

**Introduction to A Level Psychology**

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**Introduction**

For many of you, psychology will be a brand new subject. Many students see it as a ‘fresh start’ and look forward to studying something completely different.

In order to give yourself the best possible chance of succeeding on the course you will need to start the process of acclimatising yourself to Psychology as soon as possible. This booklet contains a brief introduction to the course, followed by study skills tasks. The purpose of each task is to introduce you to a key concept in psychology and in the process, help you to develop some of the study skills that you will need to thrive on the course.

**Key Information**

You do not need to have studied psychology at GCSE in order to study it at A-Level. However, there are some key requirements. Psychology is a science and as such you will need appropriate quantitative and research skills in order to undertake practical work. In addition, you will need to have critical thinking and essay writing skills, because you will have to analyse research evidence, make sound judgements and clearly articulate complex arguments in the exam. Therefore, as a minimum you should have grade 5 or above in mathematics and science and a minimum grade 6 in English.

**What is Psychology?**

Psychology is the scientific study of the mind and behaviour. It is interested in what influences our behaviour, from communication and memory to thought and emotion. It's about understanding what makes people tick and how this understanding can help us address many of the problems and issues in society today.

As a science psychology functions as both a thriving academic discipline and a vital professional practice, one dedicated to the study of human behaviour - and the thoughts, feelings, and motivations behind it - through observation, measurement, and testing, in order to form conclusions that are based on sound scientific methodology.

**What will I learn?**

We teach the GCE Edexcel specification. Students will sit 3 2 hour papers at the end of year 13.

For more information on the specification see:

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/Psychology/2015/specification-and-sample-assessments/AL-Specification-Psychology.pdf>

**Paper 1 – Foundations in Psychology**

In this paper you will learn about the four major approaches; Cognitive, Social, Biological and

Learning. In each approach you will;

* investigate some key research topics
* explore some published studies in detail
* find out how research is conducted in that area of psychology
* conduct some research of your own using specialised mathematical techniques and statistical tests to analyse the data

You will also investigate a key question where your knowledge of psychology can be applied to the real world, and you will examine various ‘issues & debates’ that link to the topic area.

In **cognitive psychology** the key theme is **memory.**

In **social psychology** you will investigate **prejudice and obedience.**

In **biological psychology** you will learn about **aggression, brain function, and the operation of the central nervous system / neurotransmitters.**

In the **learning theories** module you will learn about **classical and operant conditioning, social learning theory, and explanations and treatment of phobias.**

**Paper 2 – Applications of Psychology**

In this paper you will have an opportunity to study some of the uses of psychology in the real world. You will discover how the approaches that you have learned about so far come together to explain human behaviour.

**Clinical psychology** looks at how mental illnesses are diagnosed and classified. You will study two disorders – schizophrenia and anorexia nervosa – looking at their various different explanations and treatments. This is worth 54 marks (out of a total of 90 marks)

**Criminal psychology** is about the definition and causes of crime and anti-social behaviour, and of the identification and treatment of offenders undertaken by forensic investigators. This is worth 36 marks (out of a total of 90 marks.)

**Paper 3 – Psychological Skills**

This is a synoptic paper, meaning that it is a general summary or overview of the course. To prepare for this exam you will need to review all of the methodology, all of the classic studies, and all of the ‘issues & debates’ that you have learnt so far (including reductionism, the nature-nurture debate, cultural and gender issues in psychological research, etc). The paper is split into 3 sections:

* **Section A** has 24 marks and comprises mixed question types, including stimulus and data response, short-answer questions, covering the topic area of research methods.
* **Section B** has 24 marks and comprises mixed question types, including stimulus and data response, short-answer questions based on psychological studies and one extended response question based on classic studies
* **Section C** has 32 marks and comprises two extended response questions, covering the topic area of issues and debates in psychology.

**How will I be assessed?**

The course is ‘linear’, meaning that all 3 papers will be sat at the end of the 2 year course.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Paper**  | **Topics covered**  | **Length of exam**  | **Marks** |
| **Paper 1 – Foundation in Psychology**  | Social Cognitive Biological Learning  | 2 hours  | 90 35% of total qualification  |
| **Paper 2 – Applications of Psychology**  | Clinical Criminal  | 2 hours  | 90 35% of total qualification  |
| **Paper 3 – Psychological Skills**  | Review of Methodology Review of Classic Studies Review of Issues and Debates  | 2 hours  | 80 30% of total qualification |

**Assessment Objectives**

You will be tested on the following 3 skills:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| A01 | Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas,processes, techniques and procedures | 30-35% of GCE |
| A02 | Apply knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures:● in a theoretical context● in a practical context● when handling qualitative data● when handling quantitative data | 30-35% of GCE |
| A03 | Analyse, interpret and evaluate scientific information, ideasand evidence, including in relation to issues, to:● make judgements and reach conclusions● develop and refine practical design and procedures | 35-40% of GCE |

**Useful websites:**

Look at the British Psychological Society’s website ([www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk) ). It gives details of courses in Psychology, career opportunities for those who study Psychology and even has a magazine for A-Level students of Psychology

<http://www.psychologywizard.net/> - this is designed for the Edexcel specification

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/>

<https://www.s-cool.co.uk/a-level/psychology>

<http://www.holah.karoo.net/links.htm>

<http://psychlotron.org.uk/newResources/archive.html>

**Independent Study Tasks**

**Task 1**

Psychology is a varied discipline, with different explanations for behaviour. You will study 5 different approaches to explain human behaviour. The 5 approaches are:

* Social
* Cognitive
* Biopsychology/ biological psychology
* Learning/ Behaviourism
* Psychodynamic

(Humanistic Psychology – an extra one for those who would like to complete additional reading)

Your first task is to briefly summarise (4/5 lines) how each approach explains human behaviour. Use the websites listed above to help you. Make a note of any key words that you think are important for each approach. You will find it useful to start a glossary for each.

**Task 2**

Your next task is to research the key figures listed below. Produce a factsheet about each key thinker. Use the websites listed above to help you conduct your research.

* Sigmund Freud
* Ivan Pavlov
* Philip Zimbardo
* Roger W. Sperry
* Darwin
* B.F Skinner
* Alan Baddeley
* Albert Bandura
* Carl Rogers

Information to include:

* When and where they were born; dates they were working
* Which approach they contributed to (Social, Cognitive, Biological, Learning/ Behaviourism, Humanism, Psychodynamic)
* What their key ideas about human behaviour were. How do they explain human behaviour?
* Any classic piece of research they conducted. What did they do/ find? (This should be brief and focus on one or two pieces.)

**Task 3**

As well as the five main approaches within psychology there are also many issues and debates that are often discussed when trying to evaluate the approaches and the different explanations of behaviour. Two of those debates are:



Based on your knowledge of the 5 main approaches, predict which side of the debate they would be on. Justify your answers.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Approach**  | **Key influence on behaviour**  | **Free will vs. determinism**  | **Nature vs. nurture**  |
| **Social**  |  |  |  |
| **Cognitive**  |  |  |  |
| **Biopsychology**  |  |  |  |
| **Learning**  |  |  |  |
| **Psychodynamic**  |  |  |  |
| **Humanism**  |  |  |  |

**Task 4**

Psychologists use different research methods to conduct research which then forms the basis of theories they formulate to explain human behaviour. Complete the table below using the websites listed earlier.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Research method**  | **What is it?**  | **Evaluation - strengths of using this method**  | **Evaluation- disadvantages of using this method**  | **Example of it being used in Psychology**  |
| **Laboratory experiment**  |  |  |  |  |
| **Field experiment**  |  |  |  |  |
| **Case studies** |  |  |  |  |
| **Interviews**  |  |  |  |  |
| **Questionnaires**  |  |  |  |  |
| **Naturalistic Observation** |  |  |  |  |
| **Structured observation**  |  |  |  |  |

To help with the evaluation of each method, research what the following terms mean:

* Reliability
* Validity
* Ethical issues such as fully informed consent, confidentiality, right to withdraw, protection from harm, deception…

**Task 5**

An important skill needed for this course is the ability to evaluate studies and theories. To do this you must explain what is good or bad about research. (Research includes both studies and theories.) Below is an acronym students use to evaluate studies. (If you find some aspects difficult to apply, leave them out.)



Below are 4 studies. You are to read the attached information for each study and apply the GRAVE acronym. (Using bullet points to structure your points is fine.) I have included a few clips for you to watch based on each study.

* Mary Ainsworth’s Strange Situation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTsewNrHUHU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRejV6f-Y3c>

* Peterson and Peterson
* Money’s study of David Reimer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQJHPQpf6mI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nL5E4Im5HYg>

* Philip Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPO6BrFTsWM>

Useful documentaries to watch – there are many more you will be shown throughout the course but these are to whet your appetite and offer insight into the content you will be studying as part of the course. Some of you may find some of the content in these documentaries a little upsetting. Viewer caution is advised.

<https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/brain-secret-history/>

<https://www.documentarystorm.com/the-secret-life-of-the-manic-depressive/>

<https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/phantoms-in-the-brain/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUZpB57PfHs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lSZvEH3c1Zk>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b05nyysy/louis-theroux-by-reason-of-insanity-part-1>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD_ytS-RsGg>

<https://watchdocumentaries.com/stephen-the-murder-that-changed-a-nation/>