

# Learning to Fly in Psychology

These are the skills and habits which outstanding students of Psychology develop. Do as many of these as possible to become completely independent in the subject and to develop the skills and knowledge needed to achieve A\* at A Level. **Remember that just doing what your teacher tells you - in your lessons and beyond - is not enough to develop your full potential in the subject.**

## In your lessons

- Contribute your ideas **verbally** and be an **active participant** in lessons – be confident to challenge or question ideas and concepts contributed by both the teacher and other students.
- Make sure you **follow tasks** in your notes – consciously highlight key concepts and define relevant key terminology. Consider adding **key terms** to a working glossary.
- Ask **questions** if you are unsure and need clarification.
- Make sufficient **additional notes** – don't just rely on workbooks and handouts but make your own additional notes based on the verbal contributions of teacher and students.
- Avoid **wasting time** – if you finish a task earlier than your peers look at the example exam questions for that topic from the bottom of each textbook page and have a go at answering them (both SAQ and LAQ) – submit them for marking.
- Avoid working **too far ahead** on new tasks or topic areas in lesson times – focus instead on extending your knowledge of current topic areas to add depth to your knowledge.
- Review additional sources of information – use more than one textbook and consult the wider reading articles you are given.
- Move yourself away from sources of distraction – don't let another student be the cause of you achieving below your full potential. You won't have the same lesson again so make it count!

## Between your lessons

- Challenge yourself to complete **additional practice exam questions** on both the AS and A2 content, particularly for areas that were covered some time ago or that you find particularly challenging – submit your work for marking and feedback.
- **Consolidate** your notes regularly – the content in Psychology is vast, especially now you will sit linear exams. Ensure you regularly summarise your learning to key notes sufficient to allow you to answer a 12/16 mark question on each topic area e.g. 3 key AO1 points and 3 key AO3 points for a 12 mark essay plan.
- **Read ahead** on upcoming topic areas and consider any questions you may have that you want to be clarified in class.
- **Plan essay responses**, ideally for every topic area that you could have an essay question for – this is essential exam preparation and should be no more than a series of key words to act as prompts for your essay. If you can answer an essay question you can be confident you would be able to answer the SAQ also.
- **Test yourself** on the content from the previous lesson – if you come across areas you are struggling with make a note of them and let your teacher know or research them further yourself or with your peers.

## Beyond your lessons

- Engage in **wider reading** of topic areas – look up recent research articles using internet search engines or try to find the original research reports from key research studies covered in class.
- Access resources from **other A Level Psychology textbooks** available in the library – this will demonstrate to examiners that you have a greater breadth of knowledge and haven't just learnt the content from one textbook.
- Ask your teacher for **additional reading resources** if you are interested in a particular topic that is

being covered, or topics beyond the curriculum that interest you.

- Read **current articles** reviewing topic areas including newspaper articles or articles from psychology magazines e.g. Psychology Review (available in the library).
- Watch **psychology documentaries** – for most topics there are relevant programs exploring research and implications from a current perspective, particularly from the BBC. Have a look on YouTube to see what you can find.
- Watch **psychological films or listen to psychology podcasts** – internet search engines are a good place to start if you are unsure what to watch/listen to or ask your teacher for recommendations.
- Attend **free lectures or seminars** – keep an eye out for adverts from universities that host student days.
- **Read books** from the suggested reading list provided in your Student Subject Handbook or ask your teacher for recommendations.
- Consider how the content we are covering in Psychology might apply to your other subject areas and seek **cross-curricular links**. Also think about how the content may apply in your own life and speak to friends and family about this.
- Practice, practice practice – you can never do enough practice questions whether they be MCQ, SAQ or LAQ. There are plenty in your textbooks or you can access the past papers, mark schemes and examiner's reports on the AQA website. Hand these in to your teacher for marking and feedback.

**Of course we recognise that our students have busy lives and that this level of engagement is not always possible all the time - but this is what you should aim for if you want to reach the highest level in the subject. You don't need to do ALL of these things to improve - just doing one or two of them will have an impact. Decide on two or three to focus on to improve your skills.**

### **A suggested reading list**

- **King Solomon's Ring (Konrad Lorenz)**  
Lorenz was a world-renowned scientist of animal behaviour. He was awarded with the Nobel Prize for Medicine and Psychology in 1973. This book details his experiences and introduces us to his animal world.
- **Delusions of Gender (Cordelia Fine)**  
Cordelia Fine draws on latest research in neuroscience and psychology. Looks at sex differences and unravels some of the evidence behind claims such as male brains aren't hard wired for empathy or females for fixing cars.
- **Selfish Gene (Richard Dawkins)**  
This book is described as 'a gene eye view to human evolution'.
- **The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx & Social Psychology (Erich Fromm)**  
A dated book. Fromm (1970) gives an interesting insight into psychoanalysis, its decline and its possible renewal.
- **Permanent Present Tense: The man with no memory (Suzanne Corkin)**
- This book tells the story of Henry Gustave Molaison, until recently, better known as H.M. After having experimental psychosurgery in an attempt to relieve his epilepsy H.M woke up unable to form new memories. Suzanne Corkin looks at what his case taught us about human memory.
- **The Better Angels of our Nature (Steven Pinker)**

- Here Steven Pinker mixes psychology and history to look at violence and tells how, despite its reputation, violence has actually been decreasing
- **Uses and Abuses of Psychology (H. J. Eysenck)**  
This book attempts to dispel some of the criticisms faced by psychology and identify justified claims by the discipline and those that have no factual basis.
- **The Divided Self (R.D. Laing)**  
The attempt within this book is to make 'madness' understandable. Laing explores case studies of schizophrenia to help aid his writing.
- **Drugs - Without the Hot Air: minimising the harm of legal and illegal drugs (David Nutt)**  
Nutt explores drug use and assesses addiction along with whether something labelled as 'legal' means it is less harmful.
- **Blame My Brain: The amazing teenage brain revealed (Nicola Morgan)**  
An insight into why teenagers behave the way they do; it's not you it's your brain. Assesses how teenage brains are evolutionarily adapted to behave in ways that adults think are strange.
- **Forever Today: A true story of lost memory and never ending love (Deborah Wearing)**  
A true story about Clive Wearing, an accomplished musician and producer, who lost the ability for form new long term memories after encephalitis (herpes virus that can cause a common cold-sore) damaged his brain.
- **Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time (Mark Haddon)**  
This book assesses what it might be like to live in the world with thought patterns similar to an individual with autism. It is a novel rather than a factual book.
- **The Language Instinct: the new science of language and mind (Steven Pinker)**  
Here Pinker looks into the development of language as an evolutionary adaptation. He talks about the debate of whether language is learnt or innate.
- **The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat (Oliver Sacks)**  
What happens when parts of our brains go wrong? Dr Sacks explains some of this to us using case studies of his patients.
- **An Anthropologist on Mars (Oliver Sacks)**  
This book looks into neurological conditions and how they affect our everyday experiences. Again, Dr Sacks uses his patients' case studies to show us what happens when our brains go wrong.

For quick links, you might also consider following some of our favourites:

- Oliver Sacks - [@OliverSacks](#) (Neurologist/Psychologist. Professor of Neurology at New York University School of Medicine)
- Mo Costandi - [@mocost](#) (Neuroscientist and writer for the Guardian)
- Richard Wiseman - [@RichardWiseman](#) (Professor of Public Understanding of Psychology at University of Hertfordshire)
- Peter Lovatt - [@DanceDrDance](#) (Professional dancer turned psychologist at University of Hertfordshire)
- Elizabeth Loftus - [@eloftus1](#) (American cognitive psychologist and expert on human memory)
- Dorothy Bishop - [@deevybee](#) (Developmental cognitive neuroscientist at Oxford University)

- David Nutt - [@ProfDavidNutt](#) (British psychiatrist and neuropsychopharmacologist specialising in drugs and their effect on our brains)
- Steven Pinker - [@sapinker](#) (Canadian-born experimental psychologist, cognitive scientist at Harvard University)
- Claudia Hammond - [@claudiahammoned](#) (BBC's psychologist in residence)
- Andy Field - [@ProfAndyField](#) (Research methods lecturer at University of Sussex and Professor of Child Psychopathology)