



Department  
for Education

# Psychology

**Draft GCSE subject content**

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# The content for psychology GCSE

## Introduction

1. GCSE subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject.
2. Together with the assessment objectives it provides the framework within which awarding organisations create the detail of their specifications, ensuring progression from key stage 3 national curriculum requirements, and the possibility for progression to A level.

## Aims and objectives

3. GCSE specifications in psychology must inspire and engage students by providing a broad, coherent, satisfying and worthwhile course of study which develops an understanding of the ideas and values that characterise 'self' and others. Students will be equipped with a psychological literacy that enables them to apply their knowledge and skills in their everyday lives, including making informed decisions about further study and career choices.
4. Students should carry out ethical, investigative activities appropriate for the study of psychology at this level, but students will not be directly assessed on these activities.
5. GCSE specifications in psychology must enable students to:
  - use specialist vocabulary, psychological concepts, terminology and convention to engage in the process of psychological enquiry
  - acquire knowledge and understanding of psychology, developing an understanding of self and others, and how psychological understanding can help to explain everyday social phenomena
  - understand how psychological research is conducted, including the role of scientific method and data analysis
  - present information, develop arguments and draw conclusions through a critical approach to psychological evidence, developing as reflective thinkers
  - develop an understanding of the relationship between psychology and personal, moral, social and cultural issues, and develop an understanding of ethical issues in psychology
  - develop an understanding of psychological issues, the contribution of psychology to individual, social and cultural diversity, and how psychology contributes to society

## Subject content

6. Specifications must require students to study the core areas of psychology, and psychological ideas, processes, techniques and procedures, through:

- the five compulsory topics: abnormal psychology; child development; criminal psychology; memory; and neuropsychology
- two optional topics from the following list: language and thought; non-verbal communication; perception; sleep and dreaming; social influence; and the self
- and research methods

7. For each topic area, excluding neuropsychology, specifications must require students to study and critically evaluate:

- two related theories or explanations, including the key features of each theory, or explanation in the context of the specific topic and area of psychology. The two theories or explanations are listed for each topic in the content below
- two studies related to each topic area. The studies are not listed in the content below and should be set out in specifications

## Knowledge, understanding and skills

8. GCSE specifications in psychology must reflect the learning outcomes, and must require students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of key features of the following core areas of psychology through the compulsory and optional topics, and research methods:

- biological – an understanding of biological concepts within psychology, including neuroscience and genetics as contributors to behaviour
- cognitive – an understanding of thought, information and mental processing as contributors to behaviour
- social – an understanding of the social area of psychology, the impact of social and environmental factors on behaviour and the influence of groups
- developmental – an understanding of how individuals change throughout their lives, with a particular focus on childhood and how both nature and nurture can affect individuals
- individual Differences – an understanding of the complex nature of human behaviour and experiences and why and how people are different

9. Specifications must require students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of:

- debates within psychology, including 'psychology as a science' and 'nature/nurture'
- how psychological knowledge and ideas change over time and how these inform our understanding of behaviour
- the contribution of psychology to an understanding of individual, social and cultural diversity
- the interrelationships between the core areas of psychology
- how the studies for each of their topic areas relates to the associated theory
- research methods as outlined in the content below

## Compulsory topic areas

### Abnormal Psychology <sup>1</sup>

- examples and definitions of abnormal behaviour and problems associated with defining abnormality
- two of the following disorders: Clinical Depression, Schizophrenia, Specific Phobias, or Autism Spectrum Disorder
- for the two disorders, students must know and understand: characteristics according to the International Classification of Disease (ICD); a biological explanation; a psychological explanation; and treatments

### Child Development

- stages of development including cognitive and brain development and the role of education and intelligence including Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development
- types of intelligence and how intelligence is measured
- stages of moral development, including Eisenberg's Theory of Moral Development

### Criminal Psychology

- explanations of why criminal/anti-social behaviour occurs, including The Social Learning Theory of Criminality and Eysenck's Criminal Personality Theory

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<sup>1</sup> For Abnormal Psychology there are no discrete theories that relate to each disorder. However, students gain an understanding of two disorders by studying the related biological and psychological explanations, including two relevant studies.

- the effects of punishment, alternatives to imprisonment, rehabilitation and reducing criminal/anti-social behaviour
- how psychology can inform criminal investigations including offender profiling

## Memory

- the structure and process of memory, including The Theory of Reconstructive Memory and The Multi-store Model of Memory
- features of short-term and long-term memory, including duration and capacity
- inputs and outputs of memory, and how different types of memory are encoded and stored

## Neuropsychology

- the structure and functions of the brain and how the brain works
- the basic actions of the brain and the nervous system, what neurons and synapses are, and how they interact to generate behaviours
- basic biochemistry and the role of neurotransmitters

## Optional topic areas

### Language and Thought

- explanations of thought and language including Piaget's Theory of the Relationship between Thought and Language and The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis
- how thoughts and the structure of language affects our view of the world
- how communication works in animals and how this compares to humans

### Non-Verbal Communication (NVC)

- examples of NVC including body language, gestures, tone and pitch of voice and facial expression
- explanations of non-verbal communication including The Evolutionary Theory and The Social Learning Theory of NVC
- situations where NVC may arise and the responses to NVC including cultural variations

### Perception

- explanations of sensation and perception, including The Direct Theory of Perception (Gibson) and The Constructivist Theory of Perception (Gregory)

- monocular and binocular depth cues, visual cues, visual illusions, and visual constancies, and the reasons for these
- perceptual set and the effects of the following factors on perception: motivation, expectation, emotion, and culture

### Sleep and Dreaming

- functions, features and benefits of sleep, including The Restoration Theory of Sleep
- internal and external influences on sleep, and the features and causes of sleep disorders
- the nature of dreaming including why and when dreaming occurs, and The Freudian Theory of Dreaming

### Social Influence

- the impact of social groups, situations and other people on an individual's thoughts and behaviour, including the role of dispositional factors in conformity and obedience
- the impact of peer pressure and majority influence, including The Theory of Normative Social Influence as an explanation for conformity
- obedience to authority, including the study of the situational factors that explain such behaviour including Agency Theory

### The Self

- definitions of 'the self', 'self-concept' and the role of identity and free will
- the Humanistic Theory of Self to explain the development of self-esteem and the development of personality and the role of internal influences such as temperament and the role of experience
- measuring personality, personality scales and personality types, including The Trait Theory of Self

### Research methods

10. GCSE specifications in psychology must require students to develop the following knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to psychological investigation and Research Methods:

- planning to conduct a psychological investigation and writing a hypothesis including null and alternative

- identifying different types of variables, including independent and dependent variables, and explaining the effect of extraneous variables and how to control for them
- describing target populations, samples, sampling methods, their associated strengths and weaknesses and how to apply them. Understanding the principles of sampling as applied to scientific data
- analysing and evaluating experimental designs including independent and repeated measures and their strengths and weaknesses
- designing and conducting experimental and non-experimental methods using the following:
  - types of experimental method: lab, field and natural
  - types of non-experimental method: interview, questionnaire, correlation, case study and observation
  - identifying strengths and weaknesses of the above methods, and types of research objectives for which they are most suitable
- using, understanding, interpreting and analysing numerical data and graphical representation of data (see Appendix A)
- knowledge, analysis and evaluation of experimental designs, including independent and repeated measures, their strengths and weaknesses
- analysing the planning and conducting of research, through the consideration of the reliability and validity of sampling methods, experimental designs, experimental and non-experimental methods
- demonstrating knowledge and understanding of ethical issues in psychological research, ethical guidelines, and ways of dealing with ethical issues



## Appendix A – mathematical requirements

In order to be able to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in psychology, students need to have been taught, and demonstrate competence, to select and apply the following areas of mathematics relevant to psychology:

### Arithmetic and numerical computation

- recognise and use expressions in decimal and standard form
- use ratios, fractions and percentages
- estimate results

### Handling data

- use an appropriate number of significant figures
- find arithmetic means
- construct and interpret frequency tables and diagrams, bar charts and histograms
- understand the principles of sampling as applied to scientific data
- understand the terms mean, median and mode
- use a scatter diagram to identify a correlation between two variables
- know the characteristics of normal distributions
- understand measures of dispersion, including range
- understand the differences between qualitative and quantitative data
- understand the difference between primary and secondary data
- translate information between graphical and numerical forms
- plot two variables from experimental or other data and interpret graphs

All mathematical content must be assessed within the lifetime of the specification.



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