

INTRODUCTION TO THE PSYCHOLOGY A LEVEL COURSE AT
CAISTOR GRAMMAR SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PSYCHOLOGY A LEVEL COURSE

Firstly, congratulations! You've chosen to study a fascinating subject that you've probably not studied before, so you've already demonstrated your willingness to take positive risks and try something new. You're going to be doing a lot more of that over the next two years so please do keep your mind open and active over the summer.

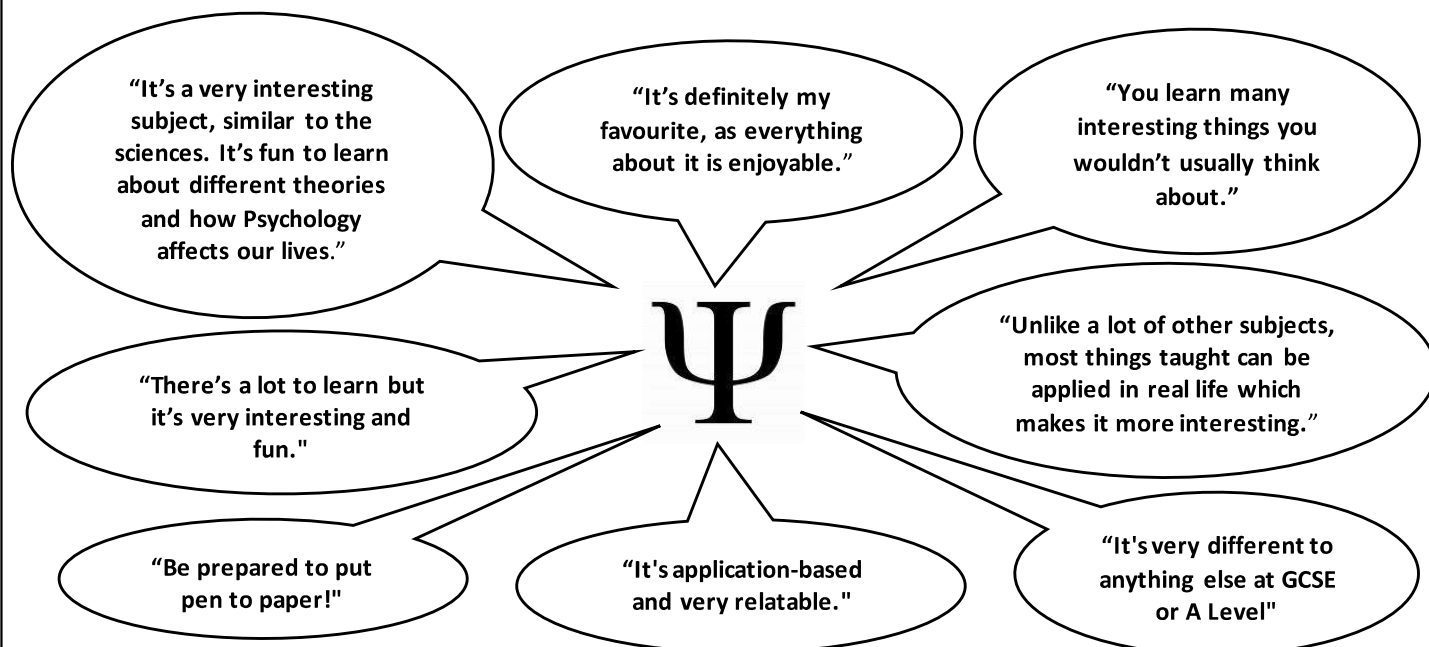
So, what IS Psychology? Well, you will hopefully have some idea (unless you chose it randomly from the prospectus!) but I suggest you watch the following video to crystallise your ideas:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vo4pMVb0R6M>

That's Hank Green from Crash Course, and we'll be watching some of his excellent videos during the course, so no need to binge-watch them this summer unless you really want to!

Psychology is not an easy A Level option – in fact, students often say it's one of their tougher subjects as they have been forced out of their comfort zone in terms of knowledge, beliefs and skills. There's quite a bit of science in the syllabus and your maths skills need to be developed to handle all the scientific data we'll be looking at. You also need to be a clear, concise and persuasive writer, so you're going to need all the skills you've developed over your GCSE courses as well as acquiring new ones.

Some quotes from the current Year 12 Psychology students:



Here I am attempting to give you an overview of the A Level course you will be following, and to give you some insight into the skills you will need to develop to achieve success in the subject. I do not expect you to hand in any preparatory work, but I do expect you to have done it – there's a skill right there: self-motivation!

The A Level Psychology Course

You will be studying the AQA A Level Psychology course:

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

There is no need to print the specification for the course, as you will be given content pages as we go through the course, but if you are interested in reading about the content of the course in more detail you could read the *Specification at a glance* page and get a feel for the kind of exam questions asked using the *Past papers and mark schemes*.

Year 1

Introductory topics:

- Social influence (how and why people's behaviour and/or beliefs change as a result of social contact)
- Memory (what memory is, how it's believed to work and how reliable it is)
- Attachments (how early relationships can influence adult behaviours)
- Psychopathology (defining abnormality, explanations and treatments of phobias, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder).

Psychology in context:

- Approaches (Learning, cognitive, biological, psychodynamic and humanistic approaches to explaining behaviour)
- Biopsychology (the influence of the nervous system and the endocrine system on behaviour, localization of function within the brain & brain plasticity, ways of studying the brain, and the influence of biological rhythms on behaviour)
- Research methods (including experimental, observational, self-report techniques as well as correlations, content analysis and case studies).

Year 2

Approaches (cont), issues and debates:

- Ethical implications of psychological research
- Gender & culture in Psychology
- Free will & determinism & implications for causal explanations
- The nature/nurture debate & the interactionist approach
- Holism & reductionism as levels of explanation
- Idiographic and nomothetic approaches to investigation.

Options:

- Relationships (evolutionary explanations for attraction, why relationships arise, why they fail, virtual relationships in social media, and parasocial relationships)
- Stress (the physiology of stress, its role in illness, sources of stress & ways to measure it, individual differences in stress experiences, managing & coping with stress)
- Forensic Psychology (offender profiling, biological and psychological explanations of offender behaviour, dealing with offending behaviour).

Assessment

The formal assessment that gives you an A Level is at the end of the course with 3 exams. Each exam is 2 hours long as is a mix of a couple of multiple choice questions, some short answer questions and some extended writing (essay) questions. Each exam is 1/3 of the A Level.

What can I do after I've completed the course?

Studying Psychology makes you employable. Journalism, nursing and marketing (to name but a few) all welcome trainees who have studied Psychology. In fact, a study of the graduate class of 2009 found that Psychology students were the most employable of all the graduates.

There are many reasons why Psychology students have a better than average chance of getting work;

"Psychology graduates acquire diverse knowledge and an impressive range of skills that make them highly employable across an enviable range of professions that offer real prospects. Psychology programmes deliver skills employers value, such as numerical skills, the ability to understand and work with statistics, effective communication and the ability to work productively in teams – and this gives students a real edge when competing with graduates from other disciplines."

Dr Alison Green

Study skills for Psychology

As preparation for starting the A Level Psychology course in September, I would like you to complete the following 3 study skills tasks (my thanks to R. Marsh of Richard Hale School for these resources) and introduce some regular psychological reading into your routine .

These tasks will introduce you to some key ideas in Psychology as well as help you to develop some of the study skills which will be beneficial to you on the course (and other courses, too).

Please complete these tasks over the next few months and before the start of term in September , and I suggest you get a regular update on the reading via email or text.

Mrs Richardson

Head of Psychology

Study Skills Task #1: Locus of control

The term 'Locus of Control' was originally proposed by Rotter (1966). It refers to the extent to which an individual perceives themselves as having mastery over events in his or her environment. Individuals may be referred to as having either a high internal or external locus of control. Individuals with the former view events in their lives as shaped by their own efforts and decisions, whereas the latter view themselves as subject to outside forces such as chance or luck. Rotter argued that the 'locus of control' orientation for most people lay on a continuum somewhere between the two extremes.

This orientation or aspect of personality was regarded by Rotter as the product of learning, though the extent to which it is a fixed personality characteristic across situations or the lifespan is debatable. More specifically, Rotter argued that locus of control was affected by the pattern of 'reinforcements' (rewards and punishments) that had followed an individual's earlier actions. Locus of control reflected the subsequent beliefs and attitudes that individuals came to develop about their own ability to affect their environment as a result of this pattern of reinforcement. The approach thus represents a combination of behavioural factors (actions) and cognitive factors (thoughts).

A high internal locus of control is often regarded as psychologically healthy and to correlate with success in terms of factors such as achieving career goals.

Rotter, J. (1966). Generalised expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcements. Psychological Monographs, 80, Whole No. 609.

Success in A-Level Psychology will depend upon your ability to tackle, understand, organise and use material such as that in the box above. This task is designed to ensure that you feel confident about that process. In a sense, to try to increase your 'locus of control' about 'locus of control'.

Here's your task (90 mins):

1) Read and understand

Skim through once to get some sense of what it's all about. Then read through in more depth to identify any terms you're not sure of or parts where your understanding isn't clear.

2) Identify terms or ideas you don't understand and clarify them

Go through with a highlighter pen or underline. Look things up, ask a friend. Do whatever you need to do to clear these up.

3) Organise and simplify

Here's the real learning part. There are loads of things you can do;

- Make a list of the key words
- Draw a table reflecting the two extremes of locus of control
- Think up 'day-to-day' examples to illustrate the points
- Write statements like 'I was never meant to get a good job' and use them to represent different attitudes

- Draw a mindmap / chart / table / picture / diagram to illustrate the key terms
- Use a mnemonic to help you remember; can you develop an acronym or acrostic to illustrate the key points?

4) Finalise

Tie all of this together and create a resource that will help you or others revise and understand the topic.

5) Think

What's the central conclusion here? Do you agree with it? How does it relate to other Psychology that you know? If you don't know about them already, look up 'Hardiness' or 'Type A behaviour' online. How do these ideas fit in with the idea of locus of control? Write a paragraph explaining your thoughts on this.

6) Evaluate

What's good about the concept and what's more of a problem? What do the online learning resources say? What does your friend say? What do you think? Write down one 'for' paragraph and one 'against' paragraph.

7) Reflect

No writing down for this bit – it's not ALL notes and exams. What about your locus of control? Do you have a sense of whether you have a high internal locus of control or not? How do these issues relate to you? Can you think of any examples?

8) Practice

Can you make up two examples of exam questions about locus of control and write them in your notes? Could you do them? What would you write?

If you can get into the habit of doing these tasks with everything that you cover in Psychology, you will enter your exams with a very high sense of internal locus of control, get a good grade and luck will have nothing to do with it!

Study Skills Task #2: Strategies for memory improvement

You probably already use a range of memory improvement strategies. For example, how do you remember the following?

- 1) A phone number?
- 2) A password for a website?
- 3) The number of days in January?
- 4) The colours of the rainbow?
- 5) Things you have to bring into lessons the next day?
- 6) The order of musical notes?
- 7) Whether 'i' comes before 'e' in a word?
- 8) Class notes for a mock exam?

Here's your task (45 mins):

Write a brief description of the following techniques, including examples, and identify which of the above items you think could be memorised using each particular technique. Research each technique on the internet if you are stuck.

ACRONYMS	
ACROSTICS	
ACOUSTIC CODING	
METHOD OF LOCI	
ORGANISATION / CHUNKING	

Study Skills Task #3: Dealing with stress

There are two distinct approaches to dealing with stress; problem-focused and emotion-focused.

Here's your task (30 mins):

Research the topic using the internet first, and once you are confident that you understand it, use the terms given below to fill in the table overleaf (30 mins).

1 Terms to include in the table

Prioritising	Relaxation	Wishful thinking	Unpleasant emotions	"I'll write a study plan"
Behaviour	Denial	Rethinking the situation	Threats from the environment	Reduce individual's stress level
Feelings	"I'll apply to a different university with a lower points offer"	"I did alright at my GCSE's without revision"	"Exams aren't the only thing in my life – I must keep it in perspective"	Reduce individual's stress level
"I don't care how I do anyway"	"I'll ask for help with revision"	Passing the blame onto someone else	Action planning	Giving up on the task

	Problem-Focused Coping	Emotion-Focused Coping
In this approach an individual will try to change their:		
In order to eliminate:		
This could involve strategies such as:		
Examples in terms of preparing for exams:		
Goal of approach:		

Reading about research

There are some fantastic resources online to keep us up-to-date with what's going on in the world of Psychology (there are also some very dodgy ones, so I shall steer you to the former!)

As a Psychology student it will do your studies and your mind the world of good to be reading around the subject as part of your ongoing routine.

<https://digest.bps.org.uk/> This comes from the British Psychological Society and is an excellent resource. They offer a free weekly email update on the latest in psychological research, so I suggest you get a regular update from this to your inbox.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb> This is an accessible resource though it does contain more pop-Psychology material.

https://www.sciencedaily.com/news/mind_brain/psychology/ An American science website with some psychology content.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/> An American website, mostly focusing on mental health but with some other interesting content, too.

Many newspapers or online news services also have free-to-view Psychology-related articles worth a browse now and again:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cz4pr2gdge5t/psychology>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/Psychology>

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/psychology>

Suggested websites

The following websites are designed specifically for post-16 Psychology students or practitioners, but not necessarily AQA A Level; despite this, they should be useful in helping you complete this preparatory work. The list is by no means exhaustive and if you find an unlisted source that helps, please feel free to use it.

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/>

<https://s-cool.co.uk/a-level/psychology>

<https://www.psychboost.com/>