

Newstead Wood School Sixth Form

September 2026

A-Level Psychology Handbook



“The brain is wider than the sky.”

Emily Dickinson

Psychology Teaching Team

Ms S Begum & Ms L Cooke (HOD)

Your teachers can usually be found in the workroom (near the language department) or in the Psychology Classrooms (Room 616 & 611).

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Psychology Year 1

Advanced Learning in this subject:

Psychology is the scientific study of the human mind and behaviour. Psychology requires students to think practically about psychology. It is not enough to simply learn the findings of research. Psychology students actively consider psychology's practical application in real-life situations and think creatively about alternative ways of investigating psychological events. They are psychologists thinking and working within the field, not simply observing it.

How is A Level different from GCSE?

At A Level, there is an expectation that students consolidate and extend their learning by reading around the subject (see reading list) as well as exploring the material covered in lessons. Whilst in your GCSE's it may have been enough to recall information, at Advanced Level students must be

able to understand the information in a given context and apply that information to a multitude of question styles and practical scenarios. Questions take the form of anything from short 1- or 2-mark factual questions and multiple-choice questions, through to application questions and essay questions requiring longer, essay style 16-mark answers requiring explanation and evaluation skills.

These qualifications are linear. Linear means that there are no modular exams and it is expected most students will continue to A Level and take all of their external exams in summer 2024.

PLEASE NOTE: Psychology is NOT offered as a one-year course, therefore there is no option to sit an AS qualification in the summer of 2027.

In what different ways will you be expected to work?

Psychology students who are passive in lessons often lack the engagement and understanding to perform to a high level in the subject. You will be expected to note-take and take an active role in class discussions. You will be expected to thoroughly consolidate your learning by reading a variety of textbooks and journals relating to class material (see reading list). You will also be expected to regularly complete exam questions both in class and for homework. This is essential preparation for your exams. You will also have to complete independent and group tasks resulting in presentations to the rest of the class.

What do successful learners in this subject do?

Successful Psychology students arrive on time and complete all homework on time and to a high standard. They also attend all support sessions as directed. They seek to improve already good work through speaking to staff outside of lessons and developing their work during individual and group support sessions. All homework that is not to standard is to be discussed with staff and improved to ensure full understanding. Successful students attend revision conferences and seek out further reading connected to material covered in class. It has been found that students who interact more in class receive higher grades on average than students who are passive in their learning.

The best preparation for exams is the completion of AQA (A) Psychology specimen papers these are to be found on the AQA website:

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

Overview of the Year 12

	Modules
Half Term 1	Social Psychology Research Methods
Half Term 2	Approaches Research Methods
Half Term 3	Biopsychology Attachment

Half Term 4	Memory Clinical Psychology
Half Term 5	Internal Exams
Half Term 6	Internal Exam Review Practical Work

Overview of Year 13

	Modules
Half Term 1	Research Methods Forensic Psychology
Half Term 2	Relationships Forensic Psychology
Half Term 3	Issues and Debates Schizophrenia
Half Term 4	Revision

Specification Overview AQA A-Level Psychology

[A-level Psychology 7182 | Specification | AQA](#)

Paper 1. Introductory Topics in Psychology

What's assessed:

- Memory
- Social Influence
- Attachment
- Psychopathology

Written exam lasting 2 hours. 96 marks total (24 marks per topic).

Questions will include multiple choice questions, short answer questions and extended

Writing.

Marks are awarded between 1 – 16 marks per question.

Paper 2. Psychology in Context

What's assessed:

- Approaches in Psychology
- Research Methods
- Biopsychology

Written exam lasting 2 hours. 96 marks total (Approaches 24 marks, Research Methods 48 marks and Biopsychology 24 marks).

Questions will include multiple choice questions, short answer questions and extended Writing.

Marks are awarded between 1 – 16 marks per question.

Paper3. Issues and Options in Psychology

What's assessed:

- Relationships
- Schizophrenia
- Forensic Psychology
- Issues and Debates

Written exam lasting 2 hours. 96 marks total (24 marks per topic).

Questions will include multiple choice questions, short answer questions and extended Writing.

Marks are awarded between 1 – 16 marks per question.

PLEASE NOTE THAT RESEARCH METHOD QUESTIONS WILL APPEAR ON ALL PSYCHOLOGY EXAM PAPERS AND IS WORTH THE MOST MARKS SO MAKE SURE YOU ARE CONFIDENT IN MATHS AND SCIENCE!

Your exams at the end of Year 12 will mimic paper 1 and paper 2 questions in Psychology and be used to guide your UCAS grade decision.

Mark scheme for A - Level

The exams will measure how students have achieved the following assessment objectives:

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures.

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures:

- In a theoretical context
- In a practical context
- When handling qualitative data
- When handling quantitative data.

AO3: Analyse, interpret and evaluate scientific information, ideas and evidence, including in relation to issues, to:

- Make judgements and reach conclusions
- Develop and refine practical design and procedures.

The questions on the exam papers are mainly shorter-answer questions and it should be clear from the question which skills you are required to demonstrate when answering these questions.

Short answers are generally marked according to how many correct points are made and whether responses are sufficiently elaborated to meet the marks available.

For longer answers, examiners use mark schemes such as the one below for a 16-mark question:
[AO1 = 6 AO3 = 10]

Level	Mark	Description
4	13-16	Knowledge of statistical infrequency and deviation from social norms is accurate and generally well detailed. Discussion is thorough and effective. Minor detail and/or expansion of argument is sometimes lacking. The answer is clear, coherent and focused. Specialist terminology is used effectively.
3	9-12	Knowledge of statistical infrequency and deviation from social norms is evident but there are occasional inaccuracies/omissions. Discussion is mostly effective. The answer is mostly clear and organised but occasionally lacks focus. Specialist terminology is used appropriately.
2	5-8	Limited knowledge of statistical infrequency and/or deviation from social norms is present. Focus is mainly on description. Any discussion is of limited effectiveness. The answer lacks clarity, accuracy and organisation in places. Specialist terminology is used inappropriately on occasions. OR one definition only at Level 3/4.
1	1-4	Knowledge of statistical infrequency and/or deviation from social norms is very limited. Discussion is limited, poorly focused or absent. The answer as a whole lacks clarity, has many inaccuracies and is poorly organised. Specialist terminology is either absent or inappropriately used. OR one definition only at Level 1/2.

Exemplar work

This is an example of a very good 16-mark question answer from Attachment. At the Bottom of the page are the marks awarded with reasons given by the examiner.

With reference to reciprocity and interactional synchrony, discuss infant–caregiver interactions. (16 marks)

Interactions between caregivers and infants provide an insight into the type and nature of attachment. Reciprocity is when an infant responds to the actions of another by turn taking. The actions of the primary caregiver elicit a response from the infant. The interaction between both individuals flows back and forth. Meltzoff & Moore (1977) conducted an observational study whereby an adult displayed facial expression or a hand gesture. Following the display from the model, a dummy was removed from the child’s mouth and their expressions filmed. There was an association between the infants’ behaviour and that of the adult model, showing reciprocity.

Interactional synchrony takes place when infants mirror the actions or emotions of another person, e.g. their facial expressions. The child will move their body or carry out the same act as

their caregiver simultaneously, and the two are said to be synchronised. Emotions may also be synchronised. This serves to sustain communication between the two caregiver and infant.

One limitation of research into caregiver–infant interactions is the questionable reliability of testing children. This is because infants move their mouths and wave their arms constantly, which is an issue for researchers investigating intentional behaviour. Therefore, we cannot be certain that the infants were engaging in interactional synchrony or reciprocity, as some of the behaviour may have occurred by chance. This questions the validity of research in relation to reciprocity and interactional synchrony and suggests that psychologists should be cautious when interpreting the findings from research in this area.

There are methodological problems with studying interactional synchrony using observational methods. There is the possibility of observer bias where the researchers consciously or unconsciously interpret behaviour to support their findings. To address this problem, more than one observer should be used to examine the inter-observer reliability of the observations. Recent research by Koepke et al. (1983) failed to replicate the findings of Meltzoff & Moore which suggests that their results of research examining infant–caregiver interactions are unreliable.

A further criticism of Meltzoff & Moore’s research is that recent research has found that only securely attached infants engage in interactional synchrony. Isabella et al. (1989) found that the more securely attached the infant, the greater the level of interactional synchrony. This suggests that not all children engage in interactional synchrony and that Meltzoff & Moore’s original findings may have overlooked individual differences which could be a mediating factor.

Psychologists suggest that caregiver–infant interactions, such as reciprocity, are present from birth and therefore are the product of nature to help infants form and maintain an attachment. However, such innate behaviours do not act in isolation and interact with the environment (caregivers) to prompt a response (e.g. attention). Consequently, researchers should consider the interaction of innate infant behaviours with the environment (e.g. their caregivers) to fully appreciate and understand the complex nature of caregiver– infant interactions.

[~475 words]

Discussion.

A relevant reference to the nature–nurture debate is tied into the answer.

Examiner style comments: Mark band 4 This is an excellent response to a complex question which demands two concepts to be discussed in a balanced way. The answer provides detailed knowledge of both reciprocity and interactional synchrony, which are highly accurate.

Furthermore, the discussion is centred to provide an in-depth commentary that is thorough and effective, with appropriate support from relevant research studies.

Expectations

In order to provide you with the most effective support in your learning, the following processes will be maintained across the department:

- **Punctuality:** All students are expected to arrive to lessons on time. Any student who is late for the first time will be spoken to by the teacher regarding why they are late. If the student is late for a second time they will not participate in the lesson and will be expected to catch up in their own time.
- **Absence:** All students should notify their teacher in advance if they know they will be absent from a lesson. The teacher will organise with the student how to catch up on the work they will miss. If it is an unplanned absence the student should contact the teacher before the next lesson to complete any work missed or ensure they find out the work from another member of the class. Any lessons missed when students have been marked in the register will be followed up by e-monitoring. If absence becomes a reoccurring issue, parents will be directly contacted via telephone.
- **Deadlines:** Students will always be given sufficient time to complete work and work should be completed to the given deadline. Students should see the teacher before the work is due in if they are having difficulties and explain why the deadline may not be met, if this is the case. The teacher and student together will decide on the appropriate strategy relevant to the given situation.
- **Consequences of missed deadlines:** If a deadline is missed and there is no appropriate explanation, students will not be allowed to participate in the lesson and will be expected to go to the library to complete the work before returning to the lesson. It is then the student's responsibility to catch up on the class work missed in their own time. If a second deadline is missed the same procedure will be followed and the information will be communicated via e-monitoring to your parents. If deadlines become a reoccurring issue, parents will be directly contacted via telephone.
- **Learning Environment:** Elements of topics are taught to students by students and therefore every student should assume responsibility for the learning of their classmates. Class discussions are based on prior learning and independent study – all students should come to the lesson fully prepared in order to be able to engage meaningfully in the lessons. Discussion is encouraged and students are expected to be polite and open-minded, not speaking over any other individuals in the class at any time.
- **Study periods and independent study:** Students will be set reading and activities prior to a lesson and should use their independent study time to complete this. Students should also use their independent study time as follows: to consolidate their class notes and make revision notes; to practise exam-style questions and prepare for End of Unit assessments; and to engage in wider reading from a variety of textbooks and other sources. You should expect to spend around 8 hours a week completing Psychology work outside of lessons, regardless of whether specific work has been set. It is very easy to feel overwhelmed by the huge content of Psychology – **the best way to overcome this is to be a proactive learner and dedicate time to consolidation and revision of material throughout the course.**
- **Learning Conversations:** you will be given continual feedback about your work and will be encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification on how to improve. If specific concerns arise, your teacher may ask for you to come and have a chat to discuss concerns and set subject-specific targets to improve.
- **How we will support you:**

Your teacher will provide you with regular feedback regarding your progress and will offer support to ensure you achieve your personal target grade. This support will include:

- Constructive comments on your written work
- Meetings during study periods to clarify and explain ideas
- Support workshops on exam skills and revision of topic areas (lunchtime).

N.B. All students are welcome to attend support workshops, however if needed you may be specifically asked to attend in which case it is vital that you take up this opportunity.

What to do when stuck...

'We all make mistakes, but only the wise learn from their mistakes'
Winston Churchill

Class teacher

Your teachers are available throughout the day to speak to. A good time to catch your teacher might be after the lesson, at break, lunchtime or after school. They will arrange specific times with you to offer support as it is needed, but you are responsible for your own learning. If you need support, the onus is on you to seek help, which will of course then be provided. If you struggle to catch your teacher, then e-mail them to arrange a time to meet/voice your concerns.

Classmates

It is highly recommended that you spend time discussing ideas with your classmates, both to help in your collective understanding and to serve as a means for deepening your evaluative involvement in the subject. You will be given the opportunity to move seats in the classroom as each topic changes – think carefully about who to best surround yourself with to support your studies! We cover topics in Psychology that some students will have personal experience of – it is important that you are willing to be open-minded and accepting of others' views and opinions, even if they differ from your own.

Teams

It's important that you regularly check out the 'Teams' page for your class. Lesson resources such as PowerPoints and handouts will be shared here, along with wider reading resources etc. If you miss a lesson you should try to ensure you catch up using the resources available.

Support sessions

Support sessions are run as and when needed throughout the year (both at lunchtime and after school) to support you with developing key skills such as how to structure essays or to revisit topics. We will notify you of specific dates and times during the year. If you are seen to be struggling in a specific area or need to catch up on work missed, you may be directed to attend these sessions. In addition, anyone is welcome to attend throughout the year for additional support.

SMH

All homework will be set on Teams – please make sure you check regularly for updates. Homework is given each week.

E-Mail

Staff will respond to e-mails sent, but it may on occasion take some time, please don't think you are being ignored.

Bridging Unit

(To be completed before the start of term – please bring to your first psychology lesson in September 2026.)

Psychology is a science subject based on experiments conducted and results statistically analysed to further our understanding of human behaviour. Throughout the course we will look at many different psychological experiments and you need to be able to understand the methods used and effectively

evaluate them. For your bridging unit you will be working independently to design and report on a study. The aim is to introduce you to the most basic research methods requirements of the course and to encourage you to think about the logistics of conducting research on humans. We will begin to explore this together during your induction week at Newstead.

Project Brief:

Begin by reading about the stroop test on the following link: [The Stroop test: how colourful is your language? | Science | The Guardian](#)

There is a more detailed explanation here: [Stroop Effect](#)

Your task is to design an experiment to see whether there is a relationship between the age of participants and their performance on the stroop test. You will need to find at least 10 participants of different ages who will each be tested using the same stroop test and will then need to report back on your findings. The wider your age range the more likely you are to get an effect.

Have a go at answering the following questions BEFORE conducting your experiment:

- What is your research aim?
- What is your independent variable? How will it be measured?
- What is your dependent variable? How will it be measured?
- What is your null hypothesis and research hypothesis? Will you use a directional or a non-directional hypothesis and why?
- What materials do you need?
- How will you recruit your participants?
- What instructions will you give to your participants?
- How will you record the results?
- What type of experiment are you conducting? Lab/Field/Natural? Justify your answer.
- Are there any extraneous that may affect the findings? How can you try to minimise these?
- Are there any ethical issues that you need to consider?

After your participants have completed the experiment, have a go at answering the following questions:

- What is the most appropriate graphical display for your results? Have a go at drawing a graph, labelling the axis and plotting your data.
- What do your results seem to show?
- What can you conclude? Try to state this in relation to your independent variable and dependent variable and whether your hypothesis was correct.
- What could be done to improve your experiment in future?

The above should be provided as a research report, preferably typed, no more than 2 sides of A4. There are many terms here that you will need to look up. This is designed to be a challenging task.

You will probably want to buy a copy of the textbook (see next page) to help you with this task.

Summer Term Preparation for A-Level Psychology

Please prepare an A4 summary sheet on each of the core APPROACHES in psychology.

An approach is a way of explaining human behaviour. The approaches you need to explore are:

- Biological
- Behaviourist
- Social Learning Theory
 - Cognitive
- Psychodynamic
- Humanist

For each approach, please try to identify the key assumptions (what do they assume to be the cause of human behaviour?) key terms from the approach, a key piece of research to demonstrate the approach and 2 strengths and 2 limitations of each approach.

Extension: identify any similarities and differences between the approaches. Which approach do you favour? Which do you think is the weakest? Justify your answers.

Resources and Equipment

a. Textbook:

The Complete Companion Student Books:

- Psychology A level Year 1 and AS – AQA Psychology for A-Level Year 1&AS: **Third Edition** – Cara Flanagan, Matt Jarvis and Rob Liddle: Illuminate Publishing ISBN: 9781036011970
- Psychology A level Year 2 – AQA Psychology for A-Level Year 2: **Third Edition** – Cara Flanagan, Dave Berry, Matt Jarvis and Rob Liddle: Illuminate Publishing ISBN: 9781036011987

All students should purchase the above two books. Other textbooks, journals and reading materials are available in the library or in Room 611. You will be provided with handouts from alternative textbook sources.

If you are particularly interested in a specific area, ask your teacher as they may have additional reading that can be provided for you.

b. Electronic Device:

Students will need a laptop or tablet with a keyboard for psychology lessons. Resources, note-taking and homework are completed/accessed electronically. Students cannot use a mobile phone for this.

Important tips

- Become an active member of the Psychology Society
- Teach your peers and students in other years (opportunities throughout year 12 & 13, e.g. by being a psychology buddy)
- Support the department in developing learning and resources
- Attend lectures by external speakers – often these are available at different universities and can be attended for free or for a small cost
- Apply to become a Student Subject Leader.

We also like to encourage you to use your initiative and be proactive, so if you have an idea regarding an enrichment or leadership opportunity, come and speak to us to see how you can take this forward.

Useful Links

<p>British Psychological Society Comprehensive resource bank for the study and practice of psychology in the UK</p>	<p>https://www.bps.org.uk/</p>
<p>British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy – with a section for students, including career advice events and membership application</p>	<p>https://www.bacp.co.uk/</p>
<p>Royal College of Psychiatrists with excellent “leaflet”- style resources on many AS and A2 topics</p>	<p>https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/</p>
<p>American Psychological Association Especially good for coverage of and links to current topics and issues in mental health</p>	<p>https://www.apa.org/</p>
<p>All in the Mind – over 40 recorded 30-minute programmes exploring the limits and potential of the human mind; includes topics such as violent teen behaviour and psychopathic brain/genes on BBC Radio 4 I-Player</p>	<p>https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxx9/episodes/player</p>
<p>Psychotron Resource Bank Downloadable lessons/slides/activities relevant to AS and A2 units.</p>	<p>http://www.psychotron.org.uk/</p>
<p>Wellcome Trust Links to articles about current research in the field of psychology. The Wellcome Gallery in Euston has some good exhibitions on Psychology and it's free.</p>	<p>https://wellcome.org/what-we-do/mental-health</p>

Resources for all your A Levels	MOOC.org Massive Open Online Courses An edX Site and https://www.ted.com/talks
Useful YouTube channels	A LEVEL PAPER 1 – Psych Boost Crash Course Psychology

Extension Reading

If you are planning to study psychology at university, you should be engaging in extended reading over the coming years. Here are some books you may find of interest:

- ‘Kpax’ – Gene Brewer, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, (ISBN: 978-0747525479)
- ‘The man who mistook his wife for a hat’ – Oliver Sacks, Picador, (ISBN: 978-0330294911)
- ‘One Flew over the Cuckoo Nest’ – Ken Kesey, Penguin Classics, (ISBN: 978-0141187884)
- ‘The Divided Self’ – RD Laing, Penguin Classics, (ISBN: 978-0141189376)
- ‘The Myth of Mental Illness’ – Thomas Szaz, HarperCollins (ISBN: 978-0061771224)
- ‘Uses and Abuses of Psychology’ – HJ Eysenck, Pelican (ISBN: 9780140202816)
- ‘Elephants on Acid’ - Alex Boese
- ‘Phantoms in the Brain: Human Nature and the Architecture of the Mind’ - Ramachandran, V.S. & Blakeslee S. (*Recommended for Oxbridge applicants*)
- ‘Bad Science’ - Ben Goldacre (*Recommended for Oxbridge applicants*)
- ‘Consciousness Explained’ - Daniel Dennett (*Recommended for Oxbridge applicants*)
- ‘The Private Life of the Brain’ - Susan Greenfield (*Recommended for Oxbridge applicants*)
- ‘Nature via Nurture: Genes, experience and what makes us human’ - Matt Ridley (*Recommended for Oxbridge applicants*)
- ‘The Language Instinct: How the mind creates language’ - Steven Pinker (*Recommended for Oxbridge applicants*)
- ‘Madness Explained: Psychosis and Human Nature’ D.C Dennett (*Recommended for Oxbridge applicants*)

It is a good idea to keep a log of what you have read and what you found interesting about it. This will prepare you for university applications.

Progression

The main change in year 2 of the A Level is that you will be required. For example, more marks are allocated for analysis, evaluation and application than for showing your knowledge and understanding. We study some of the key issues and debates within Psychology in addition to topics such as Schizophrenia, Research Methods, Forensic Psychology and Relationships.

Students who have studied Psychology in recent years have gone on to:

- Experimental Psychology
- Clinical Psychology
- Organisational and Social Psychology
- Counselling
- Teaching
- Neuropsychology

- Sport Psychology
- Criminology
- Forensic Psychology
- Educational Psychology
- Medicine

Advice from Former Students

Every year the A2 students are asked to evaluate their learning and are asked what advice they would give to students starting AS Psychology. Here is what previous A2 students have said:

- “Keep good, detailed notes and keep up to date on essay/homework questions”
- “Do practice questions when revising for exams.”
- “Make sure you can effectively structure an essay. Also see AO2 vocabulary.”
- “Consolidate notes as you go and split topics clearly so it is easier to revise.”
- “Definitely take it!”