# Thesis Preparation Assignment (TPA)

# Trainee Guide

# 2021

## Introduction

The Thesis Preparation Assignment (TPA) is undertaken in the first year of training and is specifically designed to enable trainees to develop the knowledge and skills needed to undertake the thesis. It consists of two elements: a 4,500 word literature review, and a research proposal which is submitted separately, after the literature review. The literature review is assessed and marked as a piece of written work, whilst the thesis proposal is not marked but is peer-reviewed by the programme team. In order to pass the assignment, the thesis proposal must have been submitted.

The TPA allows the trainee to undertake an in-depth exploration of research, theory and practice in an area relevant to clinical psychology which they will go on to research for their thesis and to prepare a research proposal which, under normal circumstances, will go on to form the basis for their thesis. As well as providing an academic grounding for the trainee in the topic area, it enables them to develop skills in searching and critically appraising research literature.

## Domains actively assessed

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| **1. Collating information and knowledge (gathering)** |
| **2. Critical analysis & synthesis (analysing)** |
| **3. Strategy for application (deciding)** |
| 4. Performance skills (doing) |
| 5. Responsive to impact & learning from experiences (responding) |
| **6. Communicating information effectively (communicating)** |
| 7. Interpersonal skills & collaboration (interacting) |
| 8. Organisational skills (organising) |
| 9. Professional behaviour (behaving) |
| 10. Essential Knowledge (knowing) |

In order to pass the TPA, trainees are required to reach an acceptable standard in the domains: collating information and knowledge; critical analysis and synthesis; strategy for application; and communicating information effectively. In marking the assignment, examiners will be actively looking for positive and negative evidence in each of these domains. However, the assignment may be failed if substantial negative evidence for any of the ten domains is identified in the course of marking.

## Preparing for the assignment

As the TPA involves preparatory work for the thesis, before starting work on the assignment the trainee must be allocated to a research supervisor who will go on to be the research supervisor for their thesis. Research supervisors are allocated in the first 55 days of training based on the research choices the trainee indicates on their Research Choices Form which they submit in the first 30 days of training. Trainees identify five research projects from the list put forward by members of the programme team offering research supervision.

Once the trainee has been allocated to a research supervisor they identify a topic for their TPA literature review in discussion with their supervisor. The trainee completes a [TPA Review Topic Form](https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/shm/study/doctoral_study/dclinpsy/onlinehandbook/appendices/TPA%20-%20Review%20Topic%20Form.docx) in which they give a brief outline of the title, aims and structure of the literature review element of the TPA. The trainee completes this form with guidance from their supervisor. Once the form is completed, the trainee submits the form to the TPA co-ordinator for approval to proceed. The trainee may be asked to revise or resubmit the topic form before approval is given. Once the TPA topic form is approved the trainee completes the assignment.

## Structure of the TPA literature review

The literature review should take the form of a 4,500 word review of research, clinical and theoretical literature which provides a foundation for the body of work the trainee intends to undertake for their thesis. It should be formatted as a single Word document, written in APA style, structured as follows (approximate word counts for each section given as a guide).

1. **Introduction.** 800 words.

This should include:

* + The rationale for conducting the review, including a statement of its relevance to clinical psychology theory and practice;
	+ A clear statement of the research question the review will address, and the aims of the review.
1. **Identifying and deciding what to include in the review.** 500 words.

The TPA is not a systematic review and thus there is no method section. However, an account should be provided of how relevant literature was identified and how decisions were made about what to present in the review. This may include details of searches undertaken including search terms used and databases searched.

1. **Findings/results (or other suitable heading depending on approach).** 2000 words.

This should be structured in a way that is appropriate to the review topic and approach. You can use headings but the sections of the review should follow on logically from each other.

1. **Discussion**. 1200 words.

This should include:

* + A summary of the key findings from the review;
	+ Discussion of the findings in the context of relevant theory and practice;
	+ Consideration of the clinical implications of the review findings, both for clinical psychology directly and for wider clinical practice;
	+ Identification of areas for further research, including identification of a research question that you will go on to address in your thesis proposal.
1. **References.** Not included in the word count.

These should be in APA format, and should include all references cited in the review. References not cited should not be included.

There is no prescribed format or approach for the review, other than that it should not be a systematic review. It is expected that the trainee should decide upon a suitable approach to the review with their supervisor and that the structure and content will be appropriate to the review topic. The scope of the review should reflect an appropriate balance of depth and breadth of knowledge, depending on the nature of the topic, the anticipated research question, and the type and quantity of research available. For example, a review of research into mentalisation based treatment (MBT) could take a broad approach of reviewing evidence for the effectiveness and acceptability of MBT, drawing on systematic reviews and key research papers to critically appraise the quantitative and qualitative evidence OR it could take a narrower approach, e.g. focusing in more detail on qualitative research into service users’ experiences of MBT.

The trainee should demonstrate the ability to critically appraise the quality and relevance of the evidence base in deciding how to select material for inclusion in the review. However, it is likely that choices will need to be made to exclude material that might be of potential relevance. These choices should be made in discussion with the research supervisor and should be justified and documented in the review.

As part of the discussion section, it is expected that the trainee will identify the topic that they will go on to develop in their research proposal as a line of further research inquiry arising from the review. It is expected that the trainee will build on this review when writing their thesis, but not reproduce it.

## The Research Proposal

The research proposal is completed using the [Thesis Proposal Form](https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/shm/study/doctoral_study/dclinpsy/onlinehandbook/appendices/TPA%20-%20Thesis%20Proposal%20Form). Including the text on the form and allowing space for the supervisor to add their comments, the proposal should be no more than 3,500 words (inclusive of the text on the form itself, but excluding your supervisor’s comments). The proposal consists of the following sections:

1. Lay summary
2. Brief rationale
3. Research question(s)
4. Study design/methodology
5. Methods
	1. Sample/participants
	2. Justification for sample size e.g. power calculation
	3. Recruitment plan
	4. data collection
	5. data analysis
6. Ethical considerations
7. Service user/stakeholder involvement
8. Risks to the project (including plans to address these)
9. Costs with justification (this need not be completed unless there are particular, large items associated with the project)
10. References

The thesis proposal must provide a brief rationale and a plan for the research project the trainee intends to undertake for their thesis. It is expected that the rationale for the research proposal will draw on the literature review.

The research proposal should represent a feasible, ethical research study that meets the requirement of a DClinPsy thesis (see thesis guidelines for more detail).

## Submission format and timeline

The assignment consists of two elements: the TPA literature review (hereafter referred to as the TPA) and the thesis proposal. Only the literature review (TPA) is assessed and marked, but the thesis proposal must be submitted in order for the assignment to pass. The two components are submitted as follows:

1. The TPA is normally submitted in March of your first year of training if full-time and March of your second year if part-time. The TPA must be submitted on Moodle as a single Word document, clearly titled with your trainee number, the assignment document name (‘TPA’), and the submission month and year: e.g. **19-10-TPA-19Mar20**. The document should be formatted as follows:
	* Title page including word count, trainee number, title of the TPA
	* The main body of the literature review (4,500 words)
	* The TPA Review Topic form
2. The thesis proposal is normally submitted three months (full time) after the TPA. It must be submitted on Moodle, and should be clearly titled as follows: **Jo Bloggs-thesis proposal-Jun21**. Note that as the thesis proposal will be reviewed and not marked, it does not need to be anonymised.

## Supervisory support for the assignment

The trainee will be allocated to a research supervisor who has expertise in the research area they have chosen for their thesis. Once this allocation has been made the trainee and the supervisor will meet to identify a suitable literature review topic. It is expected that the trainee will meet regularly with their research supervisor during the process of completing the assignment. As part of the supervisory support available, the research supervisor will provide written feedback on the following:

* A draft of the literature review topic form;
* A draft of a completed section of the review (approximately 1000 words); this would normally be the introduction but could be any section. The primary purpose of this draft read is to provide the trainee with guidance on their academic writing, however, reading a draft of the introduction will also enable the supervisor to give feedback on the rationale.

## Assessment of the assignment

To pass, the assignment must reaching a passing standard in all assessed domains. Trainees have up to three attempts at the TPA literature review.

Submission 1 – March Year 1 (full-time) or year 2 (part-time)

Submission 2 – July Year 1 (full-time) or July Year 2 (part-time)

Resubmission – March Year 2 (full-time) or Year 3 (part-time)

## Review of the thesis proposal

Once the thesis proposal has been submitted as part of the TPA submission process, it will be critically reviewed by members of the programme team for its suitability as a DClinPsy thesis. If the TPA literature review does not pass at submission 1, but a thesis proposal has been submitted, the thesis proposal does not need to be resubmitted as part of submission 2. The proposal review process is separate from the assessment of the assignment, which means that any revisions required to the proposal after the initial review will be submitted separately to the TPA process.

## Timeline for completing the assignment

**October-December**

* Mid October: Meet with supervisor to discuss topic for TPA. Undertake initial scoping searches to firm up topic for review.
* Mid-late October: Meet with supervisor to discuss search results and next steps. Further develop idea for review.
* Late October: Draft review topic form including outline of review structure and send draft to supervisor. Supervisor to provide written feedback on review topic form.
* Mid November: Submit review topic form.
* Mid November: Review topic form approved or returned for amendments.
* Mid-December: Revise and resubmit TPA review topic form if necessary.
* Once review topic form is approved plan the rest of the assignment. This should include an agreed date for submission of a draft of the introduction to your supervisor.

**January**

* By end of January: Submit draft introduction to supervisor for draft reading.

**February-March**

* Early February: Meet to discuss written feedback from supervisor on introduction. If necessary agree a plan for addressing key feedback points on academic writing going forward.
* Mid-February: Revise introduction. Work on writing up review findings and developing an outline structure.
* Meet with supervisor to discuss structure/content of the review. Revise as necessary.
* Late February: Meet to discuss progress with writing up the review.
* March: Submit TPA

### March-July

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| Thesis proposal | TPA submission 2 (if required) |
| * Mid-April: Meet with supervisor to firm up details of thesis project, and identify a field supervisor
* Early May: Send first draft of thesis proposal to supervisor for feedback.
* May: Meet with supervisor to discuss feedback and develop proposal further. This may involve several meetings and iterations of the proposal as you firm up ideas.
* Early June: Submit a final draft of thesis proposal to your supervisor for them to add their comments and sign it off before you submit it.
* June: Submit thesis proposal.
 | * Mid-April: Meet with supervisor to discuss feedback from submission 1. Agree a plan for addressing feedback and a date for submitting a draft of the revised TPA. This should be no later than end of May.
* Mid-May: Meet to discuss progress with resubmission.
* Mid-June: Meet to discuss feedback on draft resubmission with supervisor.
* July: TPA Submission 2
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