
GCE 2015 Psychology Student Guide

What do I need to know or be able to do before taking this course?

You do not need any knowledge of psychology to undertake this course. However, the nature of the course means that having a 'C' grade or better at GCSE Maths and English Language is strongly advisable. The course involves some essay writing, collection of data, analysis of data using statistics, and interpretation of evidence. Psychology is a science so a scientific way of looking at things can be an advantage, however, this is something you can learn.

You need to be good at writing and good at maths, or willing to learn.

What is psychology?

Psychology is a science and is the study of brain and behaviour. We all have ideas about people and about ourselves, and psychology relates to those ideas but draws on scientific methods to build a body of knowledge about such issues. Psychology can be theoretical, looking at how the brain works and what drives our behaviour, including issues such as early childhood experiences and what happens to us as we develop. Psychology can be practical, such as in therapy and treatments as well as in the workplace, such as when devising advertisements or advising the police.

You might think of psychology as listening to people on a couch and to an extent you would be right. There is much more to it than that, however.

What will I learn?

Year One/AS Psychology - Foundations of Psychology

The first year of the A level course can also be taken as an AS qualification.

- In Year One you will learn about four Topic Areas in psychology. These are social psychology, cognitive psychology, biological psychology and learning theories. In each of these four Topic Areas you will study a key question for society and the psychology that helps to explain it. You will also cover some content in that Topic Area, some studies that connect to the content including one classic study, and some methodology looking at how psychology works. You will also carry out a practical investigation in each Topic Area, where you will use some of the method you cover and where you can find out for yourself how psychology can help to understand people. You will also learn how to use statistical tests. You do not need to know any of this beforehand.

Each Topic Area uses the same structure:

- Content
- Method
- Studies
- Key question

- o Practical investigation

Here is a short summary of each of the four Year One/AS Topic Areas, which will be a foundation in psychology.

Social psychology is about how people live in groups and interact with one another. You will cover obedience to those in authority, and why someone might not obey, as well as whether our personality makes us obey or the situation we are in. You will cover prejudice too, looking at factors that lead us to become prejudiced and to discriminate, such as against those in other groups.

Cognitive psychology is about how we process information, such as using language, using memory and problem solving. In your course the focus is on memory, including, for example, how we use short-term memory and how we form long-term memories. Memory is an important part of processing information, and it can relate to successful learning by studying as well as other applications.

Biological psychology is about the brain as well as aspects of our physical make up such as genes, the idea of survival of the fittest, and hormones. Your course will focus on aggression, looking at what parts of the brain relate to aggression and how hormones link to aggression, for example. More general biological issues are also considered including the theory of evolution.

Learning theories involve looking at our behaviour and what leads to specific behaviours, including how we develop a phobia, and how we response to praise and react to punishment. You will see that we learn a lot by imitating our role models, for example. Learning theories can help to generate ideas for treating phobias and you will look at those too.

Year Two Psychology - Applications of Psychology and Psychological Skills in Psychology

Year Two has two parts.

- In the first part, you will study two more Topic Areas, both of which are applications of psychology. You will study clinical psychology, which looks at mental health and mental disorders. Then you will study one application from criminological psychology, child psychology and health psychology. Each application uses the same structure as in Year One:

- o Content
- o Method
- o Studies
- o Key question
- o Practical investigation

When studying your two applications you will draw on the foundations of psychology you covered in Year One/AS. For example, in clinical psychology you will look at biological explanations for schizophrenia, and you can include learning theories to see possible treatments for offender behaviour in criminological psychology.

Here is a short summary of each of the two Year Two Topic Areas you will cover as Applications in Psychology. Everyone covers clinical psychology and then you will be studying one from the other three, so two Topic Areas in Year Two.

Clinical psychology covers mental health issues and in your course you will look at schizophrenia (features, causes and treatments), and at one other disorder (again looking at features, causes and treatments). You will study either depression, anorexia nervosa or OCD as your 'other' disorder.

Criminological psychology focuses on different aspects of crime including offender behaviour, jury decision-making and issues affecting sentencing such as the unreliability of eye witness testimony and issues around interviewing suspects. Causes of crime are also considered as well as treatments of offenders.

Child psychology looks at how we development from very early childhood to adolescence. In your course you will cover the important role of attachment for you as a young child. Child psychology also covers issues like day care and separation, and how they affect a child's development. Autism is looked at as a developmental disorder.

Health psychology considers drug misuse. This continues from biological psychology in Year One/AS where the way drugs work in the brain is covered. Alcohol, heroin and nicotine are the three drugs focused on in health psychology, including how they work and treatments offered. A health campaign is also considered to show how health psychology is about prevention.

- 'Psychological Skills' and is a revision section, where you can pull all your learning together before doing the A level examinations. Psychological skills cover all the method material you have covered over the two years and review the classic studies you will have covered. There are also issues and debates that will be introduced in each Topic Area and will be drawn together in the second section of your Year Two studies.

The structure for the Psychological Skills section is:

- Method
- Review of studies
- Issues and debates

Here is a short summary of the Psychological Skills section of your Year Two course.

Methodology is the study of how psychology is done and you will cover method in each of the *six Topic Areas in your course. The methodology section of the Psychological Skills section of your course gives all the method you have covered so that you can revise it all ready for your exams.

Review of studies refers to reviewing all the studies you covered over the two years of your course. To make this manageable there is special focus on what are called 'classic studies'. For each Topic Area you will cover one classic study. You will cover *six Topic Areas so you can revise six classic studies for this section of Psychological Skills as well as drawing on other studies you have covered.

Issues and debates are found in psychology. They are in your course at the end of each Topic Area to show how they fit in with that Topic Area. Then in the Psychological

Skills section they are reviewed, again for revision purposes and for you to draw your learning together. For example, you can discuss the nature-nurture issue drawing on your learning about twin studies in biological psychology, for example, and about how our behaviour is shaped by our environment in learning theories. You will see that we have elements of genes and nature in us and also elements of us come from our learning from our environment and experience. Other issues and debates include how psychology can contribute to social control (perhaps you think this is not a good thing) and how psychology researches in socially sensitive areas (perhaps you think this is a good thing). Ethics in psychological research are important as are issues when researching with animals, and one issue in your course is 'ethics', which you may have expected.

*The six Topic Areas you will cover include social, cognitive and biological psychology with learning theories in Year One, and clinical psychology and one other application from criminological, child and health psychology in Year Two

A summary of the A Level

Topic Area 1: Social psychology	Topic Area 2: Cognitive psychology	Topic Area 3: Biological psychology
Topic Area 4: Learning theories	Topic Area 5: Clinical psychology	Topic Area 6: OR Criminological Psychology
Topic Area 7: OR Child psychology	Topic Area 8: OR Health psychology	Topic Area 9: Method; studies; issues and debates

Paper One: Foundations of Psychology	Paper Two: Application of Psychology	Paper Three: Psychological Skills
Social, cognitive, biological and learning	Clinical psychology and one from criminological/child/health	Method; review of studies; issues and debates

Key: Year One foundations, Year Two applications, Year Two psychological skills

A summary of the AS Level

Topic Area 1: Social psychology	Topic Area 3: Biological psychology
Topic Area 2: Cognitive psychology	Topic Area 4: Learning theories

Paper One	Paper Two
Social psychology and cognitive psychology	Biological psychology and learning theories

Key: Paper One, Paper Two

Is the subject right for me?

The most important quality for anyone wanting to study psychology is to find people fascinating. Are you intrigued by why people act in the way they do? If so, then psychology will capture your imagination.

You will need to:

- be willing to have your opinions and values challenged
- be willing to listen to and take on board new ideas and novel arguments

- be able to see both sides of an issue not reject one side simply because you believe initially that it is wrong

Psychology provides many opportunities to develop skills in assessing debates and arguments.

How will I be assessed?

A Level

Paper One	Paper Two	Paper Three
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social • Cognitive • Biological • Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical • One from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Criminological ○ Child ○ Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodology • Review of Studies • Issues and debates
Assessment time: 2 Hours	Assessment time: 2 Hours	Assessment time: 2 Hours

All the papers contain some short-answer questions and some extended writing. All the papers are taken at the end of the two-year course. The AS is a stand-alone qualification as is the A level, AS scores do not count towards the full A level and the papers are different from the AS papers.

AS Level

Paper One	Paper Two
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social • Cognitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biological • Learning
Assessment time: 1.5 Hours	Assessment time: 1.5 Hours

Paper One and Paper Two are different papers from the A Level papers. All the Papers contain some short-answer questions and extended writing. Both papers are taken in one session for the AS qualification, and this can be at the end of one year. The AS is a stand-alone qualification and the marks do not count towards the full A level.

What can I do after I have completed my course?

Psychology is a very useful subject for any career where you interact with people. Occupations such as journalism, nursing and marketing all welcome trainees who have studied psychology.

If you are considering Higher Education, psychology can be an invaluable subject. Although psychology is a science, it sits on the boundary of Science and Arts subjects and combines elements of both. If you choose the Arts route psychology shows a competence in scientific thinking and numeracy that will add breadth to your skills. Similarly, the Science route can often lack the opportunity to show your ability to construct a well-argued essay, but psychology will show you how to do this.

Next steps

- Talk to the psychology staff and students at the school/college where you intend to study
- Look at the detailed course information on the Edexcel website: www.edexcel.org.uk
- Look at the British Psychological Society's website: www.bps.org.uk. It gives details of courses in psychology, careers opportunities for those who study psychology and even has an e-zine for A level students of psychology.



Good Luck!