

Structured Fast Track A level Psychology

Course sample

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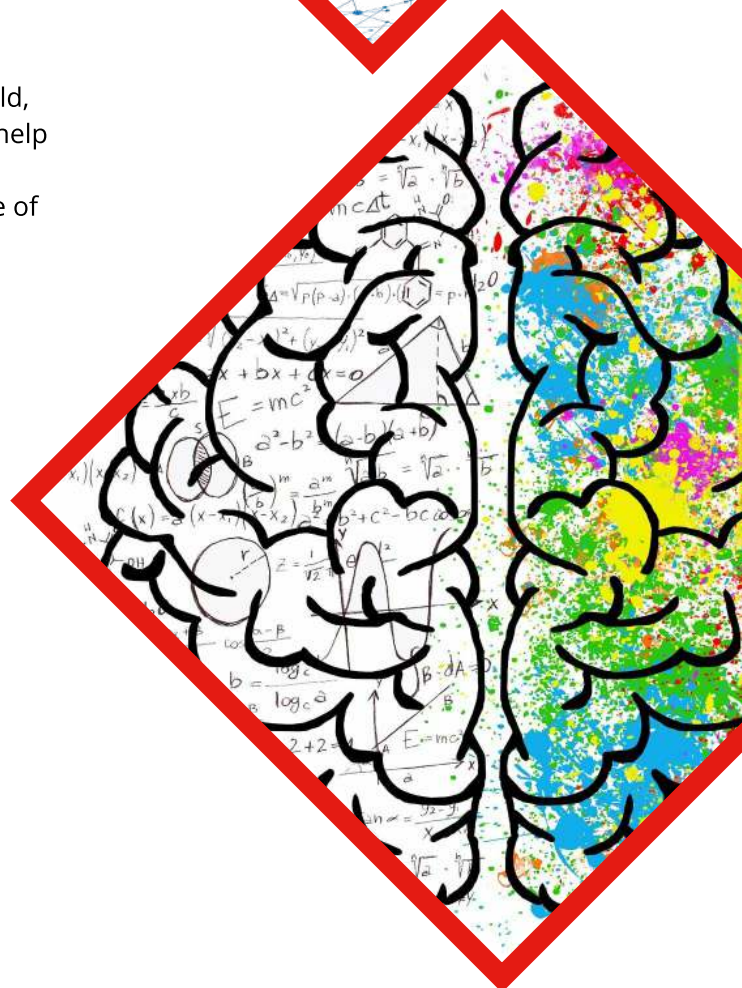
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So what will a course topic look like?

Course content

NEC's Structured Fast Track A level Psychology course will follow the same topics as Pearson Edexcel's psychology A level but has a set schedule, allowing you to complete the course within one academic year rather than two.

Section 1: Approaching psychology

Introduction to psychology and its origins

Learning and cognitive approaches

The biological approach and biopsychology

**Let's look at part of 'Topic 1
Introduction to psychology
and its origins'**

Section 2: Memory

Multi-store model of memory

Working memory model

Explanations for forgetting

Eyewitness testimony

Section 3: Social influence: conformity and obedience

Conformity

Obedience

Resistance to social influence

Minority influence and social change

Section 4: Developmental psychology: attachment

Development of attachment

Explanations of attachment

Types of attachment

Maternal deprivation

Section 5: Psychopathology

Definitions of abnormality

Phobias, depression and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

The behavioural approach to phobias

The cognitive approach to depression

The biological approach to OCD

Section 6: Research methods

Research methods

Scientific processes

Data analysis and presentation

Maths resources

Section 7: Approaches and debates

The psychodynamic approach

The humanistic approach

Further biopsychology

Gender and culture in psychology

Free will and determinism

The nature–nurture debate

Holism and reductionism

Idiopathic and nomothetic approaches

Ethical implications of research studies

Comparing approaches

Section 8: Schizophrenia

Classifying schizophrenia

Explanations for schizophrenia

Therapies for schizophrenia

The interactionist approach

Section 9: Cognition and development

Piaget's theory of cognitive development

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development

Baillargeon and early infant abilities

The development of social cognition

Section 10: Aggression and further research methods

Biopsychological explanations of aggression

Ethological and evolutionary explanations of aggression

Social explanations for human aggression

Institutional aggression

Media influences on aggression

Psychology as a science

Inferential testing

Choosing a statistical test



Topic 1

Introduction to psychology and its origins

Introduction

What exactly is psychology? Why is it considered a science? What does studying psychology involve? This topic explores some of these important questions, starting with an attempt to answer the basic question of what psychology actually is.

Although psychology is a relatively young discipline, it is easier to understand its current concerns if they are viewed in a historical context. Therefore this topic also explores emergence of psychology as a science and the origins of some of the current theoretical approaches as well as introducing the different approaches used in psychology.

Exam hint

The origins of psychology, which includes Wundt, introspection and the emergence of psychology as a science, are required for the AS and A level examinations.



You will probably need about 4 hours to complete this topic.

Objectives

When you completed this topic you should be able to:

- explain what psychology is
- recognise how psychology can be applied to understanding people's behaviour
- describe the theory proposed by Wundt
- explain the use of introspection
- describe how psychology developed into a science out of the domain of philosophy.

Looking for shared behaviour

Ever since human life began, there never has been, nor ever will be, anyone just like you. You are unique. That is not to say you don't have anything in common with other people – of course you do. There are many similarities as well as differences in the ways you think and behave and the ways that other people think and behave. Looking for these similarities is one of the main tasks of psychology.

Activity 1

(Allow 10 minutes)

Here are some examples of behaviour. Think about whether these habits apply to you. Put either a tick or a cross against each statement. Then decide whether you think each statement is true for most people. Again, put either a tick or a cross against each statement.

	True for you?	True for most people?
When talking to friends at a party, people still hear someone speaking in a far corner if that person mentions their name.		
People who are rewarded for doing something well, or punished for doing something wrong, may then behave in ways that ensure another reward and avoid another punishment in the future.		
People often seem to work harder when someone important is watching than if they work alone.		
People do things they don't really want to because their friends persuade them to.		
People's best friends are mostly very similar to themselves.		
When people are nervous or anxious, they often prefer to be with others who are in the same state.		

	True for you?	True for most people?
People involved in group activities (such as singing in a choir or pulling a tug-of-war rope) often put less effort into the activity than they would if they were the soloist and their individual effort was being measured.		

You probably found that some of these observations were not only true for you, but were also true for most people. It seems that we have many aspects of our behaviour in common. For the last hundred years or so, psychologists and others have been looking for the principles that underlie shared behaviour and, in this course, you will find out about what has been discovered so far.

However, as we said at the start, you are also unique. There may be many ways in which the observations above do not apply to you.

Psychologists are therefore also interested in the ways in which people differ from each other. This area is usually called the study of individual differences.

Did you find it difficult to decide if some of the statements in Activity 1 were true for most people? Your instincts may tell you that many of them are, but you probably don't have any actual evidence, apart from your own experience.

Psychologists are concerned with gathering evidence, which will enable them to make an intelligent analysis of people's behaviour.

Your expectations of psychology

Activity 2

(Allow 10 minutes)

Make a list of five questions that you think having some knowledge of psychology might help you to answer.

The questions can be as specific or as general as you like, such as, 'How do children learn?' or 'Why do people get angry?' The questions should be ones that you personally find interesting.

This activity is intended only to help you to think about what you hope to learn from a study of psychology and which areas you find particularly interesting.

You will be asked to refer back to your list later in this topic and see if your expectations are still the same.

Definitions of psychology

Psychology is a vast subject and so it is not easy to provide a single definition. However, one of the earliest definitions was that psychology was 'the study of mental experiences and consciousness'. Another view claimed that it was 'the study of the unconscious mind'. Later on, psychology was called 'the study of behaviour', and more recently, 'the study of the individual'.

The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology says: 'Psychology simply cannot be defined ... it really isn't a thing at all, it is about a thing, or many things.' So where does this leave us? We are embarking on a course of study, but cannot even define what it is that we're supposed to be studying! An optimist would say that this is not a problem – it's a challenge. And if that's the way you approach the study of psychology, so much the better.

For now, we'll say that psychology is that branch of knowledge concerned with studying human (and some other animal) behaviour and human experiences, or as Atkinson et al. (1999) put it: 'the scientific study of behaviour and mental processes'. Clearly, a huge range and diversity of topics are included within psychology. An understanding of the different areas of psychology will help to make the range and diversity manageable – for this reason, this topic provides an overview of the subject.

Psychology developed from the nineteenth-century philosophical view that it was appropriate to apply the methods and principles of the natural sciences to the study of human beings, and from the advances made in sciences such as biology. You will investigate the historical context of psychology later in this topic.

You can read more about definitions of psychology at:
<https://www.verywellmind.com/psychology-4014660>

Psychologists have applied their understanding of people's behaviour in many aspects of our lives. There's so much to be discovered in just about every area of human experience.

Psychologists use a number of different research techniques, which you will learn about as you work through the course. They are



discussed in more detail in Section 6. All the techniques, however, aim to produce evidence that is **verifiable** – that is, other people with the expectation of producing the same results can repeat the studies. If the same results are not obtained, then it should be possible to uncover the source of the difference.

Activity 3

(Allow 5 minutes)

If results or data are to be verifiable (so that other people would be able to repeat the study and get the same results), what implications do you think that has for the way the (is carried out?

Write down two ideas that come to mind.

You might find this tough if you are not familiar with the workings of scientific investigation.

If results or data are to be verifiable, they must fulfil certain conditions:

- The study must be carried out and reported with precision. Just as a chemist in a laboratory would not simply add an unmeasured dash of dilute hydrochloric acid to a mixture in a test tube, so a psychologist must be as precise as possible in the conditions for a given study.
- The data must be objective rather than subjective. Objective measures are not influenced by personal feelings, opinions, biases or preferences and their accuracy can be examined.

Interpreting evidence

Although the collection of evidence in psychology is very important we don't want to leave you with the impression that psychology is only about collecting evidence. Evidence on its own has little meaning – the next stage is appropriate interpretation of that evidence.

During your course you will meet some rather fundamental disagreements between psychologists on what a particular study means and how the data should be interpreted. This is the point where personal experience can be of assistance to you in psychology. The knowledge that you have acquired in your

everyday life may suggest a new interpretation of a past study or new studies that should be carried out.

In studying A level Psychology you will find two major components:

- There is a substantial body of psychological knowledge.
- Perhaps even more important, there is material about the research techniques that psychologists use. An understanding of these techniques will allow you to begin not only to examine the interpretations of evidence from studies, but also to evaluate the quality of the evidence itself.

We have tried to give you some ideas of what you will gain from a study of psychology and hope that it is not too different from the responses you gave to Activity 2. All of us have unanswered questions about the nature and causes of human behaviour. Psychology often cannot provide all the answers to these questions, but it can help you to think about how such answers might be obtained.

Is psychology 'relevant'?

Many students, when they start psychology, wonder how relevant the subject will be. We'll look at how it can contribute to two areas:

- understanding yourself and the people that you meet, and
- some real-life problems.

Understanding yourself

Psychology will not necessarily give you a better understanding of yourself or, perhaps more importantly, more control over your behaviour. Psychology cannot yet answer some of the 'large' questions about human behaviour, such as why people get angry, and knowledge of the material that is available will not necessarily help you to understand yourself better. Similarly, a course in psychology will not enable you to understand more easily the hidden thoughts and feelings of those you encounter.

However, knowledge of psychology can help you in some ways. For example, there is an effect known in psychology as 'bystander apathy'. This simply means the tendency of bystanders at an emergency to stand by rather than to intervene or offer help.

A series of studies have gone some way to uncovering why people act in this way; it is certainly not simply apathy that prevents them from offering help. One study (Beaman et al, 1978) staged an apparent emergency for students who had been fairly recently

taught about the causes of bystander apathy. Of these students, 43 per cent went to help compared to 25 per cent of students who had not heard about the material.

So, psychology, perhaps in some unexpected ways, may affect your behaviour. However, rather than being able to supply all answers, what you will derive from psychology is the ability to ask questions about behaviour.

Real-life problems

In answer to the second point made above, some psychology focuses on real-life problems and some does not. There are two useful distinctions that can be made.

Pure versus applied research

The first is between pure and applied research. The starting point for **applied research** is usually a practical problem and the aim is to provide an answer, both by conducting new studies and by drawing on pre-existing understanding, which relates to the problem area. **Fundamental** or **pure research** is, on the other hand, undertaken for its own sake, regardless of whether or not the knowledge can be applied. For example, one might want to know if very young infants show a preference for looking at pictures of human faces rather than at complex patterns. Sometimes this kind of research can appear rather remote from everyday experience. Pure research, however, always has a problem or interesting question about human behaviour as its starting point, although sometimes the question can be difficult to spot. Faces are a very important part of our environment; questions about how we recognise familiar faces and how this ability develops could lead to the study on young infants described above. At the root of most research in psychology are real-life problems or at least questions about recognisable real-life phenomena.

Person versus process approaches

The second important distinction is between person and process approaches within psychology (Legge, 1975). The **process approach** is likely to appear less 'relevant'. Psychologists who take this approach focus on processes such as memory, reasoning or learning. They usually study such processes separately and in the simplest form to which they can be reduced. Some of the research, if viewed out of context, can appear distinctly strange.

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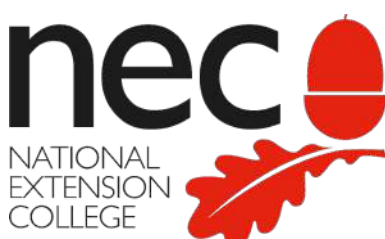
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