

HSPS Tripos Competence Standards

Faculty of Human, Social and Political Sciences

Competence standards refer to the competences that students are required to demonstrate in assessments in order to successfully complete a programme of study. This document identifies the competences that the Faculty of Human, Social and Political Sciences (HSPS) assesses in the HSPS Tripos.

HSPS is an interdisciplinary degree that combines three core disciplines of Politics and International Studies, Social Anthropology, and Sociology. Students on the HSPS Tripos may opt to specialize in a single, or joint subject track.

- The three single-track HSPS options are: Politics and International Relations; Social Anthropology; Sociology.
- The five joint-track HSPS options are: Politics and Sociology; Social Anthropology and Politics; Social Anthropology and Religious Studies (Modern Religions); Sociology and Social Anthropology; Sociology and Criminology.

During the course of their degree, HSPS students will study for a range of papers that are organised and taught by different departments. Students are encouraged to think across the Tripos, and to apply their knowledge and understanding of the wider course material in a productive manner. However, each individual examined paper in the Tripos is organised and formally delivered by one Department. The competence standards for examined work in papers organised and formally delivered by the Departments of Politics and International Studies, Social Anthropology, and Sociology is as follows:¹

Competence Standards for Politics and International Studies, HSPS Tripos

I. Examinations and Coursework

1. Knowledge and understanding: the ability to demonstrate cumulative knowledge and understanding of the subject matter, academic literature, and other relevant sources.
2. Analytical agility: the ability to draw on existing knowledge and understanding of academic debates and academic literature to produce a response to an assessment prompt, whether unseen or not.
3. Independent thinking: the ability to think independently about and critically evaluate theory and evidence, and to connect theory and evidence effectively whilst constructing arguments.
4. Academic rigour: the ability to make and substantiate academic arguments fairly and with integrity, without the use of generative AI.
5. Written communication: the ability to express complex reasoning through precise, clear, concise and logical writing, observing academic rigour.
6. Performance under time constraints: the ability to identify and prioritise the most important issues and produce high-quality work within time constraints.

¹ Students should consult the Departments of Divinity and Criminology for guidance on any relevant competence standards in papers that are organised and formally delivered by those Departments.

II. Dissertations

1. Research skills: the ability to identify a research question and to address it through appropriate theory, methods, and sources.
2. Knowledge and understanding: the ability to demonstrate in-depth knowledge and understanding of the subject matter, academic literature, and other relevant sources.
3. Academic rigour: the ability to make independent academic arguments fairly, with integrity and in properly evidenced ways, without the use of generative AI.
4. Independent thinking: the ability to think independently about and critically evaluate theory and evidence, and to connect theory and evidence effectively whilst constructing sustained arguments.
5. Written communication: the ability to discuss academic material and construct sustained arguments through clear and cogent writing.
6. Project management skills: the ability to plan, structure, and execute an extended piece of independent research within a set timeframe and word limit, observing all relevant ethical, risk assessment, data protection and other requirements.

Competence Standards for Social Anthropology, HSPS Tripos

I. Examinations

1. Knowledge and understanding: the ability to demonstrate cumulative knowledge and understanding of the subject matter, academic literature and other relevant sources, and to show how different components of the paper relate to each other.
2. Academic agility and independent thinking: the ability to draw on existing knowledge and understanding to produce an independent response to previously unseen examination questions.
3. Contextual analysis: the ability to demonstrate a contextual understanding of the subject matter, academic debates and academic literature, and how these are shaped by wider social, political and scholarly factors.
4. Academic rigour: the ability to represent ethnographic and academic material in fair, ethical and properly evidenced ways.
5. Critical thinking: the ability to think independently about and critically evaluate academic sources and key issues; to effectively connect ethnography, theory and analysis; and to construct original and sustained arguments.
6. Written communication: the ability to discuss ethnographic material and construct arguments in a clear, concise manner with academic rigour, without the use of AI.
7. Performance under time constraints: the ability to identify and prioritise the most important issues and produce high-quality work within time constraints.
8. Oral communication (where a viva is required): the ability to sustain an in-depth, critical conversation about the examination questions, and to field follow-up questions and discussions.

II. Coursework

1. Knowledge and understanding: the ability to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter, academic literature and other relevant sources.
2. Contextual analysis: the ability to demonstrate a contextual understanding of the subject matter, academic debates and academic literature, and how these are shaped by wider social, political and scholarly factors.
3. Academic rigour: the ability to represent ethnographic and academic material in fair, ethical and properly evidenced ways.
4. Critical thinking: the ability to think independently about and critically evaluate academic sources and key issues; to effectively connect ethnography, theory and analysis; and to construct original and sustained arguments.
5. Written communication: the ability to discuss ethnographic material and construct cogent arguments in a clear, concise manner with academic rigour, without the use of AI.

III. Dissertations

1. Research skills: the ability to identify research questions; to address those questions through appropriate ethnographic methods, utilising relevant sources; and to adapt to new or unexpected developments.
2. Knowledge and understanding: the ability to demonstrate in-depth knowledge and understanding of the subject matter, academic literature and other relevant sources.
3. Contextual analysis: the ability to demonstrate a contextual understanding of the subject matter, ethnographic material, academic debates and academic literature, and how these are shaped by wider social, political and scholarly factors.
4. Academic rigour: the ability to represent ethnographic and academic material in fair, ethical and properly evidenced ways.
5. Ethical rigour: the ability to identify relevant ethical concerns and challenges in ethnographic research and address them through appropriate methods, analytical frameworks and narrative strategies.
5. Critical thinking: the ability to think independently about and critically evaluate the ethnographic material and relevant academic literature; to identify key trends and gaps in extant scholarship; to effectively connect ethnography, theory and analysis; and to construct original and sustained arguments.
6. Written communication: the ability to discuss ethnographic material and construct cogent arguments in a clear, concise, sustained manner with academic rigour, without the use of AI.
7. Oral communication: the ability to sustain an in-depth, critical, reflexive conversation about the research and dissertation, and to field follow-up questions and discussions.
8. Project management skills: the ability to plan, structure, and execute a lengthy, independent piece of research within a set timeframe and word limit, observing all relevant ethical, risk assessment, data protection and other requirements.

Competence Standards for Sociology, HSPS Tripos

The below are the competence standards for undergraduate sociology. These competence standards are agreed upon as a department, and may thus have differences to competence standards of other departments within and outside of Cambridge. Competence standards are related to, but distinct from general rules and regulations (including those surrounding academic misconduct and use of AI). Thus, we encourage students to also consult the latest Sociology (and HSPS) rules and regulations alongside this set of competence standards.

Examinations, Coursework, Dissertations

1. A familiarity with the discipline of Sociology. For undergraduates this refers to gaining a familiarity with core texts on reading lists.
2. An awareness of key debates in respective subfields of sociology. Students should acknowledge differing perspectives where they exist, including positions with which they do not agree. There is no requirement for students to take a “balanced” position in their writing, but where they support or oppose a particular line of thought, this should be carefully explained and evidenced.
3. An understanding of the relationship between academic endeavour and real-world issues: The world we study is not separate to the world in which we live. Students should thus demonstrate an understanding of how social science research may be motivated by social challenges, and assessed in the light of real-world developments. In this context, students should also show an understanding of how sociology can have an impact on the world).
4. The capacity for independent critical thinking: as well as being *aware of* the literature and debates in the relevant sub/field, students should demonstrate a deeper understanding, including, for example, the ability to assess the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches and/or perspectives, and the capacity to synthesise bodies of literature when appropriate.
5. The ability to develop and defend an argument (including by oral defence). This does not necessarily mean working towards a strongly articulated opinion; the conclusion may be that the question is highly complex and nuanced. Rather, students should demonstrate the ability to address a question, drawing on appropriate evidence from the academic literature and other sources, to work towards a well-supported and well-argued conclusion.
6. Clear and effective writing. This does not necessarily mean perfect grammar or spelling; it is entirely appropriate to overlook such errors for non-native speakers or students with certain accessibility requirements. However, students are expected to use language and to structure their work in a way which makes their meaning clear.