbers can be compared statistically 18. In my study, I can compare the mean number of persecutory words 19 written by men and women to see whether there is a difference.

18 1ST MARK The general reason: **numbers** can be compared.

19 2ND MARK Applied: compares **persecutory words** for men and women.

Part (c), built for both marks

Every (c) answer shows the general point and the applied point, side by side.

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a

November 2025 · Paper 41 & 43 · Question 9

The plan

10 marks

(a) Plan a study using a structured observation to investigate the effectiveness of imaginal desensitisation for treating gambling disorder. **10 marks**

Your plan must include details about:

- naturalistic or controlled observation
- type(s) of data

The aim is to find out whether imaginal desensitisation reduces gambling behaviour. Participants will be 30 adults diagnosed with gambling disorder using ICD-11, recruited as volunteers [1] through a leaflet at a gambling support clinic. Each participant is observed before and after therapy, so any cha

[1] **SAMPLING TECHNIQUE** **Volunteers** from a clinic leaflet who are about to start treatment.

13 more questions like this

Field experiments, interviews, questionnaires and observations, all annotated.

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b

June 2024 · Paper 42 · Question 9

Psychological knowledge

8 marks

(b)(i) For one piece of psychological knowledge on which your plan is based, describe this psychological knowledge. — 4 marks

Imaginal desensitisation 12 is a behavioural therapy based on classical conditioning. First, the patient is taught **relaxation** techniques, such as deep breathing. Then they **imagine** 13 a series of situations that would normally trigger the urge to set a fire, from mild to strong, such as seeing matches, then smelling smoke, then watching a fire. They stay relaxed 14 while imagining each one, until it no longer causes arousal. Relaxation and arousal cannot happen at the same time, so the urge is reduced.

12 THEORY Names the **therapy**.

13 THEORY Imagined **situations**, mild to strong.

14 THEORY Staying **relaxed** weakens the urge.

Psychological knowledge, done properly

One piece of knowledge per answer, with two features linked straight into the plan.

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