



# A level Psychology: Where could it take you?

Student guide



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# Why choose Psychology?

The mind is something intangible that exists within our brain; an unseen process of enzymes, chemicals and electric currents. But why is it that some people suffer from stress or mental illness? Or that others are considered abnormal for deviating from social norms? Psychology looks at questions like these and more. It's a fascinating science with cutting edge research that has real world applications that you are bound to find interesting.

## What will I study?

In your first year will cover the topic areas:

- **Introductory topics in psychology:**  
learn about conformity, social norms, how the mind remembers and forgets and how children form attachments
- **Psychology in context:**  
learn more about the different approaches in psychology and how to design and conduct your own research.

In the second year of the A level you'll deepen your understanding of human behaviour. You'll study additional topics under Approaches in psychology, Biopsychology, Research methods and Issues and debates in psychology. You then choose three further topics; one from each of three option groups.

**Issues and debates in psychology:** learn about the fascinating tendencies of human behaviour, with options looking into gender differences and the criminal mind.

**Issues and options in psychology:** you'll learn more about psychological concepts, research methods and ethical issues.

### Option one:

- relationships
- gender
- cognition and development.

### Option two:

- schizophrenia
- eating behaviour
- stress.

### Option three:

- aggression
- forensic psychology
- addiction.

## How will I be assessed?

At A level there are three exams, each account for one third of your A level. The three exams last 2 hours and are worth 96 marks each. The exams consist of multiple choice, short answer and extended writing questions.

# A level syllabus at a glance

## Compulsory content

- |                    |                                    |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 Social influence | 5 Approaches in Psychology         |
| 2 Memory           | 6 Biopsychology                    |
| 3 Attachment       | 7 Research methods                 |
| 4 Psychopathology  | 8 Issues and debates in Psychology |

## Optional: choose one topic from each option

### Option 1

- 9 Relationships
- 10 Gender
- 11 Cognition and development

### Option 2

- 12 Schizophrenia
- 13 Eating behaviour
- 14 Stress

### Option 3

- 15 Aggression
- 16 Forensic Psychology
- 17 Addiction

## Paper 1: Introductory Topics in Psychology

### What's assessed

Compulsory content 1-4 above

### Assessed

Written exam: 2 hours  
96 marks in total  
33.3% of A level

### Questions

Section A: Multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 24 marks  
Section B: Multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 24 marks  
Section C: Multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 24 marks  
Section D: Multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 24 marks.

## Paper 2: Psychology in Context

### What's assessed

Compulsory content 5-7 above

### Assessed

Written exam: 2 hours

96 marks in total

33.3% of A level

### Questions

Section A: Multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 24 marks

Section B: Multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 24 marks

Section C: Multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 48 marks.

## Paper 3: Issues and Options in Psychology

### What's assessed

Compulsory content 8 and above

Optional content, one from option 1, 9-11 one from option 2, 12-14 and one from option 3, 15-17 above

### Assessed

Written exam: 2 hours

96 marks in total

33.3% of A level

### Questions

Section A: Multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 24 marks

Section B: One topic from option 1, 9-11 above, multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 24 marks

Section C: One topic from option 2, 12-14 above, multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 24 marks

Section D: One topic from option 3, 15-17 above, multiple choice, short answer and extended writing, 24 marks.

## Where will A level Psychology take you?

Psychology is a great subject to study because it will not only give you several transferable skills, it will also teach you more about the way people think. An understanding of the human mind is useful in a number of careers.

“Studying how the human mind develops and functions allowed me to grasp the elements of child development quickly and confidently. To this day I still apply aspects of my A-level Psychology learning to my everyday classroom practice.”

**Emily Burningham**  
Primary School Teacher

“I loved studying A level Psychology. I learned so much that has stayed with me. One thing that really helped me during my PHD during my PhD studies and in my current job is that for every answer you find, there are always more fascinating questions which arise”.

**Kat Elliott**  
Scientific software support

“I chose to study A level Psychology out of a desire to understand why people do what they do, but it has proved to have far wider applications. The knowledge I gained from the course was useful during the study of business management theories, and the reading and comprehension of case studies helped me develop skills which have helped in the study of law.”

**Adrian Roux, Student – Postgraduate Bachelor of Laws (LLB)**  
University of Cape Town, South Africa

## Possible degree options

According to [bestcourse4me.com](http://bestcourse4me.com), the top seven degree courses taken by students who have an A level in Psychology are:

- Psychology
- English studies
- Sociology
- Business studies
- Teaching
- Sport and exercise science
- Law.

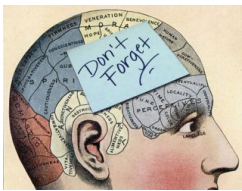


# Questions in the classroom



## Social influence

What makes us conform? What are the variables affecting conformity including group size and peer influence? How far would we go in obeying authority figures? What explains our obedience? How do we learn to accept the authority of others? What explanations are there for resistance to social influence in the behaviour of strongly independent individuals?



## Memory

What is the difference between short-term memory and long-term memory? How is information transferred from one to the other? Do we remember in pictures or in language? Why do we forget? What explanations are there for forgetting? How much do we rely on cues to remember things? How would we go about improving the accuracy of eyewitness testimony?



## Attachment

How important are the first relationships that babies form with their parents or carers? To what extent do these influence the quality/ type of relationships that s/he will form later on as an adult?

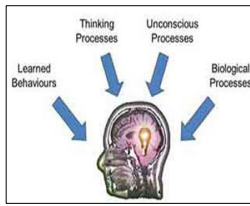
How should a parent or carer interact with their baby to ensure that s/he is securely attached? And how might we test this child in order to assess the strength of their attachment? What effect does it have upon the child if they are insecurely attached or have been deprived of the opportunity to form an attachment in the first year of life?

And how important are fathers in children's development?



## Psychopathology

There are more than two hundred psychological disorders that differ in symptoms and the degree to which they affect a person's ability to function. What is mental illness? How do we define abnormality? What are the characteristics of phobias, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)? How do we treat phobias? What is depression and how do we treat it? Do we treat it with therapy or medication, or both?



## Approaches in Psychology

What are the origins of Psychology as a distinct branch of study in its own right? What are the key approaches in Psychology and what suggestions does each make as to how we should best investigate and understand human behaviour and experience?



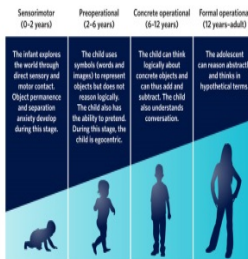
## Biopsychology

How is our nervous system organised and how does it work? How do we investigate brain function and what does each part of the brain do? What is the meaning and cause of what we call 'body clocks'?



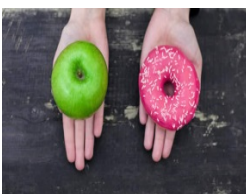
## Research methods

How should unbiased psychological studies be designed? How do we present and statistically analyse data collected appropriately? What implications do psychological research have for our economy?



## Cognition and development

How do children develop the ability to think and reason? Are babies born as 'blank slates' knowing nothing, or are they born with some form of innate knowledge? Does cognitive development take place in stages which are biologically programmed and which unfold naturally without teaching as the child matures (Piaget)? Or is the ability to think and reason the 'outcome of a fundamentally social process' as children interact with their family and friends (Vygotsky)?



## Eating behaviour

How do our bodies detect hunger and develop preferences for certain types of food? To what extent is anorexia caused by our genes rather than our environment? Why do some diets lead to more effective weight loss than others?



## Teaching arrangements

- Teaching takes place in discussion seminars.
- Each lesson involves some reading; some discussion; and some writing.
- Each teacher will set work weekly.
- You will have three teachers.
- Teachers: Claire Warren, Penny Staufenberg, Michael Mulligan (Head of Psychology), and Dr Elliott Wolsey.

Email us for further information

[cwarren@norwich-school.org.uk](mailto:cwarren@norwich-school.org.uk)

[pstaufenberg@norwich-school.org.uk](mailto:pstaufenberg@norwich-school.org.uk)

[mmulligan@norwich-school.org.uk](mailto:mmulligan@norwich-school.org.uk)

[ewolsey@norwich-school.org.uk](mailto:ewolsey@norwich-school.org.uk)

Further information can be found at

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/psychology/as-and-a-level/psychology-7181-7182>