

**FLYING START**  
Your Summer Introduction to



# A LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

## Exploring the Science of Mind & Behaviour

Five hours of activities to ignite your curiosity before you arrive

Social Influence

Memory

Attachment

Clinical  
Psychology

Research Methods

Biopsychology

Approaches

Issues & Debates

Gender

Forensics

Schizophrenia

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Welcome to the department. We cannot wait to meet you!**

### Dear Student,

Congratulations on choosing A Level Psychology — one of the most fascinating, thought-provoking and genuinely life-changing subjects you could study. You are about to enter a world of ideas that will challenge how you see yourself, how you understand other people, and how you make sense of society.

Psychology is both a science and a social science. It uses rigorous experimental methods to answer some of the biggest questions humans have ever asked: Why do ordinary people commit acts of cruelty? Can memories be entirely false? What makes a person develop a mental illness — and how can it be treated? Why do we form the emotional bonds we do, right from birth?

This booklet is your flying start. It contains around five hours of activities — things to read, watch, listen to, think about and write. You don't need any prior knowledge of Psychology; you just need curiosity, an open mind, and a willingness to be surprised.

We look forward to welcoming you in September.

**James and Jo, The Psychology Department, North Devon College**

# What's Inside This Booklet

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| Activity     | Topic                                             | Time    |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 1            | What is Psychology? The Big Questions             | ~50 min |
| 2            | Social Influence: Obedience & Conformity          | ~60 min |
| 3            | Memory: How Reliable Is Your Mind?                | ~55 min |
| 4            | Mental Health & Clinical Psychology               | ~55 min |
| 5            | Life beyond A Level Psychology!                   | ~60 min |
| <b>Bonus</b> | Year 2 Tasters: Gender, Schizophrenia & Forensics | ~40 min |

## How to use this booklet

You have the whole summer — there is no rush and this is not meant to feel like ‘homework’! It is not compulsory but we’d hope you find the activities interesting enough to complete and we look forward to discussing what you’ve found in our first weeks together! We suggest spreading the activities across several sessions rather than completing them all at once. Here are some tips:

1. Complete the activities in order — each one builds on the last.
2. Dip into it ‘when you are feeling curious’ rather than ‘because you feel you have to’
3. Write your answers in the spaces provided. You will use this booklet in your first lessons.
4. Watch the recommended videos — they are short and genuinely brilliant.
5. Don't worry if you find some concepts challenging — that's the point. Stick with it.
6. The Bonus activity at the end gives you a taste of your Year 2 options — enjoy!

**Here's a short video to introduce ourselves and this Flying Start booklet**

<https://app.screencastify.com/watch/LXHwnvXpaJnU04xJVmOX>

## ACTIVITY 1

# What is Psychology? The Big Questions

🕒 Estimated time: approximately 50 minutes

Psychology is the scientific study of mind and behaviour. But what does that actually mean? Before you begin studying the formal content of the course, this activity invites you to think about the big questions that psychologists try to answer — and to form your own views.

## Part 1A — What Do You Already Think? (10 minutes)

Before watching or reading anything, answer the following questions honestly. There are no right or wrong answers — we want to know what you think right now, before your studies begin.

🗨️ **Do you think people are fundamentally good or fundamentally selfish? Give a reason for your answer.**

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🗨️ **Can you think of a time when you or someone you know behaved differently because of the presence of other people? Describe what happened.**

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🗨️ **How reliable do you think your own memory is? Can you think of a memory you are not 100% certain is accurate?**

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## Part 1B — Watch & Engage (20 minutes)

Watch the two short clips below. You may want to pause and take notes in the spaces provided.

### ► WATCH / LISTEN

**Crash Course: What is Psychology?** <https://youtu.be/vo4pMVb0R6M>

A clear, engaging introduction to what psychology is and the key questions it tries to answer. (~5 mins)



Notes from the clip

## Part 1C — Read & Reflect (20 minutes)

Read the following passage carefully. It is written in an academic style — similar to texts you will encounter at A Level. Annotate any words or phrases you do not understand.

### Psychology as Science

Psychology occupies a unique position among academic disciplines. Unlike physics or chemistry, it studies phenomena that are notoriously difficult to measure — thoughts, feelings, memories, motivations. Yet it employs the same rigorous methodology as the natural sciences: forming hypotheses, designing controlled experiments, analysing data and drawing evidence-based conclusions.

One of the central debates in psychology is whether human behaviour is best explained by nature or nurture — that is, by biological inheritance or by environmental experience. This debate is not merely academic: it shapes how society treats mental illness, how courts make judgements about criminal responsibility, and how governments design educational policies.

Modern psychology has largely moved beyond this debate, recognising that the interaction between genetic predisposition and lived experience is what shapes who we are. Nevertheless, different psychological approaches — or 'schools of thought' — still tend to emphasise one side more than the other. As you study this course, you will encounter the biological approach, the behaviourist approach, the cognitive approach, and several others, each offering a different lens through which human behaviour can be understood.

The great strength of psychology is that it does not claim to have all the answers and, in fact, you will rarely come across a definitive answer in the course. It is a discipline defined by productive disagreement — where competing theories are tested against evidence and refined over time. This is precisely what makes it so exciting to study.



**After reading, consider the following:**

1. What does the author mean by 'productive disagreement'? Do you agree that disagreement can be a strength in a subject?

2. Do you think psychology should be considered a science? What criteria would a science need to meet?

## ACTIVITY 2

# Social Influence: Obedience & Conformity

🕒 Estimated time: approximately 60 minutes

One of the most dramatic and important areas of psychology is Social Influence — how other people shape our thoughts, feelings and actions. This topic asks some deeply uncomfortable questions: Would you obey an authority figure if ordered to harm someone? Do you conform to the crowd even when you know the crowd is wrong?

### A key Psychologist in this Topic

**Stanley Milgram (1963)** — Obedience to Authority experiment

## Part 2A — Watch (15 minutes)

### ► WATCH / LISTEN

**Obedience in Action (Milgram Replication)** <https://youtu.be/y6GxIuljT3w>

A modern replication of the Milgram study. Genuinely shocking. (~10 mins)

🗒️ **What surprised you most about the study? Do you think YOU might have obeyed in the same way as some participants did? Why? Why not? Make a few notes**

## Part 2B — Key Terminology (15 minutes)

Before you can analyse research in psychology, you need to understand the specialist vocabulary. Study the key terms below, then complete the matching activity that follows.

| Key Term               | Definition                                                                                       |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Conformity</b>      | A change in behaviour or belief as a result of real or imagined group pressure.                  |
| <b>Obedience</b>       | A form of social influence where an individual follows the direct orders of an authority figure. |
| <b>Internalisation</b> | The deepest type of conformity — where a person genuinely adopts the beliefs of the group.       |
| <b>Compliance</b>      | Going along with the group publicly, but privately maintaining your own views.                   |

|                                |                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Agentic State</b>           | Milgram's term for when a person sees themselves as an agent of another's will, removing personal responsibility. |
| <b>Autonomous State</b>        | When a person sees themselves as responsible for their own actions and moral choices.                             |
| <b>Legitimacy of Authority</b> | The perception that an authority figure has the right to give orders (e.g. due to their role or status).          |
| <b>Social Support</b>          | The presence of others who resist authority or conformity, which can reduce obedience/conformity.                 |

## Part 2C — Scenario Analysis (20 minutes)

Read each scenario below. Using the terminology you have just learned, explain what type of social influence is occurring and identify the psychological processes at work.

**Scenario 1:** Jayda joins a new friendship group at college. She doesn't personally like the music they listen to, but she begins to say she does and starts attending their events. After a few months, she genuinely begins to enjoy the music.

What type(s) of social influence are shown here? What psychological process explains Jayda's shift in attitude?

**Scenario 2:** Marcus is a junior doctor. His consultant tells him to administer a drug dosage that Marcus believes is too high. He raises his concern but is firmly told to comply. Marcus administers the drug, telling himself 'the consultant knows best.'

Which of Milgram's concepts best explains Marcus's behaviour? What factors make obedience more likely here?

## Part 2D — Ethical Debate (10 minutes)

The Milgram experiment is celebrated as a landmark in psychology — but it is also deeply controversial because of the harm caused to participants.

🗣️ **Do you think it is ever acceptable to deceive research participants or cause them psychological distress in order to produce important scientific knowledge? Justify your view.**

### ACTIVITY 3

## Memory: How Reliable Is Your Mind?

🕒 Estimated time: approximately 55 minutes

We tend to think of memory as a faithful recording — like a video camera — but psychological research tells a very different story. Memory is reconstructive: every time we remember something, we actively rebuild it, and in doing so, we can introduce errors, distortions and even entirely false recollections.

### Why does this matter?

The reliability of memory has profound real-world consequences. In the criminal justice system, eyewitness testimony has been used to convict people — some of whom were later proven innocent by DNA evidence. Understanding how and why memory fails is not just academically interesting: it is a matter of justice.

## Part 3A — The Multi-Store Model (15 minutes)

The first major model of memory in the AQA specification is the Multi-Store Model, proposed by Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968). Study the description below and then complete the diagram.

### The Multi-Store Model (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968)

The model proposes that memory consists of three distinct stores, each with different capacities and durations:

1. **Sensory Register:** receives all information from our senses. Duration: very brief (milliseconds to 2 seconds). Capacity: very large. Most information decays immediately.
2. **Short-Term Memory (STM):** holds information we are currently conscious of. Duration: 15–30 seconds without rehearsal. Capacity:  $7 \pm 2$  items (Miller, 1956). Information can be moved to LTM through maintenance rehearsal.
3. **Long-Term Memory (LTM):** potentially unlimited in both duration and capacity. Information stored here can last a lifetime.

📏 In the space below, draw and label your own diagram of the Multi-Store Model, showing the flow of information between the three stores. Include the terms: encoding, storage, retrieval, rehearsal, decay.



## Part 3B — Watch (10 minutes)

### ► WATCH / LISTEN

#### **Crash Course Psychology: Memory** <https://youtu.be/bSyCdIx-C48>

Covers types of memory, encoding and some of the key studies you will encounter on the course. (~10 mins)

### ► WATCH / LISTEN

#### **TED Talk: Elizabeth Loftus — The Fiction of Memory** <https://youtu.be/PB2Oegl6wvI>

Elizabeth Loftus is one of the world's leading experts on eyewitness testimony and false memory. Essential viewing. (~18 mins)

## Part 3C — The Loftus & Palmer Study (20 minutes)

Read the following summary of one of the most famous studies in psychology:

### **Loftus & Palmer (1974) — Eyewitness Testimony**

**Aim:** To investigate whether the wording of a question can alter a participant's memory of an event.

**Procedure:** Participants were shown a film of a car accident. They were then asked 'About how fast were the cars going when they \_\_\_\_\_ each other?' Different groups received different verbs: smashed / collided / bumped / hit / contacted.

**Findings:** The verb used significantly affected speed estimates. 'Smashed' produced the highest average speed estimate (40.8 mph); 'contacted' the lowest (31.8 mph). In a follow-up experiment, participants given 'smashed' were also more likely to report seeing broken glass (which did not exist in the film).

**Conclusion:** Post-event information can distort memory. Memory is not a fixed record but a reconstructive process susceptible to suggestion.



### **Analysis Questions**

1. What does this study tell us about the reliability of eyewitness testimony in courts of law?

2. Can you think of any weaknesses of this study? (Consider: where it was conducted, who the participants were, and what they were shown.)

#### ACTIVITY 4

## Mental Health & Clinical Psychology

🕒 Estimated time: approximately 55 minutes

Psychopathology is the study of mental illness — its causes, characteristics and treatments. This is one of the most personally relevant topics on the course: one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem in any given year. Psychology provides powerful tools for understanding and treating these conditions.

### Topics covered in Clinical Psychology (Year 1):

1. Definitions of abnormality (statistical infrequency, deviation from social norms, failure to function adequately, deviation from ideal mental health)
2. Characteristics of phobias, depression and OCD
3. Behavioural, cognitive and biological explanations and therapies

## Part 4A — Identifying Mental Illness

### Watch (5 minutes)

#### ► WATCH / LISTEN

**Psychological Disorders** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fWo\\_Yme2G0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fWo_Yme2G0)

A brief overview of major mental disorders. (~10 mins)

#### ► EXTENSION - WATCH / LISTEN

**TED Talk: Andrew Solomon — Depression, the Secret We Share**

<https://youtu.be/-eBUcBfkVCo>

A personal and profound account of depression. As you watch, note the biological, psychological and social factors he describes. (~30 mins — worth it)

## Part 4B — Diving deep into Clinical Psychology

### Independent study (30 minutes)

📌 On a separate sheet, choose any one mental health condition and research it! Follow whatever interests you but maybe look at; the formal DSM5 categorisation of the disorder, examples of symptoms, typical treatments and possibly even one explanation for what might be causing the disorder. You can present this in a creative way if you like - don't simply Claude/ChatGPT a text answer!

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## Part 4C — Approaches to Treatment (15 minutes)

Psychology offers several approaches to treating mental health conditions. Read the summaries below and do some wider research of how each may be used in the treatment of your chosen disorder.

### Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT is based on the principle that our thoughts (cognitions) directly affect our feelings and behaviours. A person with depression may hold distorted beliefs — such as 'I am worthless' or 'nothing will ever improve' — that maintain their low mood. CBT challenges these beliefs through structured sessions, helping the client to identify, question and replace distorted thinking with more balanced and realistic thoughts.

### Systematic Desensitisation (Behavioural Therapy)

Developed from behaviourist principles, systematic desensitisation is used to treat phobias. The client is gradually exposed to their feared stimulus while in a state of relaxation, breaking the learned association between the stimulus and the fear response. This works through a process called counter-conditioning.

### Drug Therapy (Biological treatments)

In Clinical Psychology these often focus on changing the levels of neurotransmitters in the synapse, often Dopamine or Serotonin. For example, some disorders have an overactivity of Dopamine so drugs are used to prevent dopamine activity and therefore reduce symptoms.



### Questions

1. Which treatment is used most commonly for your chosen disorder?

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2. How does it reduce the symptoms?

3. Extension - Google 'NICE' recommendations for your chosen disorder - what are Doctor's advised to prescribe (known as the first line treatment)?

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## ACTIVITY 5

# Where can this take me?!: Thinking beyond A levels

🕒 Estimated time: approximately 60 minutes

It might feel strange thinking about 'life beyond A levels' before you have even started them but seeing how Psychology can fit into and shape your future plans can really help you get the most out of your time with us! We will constantly help you to develop an understanding of the various careers and progression pathways that Psychology leads you to.

## Part 5A — Some Psych-specific careers (20 minutes)

Have a look at these Psychology specific jobs and make a brief note of the kinds of things this job entails.

| Job title                 | Brief description of what the job entails |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Clinical Psychologist     |                                           |
| Educational Psychologist  |                                           |
| Forensic Psychologist     |                                           |
| Counsellor                |                                           |
| Occupational Psychologist |                                           |
| Neuropsychologist         |                                           |
| Criminal profiler         |                                           |
| Research Psychologist     |                                           |
| Sport Psychologist        |                                           |
| Child Psychologist        |                                           |

Psychology has direct relevance to almost every other possible career (it's all about people, after all!!) Use this box to make any brief notes about how Psychology might be relevant to any other career of your choosing!

## Part 5B — Research Pathways (10 minutes)

Now choose 1 possible career which might interest you and answer the following questions:



### Questions

1. What qualifications might you need for this particular job?

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2. How much might you earn in this role?

3. Extension - Google 'Guardian University League Table Psychology' and research:

a) What it is like to study this subject at degree level (make a few notes)

b) 5 universities in the top 30 Psychology universities which you might be interested in one day attending! (Note the uni's, their courses and anything else you want to!)

1

2

3

4

5

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Some helpful links:

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/ng-interactive/2025/sep/13/best-uk-universities-for-psychology-league-table>

<https://www.ucas.com/explore/search/all?query=psychology>

## ACTIVITY BONUS

# Year 2 Tasters: Gender, Schizophrenia & Forensics

🕒 Estimated time: approximately 40 minutes

In Year 2, you will cover a range of fascinating topics that go deeper into specialist areas of psychology. Working with our students we have chosen: Gender, Schizophrenia and Forensic Psychology. This bonus activity gives you a flavour of each — consider which excites you most!

## Topic 1: Gender

Is gender something we are born with, or something we learn? *How* is it inherited? *How* is it learnt? Psychology's approach to gender challenges many everyday assumptions. You will study biological, psychoanalytic, social learning and cognitive explanations — and encounter fascinating research on gender dysphoria, androgyny and cultural variations in gender.

**Key thinkers:** Kohlberg, Sandra Bem, Bandura, Freud.

🗒️ **In what ways might a person's gender identity be shaped by biology? In what ways might it be shaped by learning? Note down your initial thoughts.**

## Topic 2: Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is one of the most complex and misunderstood mental health conditions. Contrary to popular belief, it does not mean 'split personality'. You will examine its symptoms (hallucinations, delusions, thought disorder), explore biological and psychological explanations, and evaluate the effectiveness of antipsychotic medication and psychological therapies.

### ► WATCH / LISTEN

**Living with Schizophrenia — BBC Documentary Clip** [https://youtu.be/K2sc\\_ck5BZU](https://youtu.be/K2sc_ck5BZU)

First-person accounts of what schizophrenia feels like from the inside. Sensitive and powerful. (~8 mins)

🗒️ **What surprised you most about schizophrenia? How had you understood this condition before watching the clip? Has your understanding changed?**

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### **Topic 3: Forensic Psychology**

Forensic psychology applies psychological knowledge to the criminal justice system. What turns a person into an offender? Can criminal behaviour be explained by biology, upbringing, thinking patterns — or a combination of all three? You will look at offender profiling, theories of criminal behaviour, and the effectiveness of custodial versus non-custodial sentencing.

**Key thinkers: Eysenck, Farrington, Yochelson and Samenow.**

#### **► WATCH / LISTEN**

**Mindhunter Podcast — Profiling Serial Offenders** <https://youtu.be/gPhLgBMQeAo>

An insight into offender profiling from the FBI's Behavioural Science Unit. (~10 mins)

🗒️ **Do you think criminals are 'born' or 'made'? What evidence — from everyday life, the news, or this activity — informs your view? Try to use at least one psychological concept in your answer.**

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## Before You Arrive: Final Reflection

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Having completed this booklet, reflect on the following questions. These will form the basis of a discussion in your first Psychology lesson.

1. Which topic or activity engaged you most? Why?

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2. Which concept or finding surprised you most? What had you previously assumed?

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3. What question do you most want psychology to help you answer?

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## Further Reading & Resources

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### Recommended Books

- What Mental Illness Really Is ... And What It Isn't - Lucy Foulkes (2021)
- The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat — Oliver Sacks (fascinating case studies of neurological conditions)
- Thinking, Fast and Slow — Daniel Kahneman (how our minds make decisions — brilliantly readable)
- The Psychopath Test — Jon Ronson (an accessible exploration of mental health diagnosis and forensic psychology)

### Useful Websites & Channels

- <https://www.bearitinmind.org/> (YouTube) — excellent AQA-specific revision videos
- BBC Radio 4 — All in the Mind podcast (current, accessible discussions of psychological research)

**We really look forward to seeing you in September!**

Bring this booklet — and your questions — on your first day.

Jo and James