# Thesis Preparation Assignment (TPA)

# Trainee Guide

## Introduction

The Thesis Preparation Assignment (TPA) is undertaken in the first year of training for trainees on a full-time pathway and in the second year for trainees on a part-time pathway. It 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 (4,000 words for the review itself + a 500 word literature retrieval summary), 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* 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.

## Approaches to the TPA

There is no prescribed format or approach for the TPA, other than that it should not be a systematic review. It is expected that the trainee will decide upon a suitable approach with their supervisor and that the scope, structure and content will be appropriate to the review topic and the type and quantity of research available. Below are two suggested approaches:

### An argument based review

With this approach, the review will be structured around an argument or rationale leading directly to the research question the trainee intends to address in their thesis. This is likely to involve covering a number of different topic areas, synthesising and appraising the research within each area and pulling out the key issues to build the argument for the thesis topic. For this type of review, it is likely to be important to use different search strategies to identify the different pockets of literature to include. Although this type of review is broad in scope, the trainee is still expected to demonstrate skills in critically appraising and synthesising evidence. This means that decisions will have to be made about what literature to include in each section e.g. a mix of systematic reviews to provide an overview of the topic and key studies used as examples to highlight particular issues.

### A synthesis of research on one topic related to the intended thesis project

With this approach, the review will focus in detail on a specific topic that will form part of the rationale for the trainee’s intended thesis project but will not provide the full rationale for it. Instead, the research question to be addressed in the thesis will arise out of the discussion of the review findings. This type of review is likely to involve more comprehensive searches for published research on the particular topic which forms the focus of the review. However, it should not attempt to be a systematic review. This type of review might be appropriate where the research the trainee intends to undertake for their thesis builds upon an emerging area of research and thus detailed synthesis and appraisal of this evidence base will form an important part of the rationale for the thesis.

## Structure of the TPA

The TPA should take the form of a 4,000 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 plus a 500 word literature retrieval summary. It should be formatted as a single Word document, written in APA style. Although the format of the review may vary depending on the topic and the approach taken, as with most literature reviews and other academic writing, it should include the following sections (approximate word counts for each section given as a guide).

1. **Introduction.** 800 words.

This should include:

* + The background to the topic area and a rationale for the review, which makes reference to its relevance to clinical practice, policy (including relevant guidelines), and psychology theory as appropriate.
  + A clear statement of the aims of the review.

1. **Main body of the review.** 2000 words.

The heading – or headings – used for this section will depend on the approach taken (‘Main body of the review’ is not intended as a heading!). It should be structured in a way that is appropriate to the review topic and approach taken. If the review covers several different topics, there may be no need for a main section heading, simply use appropriate headings for each topic. If the review focuses on a single body of research on a specific topic linked to the intended thesis topic, this might be called the ‘Findings’ section. Whatever approach is taken, it is generally helpful to start the main part of the review with a summary or overview of the research to be included in the review.

1. **Discussion**. 1200 words.

This will depend on the approach taken to the review, but should generally include:

* + A summary of the key findings and/or key points in the argument;
  + Discussion of the findings in the context of relevant theory and practice;
  + Consideration of the clinical and research implications of the review;
  + Identification of the research question that the trainee will go on to address in their thesis proposal. The rationale for this research should have been established either directly through the review itself or in the discussion. If the question does not follow directly from the review itself, an explicit rationale should be provided, explaining how the review supports the chosen research topic.
  + A brief conclusion highlighting the key findings or conclusions from the review, including a summary of the rationale for the intended thesis project.

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. The use of referencing software such as Endnote is strongly encouraged.

1. **Literature Retrieval Summary.** 500 words (plus the words on the form).

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. In order to guide the trainee through the process, they are asked to complete the *TPA Literature Retrieval Summary form*, using a maximum of 500 words. This will form part of the main TPA and will be used in the marking process, principally to assess competence in the ‘gathering’ domain.

**Appendix**

**TPA Review Topic Form.** This should be the version of the form that was approved by the TPA Assignment Co-ordinator.

## The Research Proposal

The research proposal is completed using the Thesis Proposal Form. 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 the 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 the first year of training if full-time and March of the second year if part-time. The TPA must be submitted on Moodle as a single Word document, clearly titled with the 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 complete draft of the review. A date should be agreed in advance for this to be submitted to the supervisor, but will be no less than 4 weeks before the TPA submission deadline. Feedback on this draft will usually be returned within 1 week of it being received.

## 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 review to your research supervisor.

### February-March

* By mid-February: Submit draft to supervisor for draft reading.
* Late February: Meet to discuss written feedback from supervisor on introduction. Meet again as necessary to discuss progress.
* 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 |