Psychology A-Level Curriculum Overview

Psychology at Coopers' Coborn is taught by two teachers, who instruct all students. Mr. W. Ferreira (WFE) is the Head of Department (email: wfe@cooperscoborn.co.uk). 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. We do not issue textbooks and subscribe to an online textbook. https://www.hachettelearning.com/psychology/aqa-psychology-for-a-level-year-1-and-as-third-edition There are different textbooks for psychology and we have copies available in the psychology office. A useful text, in addition to the online book, is: *The Complete Companions: AQA Psychology Year 1 and AS Student Book (Sixth Edition),* Cardwell & McLaughlin, Oxford Press. ISBN 9781382071840

AQA subject content weblink: https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/psychology/a-level/psychology-7182/specification/specification-at-a-glance

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 Clinical Psychology & Mental Health
- 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, Schizophrenia (TBC) 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.

Year 12: Autumn	
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. The course covers the learning approaches, the cognitive approach, the biological approach, the psychodynamic approach and humanistic approach. These approaches are fundamental in understanding psychology as a whole. The comparison of approaches is left for the year 13 course. **Research Methods (Paper 2, imbedded in paper 1 and 3)** Research methods teaches us how to study human behaviour. This includes experimental design, sampling, and descriptive statistics. Some schools only teach each concept as it is embedded in other	**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 course focuses on conformity as a social influence and considers the work of Asch. 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 obedience. This part of the course introduces the student to personality factors leading to obedience called authoritarian personality. We end the social influence course looking at explanations for resisting social influence and how the minority can influence the majority.

topics, but we have found students find this confusing and retention is poor. We therefore have specific research methods workbooks and discrete lessons on each of the topics required for A-level psychology. **Clinical Psychology and Mental Health (Paper 1)** This topic looks at the cause of a psychological disorder. We study phobias from a behavioural perspective, depression through a cognitive perspective and obsessive-compulsive disorder through a biological perspective.	**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. Presentation and display of quantitative data is included in the course. We expect that a GCSE mathematics grade 5 (and above) will equip students with the skills needed to be successful in the mathematics requirements needed for A-level psychology.
Assessment: **Social Influence/Approaches Test (40 marks)** **Social Influence Essay (16 marks)** **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.	

Year 12: Spring	
Clinical Psychology & Mental Health (Paper 1) (Continued from Autumn term): This topic is broken into discrete sections which make it easy to teach alongside research methods. We cover treating phobias with the behavioural approach and depression with CBT. We finish with using the biological approach to explain and treat OCD. **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. We start with looing at two models of memory, the multi-store model and the working memory model before trying to understand forgetting. We end with factors that affect eyewitness testimony.	**Study Skills and Note Taking** WFE reinforces study skills using Psychologists such as The Learning Scientists. https://www.learningscientists.org/ **Attachment (Paper 1)** 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 considers how culture affects attachment. We then look at disruption of attachment bonds and the impact it will have on a child. This includes looking into a long-term study of Romanian orphans who were adopted. The

	course finishes with how attachment can impact our future relationships.

Assessment:
Research Methods (24 marks)

Psychopathology (36 marks)

Attachment (16 marks)

Homework

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

Year 12: Summer (year 13 content)	
Biopsychology (Paper 2) The first part of this topic is factual and covers the nervous and endocrine systems. It is quite scientific 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. The course includes looking at the fight or flight response before exploring ways of studying the brain (including fMRI and EEGs). The last part of the course looks at localisation of function in the brain and hemispheric lateralisation and includes interesting topics such as split-brain research and plasticity.	**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. **Introduction to experimentation:** 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. **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.

Assessment:

Mock Exams: Paper 1 (2hrs): Social Influence, Memory, Attachment, Clinical Psychology and Mental Health
Paper 2(1hr) Approaches and Research Methods 24 marks per section

Homework

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

Year 13: Autumn	
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. The issues cover gender and culture bias as well as the social sensitivity of psychological research. Issues and Debates are synoptic as we expect students to be able to use examples from year 12 and 13 content to either identify or explain the issues and debates in psychology. The course ends with looking at the idiographic and nomothetic approaches as well as understanding of socially sensitive research in psychology.	**Addiction (Paper 3)** 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. **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.

Assessment:

Mock Exam: Paper 1 (2hrs) Biopsychology plus three other topics to be confirmed

Paper 2 (1 hr) Research Methods and Addiction

Homework

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

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Year 13: Spring</th></tr>
<tr><td>Issues and Debates (Paper 3)
Continued from Autumn term.

Schizophrenia (Paper 3) TBC
The Schizophrenia topic covers the classification, causes, and treatment of the disorder, which is diagnosed by a combination of positive symptoms and negative symptoms. The reliability and validity of this diagnosis are frequently challenged by clinical issues like co-morbidity, symptom overlap, and culture and gender biases. The course contrasts biological explanations—focusing on genetic vulnerability, neural correlates, and the dopamine hypothesis—with psychological explanations, namely family dysfunction and cognitive impairments in thought processing. These theories directly shape their respective treatments, pairing biological typical and atypical antipsychotic drug therapies against psychological interventions like CBT and family therapy. The topic synthesizes these viewpoints through the lens of the interactionist approach, employing the diathesis-stress model to show how an underlying biological or trauma-based vulnerability must interact with an environmental stressor to trigger the condition.

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.</td><td>Research Methods (Paper 2, imbedded in all topics)
Factors of science and the scientific process 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.

Relationships (Paper 3)
The relationships topic explores initial attraction through the lenses of self-disclosure, physical attractiveness (the matching hypothesis), and Filter Theory. Traditional theories of relationships such as Social Exchange, Equity, and Rusbult’s Investment Model are studied. The curriculum applies Duck’s Phase Model to chart the structured psychological and social stages of a breakup. The relationships topic analyses how digital spaces alter communication through the use of deception and the absence of gating in online relationships. We end the topic looking at the absorption-addiction model and childhood attachment theory to explain the one-sided mechanics of celebrity-focused parasocial relationships.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Assessment:

Mock Exams: Issues and Debates, Approaches - summative
Research Methods - summative</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Final Exam</td></tr>
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