

Psychology A-Level Curriculum Overview

Psychology at Coopers’ Coborn is taught by two teachers, who instruct all students, they are Mrs C. Harries (CHS) and Mr W. Ferreira (WFE) who is the Head of Department (email: wfe@cooperscoborn.co.uk). There are three teaching groups in Year 12 and three in Year 13. Year 12 have five lessons with CHS and five with WFE over the two-week timetable. In Year 13, CHS teaches four lessons and WFE teaches six lessons over the two-week timetable. Each teacher teaches specific topics prescribed by the AQA A Level Specification. The students have workbooks which they can fill in during the lesson and these represent their notes for the year. There is an online textbook, from Illuminate Publishing, (AQA endorsed) which the students can use if they are connected to the internet.

AQA subject content weblink: <https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/psychology/as-and-a-level/psychology-7181-7182/subject-content-a-level>

There are three exams at the end of year 13. Each exam is 2 hours long and comprise of 96 marks in total.

- Paper 1: Introductory Topics in Psychology, Social Influence, Memory, Attachment and Psychopathology
- Paper 2: Psychology in Context, Approaches in Psychology, Biopsychology and Research Methods (year 12 and year 13)
- Paper 3: Issues and Options in Psychology, Issues and Debates in Psychology, Relationships, Eating Behaviour and Addiction

Please Note: Overall, at least 10% of the marks in assessments for Psychology will require the use of mathematical skills. These skills will be applied in the context of A-level Psychology and will be at least the standard of higher tier GCSE mathematics.

| Teacher (CHS) | Teacher (WFE) |
|---|---|
| Year 12: Autumn | |
| <p>Approaches (Paper 2) These are the different approaches psychologists take to understanding human behaviour such as whether they assume it is driven by biology, environment, or the unconscious for example. CHS starts with this topic as it is the basis of the whole course. The Approaches topic can be challenging but once they have this framework other topics in the course can fit into place more easily. It also allows for development of writing skills. Two of the five approaches are designed for the second year, but we think it makes more sense for students to cover them all at the start since all approaches can be used when moving on to the next topic.</p> <p>The origins of Psychology and comparison of approaches are left until later when students have a deeper understanding and can write in a more sophisticated way.</p> | <p>Social Influence (Paper 1) Social influence is the process by which an individual’s attitudes, beliefs or behaviour are modified by the presence or action of others. The A level course develops our understanding of conformity, obedience, and minority influence. This give a good contrast to what CHS is doing with Approaches. It is interesting and easy to understand. It allows us to establish good essay writing skills by differentiating clearly between knowledge and evaluation needed for extended writings. It also reinforces research examples such as Asch, Milgram, and Zimbardo.</p> <p>The course focuses on conformity as a social influence and considers the work of Asch and Zimbardo. Students are introduced to the concept that people may behave in a particular way because of the situation they find themselves in (called situational variables). After we have finished conformity we look at the work of Milgram and</p> |

Research Methods (Paper 2, imbedded in paper 1 and 3)

Research methods teaches us how to study human behaviour. This topic includes experimental design, sampling, and descriptive statistics. This is an important topic but can be dry to do all at once, so we start it here and interleave it throughout the next topic. It is finished before we start the Memory topic as that gives a lot of opportunity for practice.

Psychopathology (Paper 1)

Psychopathology looks at the cause of psychological disorder. We study phobias from a behavioural perspective, depression through a cognitive perspective and obsessive-compulsive disorder through a biological perspective. This allows the consolidation of the approaches they have already learned and practise at using lots of new terminology and ideas.

obedience. This part of the course introduces the student to personality factors leading to obedience called authoritarian personality which opens the students to understanding how people can resist social influence.

Research Methods (Paper 2, imbedded in paper 1 and 3)

Research methods does involve some core mathematics skills including understanding terms such as mean, median and mode. Other calculations such as ratio, fractions and percentages are required to understand data. WFE does the more maths topics of year 12 course and complements CHS's aspect of the course. As a former maths teacher, we decided that WFE should deliver this part of the course. The A Level topic, of Case Studies is taught here to be done before memory is delivered in the Spring term.

Assessment:

Social Influence/Approaches Test (40 marks) - Summative (can be used as baseline)

Social Influence Essay (16 marks) - Formative

Homework

Formative, various pieces of work are set during the term to assess understanding and allow students to practise the writing style required which is more concise and scientific than they are used to. Many find this precision difficult to adjust to.

| Teacher (CHS) | Teacher (WFE) |
|---|--|
| Year 12: Spring | |
| <p>Research Methods (Continued from Autumn term): Some schools only teach each concept as it is embedded in other topics, but we have found students find this confusing and retention is poor.</p> <p>Psychopathology (Paper 1) (Continued from Autumn term): This topic is broken into discrete sections which make it easy to teach alongside research methods.</p> <p>Memory (Paper 1) This topic looks at the capabilities and different types of memory before looking at factors that influence the accuracy of eye-witness testimony. It involves some practical experiments that students can take part in which consolidates their knowledge and understanding of research methods as well as making a refreshing change.</p> <p>The emergence of psychology as a science is covered here as students now have a firm grasp of all approaches and can think about a chronological timeline. It is a nice way to revise them as well as arguments about how scientific the discipline should be. It underlines how much they have learned throughout the year which provides a confidence boost.</p> | <p>Social Influence (Paper 1) Minority influence takes the social influence topic away from how a majority can influence human behaviour towards what influence a minority has on the majority. Minority influence and social change topics are usually finished at the start of Spring term. This allows the student to return after the break to a familiar topic. WFE has examples from South Africa to illustrate social change.</p> <p>Study Skills and Note Taking WFE reinforces note taking skills (Cornell Method) and study skills using Psychologists such as The Learning Scientists. https://www.learningscientists.org/</p> <p>Attachment (Paper 1) The attachment topic is a good introduction to caregiver/infant interaction and a foundation of early development psychology. In this topic we cover theories that explain attachment, we look at animal studies relating to attachment and the impact of not forming an attachment. The course involves two explanations of attachment, learning theory and Bowlby’s monotropic theory. The course explains attachment types according the Mary Ainsworth and finishes with how attachment can impact our future relationships.</p> <p>Doing attachment after the Spring term means that they have some basic skills. Delivered by WFE as a male, with young children, is good for them to see and shows them there is more to parenting/psychology.</p> |
| <p>Assessment: Research Methods (24 marks) - Formative</p> <p>Psychopathology (36 marks) - Summative, 16-mark essay included in the test.</p> | |

Attachment (16 marks) - Formative, timed essay.

Homework

Formative, various pieces of work are set during the term to assess understanding.

| Teacher (CHS) | Teacher (WFE) |
|--|--|
| Year 12: Summer (year 13 content) | |
| <p>Biopsychology (Paper 2) The first part of this topic is factual and covers the nervous and endocrine systems. It is quite scientific which not all students find easy but by this point in the course they usually cope well and some aspects, such as synaptic transmission, build on GCSE science. The more advanced areas include how the brain is structured and functions which can be quite technical. Doing it either side of the summer holiday allows them to give it some extra time for independent study, if necessary, as there are quite a lot of online resources for this topic. It also prepares them for what is to come at the start of year 2</p> | <p>Introduction to experimentation: This is part of the year 13 content regarding testing hypothesis. It is important to learn the skills of running an experiment. Once the end of year exams over there is opportunity to run an experiment and to put into practise the parts of the research methods course that require the students to know what happens when planning and executing research.</p> <p>Research Methods (Paper 2, imbedded in paper 1 and 3) In order to introduce inferential statistics and how to work out significance for data these topics are included when looking at the sign test. This is the only calculation of significance they need to be able to do. Types of data, significance and the sign test are taught at this stage to bridge the gap between year 12 and year 13 research methods.</p> <p>Introduction to Addiction: We use the summer term to consider the applied psychology topic of addiction. Using the introduction from, Marc Lewis (The Biology of Desire, Why Addiction is not a Disease) we start to explore the difference between drug use and addiction. This is important because addiction is complex and they can use their knowledge of psychology, so far, to understand that addictive behaviour. We start with a Discovery Channel documentary on the effects of drugs on the body.</p> |
| <p>Assessment:</p> <p>Mock Exams: Social Influence, Memory, Attachment, Psychopathology and Research Methods - Summative, this the topics for Paper 1, 24 marks per section, and will include research methods imbedded in the topics.</p> <p>Homework</p> <p>Formative, various pieces of work are set during the term to assess understanding.</p> | |

| Teacher (CHS) | Teacher (WFE) |
|---|---|
| Year 13: Autumn | |
| <p>Biopsychology (Paper 2) (Continued from Summer term): The final part looks at the biological rhythms of the body such as the sleep-wake cycle. Completing a booklet early in the year is quite encouraging for students.</p> <p>Issues and Debates (Paper 3) Key debates in Psychology include assessing the value of a reductionist approach in research and whether humans are determined or have freewill. students have been using these ideas from the start of the course, but this involves a more explicit, technical, assessment.</p> <p>The issues cover gender and culture bias as well as the social sensitivity of psychological research. These are new and require quite a lot of time to develop the ability to write coherent answers. Although it is synoptic content it is the most challenging unit of the A Level for many. Starting it before the course is finished restricts some of the examples available for discussion but there are still plenty, and it does mean that issues can be returned to during the last two units of the course to improve their confidence in using these ideas.</p> <p>Approaches (Paper 2) Comparison of approaches can also be effectively tackled now to give practise at using the debates in a structured way. This completes the Approaches topic.</p> | <p>Addiction (Paper 3) We start the academic year 13 with going straight into the specification content for addiction. This is an option topic, but we chose it for them based on experience and previous student choice. Furthermore, the addiction topic is interesting and can relate to their lives. The start of the course can be covered at the end of year 12 and deals with describing addiction and understanding dependence and tolerance. The content moves on to understanding how certain aspects of our lives such as inherited traits or family may put us at risk of developing addiction as well as exploring the risk of peers. The course then explains smoking and gambling as addictive behaviour. Smoking is seen as a substance addiction and gambling as a behavioural addiction. The course ends with treatment of addictive behaviour and looks at models that can be used to prevent addictive behaviour.</p> <p>Research Methods (Paper 2, imbedded in all topics) Inferential statistics is the part of research methods that attempts to explain if the data from an experienced is significant and whether we should accept or reject a hypothesis. Inferential statistics can be hard to understand therefore it is left for year 13. We teacher research methods through the course but also as a discrete topic because it is about a third of their grade. Research methods is an important part of being a psychology student. The content for this term focusses on the different inertial tests.</p> |
| <p>Assessment: Mock Exam: Social Influence, Memory, Attachment & Psychopathology - Summative, complete paper 1 paper.</p> <p>Research Methods and Addiction - Summative, topics covered in paper 2 and 3</p> <p>Homework Formative, various pieces of work are set during the term to assess understanding.</p> | |

| Teacher (CHS) | Teacher (WFE) |
|---|--|
| Year 13: Spring | |
| <p>Issues and Debates (Paper 3) Continued from Autumn term.</p> <p>Eating Behaviour (Paper 3) This topic includes how diets are influenced by evolution and environment as well as different theories for obesity and anorexia nervosa. Past students have really enjoyed this topic and the content is more straightforward than the previous two units CHS has covered. This makes it a less stressful experience for students at the end of the course when revision anxiety is starting. They understand the sorts of arguments they can use and the issues from the previous topic can be consolidated. For these reasons, the topic can often be covered quite quickly.</p> | <p>Addiction (Paper 3) If the content is not finished before Christmas we use the first few lessons to complete the topic.</p> <p>Research Methods (Paper 2, imbedded in all topics) Factors of science and the scientific process is completed after spring to complete the course. This is a theoretical section of research methods that requires the student to understand what science is and why psychology can be considered a science. There is a section on the application of science that refers to peer review and the impact of research on the economy that we complete at this stage in the course. These are better to cover after students have studied psychology for a longer period of time. Report writing is used to introduce the extended questions (research design) that can be found in paper 2.</p> <p>Relationships (Paper 3) Past students have really enjoyed this topic and the content is more straightforward because they can relate this to their own lives. This makes it a less stressful experience for students at the end of the course when revision anxiety is starting. As a Team Leader (examiner) for Paper 3 this allows WFE to guide the students in how to approach this topic and the paper as a whole.</p> |
| <p>Assessment:</p> <p>Mock Exams: Issues and Debates, Approaches - summative Research Methods - summative</p> | |
| <p>Final Exam</p> | |