

Getting Ready for A Level Psychology

Psychology is the science of the mind and behaviour. It is a subject that requires a broad range of skills from scientific investigation, statistical analysis of data and critical evaluation to an appreciation of our history, mistakes that have been made and the developments that have come from them. The content here is not linked to the syllabus, rather it is designed to introduce you to a psychological way of thinking in preparation for what you will discover during the A Level. There are 7 tasks. You may do all, some, parts – up to you (but no.1 is most important for the course).

#1 – THE CONSOLIDATION OF YOUR GCSES:

You could prepare for the psychology A level by:

- Reviewing your understanding of biological structures e.g. the nervous system, structure of neurons, synapses, endocrine system and thinking about how these might be applied to psychology.
- Revising your maths skills particularly % increase and % decrease, mean, median, mode and range, ratios and probability, all charts, graphs and scatter grams. Along with any understanding of sampling methods or statistical tests you might have. (Please don't feel the need to teach yourself these last two if you have no knowledge of them).

#2 - 'REAL-LIFE'.

Keep a scrapbook (digital or paper) of articles in the news that are linked to how people behave, how they think, what motivates them etc. Annotate each article with a summary of the main points and create a glossary of terms that are new to you. You should find at least one article per week.

Use the following sources as a start:

www.bbc.co.uk

www.theguardian.com

www.thetimes.co.uk

www.independent.co.uk

Science, health, family and business sections may be useful. Additionally use the search box and enter 'psychology'.

#3 - OUR AMAZING BRAIN.

1. Do some research on how ways of investigating the brain have changed over the years. Think about the methods used before scans such as MRI's were invented and how the scanning processes have helped us to understand more and confirm / develop theories. You might also want to look into things like psycho-surgery and neurosurgery so that you can begin to identify how operating on the brain has changed over the years.
2. Visit www.livescience.com and read '10 things we learned about the brain in 2019'. Choose your three favourite and write a summary of each finding.

#4 – CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Investigate the question – Is anti-social behaviour nature or nurture?

You should produce a 500-1000 word essay considering this question and weighing up the arguments and the evidence. The nature side of the argument suggests anti-social behaviour is influenced by biology e.g. genetics, brains, biochemistry. The nurture side of the argument suggests that anti-social behaviour is influenced by personality, society, cognition (thinking) or learning and environment. To truly answer this question we'd need to look at childhood behaviour. What will your conclusion be? In Psychology you have to give a measured conclusion based on the weight of the evidence for each side and not on personal opinion.

Starting points:

- <https://psychcentral.com/news/2014/12/13/nature-nurture-both-figure-into-antisocial-behavior/78604.html>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/science/head-quarters/2018/may/04/nature-or-nurture-unravelling-the-roots-of-childhood-behaviour-disorders>
- <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/12/121210160852.htm>

#5 - INVESTIGATING HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

Design a study to investigate whether there is an association or relationship (correlation) between time spent outdoors and happiness. When designing an investigation we always have to ask ourselves 'why' we are choosing our methods. Think about:

- Who your participants would be & why?
- How you would gain their participation & why?
- What you would ask them to do & why?
- How you would analyse their results & why?
- What conclusions you expect to find & why?

Some of the answers to 'why' are gained via experience/knowledge, others are gained via researching options and expected behaviour. Type/write up your research design. We can run it through an ethics check later in the year.

#6 - READ, WATCH, FOLLOW

The next few pages are lists of books, people to follow on twitter, ted talks and films that are psychology related and interesting. You might like to look a few up.



Black Swan
The Stanford Prison Experiment
Shutter Island
Gone Girl
A Dangerous Method
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
Inception
A Beautiful Mind
We Need to Talk About Kevin
Memento
The Notebook
Regarding Henry
Rein Over Me

Good Will Hunting
The Butterfly Effect
The Machinist
The Sixth Sense
Vanilla Sky
Donnie Darko
Fatal Attraction
Rain man
12 Angry Men
28 Days
The Blind Side
Enough
Identity

Further reading for topics surrounding A level psychology:

- 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 ABUSED 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 is not them it is their 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)

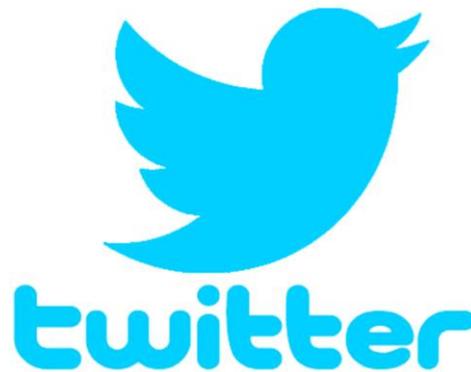
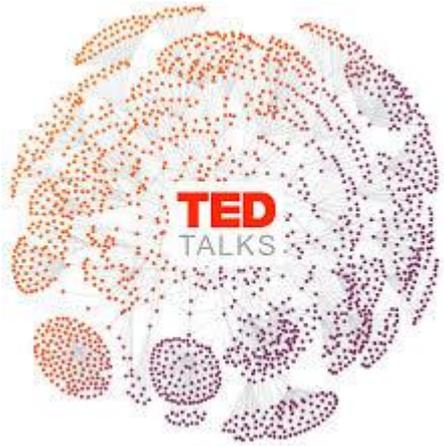
Here Pinker looks into the development of language as an evolutionary adaptation. He talks about the debate of whether language is learnt or innate.

- 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.



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>The mysterious workings of the adolescent brain</u>
(Sarah Jayne Blakemore) ● <u>Exploring the mind of a killer</u>
(Jim Fallon) ● <u>The new era of positive psychology</u>
(Martin Seligman) ● <u>The power of introverts</u>
(Susan Cane) ● <u>The psychology of evil</u>
(Philip Zimbardo) ● <u>The origins of pleasure</u>
(Paul Bloom) ● <u>The sibling bond</u>
(Jeffery Kluger) ● <u>The psychology of time</u>
(Philip Zimbaro) ● <u>Teach girls bravery not perfection</u>
(Reshma Saujani) ● <u>The brain-changing effects of exercise</u>
(Wendy Suzuki) ● <u>Your brain hallucinates your reality</u>
(Anil Seth) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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 - @claudiahammed
(BBC's psychologist in residence) ● Andy Field - @ProfAndyField
(Research methods lecturer at University of Sussex and Professor of Child Psychopathology) |
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#7 - PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COVID-19

Have a look at a few of the articles below. Note anything of interest to you and do some wider research around unfamiliar terminology, concepts or behaviours. Many of the ideas here link to things we will learn in the first year e.g. social influence, psychopathology and cognitive psychology.

Link to article:	Psychological focus:
https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-33/april-2020/coronavirus-psychological-perspectives	This link takes you to a list compiled by the British Psychological Society (BPS). It has a number of articles relating to Covid-19 (it is continually updated). There are a considerable number of articles via this link alone with a huge array of psychological focus.
https://digest.bps.org.uk/2020/03/26/how-psychology-researchers-are-responding-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/	The link here takes you to a general overview of the research that is currently taking place.
https://metro.co.uk/2020/04/18/like-ocd-coronavirus-pandemic-12572793/	An interesting read on living with OCD in during the virus outbreak.
https://www.theguardian.com/football/2020/apr/20/number-of-footballers-with-depression-symptoms-doubles-during-shutdown-survey-fifpro-coronavirus	A look at footballers and depression during the outbreak.
https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/2020/04/psychologists-watching-coronavirus-social-distancing-coping/	Here you can read about isolation and the mental health effects.
https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/stretching-theory/202003/is-zero-risk-bias-impairing-your-crisis-response	Cognitive (internal mental processes e.g. thinking) aspects of what is shaping our behaviour during this time.
https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/this-is-the-psychological-side-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-that-were-ignoring/	‘The world’s biggest psychological experiment’ - the psychological effects of lockdown.
https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200401-covid-19-how-fear-of-coronavirus-is-changing-our-psychology?ocid=twfut	A think about whether there could be long lasting changes to our social behaviour?
https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/neuroparent/202003/why-some-people-refuse-practice-social-distancing	An attempt to explain the refusal of some to socially distance.
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2020/mar/new-study-psychological-and-social-effects-covid-19	Current study into the psychological effects of Covid-19 (At the bottom it gives you a link to take part, if you wish).