

AQA A-LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

STUDENT HANDBOOK



Student Name:

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

AQA A-Level Psychology is a linear qualification, which means that you will sit all the exams at the end of the A-Level course (normally after two years of study).

The topics you will study include:

- 1 Social influence
- 2 Memory
- 3 Attachment
- 4 Clinical Psychology and Mental Health
- 5 Approaches in Psychology
- 6 Biopsychology
- 7 Research Methods
- 8 Issues and Debates in Psychology



Option 1	Relationships, Gender or Cognition and Development
Option 2	Schizophrenia, Eating Behaviour, or Stress
Option 3	Forensic Psychology, Aggression, or Addiction

How will I be Assessed?

You will be assessed across three exam papers:

Paper	What is assessed?	Assessed	Questions
Paper 1: Introductory Topics in Psychology	Compulsory content 1-4 above	Written exam: 2 hours 96 marks in total 33.3% of A-Level	Sections A/B/C/D: Multiple choice, short answer and extended writing (24 marks each)
Paper 2: Psychology in Context	Compulsory content 5-7 above	Written exam: 2 hours 96 marks in total 33.3% of A-Level	Sections A/B: multiple choice, short answer and extended writing. (24 marks each) Section C: multiple choice, short answer and extended writing. (48 marks)
Paper 3: Issues and Options in Psychology	Compulsory content 8 above Optional content, one from option 1, one from option 2, one from option 3 above	Written exam: 2 hours 96 marks in total 33.3% of A-Level	Sections A/B/C/D: multiple choice, short answer and extended writing. (24marks each)

PAPER 1 INTRODUCTORY TOPICS IN PSYCHOLOGY

1 Social influence

- Types of conformity: internalisation, and compliance. Explanations for conformity: informational social influence and normative social influence, and variables affecting conformity including group size, unanimity and task difficulty as investigated by Asch.
- Explanations for obedience: agentic state and legitimacy of authority, and situational variables affecting obedience including proximity, location and uniform, as investigated by Milgram. Dispositional explanation for obedience: the Authoritarian Personality.
- Explanations of resistance to social influence, including social support and locus of control.
- Minority influence including reference to consistency, commitment and flexibility.

2 Memory

- The multi-store model of memory: sensory register, short-term memory and long-term memory. Features of each store: coding, capacity and duration.
- The working memory model: central executive, phonological loop, visuo-spatial sketchpad and episodic buffer. Features of the model: coding and capacity.
- Explanations for forgetting: proactive and retroactive interference and retrieval failure due to absence of cues.
- Factors affecting eyewitness testimony: leading questions and post-event discussion; anxiety; the cognitive interview technique.

3 Attachment

- Animal studies of attachment: Lorenz and Harlow.
- Explanations of attachment: learning theory and Bowlby's monotropic theory. The concepts of a critical period and an internal working model.
- Ainsworth's 'Strange Situation'. Types of attachment: secure, insecure-avoidant and insecure-resistant. Cultural variations in attachment, including van Ijzendoorn.
- Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation. English and Romanian Adoptees Project, and the effects of institutionalisation: effects of institutionalisation.
- The influence of early attachment on childhood and adult relationships, including the role of an internal working model.

4 Clinical Psychology and Mental Health

- Definitions in the field of mental health, including deviation from social/cultural norms, failure to function adequately, statistical infrequency and deviation from ideal mental health.
- The behavioural, emotional and cognitive characteristics of phobias, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).
- The behavioural approach to explaining and treating phobias: the two-process model, including classical and operant conditioning; systematic desensitisation, including relaxation and use of hierarchy; flooding.
- The cognitive approach to explaining and treating depression: Beck's negative triad and Ellis's ABC model; cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), including challenging irrational thoughts.
- The biological approach to explaining and treating OCD: genetic and neural explanations; drug therapy.

PAPER 2 PSYCHOLOGY IN CONTEXT

5 Approaches in Psychology

The basic assumptions of the following approaches:

- Learning approaches: the behaviourist approach, including classical conditioning and Pavlov's research, operant conditioning, types of reinforcement and Skinner's research; social learning theory including imitation, identification, vicarious reinforcement, the role of mediational processes and Bandura's research.
- The cognitive approach: the study of internal mental processes, the role of schema, the use of models.
- The biological approach: the genetic basis of behaviour: genotype, phenotype and evolution. Influence of biological structures and neurochemistry on behaviour. Cognitive neuroscience.
- The psychodynamic approach: the role of the unconscious, the structure of personality, that is Id, Ego and Super ego, defence mechanisms including repression, denial and displacement, psychosexual stages.
- Humanistic Psychology: free will, self-actualisation and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, congruence, the role of conditions of worth.
- Comparison of approaches.

6 Biopsychology

- 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
- 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, including functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI); electroencephalogram (EEGs) and event-related potentials (ERPs); post-mortem examinations.

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.

- Experimental method. Types of experiment, laboratory and field experiments; natural and quasi-experiments.
- Observational techniques. Types of observation: naturalistic and controlled observation; covert and overt observation; participant and non-participant observation.
- Self-report techniques. Questionnaires; interviews, structured and unstructured.
- Correlations. Analysis of the relationship between co-variables. The difference between correlations and experiments.
- Coding in Content Analysis.
- Case studies.

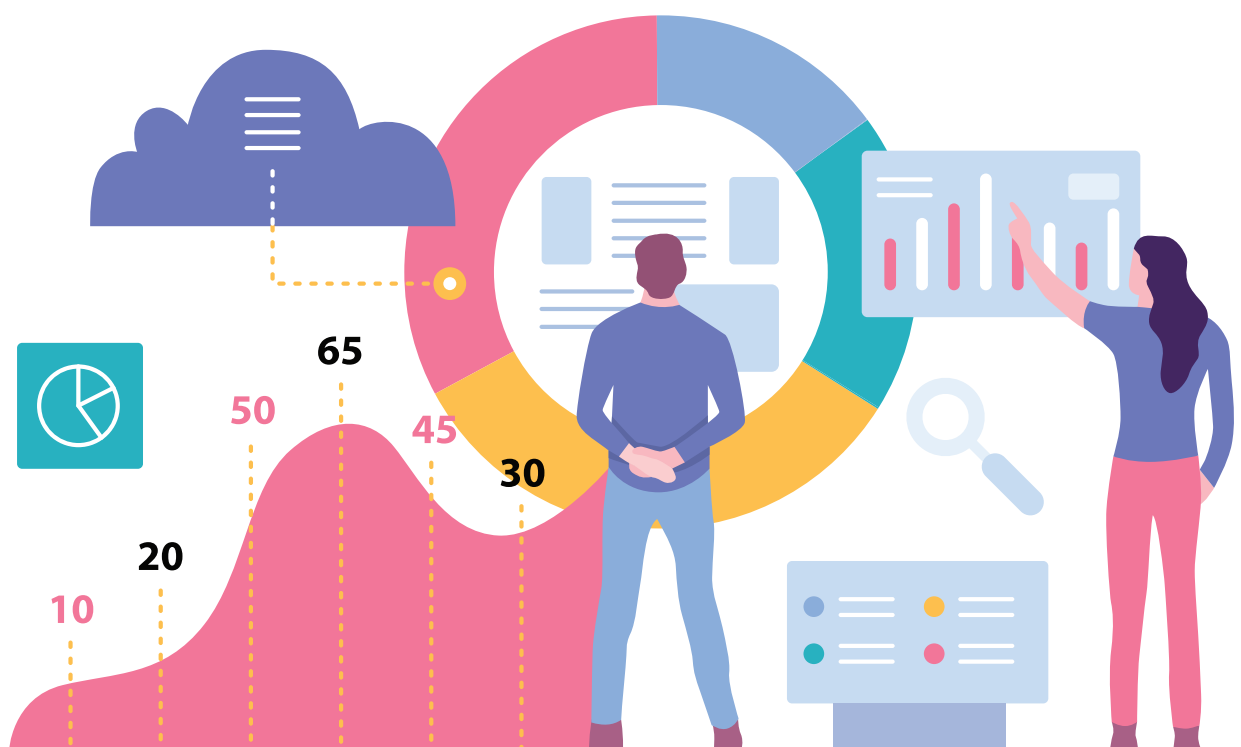
7.1 Scientific process

- Aims: stating aims, the difference between aims and hypotheses.
- Hypotheses: directional and non-directional.
- Sampling: the difference between population and sample; sampling method including: random, systematic, stratified, opportunity and volunteer; implications of sampling methods, including bias and generalisation.
- Pilot studies and the aims of piloting.
- Experimental designs: repeated measures, independent groups, matched pairs.
- Observational design: behavioural categories; event sampling; time sampling.

- Questionnaire construction, including use of open and closed questions; design of interviews.
- Variables: manipulation and control of variables, including independent, dependent, extraneous; operationalisation of variables.
- Control: random allocation and counterbalancing, control groups, randomisation and standardisation.
- Demand characteristics and investigator effects.
- Ethics, including the role of the British Psychological Society's code of ethics; ethical issues in the design and conduct of psychological studies; dealing with ethical issues in research.
- The role of peer review in the scientific process.
- The implications of psychological research for the economy.
- Reliability across all methods of investigation. Ways of measuring reliability: test-retest and inter-observer; improving reliability.
- Types of validity across all methods of investigation: face validity, concurrent validity, ecological validity and temporal validity. Measurement of validity. Improving validity.
- Features of science: objectivity and the empirical method; replicability and falsifiability; theory construction and hypothesis testing; paradigms and paradigm shifts.
- Reporting psychological investigations. Sections of a scientific report: abstract, introduction, method, results, discussion and referencing.

7.2 Data Handling and Analysis

- Quantitative and qualitative data; the distinction between qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques.
- Primary and secondary data, including meta-analysis.
- Descriptive statistics: measures of central tendency – mean, median, mode; calculation of mean, median and mode; measures of dispersion; range and standard deviation; calculation of range; calculation of percentages; positive, negative and zero correlations.
- Presentation and display of quantitative data: graphs, tables, scattergrams, bar charts, histograms.
- Distributions: normal and skewed distributions; characteristics of normal and skewed distributions.
- Analysis and interpretation of correlation, including correlation coefficients.
- Levels of measurement: nominal, ordinal and interval.



7.3 Inferential Testing

Students should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of inferential testing and be familiar with the use of inferential tests.

- Introduction to statistical testing; the sign test.
- Probability and significance: use of statistical tables and critical values in interpretation of significance; Type I and Type II errors.
- Factors affecting the choice of statistical test, including level of measurement and experimental design. When to use the following tests: Spearman's rho, Pearson's r, Wilcoxon, Mann-Whitney, related t-test, unrelated t-test and Chi-Squared test.

PAPER 3 ISSUES AND OPTIONS IN PSYCHOLOGY

8 Issues and Debates in Psychology

- Gender and culture in Psychology – universality and bias. Gender bias including androcentrism and alpha and beta bias; cultural bias, including ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.
- Free will and determinism: hard determinism and soft determinism; biological, environmental and psychic determinism. The scientific emphasis on causal explanations.
- The nature-nurture debate: the relative importance of heredity and environment in determining behaviour; the interactionist approach.
- Holism and reductionism: levels of explanation in Psychology. Biological reductionism and environmental (stimulus-response) reductionism.
- Idiographic and nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation.
- Socially Sensitive Research.



Tip: From now, highlight the options which your college/school has chosen

9 Option – Relationships

- Factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships: self-disclosure; physical attractiveness, including the matching hypothesis; filter theory, including social demography, similarity in attitudes and complementarity.
- Theories of romantic relationships: social exchange theory, equity theory and Rusbult's investment model of commitment, satisfaction, comparison with alternatives and investment. Duck's phase model of relationship breakdown: intra-psychic, dyadic, social and grave dressing phases.
- Online relationships: self-disclosure, use of deception, effects of absence of gating..
- Parasocial relationships: levels of parasocial relationships, the absorption addiction model and the attachment theory explanation.



10 Option – Gender

- The role of chromosomes and hormones (testosterone, oestrogen and oxytocin) in biological sex. Diversity in sex development, including androgen insensitivity syndrome, Klinefelter's syndrome and Turner's syndrome.
- Gender identities, including binary, non-binary and gender fluid. How gender has been measured using the Bem Sex Role Inventory.
- Biological explanations of gender development, including chromosomes and hormones.
- Cognitive explanations of gender development, Kohlberg's theory, gender identity, gender stability and gender constancy; Martin and Halverson's gender schema theory.
- Social learning theory as applied to gender development. The influence of culture and media on gender roles.
- Gender incongruence: biological and social/cultural explanations..

11 Option – Cognition and Development

- Piaget's theory of cognitive development: schemas, assimilation, accommodation, equilibration, stages of intellectual development. Characteristics of these stages, including object permanence, conservation, egocentrism and class inclusion.
- Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, including the zone of proximal development and scaffolding.
- Baillargeon's explanation of early infant abilities, including knowledge of the physical world; violation of expectation research.
- The development of social cognition: Selman's levels of perspective-taking; theory of mind, the Sally-Anne study. The role of the mirror neuron system in social cognition.

12 Option – Schizophrenia

- Positive symptoms of schizophrenia, including hallucinations and delusions. Negative symptoms of schizophrenia, including speech poverty and avolition. Issues in diagnosis: co-morbidity, culture and gender bias and symptom overlap.
- Biological explanations for schizophrenia: genetics and neural correlates, including the dopamine hypothesis.
- Psychological explanations for schizophrenia: family dysfunction and cognitive explanations, including dysfunctional thought processing.
- Drug therapy: typical and atypical antipsychotics.
- Cognitive behaviour therapy and family therapy as used in the treatment of schizophrenia.
- The importance of an interactionist approach in explaining and treating schizophrenia; the diathesis-stress model.

13 Option – Eating Behaviour

- Explanations for food preferences: the evolutionary explanation, including reference to neophobia and taste aversion; the role of learning in food preference, including social and cultural influences.
- Neural and hormonal mechanisms involved in the control of eating behaviour, including the role of the hypothalamus, ghrelin and leptin.
- Biological explanations for anorexia nervosa, genetic and neural explanations.
- Psychological explanations for anorexia nervosa: family systems theory, including enmeshment, autonomy and control; social learning theory, including modelling, reinforcement and media; cognitive theory, including distortions and irrational beliefs.
- Biological explanations for obesity, including genetic and neural.
- Psychological explanations for obesity, including restraint theory, disinhibition and the boundary model.

14 Option – Stress

- The physiology of stress, including general adaptation syndrome, the hypothalamic pituitary-adrenal system, the sympathomedullary pathway and the role of cortisol.
- The role of stress in illness, including reference to immunosuppression and cardiovascular disorders.
- Sources of stress: life changes and daily hassles. Workplace stress, including the effects of workload and control.
- Measuring stress: self-report scales (Social Readjustment Ratings Scale and Hassles and Uplifts Scale) and physiological measures, including skin conductance response.
- Individual differences in stress: personality types A, B and C and associated behaviours; hardiness, including commitment, challenge and control.
- Managing and coping with stress: drug therapy, stress inoculation therapy and biofeedback. Gender differences in coping with stress. The role of social support in coping with stress; types of social support, including instrumental, emotional and esteem support.

15 Option – Aggression

- Neural and hormonal mechanisms in aggression, including the roles of the limbic system, serotonin and testosterone. Genetic factors in aggression, including the MAOA gene.
- The ethological explanation of aggression, including reference to innate releasing mechanisms and fixed action patterns. Evolutionary explanations of human aggression.
- Social psychological explanations of human aggression, including the frustration-aggression hypothesis, social learning theory as applied to human aggression, and de-individuation.
- Institutional aggression in the context of prisons: dispositional and situational explanations.
- Media influences on aggression, including the effects of computer games. The role of desensitisation, disinhibition and cognitive priming.

16 Option – Forensic Psychology

- Offender profiling: the typology approach, including organised and disorganised types; the data driven approach, including investigative psychology; geographical profiling.
- Biological explanations of offending behaviour: 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.
- Dealing with offending behaviour: the aims of custodial sentencing and the psychological effects of custodial sentencing. Behaviour modification in custody. Anger management and restorative justice programmes.

17 Option – Addiction

- Describing addiction: physical and psychological dependence, tolerance and withdrawal syndrome.
- Risk factors in the development of addiction, including genetic vulnerability, personality and social influences.
- Explanations for nicotine addiction: brain neurochemistry, including the role of dopamine, and learning theory as applied to nicotine addiction, including reference to cue reactivity.
- Explanations for gambling addiction: learning theory as applied to gambling, including reference to partial and variable reinforcement; cognitive theory as applied to gambling, including reference to cognitive bias.
- Reducing addiction: drug therapy; behavioural interventions, including aversion therapy and covert sensitisation; cognitive behaviour therapy.
- The application of the following theories of behaviour change to addictive behaviour; Prochaska's six-stage model of behaviour change.

EXPECTATIONS

As a Psychology student, you will be expected to:

- ✓ Meet all deadlines. If unavoidable circumstances arise and you are unable to complete work, this is something you must discuss with your tutor
- ✓ Attend all lessons on time
- ✓ Come to the lessons prepared
- ✓ Show respect to other students and your tutor
- ✓ Ask for support if you are struggling

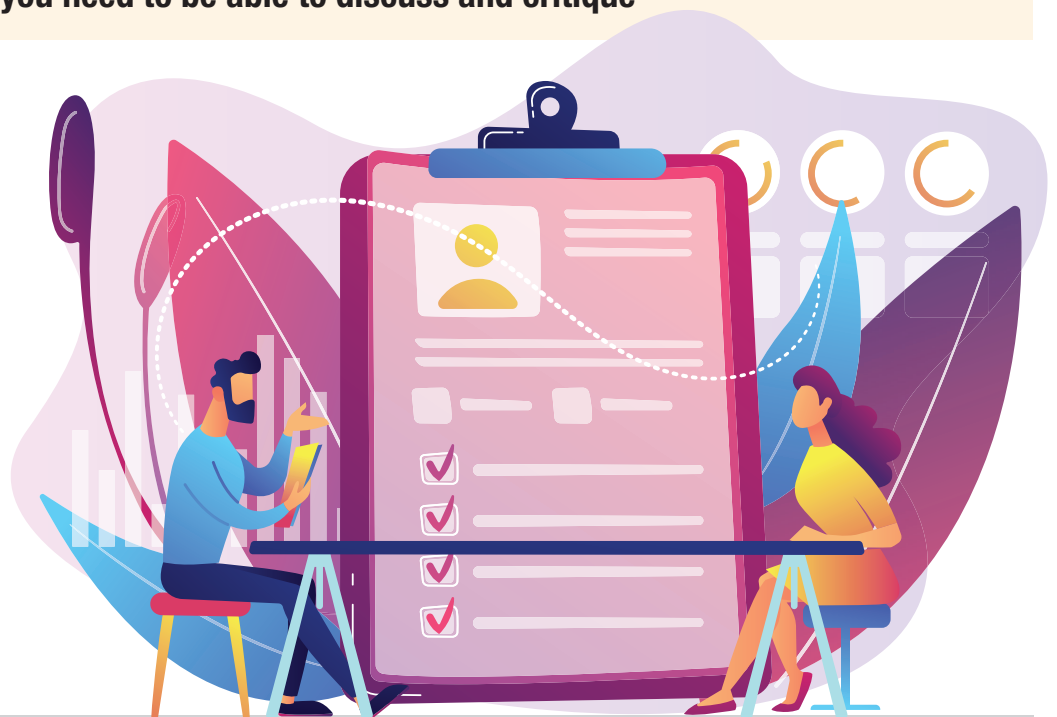
Useful Resources for A Level Psychology



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Reminder of Skills and Assessment Objectives

A01	Knowledge & Understanding- so you need to know the facts!
A02	Application- you need to be able to relate the psychology to the stem/ scenario
A03	Evaluation- you need to be able to discuss and critique



EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS

Multiple-choice

- 1 In van Ijzendoorn's research on cross-cultural variations in attachment, which one of the following countries had the highest number of insecure-resistant children? Shade **one** box only.

(1 mark)

- A China
- B Germany
- C Israel
- D Sweden

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- 2 Which **one** of the following is most associated with informational social influence? Shade **one** box only.

(1 mark)

- A It is an emotional, rather than cognitive, process
- B It is based on a desire to be liked, rather than a desire to be right
- C It is more likely to lead to a permanent, rather than temporary, change in attitude
- D It occurs in unambiguous situations, rather than those where there is no obvious answer

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Short answer

- 1 One explanation for forgetting is interference.
Using an example, explain what is meant by retroactive interference.

(3 marks)

- 2 Nine-year-old Annie asks her mother, "What was I like as a toddler?"
"Oh, you could be a bit difficult," Annie's mother replies. "You used to scream when I left you at nursery. When I returned to pick you up, you would run towards me and then push me away."

- a Identify the attachment type that Annie's mother is describing.

(1 mark)

b Distinguish between **two other** types of attachment.

(4 mark)

Extended Questions

1 Outline and evaluate research into duration of memory.

(8 marks)

2 Discuss research into the localisation of brain function.

(16 marks)

3 Max has a phobia of the sea. On a family holiday as a child, he was carried away by the tide and had to be rescued by a lifeguard. Now he has a family of his own, Max refuses to go on beach holidays.

Discuss the two-process model of phobias. Refer to Max's phobia of the sea in your answer.

(16 marks)

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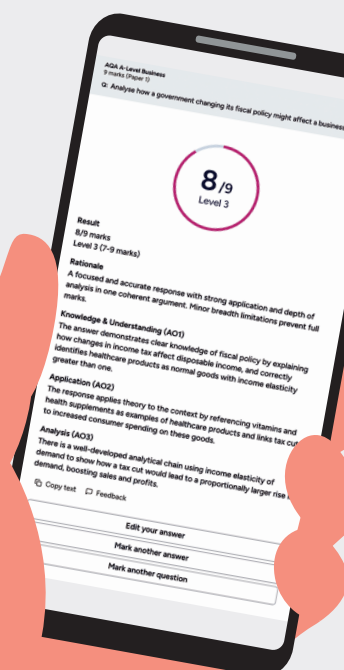
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