



Psychology

Exam Board: Edexcel

A Level



A Level Psychology

Psychology is a fascinating subject because it aims to explain you. Psychology tries to explain what makes us who we are; are we entirely the products of our environment or does our biology play a more important role? How does our behaviour reflect evolutionary pressures over our ancestral history? We study a range of topics to try and discover these answers, but at a little over a century old psychology is still a relatively young science, and therefore there are many questions we still do not know the answers to.

In studying psychology then, you will develop important skills of analysis and evaluation; making judgements as to whether the current research evidence does indeed present a persuasive argument. You will also develop written skills in order to answer both the shorter and longer, more essay based questions during the course. Our key focus is on understanding the material we cover which can be theoretical or scientific in nature, and challenging yourself to always think critically about the course content.

Areas of Psychology that will be covered

Social Psychology

Additionally factors affecting obedience and dissent/resistance to obedience such as individual differences (personality and gender), situation and culture shall be explored as factors that may influence one's level of obedience.

Cognitive Psychology

This includes short and long-term memory and ideas about information processing, encoding, storage and retrieval, capacity and duration.

Learning Psychology

Looking at how children learn through Social Learning Theory and different types of reinforcement. The main features of classical conditioning, operant conditioning, how learning theories explain the acquisition and maintenance of phobias. Treatments for phobias based on theories of learning, including systematic desensitisation. How memory can be affected by development and illness.

Developmental Psychology

Students must show an understanding that biological psychology is about the mechanisms within our body and understand how they affect our behaviour, focusing on aggression. Aggression will be studied by looking at the structure of the brain, different brain areas (e.g. pre-frontal cortex) and brain functioning as an explanation of aggression as a human behaviour. Comparing this idea to Freud's psychodynamic explanation, referring to the different parts of the personality (id, ego, and superego), the importance of the unconscious, and catharsis and also the role of hormones (e.g. testosterone) to explain human behaviour such as aggression.

Clinical psychology

Students must show understanding that clinical psychology is about explaining and treating mental health issues, and of the different ways of treating them, including counselling and drug treatments. Individual differences and developmental psychology must be considered when learning about links between personality factors and mental disorders and genetic influences (nature) or environmental influences (nurture) within different explanations for mental health disorders.

Criminological psychology

Students must show understanding that criminological 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. Individual differences and developmental psychology must be considered when learning about the possible causes of criminal behaviour, such as labelling, self-fulfilling prophecy and social learning.

Psychological skills

This is a synoptic section in which students will be asked to draw on other areas of the qualification in order to understand conceptual and methodological issues. Students will develop an understanding of how to use theories and evidence from many areas of psychology and apply them to the issues. Relevant psychological skills have been contextualised in all topics. This topic collects them together in order to ensure that all content has been covered. Students must consider issues and debates from across all topics in order to develop a general knowledge of key issues and debates.

Course Specification

Foundations in psychology: 35% of the total qualification

Section A: Social psychology

Section B: Cognitive psychology

Section C: Biological psychology

Section D: Learning theories

Section E: Issues and debates section is 20 marks and comprises two extended response questions, covering the topic area of issues and debates in psychology.

The assessment is 2 hours long and consists of 90 marks.

Applications of psychology: 35% of the total qualification

The paper is composed of two sections. Students must answer all questions from Section A and all questions from a choice of three optional topic areas in Section B.

Section A has 54 marks comprising mixed question types, including data response and short-answer questions and a 20-mark essay covering the topic area of clinical psychology.

Section B presents students with a choice of one from three optional topic areas: Criminological psychology, Child psychology or Health psychology. Each section totals 36 marks, comprising mixed question types, including data-response, short-answer and extended response questions.

The assessment is 2 hours long and consists of 90 marks.

Psychological skills: 30% of the total qualification

Section A has 24 marks and comprises mixed question types, including data-response and short-answer questions, covering the topic area of research methods.

Section B has 24 marks and comprises two extended response questions based on psychological studies given in Topics 1–4.

Section C has 32 marks and comprises two extended response questions, covering the topic area of issues and debates in psychology.

The assessment is 2 hours long and consists of 80 marks.

Assessment Objectives and weightings

AO1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures 30–35%

AO2 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%

AO3 Analyse, interpret and evaluate scientific information, ideas and evidence, including in relation to issues, to:

Make judgements and reach conclusions

Develop and refine practical design and procedures 35–40%

Supports the following range of careers:

Psychology is useful for any job that requires lots of interaction or an understanding of human behaviour and development. People with skills in psychology are sought after in business, management, teaching, research, social work and careers in medicine and healthcare.

Sports – helping athletes to build mental strategies to improve their performance and handle pressure.

Education – studying child development and helping children experiencing difficulties with their education.

Clinical and counselling – treating people with mental health needs.

Forensic - assessing and treating criminal behaviour, which can involve working with offenders and victims of crime.

Occupational – aiming to increase the effectiveness of an organisation and improve job satisfaction.

Neuropsychology – studying how the physical function of the brain affects the way we behave.