

Psychology (Specification A)

Exam Board: AQA

This course of study comprises two written units at AS and two at A-level, with no coursework. The emphasis is on applying knowledge and understanding, thereby developing students' transferable skills of analysis, evaluation and critical thinking. The A level Psychology qualification will give you a good fundamental and lasting insight into human behaviour, thinking and reasoning. This will definitely help you to cope better with your own life, but also it will help you to gain better understanding of others.

By studying the nature of memory and techniques for memory improvement you will learn methods of successful study skills, which should help you with other subjects as well. A new Psychology specification is currently being developed, ready for first teaching in September 2015.

These qualifications are linear. Linear means that students will sit all the AS exams at the end of their AS course and all the A-level exams at the end of their A-level course.

A-level Subject content topics

Assessment: 3 written exam papers;

Paper 1 (33.3%) - Introductory Topics in Psychology (96 marks) 2 hours– Topics 1-4

Paper 2 (33.3%) – Psychology in context (96 marks) 2 hours – Topics 5-7

Paper 3 (33.3%) – Issues and Options in psychology (96 marks) 2 hours – Topic 8 and options 1, 2, and 3.

Question types

Multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 24 marks for each section one section is 48 marks

A-level Topic Outline

1. Social influence (Paper 1)

This topic involves conformity, including Zimbardo's research to social roles. Explanations of obedience, resistance to social pressures, minority influence and the role of social influence processes in social change.

2. Memory (Paper 1)

The multi-store model of memory. The working memory model. Explanations for forgetting: proactive and retroactive interference and retrieval failure due to absence of cues. Factors affecting the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. Improving the accuracy of eyewitness testimony, including the use of the cognitive interview.

3. Attachment (Paper 1)

Caregiver-infant interactions in humans. Stages of attachment. Multiple attachments and the role of the father. Evolutionary and learning explanation of attachment. Understanding Ainsworth's 'strange situation' and types of attachment such as secure and insecure, in addition to the cultural variations. The influence of early attachments on adult relationships.

4. Psychopathology (Paper 1)

Definitions of abnormality, including deviation from social norms, failure to function adequately, statistical infrequency and deviation from ideal mental health. The behavioural, cognitive and biological approach to explaining and treating disorders and phobias such as Depression and OCD.

5. Approaches in Psychology (Paper 2)

Origins of psychology: Wundt, introspection and the emergence of psychology as a science. The basic assumptions of the following approaches: Learning approaches, Cognitive approach, Biological approach.

6. Biopsychological (Paper 2)

The divisions of the nervous system: central and peripheral (somatic and autonomic). The structure and function of sensory, relay and motor neurons. The process of synaptic transmission, The function of the endocrine system: glands and hormones. The fight or flight response. Localisation of function in the brain and hemispheric lateralisation: motor, somatosensory, visual, auditory and language centres; Broca's and Wernicke's areas, split brain research. Plasticity and functional recovery of the brain after trauma. Ways of studying the brain: scanning techniques; post-mortem examinations. Biological rhythms: circadian, infradian and ultradian and the difference between these rhythms. The effect of endogenous pacemakers and exogenous zeitgebers on the sleep/wake cycle.

7. Research methods (Paper 2)

Students should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following research methods, scientific processes and techniques of data handling and analysis, be familiar with their use and be aware of their strengths and limitations. This includes experimental methods, observational techniques, self-reports and correlations.

8. Issues and debates in psychology (Paper 3)

Gender and culture in psychology – universality and bias (e.g. androcentrism and ethnocentrism) Free will and determinism: The scientific emphasis on causal explanations. The nature-nurture debate: the relative importance of heredity and environment in determining behaviour. Holism and reductionism: levels of explanation in psychology. Biological reductionism and environmental (stimulus-response) reductionism. Idiographic and nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation. Ethical implications of research studies and theory, including reference to social sensitivity.

9. Relationships (Paper 3)

The evolutionary explanations for partner preferences. Factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships. Theories of romantic relationships: social exchange theory, equity theory and Rusbult's investment model and investment. Duck's phase model of relationship breakdown. Virtual relationships in social media: self-disclosure in virtual relationships; effects of absence of gating on the nature of virtual relationships. Parasocial relationships: levels of parasocial relationships, the absorption addiction model and the attachment theory explanation.

10. Schizophrenia (Paper 3)

Classification of schizophrenia. Positive symptoms of schizophrenia, including hallucinations and delusions. Negative symptoms of schizophrenia, including speech poverty and avolition. Reliability and validity in diagnosis and classification of schizophrenia. Biological explanations for schizophrenia. Psychological explanations for schizophrenia. Drug therapy. Cognitive behaviour therapy and family therapy. Token economies as used in the management of schizophrenia. The importance of an interactionist approach in explaining and treating schizophrenia; the diathesis-stress model.

11. Forensic Psychology (Paper 3)

Problems in defining crime. Ways of measuring crime, including official statistics, victim surveys and offender surveys. Offender profiling: the top-down approach and the bottom-up approach. Biological explanations of offending behaviour: an historical approach (atavistic form); genetics and neural explanations. Psychological explanations of offending behaviour: Eysenck's theory of the criminal personality; cognitive explanations; level of moral reasoning and cognitive distortions, including hostile attribution bias and minimalisation; differential association theory; psychodynamic explanations. Dealing with offending behaviour: the aims of custodial sentencing and the psychological effects of custodial sentencing. Recidivism. Behaviour modification in custody. Anger management and restorative justice programmes.

Mrs Sonali Lariko

Head of Psychology & Health and Social Care