

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.

AS Subject content topics

Assessment: 2 written exam papers;

Paper 1 (50%) - Introductory Topics in Psychology (72 marks) 1 hour 30 marks – Topics 1-3

Paper 2 (50%) – Psychology in context (72 marks) 1 hour 30 marks – Topics 4-6

Question types

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

AS Topic Outline

1. Social influence

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

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

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. Approaches in Psychology

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.

5. Psychopathology

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.

6. Research methods

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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, including reference to neurotransmitters, excitation and inhibition. The function of the endocrine system: glands and hormones. The fight or flight response including the role of adrenaline.

7. Research methods

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

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. Option 1: Relationships or Gender

10. Option 2: Schizophrenia or Stress

11. Option 3: Aggression or Addiction

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