

Psychology

AQA A-level Psychology (7182)

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Introduction

Psychology is the scientific study of the human mind and behaviour. It is a dynamic and fascinating discipline which students enjoy because it provides them with an opportunity to engage with stimulating and personally relevant topics and issues. Psychologists conduct scientific research to find out what motivates, challenges or changes us. They use this understanding to predict behaviour, tackle personal and social problems in society and improve quality of life.

Psychology is an interesting and fun subject to study as it can help students understand themselves and those around them. Lessons are filled with fun activities and experiments as well as discussions about a wide range of topics. We explore vital questions such as: why are some people more likely to commit violent crime?; why do we forget?; why do some people suffer with mental disorders e.g. depression, schizophrenia, phobias?; and why do some people conform to group pressure even when they don't want to? We also explore some big issues and debates such as nature vs nurture, free will vs determinism, and the ethical implications of scientific research. Pupils are encouraged to question research, rather than accepting theories at face value, so they quickly develop analytical and critical thinking skills.

Subject Requirements

Psychology students need to write coherently, structure an evidence-based argument, and have a strong grasp of scientific and mathematical concepts. Those starting the course must therefore have achieved a minimum of a Grade 6 in each of their sciences, maths and English.

Course Outline

AQA A-level psychology is assessed based on three papers, sat at the end of the Upper Sixth. There are a variety of types of question, including multiple choice, short-answer, application, and mini essays. There is no coursework element, although there is opportunity to conduct simple research studies and trial data collection techniques throughout the course. As psychology is a science, research methods comprises 25 – 30% of the total mark, with 10% of marks being awarded for maths-based questions.

Paper 1 topics:

- *Social influence* – conformity, obedience to authority, minority influence and the role of social influence processes in social change.
- *Memory* – models of memory, types of long-term memory, explanations for forgetting, factors affecting the accuracy of eye-witness testimony and how to improve eyewitness testimony in real world criminal proceedings.
- *Attachment* – caregiver-infant interactions and explanations of why we attach, the types of attachment between caregiver and infant and the importance of our early attachments on later relationships, including issues surrounding Romanian orphanages.
- *Psychopathology* – definitions of abnormality and the symptoms, causes and treatments of phobias, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Paper 2 topics:

- *Approaches in psychology* – the different theoretical perspectives of explaining behaviour including the learning approach, the cognitive approach, the biological approach, the psychodynamic approach and the humanistic approach. The development of psychology, including the emergence of cognitive neuroscience.
- *Biopsychology* – the workings of our central and peripheral nervous systems, our endocrine system, our brain and to what extent our biological rhythms, such as the sleep/wake cycle, are influenced by internal or external factors.
- *Research methods* – knowledge and understanding of a range of research methods, the scientific process, as well as data handling and analysis. There is an applied maths element to this topic.

Paper 3 topics:

- *Issues and debates in psychology* – free will vs. determinism; holism vs. reductionism; and nature vs. nurture. Students also consider ethical and cultural issues in research and theories, including reference to social sensitivity, gender and cultural bias.
- *Relationships* – evolutionary explanations for partner preferences, factors affecting attraction and theories of romantic relationships. Students will also explore virtual relationships and parasocial relationships.
- *Schizophrenia* – diagnosis and classification as well as biological and psychological explanations and treatments of schizophrenia. Students will also explore the interactionist approach and methods of managing schizophrenia.
- *Aggression* – biological and social causes of aggression as well as the role of computer games and the media in aggression. Students will also explore aggression in a prison setting and the impact of desensitisation and cognitive priming.

Higher Education and Careers

Psychology students learn to understand people and what motivates them, which is relevant to all aspects of society. As a result, the A-level opens the doors for students to pursue a wide range of undergraduate degrees and careers. It is highly regarded by universities and is considered a science/maths discipline.

Psychology A-level candidates move on to all sorts of different areas. Some choose to study psychology at undergraduate level and then continue within their chosen specialism at master's level to qualify as a chartered psychologist. Alternatively, the subject acts as a great springboard for pupils who wish to pursue careers in economics, medicine, neuroscience, marketing, human resources, law, sports and exercise science and business, to name just a few.

What should I study alongside psychology?

Due to its multidisciplinary approach, psychology combines well with all A-level subjects. Content specifically overlaps with maths, biology, geography, PE and RS, but those who enjoy science-based subjects and those who enjoy the arts and humanities are equally well suited to the subject as it

combines a unique blend of scientific theories and processes, alongside a qualitative understanding of how culture and social interactions impact our behaviour.

Is there anything else I should consider?

Psychology is an academic A-level which contains a lot of content and is rigorously assessed, so a strong work ethic and commitment to regular revision and consolidation is essential for success.