

SEPAR Relational Case Study – Candidate Guidance

This case study requires you to consider a critical relational experience in your SEPAR journey when something profound and meaningful happened that had a significant impact on your practice.

The case study should be ~5000 words (excluding references)

You are required to answer four questions within the case study:

1. Tell us about the critical relational experience

Use this section to provide the relevant background information needed to understand the case. e.g., who was the client and what is the particular relational issue or event you're focusing the case study on?

Describe what happened, paying particular attention to any practice decisions you made, the factors you needed to consider in this process, how you went about making the decision (including use of reflection, supervision etc.), and the emotions this elicited in you.

See Appendix A for tips on choosing your critical relational experience.

2. How do you conceptualise the case using your psychological knowledge and training?

This section provides the opportunity to apply psychological knowledge and theory to the issue you're discussing. We would like to understand how your training, philosophical approach and knowledge as a psychologist has led you to make sense of this experience differently than a lay person without this training might.

For example, imagine the situation was a client who seemed very present during sessions, but never seemed to attempt their action plans outside of sessions. A lay person may see this as the client being lazy. A psychologist working from a CBT perspective may develop a hypothesis that the client is being held back by an intermediate rule of "if I don't try I can't fail", stemming from a core belief of "I'm a failure" from constantly being told they weren't good enough in their childhood.

3. Tell us how this situation impacted on you and what you've learned about yourself as a result?

This section is about critical introspection. Think about how you responded to the situation, why this was, and what you learned about yourself. Consider how this enhanced self-awareness is helping you grow as a person and practitioner.

See Appendix B for example questions to prompt a deeper interrogation of self (relates to both sections 3 & 4).

4. Tell us why you think you're ready to be called a sport and exercise psychologist.

In this section, we would like to understand what's different about you now, compared with when you started SEPAR. How do you know you're ready to work as a safe and effective practitioner and to apply for HCPC registration?

Important notes for preparing your case study

- Your case study should be written in the first person, and give readers a sense of “you”, your beliefs, your professional challenges and how you see the world around you. Try to use active rather than passive language (e.g., instead of “the session was planned to X”, say “I planned the session to X”). Make your writing specific, with examples throughout to bring the case study to life. E.g., you might include specific dialogue if the language used was pertinent to the emotions it evoked, or you might include a section from your reflective journal to illustrate the incongruence you were feeling in the moment.
- Your case study should be supported by some professional practice literature (which may come from fields of sport and exercise psychology, other psychology domains, psychotherapy and counselling, philosophy etc.) but the aim is *not* to showcase your knowledge of the literature. Only include literature that adds depth to, questions or supports your critical argument, i.e., your reflections drive the content, then you relate this to literature to make deeper sense of your reflections.

For sections 3 & 4

- A key aspect of your case study should be meaningful interrogation of self, in relation to both the specific case context, and your broader SEPAR journey. You will need to ask yourself challenging questions about yourself demonstrating self-awareness in an open and honest manner (*see examples in Appendix B*).

This is not about simply wanting to appear competent but rather welcoming your uncertainties and vulnerabilities.

At this stage of SEPAR, we are looking for deep, critical reflection that shows your self-awareness, insights you’ve gained about yourself, your beliefs and the world around you, and how these insights will impact your practice as you move forward.

If we are not able to critically interrogate ourselves, we cannot expect our clients to do this.

Appendix A – Tips on choosing your critical relational experience

Think about the relationships you've navigated and any moments of personal growth you've experienced through your SEPAR journey.

Which relationship/s have led you to question your existing assumptions and changed how you see yourself, others and the world around you?

The critical relational experience you choose may be one event in time (e.g., handling a safeguarding concern, making a difficult decision about a client relationship on ethical grounds, having a disagreement with a line manager), or it may be a longer-term process that led to meaningful personal and professional growth (e.g., working with a complex client or navigating a dual-role relationship, supporting clients with mental health concerns, reflecting on your own relationship with sport, eating or exercise).

Your case study should have a relational component to it, i.e., involve reflecting on the interactions between you and other individuals. These other individuals may be clients, your supervisor, multi-disciplinary peers or line manager, or other key stakeholders (e.g., funders, parents, referring practitioners).

If you have trouble identifying a critical relational experience, the following questions might help you come up with ideas:

- Have you worked with a client where you've been aware of strong transference / counter-transference?
- Have you faced an ethical dilemma when deciding whether or how to work with a client (or continuing working with a client)?
- Has someone done or said something that's led you to question yourself and your role as a sport and exercise psychologist?
- Have you found anything more emotionally challenging than you felt you "should have"?
- Have you faced any challenges managing expectations amongst multidisciplinary teams, e.g., about confidentiality or player care?
- Have you had to navigate complex ethical challenges within a dual-role / identity?
- Have you worked with a high-risk client or had to process a safeguarding concern?
- Have you experienced therapeutic rupture with a client?
- Have you had a fall out, been let go, or had a moral disagreement with a line manager?
- Have you faced challenges in navigating the supervisory relationship, or with your peers?
- Have you worked with a client with a very similar lived experience to your own?
- Have you worked with a client from a different culture, religion, socio-economic background, or with an experience very different from your own?
- Have you worked with a client with a disability or additional needs?
- Have you experienced an "elephant in the room" due to observable differences between you and a client?
- Has observing a client's experience led you to question what you previously knew about a topic?

Appendix B - Questions to help deepen your interrogation of self

You might wish to use the following questions as a guide to help you reach a greater level of critical depth in your writing. These are not intended as a question and answer, nor does every single question need to be covered. Use them to prompt your own critical reflection and to help you better understand how to interrogate yourself. Which in turn will help you get more learning from the experience of writing the case study.

- What personal challenges did you face in building/maintaining this relationship?
- How did this experience impact on and affect you – both personally and professionally? Why do you think this was?
- How do you understand yourself differently now than you did before this situation occurred?
- What have you discovered about yourself that is new?
- What have you learned about your values, biases, and personal challenges through this experience?
- How had your prior experiences on SEPAR prepared you (or not) for this situation? How might have you handled this situation earlier on in your SEPAR journey, and what does this tell you about how you've developed as a practitioner since?
- What surprised you in your interactions with this client, were there any key “lightbulb moments” or critical learning points you'll take away?
- What do you realise now that you didn't realise when you started this work?
- How did reflective practice and supervision contribute to your learning process?
- Did reflecting with your supervisor highlight any blind spots you weren't aware of?
- (if applicable) How did the therapeutic modality you used impact on this situation, and how has the relational experience further developed your understanding of this therapeutic modality?