



Pearson

International Advanced Level Psychology

Getting Started for Students

Student guide

This guide has been written to support students starting the IAL Psychology course. It gives an overview of subject content and assessment method with learning advice, including command words used in examination papers, to prepare for the course.

Psychology may be a subject you have not studied until AS/A2 Level subject choices. With this in mind it is important that you are prepared for your learning. A good way to begin is to read around the topic before you start your AS studies. There are some good websites to look at, but the best advice is to ask your teacher if they can also recommend a textbook or set of textbooks. Wider reading is essential in building an understanding, so look for articles online or in the news about developments in psychology.

There are some suggested useful online resources on page 6 of this document that can provide additional reading materials throughout the course.

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Getting started for students

Why study the Pearson Edexcel IAL Psychology ?

It gives a broad base of psychological knowledge and understanding in which you will look at not only famous traditional studies but also contemporary ones. Research methods is made relevant by distributing the various techniques to appropriate topics and encouraging the carrying out of practical work.

What will I learn?

You will learn to apply psychological theory to everyday behaviour and to appreciate the variety of people's characteristics. In addition, you will learn how to analyse aspects of your own behaviour in different circumstances.

Is this the right subject for me?

If you have a desire to understand your and others behaviour then this is the right subject for you. It will assist you in overcoming common myths about why we do what we do and replace them with a scientific assessment of the human condition.

Learning advice

Psychology may be a subject you have not studied until AS/A2 Level subject choices. With this in mind it is important that you are prepared for your learning. A good way to begin is to read around the topic before you start your AS studies. There are some good websites to look at, but the best advice is to ask your teacher if they can also recommend a textbook or set of textbooks. Wider reading is essential in building an understanding, so look for articles online or in the news about developments in psychology.

Psychology requires you to critically evaluate core ideas about human behaviour, and to do this you should be able to make judgements about theories and studies into human actions.

Theories are the explanations behind human behaviour, whereas studies are the research investigations that have been undertaken by psychologists to find evidence to add to their theories of human behaviour (or to prove someone else wrong!).

Being able to judge whether a theory is a credible explanation is essential in determining how much value it adds to psychological knowledge as an academic discipline, and how useful the theory is in real world applications. When you are learning about theories, consider how useful it is. Are there any applications to society you can think of? For example, can you use a theory of memory to help with your revision? Not only does it help you learn, but it is a strength of that theory as an explanation.

Extended essays are a key feature in the written exams, for these you should take time to look at the taxonomy words on the next two pages. Take time to review these, for example the essays will always be Evaluate, Assess, Discuss or To what extent... do you confidently know the difference between these?

Extended essays can be 8, 12, 16 or 20 marks depending on the paper you are sitting. Practice writing essays using notes so that you can time yourself in preparation for live

examinations. The essays are marked using a levels based system which is on the Pearson website. If you self-assess your work as you go along it will help you in the actual exams.

Pay close attention to the 'logical chains of reasoning', 'balance' and 'conclusions' in your work. Without these, your essays may not reach the higher levels. Use your knowledge and understanding of a topic to lead you into an evaluation or assessment for example. Generic responses without knowledge do not help the examiners or your teachers to know if you understand the content itself.

For example; is Milgram's work reliable? How do you know this? What did he do that makes you think this? What kind of reliability does this show? Why is this a strength or weakness in terms of your essay answer?
Always make it clear.

Classic and Contemporary studies need to be understood in detail. Pay close attention to these studies. Not only do they help you give supporting or refuting evidence for theories, but you can be asked very specific details on these in an exam. Do you know the aims of the study? Could you describe the sampling? What was the exact procedure? Can you give the conclusions?

You should also be able to give the strengths and weaknesses of these in relation to a number of core issues – such as reliability, validity, generalisability, ethics, credibility, and so on.

A last word on the maths... do not under estimate the mathematical content! You do need a calculator, you will need to be able to draw chart and use statistical tables. This makes up a minimum of 10% of each exam, so practice this and know your data.

Finally, although the specification is written for your teachers, it is useful in giving you an overview of what to expect in each topic. Have a look at it!

How will I be assessed?

You will sit formal exams in which you will need to demonstrate not only knowledge of psychological theory but be able to apply this knowledge in novel situations. You will also carry out practical activities in your course and be expected to explain this process in the examinations.

The ability to evaluate the findings of studies and the assessment of psychological practice and theories will be assessed in the examinations.

What can I do after I've completed the course?

A study of psychology at A level is valuable in almost any career, involving interactions with people. It is clearly very valuable as a preparation for further study of psychology at university. Here you can take your knowledge to a higher academic level.

Next Steps!

Your subject teacher at your school or college should be able to guide you further.

Taxonomy - command words used in assessment

The following command words in this taxonomy will be used consistently by Pearson in assessments to ensure students are rewarded for demonstrating the necessary skills.

Please note: the list below will not necessarily be used in every paper/session and is provided for guidance only.

Command word	Question types
Analyse	Break something down into its components/parts. Examine each part methodically and in detail in order to discover the meaning or essential features of a theme, topic or situation. Explore the relationship between the features and how each one contributes to the topic.
Assess	Give careful consideration to all the factors or events that apply and identify which are the most important or relevant. Make a judgement on the importance of something, and come to a conclusion where needed.
Calculate	Obtain a numerical answer, showing relevant working. If the answer has a unit, this must be included.
Compare	Looking for the similarities and differences of two (or more) things. This should not require the drawing of a conclusion. The answer must relate to both (or all) things mentioned in the question. The answer must include at least one similarity and one difference.
Complete	To fill in/write all the details asked for
Convert	Express a quantity in alternative units.
Define	Define Provide a definition of something.
Describe	To give an account of something. Statements in the response need to be developed as they are often linked but do not need to include a justification or reason.
Determine	The answer must have an element that is quantitative from the stimulus provided, or must show how the answer can be reached quantitatively. To gain maximum marks there must be a quantitative element to the answer.
Discuss	Explore the issue/situation/problem/argument that is being presented within the question, articulating different or contrasting viewpoints.
Draw	Produce an output, either by freehand or using a ruler (e.g. graph).
Evaluate	Review information then bring it together to form a conclusion, drawing on evidence including strengths, weaknesses, alternative actions, relevant data or information. Come to a supported judgement of a subject's qualities and relation to its context.
Explain	An explanation that requires a justification/exemplification of a point. The answer must contain some element of reasoning/justification, this can include mathematical explanations.
Give	Generally involves the recall of one or more pieces of information; when used in relation to a context, it is used to determine a candidate's grasp of the factual information presented.
Identify	This requires some key information to be selected from a given stimulus/resource.
Interpret	Recognise a trend or pattern(s) within a given stimulus/resource.
Justify	Rationalise a decision or action.
Name	Synonymous with 'Give'.
Plot	Produce, or add detail to, a graph/chart by marking points accurately (e.g. line of best fit).
Predict	Articulate an expected result.
State	Synonymous with 'Give'.
Suggest	Make a proposal/propose an idea in written form.
To what extent	Review information then bring it together to form a judgement conclusion, following the provision of a balanced and reasoned argument.

Suggested useful online resource links

To be successful in your learning it would be useful to research around the topic areas you will be studying.

The websites below are where you can find a variety of useful resources – including summary information, free books, video clips and radio podcasts that you can download.

It is useful to read up on a topic before you start, and then add to your understanding outside the lessons you attend.

<http://www.simplypsychology.org/> this website gives an overview of many of the key areas you will study. It would be useful to give you some background reading before starting a new topic so you have a good grounding from which to begin your learning.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/> is an online magazine (with an option to subscribe) that brings psychological theories into modern, contemporary issues. It is useful for reading around a topic and understanding the role of psychology in the world.

<https://play.google.com/store/search?q=psychology%20free%20books&c=books&hl=en> this site has a number of free short books about key areas of Psychology.

<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/body-mind/psychology> The 'OpenLearn' programme provides freely accessible study packs and wider reading, provided by the Open University, and are particularly useful.

<http://allpsych.com/> is a useful site with books, articles and summaries of the key concepts that you will encounter in your Psychology course.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8dPuuaLjXtOPRKzVLY0jJY-uHOH9KVU6> Psychology 'Crash Course' is a YouTube channel that provides 40 short overviews of psychological issues, many of the topics you will study in your AS and A Level Psychology course are included.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b008cy1j> 'BBC Mind Changers' is a series of radio episodes, that can also be downloaded, about key psychologists, their work, and the development of Psychology over time.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006gxx9> 'BBC In the Mind' is a series of radio episodes that have a focus on the human mind by using the application of psychological concepts and theories that you may encounter during your learning.