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Introduction to A Level Psychology

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Miss T Claire



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.

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 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 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 achieved at least a grade 6 in mathematics and English and at least a grade 5 in science.

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.

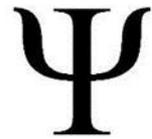
As a science, psychology functions as both a thriving academic discipline and a vital professional practice, one dedicated to the study of human behaviour - and the thoughts, feelings, and motivations behind it - through observation, measurement, and testing, in order to form conclusions that are based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

What will I learn?

We teach the GCE Edexcel specification. Students will sit three two-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/specificationhttps://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A Level/Psychology/2015/specification-and-sample-assessments/AL-Specification-Psychology.pdfand-sample-assessments/AL-Specification-Psychology.pdf](https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/Psychology/2015/specificationhttps://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/Psychology/2015/specification-and-sample-assessments/AL-Specification-Psychology.pdfand-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/ Behaviourism. In each approach you will;

- investigate some key research topics
- explore some published studies in detail – both classic and contemporary
- 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.

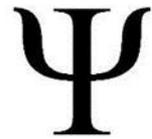
- In **cognitive psychology** the key theme is **memory**
- In **social psychology** you will investigate **prejudice and obedience**
- In **biological psychology** you will learn about **aggression, brain function, and the operation of the central nervous system / neurotransmitters**
- In the **learning 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 various explanations and treatments for each condition. 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. You will also look at factors that affect jury decision making and eyewitness testimony. This is worth 36 marks (out of a total of 90 marks.)



Paper 3 – Psychological Skills

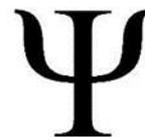
This is a synoptic paper, meaning that it is a general summary or overview of the course. To prepare for this exam you will need to review all the methodology you have studied, classic studies, and ‘issues & debates’ that you have learnt so far (These are listed further below in this pack.) It is about applying the skills you have developed throughout the course. 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 the classic studies you have looked at
- **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 two-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: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● 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, ideas and evidence, including in relation to issues, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● 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). 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

www.psychologywizard.net – designed for the Edexcel specification

<https://psychologyrocksblog.wordpress.com/> click on Edexcel A level – very useful for mathematical requirements

www.curriculum-press.co.uk

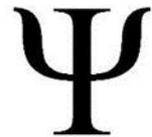
<https://www.revisely.co.uk/alevel/psychology/edexcel/> useful website although not exactly the same as the content we cover at BCCC. (Be mindful you are covering the content I have directed you towards.)

<https://www.physicsandmathstutor.com/psychology-revision/>

<https://www.hoddereducation.co.uk/magazines/magazines-extras/psychology-review-extras>

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

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



Independent Study Tasks

Task 1a – Approaches in Psychology

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
- 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 1b

Here is an extract from a brief psychological assessment made by a psychiatrist:

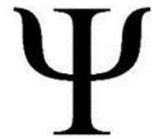
K' is a 30-year-old man who has had a long history of violence.

He was most recently arrested (for the fifth time) for an attack on another man in a crowded pub. 'K' claimed that the man had knocked his drink and laughed about it. At the time of the arrest, 'K' was found to have abnormally high levels of testosterone (as well as high blood alcohol level).

He reported many experiences of seeing his father being aggressive and suffered himself in the form of beatings. 'K' said very little about his mother, who appeared to have been absent during this time, although this did not seem to be a concern for 'K'. 'K' was excluded from school on many occasions for bullying other children.

If 'K' had a philosophy on life, it would be, 'never show weakness to others'. I recommend further detailed psychological assessment.

Explain how one of the approaches from task 1 could explain what is causing K's behaviour.



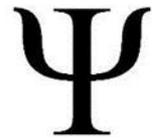
Task 2 - Key Psychologists

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 - Issues and Debates

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. These are:

Debates

- Psychology as a science
- Reductionism
- Nature-nurture

Issues:

- Ethics
- Usefulness of research
- Issues in the design and implementation of research
 - Explaining behaviour using different approaches
 - Culture and gender bias within research
 - How psychology has developed over time
 - Social control
 - Socially sensitive research

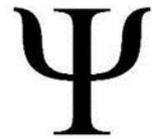
Using the links provided on page 5, write one or two sentences summarising what each issue or debate means.

Based on your knowledge of the 5 main approaches, where would you place each approach on the continuum below in relation to **nature-nurture debate**? Justify your answers. E.g., you may place biopsychology closest to the nature side of the debate because it explains human behaviour using biological features such as genes and hormones. (You may wish to do this on a separate sheet of paper.)

NATURE

NURTURE





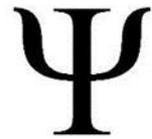
Task 4 - Research Methods

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 on page 5.

Research method	Describe what is it?	Evaluation - strengths of using this method	Evaluation- disadvantages of using this method	Example of it being used in Psychology. (Use links on page 5.)
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 5a – Schizophrenia

You will need to use <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MN3BpNT8xqc> to answer the questions below

- 1) What is the onset of schizophrenia?
- 2) What are some of the symptoms?
- 3) What are some of the treatments available?

Task 5b –McGuire’s Research

You will need to use the following link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfy9j0h9_O8 and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1u6mUF-C4oA> (start watching from 42 seconds) to answer the questions below?

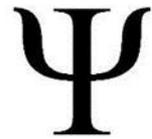
- 1) What is the hippocampus involved in?
- 2) What did McGuire find?
- 3) Why did the researchers need to use a control group (which consisted of men who were not taxi drivers) as part of the study?
- 4) Challenge: how can you apply the nature-nurture debate to these findings?

Task 6 – Careers in Psychology

Psychology is useful for a range of different careers. Research the following careers in psychology and then summarise each one in 150 of your own words. Use the links provided below.

- 1) Clinical psychologist
- 2) Forensic psychologist
- 3) Health psychologist

- <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explorehttps://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/clinical-psychologistroles/psychological-therapies/roles/clinicalhttps://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/clinical-psychologistpsychologist>
- <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/clinicalhttps://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/clinical-psychologistpsychologist>
- <https://www.careerexplorer.com/careers/forensichttps://www.careerexplorer.com/careers/forensic-psychologist/psychologist/>



- <https://careers.bps.org.uk/area/health>
- <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explorehttps://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/health-psychologistroles/psychological-therapies/roles/healthhttps://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/health-psychologistpsychologist>

Psychology Film Recommendations (I will mention many others)

- A Beautiful Mind
- One Flew over the Cuckoo's nest
- 12 Angry Men
- Girl Interrupted
- Hotel Rwanda
- Mozart and the Whale
- The Soloist
- To the Bone
- We Need to talk about Kevin
- Compliance
- Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
- Instinct
- Memento
- Shutter Island
- The Silence of the Lambs
- Psycho
- Good Will Hunting
- Identity
- Rain Man
- Black Swan
- Sylvia
- Borderline
- The Experiment
- As Good As It Gets
- Crash
- Donnie Darko
- The Dark Knight