KINGSTHORPE COLLEGE AQA PSYCHOLOGY

A LEVEL TRANSITION WORKBOOK

Year 11 → Year 12

Summer Preparation Programme

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How to use this workbook:

This workbook is designed to introduce you to key themes and content from the AQA A Level Psychology specification. Work through one week at a time — but feel free to do more if you are enjoying it!

Each week includes:

- Core information to read

	and learn • Key terms to define and remember • Exam-style practice questions • A research activity • A critical thinking challenge

What will I study in A Level Psychology?

AQA Psychology A Level covers a fascinating range of topics across two years. In Year 12 you will study: Social Influence, Memory, Attachment, Approaches to Psychology, Psychopathology, and Research Methods. In Year 13 you will add optional topics and advance your research methods knowledge.

This workbook gives you a head start on the most important foundational topics, key thinkers, and the skills you will need from day one.

INTRODUCTION: What is Psychology?

Psychology is the scientific study of the mind and behaviour. Psychologists seek to understand how and why people think, feel, and behave the way they do. Unlike common assumptions, psychology is not just about therapy or mental illness — it covers everything from memory and perception to social influence and human development.

The Four Main Goals of Psychology

Psychologists generally work towards four goals:

- Describe — What is happening? (e.g. describing how memories are stored)
- Explain — Why is it happening? (e.g. explaining why we forget)
- Predict — What will happen? (e.g. predicting who is more susceptible to obedience)
- Control / Change — How can we change behaviour? (e.g. developing therapies for phobias)

Psychology as a Science

At A Level, you will explore whether psychology truly is a science. A key debate centres on whether the methods used to study human behaviour are objective and reliable. Scientific research relies on empirical evidence — evidence gathered through observation and experimentation rather than opinion or intuition.

Key Term	Definition
Psychology	The scientific study of mind and behaviour
Empirical Evidence	Evidence gathered through direct observation or experimentation
Behaviour	Observable actions of a person or animal
Cognition	Mental processes such as thinking, memory, perception and problem-solving
Nature	The influence of genetics and biology on behaviour
Nurture	The influence of the environment and experience on behaviour
Determinism	The view that behaviour is caused by factors outside our control
Free Will	The view that individuals have control over their own behaviour

Activity 1 — Defining Psychology

In your own words, write a definition of psychology that you could explain to someone who has never heard of it. Then write three questions you think psychology might be able to answer.

My definition of psychology:

Three questions psychology might answer:

Activity 2 — Nature vs Nurture Debate

For each of the following examples, decide whether you think nature or nurture is the main explanation. Tick your choice and give a reason.

Example	Nature	Nurture	My reason
Shyness	☐	☐	
Intelligence	☐	☐	
Addiction	☐	☐	
Aggression	☐	☐	
Language development	☐	☐	

WEEK 1 | Social Influence

Conformity, Obedience and Resistance

Social influence is the study of how other people affect our thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. This is one of the most fascinating areas of psychology, and some of the most famous and controversial experiments in the history of the discipline belong here.

Conformity

Conformity occurs when we change our behaviour or beliefs to match those of a social group. Psychologists distinguish between different types of conformity:

Type	Explanation	Example
Compliance	Going along publicly but not changing private beliefs. Motivated by wanting to fit in (normative social influence).	Laughing at a joke you don't find funny because everyone else is.
Identification	Adopting the views of a group we want to be associated with, but not necessarily internalising them.	Wearing a school uniform without particularly valuing the rules it represents.
Internalisation	A genuine change in both public behaviour and private beliefs. Motivated by wanting to be right (informational social influence).	Becoming vegetarian after being persuaded by friends' arguments about animal welfare.

Asch's Conformity Experiment (1951)

Solomon Asch conducted a series of classic experiments to investigate conformity. Participants were shown a standard line and three comparison lines. They had to say out loud which comparison line matched the standard line. The task was easy, but each real participant was surrounded by confederates (actors) who all gave the same wrong answer.

Key Findings

- 75% of participants conformed at least once
- On average, participants conformed on 32% of critical trials
- Only 25% never conformed at all

Asch concluded that people conform due to normative social influence — they feared rejection and ridicule, even when they could clearly see the correct answer.

Variables Affecting Conformity

Asch also investigated what factors increase or decrease conformity:

- Group size: Conformity increased up to 3 people, then levelled off
- Unanimity: Having even one ally reduced conformity dramatically
- Task difficulty: Harder tasks increased conformity (informational influence)
- Anonymity: Written answers reduced conformity compared to public responses

Obedience — Milgram's Experiment (1963)

Stanley Milgram investigated whether ordinary people would obey an authority figure's instructions to harm another person. Participants believed they were administering electric shocks to a 'learner' (actually a confederate) who gave wrong answers, with shocks increasing to a dangerous 450 volts.

Milgram's Findings

- 65% of participants went to the maximum 450 volts
- All participants went to at least 300 volts

This shocked the world. Milgram showed that ordinary Americans would obey destructive orders from an authority figure, helping to explain atrocities such as the Holocaust.

Milgram's Situational Variables

Variation	Obedience Rate	Explanation
Experimenter in same room	65%	Proximity of authority increases obedience
Experimenter by phone	20.5%	Reduced authority at a distance
Conducted at run-down office	47.5%	Less prestigious location reduces authority
Other teachers refuse (allies)	10%	Social support allows resistance
Participant only reads out answers	92.5%	Less personal responsibility

Activity 3 — Evaluating Milgram

Milgram's research is famous but controversial. Consider the following points and write an evaluation.

Strength — the findings have important real-world implications:

Limitation — there are ethical concerns with the study:

Limitation — there are questions about validity:

Explanations for Obedience

Milgram proposed two key explanations for why people obey:

Agentic State

When people see themselves as an agent of someone else's will, they hand over moral responsibility to the authority figure. They are just 'following orders'.

Legitimate Authority

We obey people we perceive as having the right to give orders — e.g., teachers, doctors, police officers — especially in formal institutional settings.

Resistance to Social Influence

Not everyone conforms or obeys. Psychologists have identified factors that help people resist:

- Social support: Having an ally greatly reduces conformity and obedience
- Locus of control: People with an internal locus of control (belief they control their own fate) are more likely to resist
- Reactance: When people feel their freedom is threatened, they may resist
- Moral beliefs: Strong personal values can override situational pressures

Activity 4 — Exam Practice (Social Influence)

Answer the following exam-style questions. Use your notes and the information above.

1. Outline what is meant by 'internalisation' as a type of conformity.

2. Research the strengths and limitations of Asch's research

3. Explain two factors that affect obedience.

WEEK 2 | Memory

Models of Memory, Forgetting and Eyewitness Testimony

Memory is one of our most important cognitive abilities. Without it, we could not learn from experience, recognise people we know, or plan for the future. Cognitive psychologists study memory by creating models — simplified representations of how memory works.

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

The most influential early model of memory proposed that information passes through a series of memory stores:

Store	Duration	Capacity	Encoding
Sensory Register	Very brief (0.25 – 2 seconds)	Large but most is lost	Modality-specific (e.g. visual, auditory)
Short-Term Memory (STM)	18–30 seconds without rehearsal	7 ± 2 chunks (Miller, 1956)	Mainly acoustic (sound)
Long-Term Memory (LTM)	Potentially a lifetime	Unlimited	Mainly semantic (meaning)

Transfer and Rehearsal

Information moves from STM to LTM through rehearsal (maintenance rehearsal = repetition; elaborative rehearsal = making meaning). Information can be retrieved from LTM back into STM when needed. The model is supported by evidence from brain-damaged patients, e.g. HM (Milner) who could not form new long-term memories but had intact STM.

The Working Memory Model (Baddeley & Hitch, 1974)

Baddeley and Hitch argued that STM is not a single store but a multi-component system for active processing:

- Central Executive: The 'boss' — allocates attention and coordinates the other components. Has limited capacity.
- Phonological Loop: Deals with sound and speech. Includes the phonological store (inner ear) and articulatory process (inner voice).
- Visuospatial Sketchpad: Processes visual and spatial information. Like a mental whiteboard.
- Episodic Buffer (added 2000): Integrates information from the other components and links to LTM.

Types of Long-Term Memory

Episodic Memory

Memory for personal events and experiences — autobiographical memories with time and place attached. E.g. your first day at secondary school.

Procedural Memory

Memory for how to do things — motor skills and sequences that can be performed without conscious thought. E.g. riding a bike or typing.

Semantic Memory

Memory for general knowledge and facts about the world, not tied to personal experience. E.g. knowing that Paris is the capital of France.

Why does this matter?

Different types of LTM appear to be stored in different brain regions and can be selectively impaired by brain damage, supporting the distinction.

Forgetting

Why do we forget? Psychologists have proposed several explanations:

Theory	Explanation
Interference (Proactive)	Old memories interfere with new ones — e.g. old phone numbers make it harder to remember your new one.
Interference (Retroactive)	New memories interfere with old ones — e.g. learning French makes it harder to remember Spanish you learned before.
Retrieval Failure	Memory is there but we cannot access it without the right cue. Tulving proposed the Encoding Specificity Principle: cues must match the context of encoding.
Trace Decay	Memories fade over time if not accessed (mainly applies to STM). Supported by Peterson & Peterson's trigram study.

Eyewitness Testimony (EWT)

A crucial application of memory research is understanding how reliable eyewitness accounts are in legal settings. Research shows that memory is not a perfect recording but is reconstructive — we fill in gaps and are influenced by post-event information.

Loftus & Palmer (1974) — Leading Questions

Participants watched a film of a car accident and were asked 'How fast were the cars going when they _____ each other?' with different verbs (smashed / collided / bumped / hit / contacted).

- 'Smashed' produced the highest speed estimates (~40mph)
- 'Contacted' produced the lowest (~32mph)
- In a follow-up study, participants asked 'smashed' were more likely to falsely report seeing broken glass

This demonstrated the misinformation effect — post-event information can distort memories.

Other factors affecting EWT include: anxiety (complex relationship — Yerkes-Dodson law), age of witness, weapon focus effect, and post-identification feedback.

Activity 5 — Memory Diagram

Draw your own diagram of the Multi-Store Model of Memory in the box below. Label each store with its capacity, duration, and type of encoding. Add arrows to show how information moves between stores.

Activity 6 — Exam Practice (Memory)

Answer these exam-style questions.

1. Outline one difference between episodic and semantic memory.

2. Research and strength and limitation of the Working Memory Model

3. Explain how leading questions can affect the accuracy of eyewitness testimony.

WEEK 3 | Attachment

Caregiver-Infant Bonds, Ainsworth and Bowlby

Attachment is a strong emotional bond between two people, particularly the bond between an infant and their primary caregiver. Understanding how attachments form — and what happens when they go wrong — has profound implications for child development, mental health, and social policy.

Caregiver-Infant Interactions

Before attachments form, caregivers and infants engage in reciprocal behaviours that lay the groundwork for bonding:

- Interactional synchrony: A 'turn-taking' pattern where caregiver and infant match and mirror each other's emotional states
- Caregiver sensitivity: Responsive caregivers who read and respond to infant cues tend to foster more secure attachments
- Reciprocity: Both infant and caregiver actively initiate and respond to each other's signals

Stages of Attachment (Schaffer & Emerson, 1964)

Schaffer and Emerson studied 60 Glasgow babies and identified four stages of attachment development:

Age	Stage	Description
0–6 weeks	**Asocial**	Babies respond equally to objects and people. Prefer social stimuli slightly.
6 weeks–7 months	**Indiscriminate**	Babies show preference for people over objects but accept attention from any caregiver.
7–9 months	**Specific**	First specific attachment formed, usually to the primary caregiver. Separation anxiety and stranger fear emerge.
10–11 months+	**Multiple**	Secondary attachments form to other familiar people (e.g. father, siblings).

Explanations of Attachment

Learning Theory (Behaviourist)

Babies become attached because caregivers provide food (primary reinforcer), so the caregiver becomes associated with pleasure (secondary

Bowlby's Evolutionary Theory

Bowlby argued attachment is innate and adaptive — it evolved to keep infants close to caregivers for protection. Key features: monotropy (one primary attachment), critical

reinforcer). Cupboard love — attachment is a learned drive.

Challenge to this view:

Harlow's (1959) study with rhesus monkeys: infant monkeys preferred a cloth 'contact comfort' mother even though the wire mother provided food. This contradicts the learning theory explanation.

period (first 2.5 years), internal working model (template for future relationships).

Support:

Lorenz's (1935) imprinting study showed that geese formed attachments to the first moving object they saw during a critical period — supporting the idea that attachment is innate.

Types of Attachment — Ainsworth's Strange Situation (1970)

Mary Ainsworth devised a controlled observation — the Strange Situation — to classify infants' attachment types. An infant and caregiver went through a series of episodes including separation and reunion.

Attachment Type	% in Ainsworth's study	Behaviour
Secure	66%	Uses caregiver as safe base. Distressed when separated but easily soothed on reunion. Comfortable with strangers when caregiver present.
Insecure-Avoidant	22%	Shows little distress on separation. Avoids or ignores caregiver on reunion. No preference between caregiver and stranger.
Insecure-Resistant	12%	Extremely distressed when separated. Simultaneously seeks and resists comfort on reunion. Ambivalent and difficult to soothe.

Cultural Variations in Attachment

Van IJzendoorn and Kroonenberg (1988) conducted a meta-analysis of Strange Situation studies across 32 samples from 8 countries. They found:

- Secure attachment was the most common type in all countries studied
- Germany showed higher rates of insecure-avoidant (linked to cultural value of independence)
- Japan and Israel showed higher rates of insecure-resistant (linked to collectivist cultures and different caregiving practices)
- Variation within countries was greater than variation between countries

Bowlby's Theory of Maternal Deprivation

Bowlby proposed that continuous care from a primary caregiver is essential in the first 2.5 years. Disruption to this bond could cause permanent intellectual and emotional damage — affectionless psychopathy.

Bowlby's 44 Thieves Study (1944)

Bowlby studied 44 juvenile thieves and found that 14 showed 'affectionless psychopathy' (inability to show concern for others). Of these, 12 had experienced early maternal deprivation. This suggested a link between early separation and criminal/antisocial behaviour.

Criticism:

The study relied on retrospective reports (memory of past events), which may be unreliable. Later research (e.g. Rutter) distinguished between deprivation and privation, suggesting it is the complete absence of attachment (privation) that causes lasting damage, not temporary separation.

Activity 7 — Attachment Research

Research one of the following studies in more detail using books or the internet. Make notes using the structure below.

- Lorenz (1935) — Imprinting in geese
- Harlow (1959) — Contact comfort in rhesus monkeys
- Robertson & Robertson (1971) — John: 9 months in a residential nursery

Study chosen:

Aim:

Procedure:

Findings:

Conclusions:

One strength and one limitation:

WEEK 4 | Approaches to Psychology

The Major Schools of Thought

Psychology has developed several major approaches — distinct ways of explaining human behaviour, each with its own assumptions, methods, and applications. At A Level you will compare and evaluate these approaches throughout all topics.

Approach	Key Assumptions	Key Figures
Behaviourist	All behaviour is learned through experience. Psychology should only study observable behaviour, not the mind. Classical and operant conditioning explain all behaviour.	Watson, Pavlov, Skinner
Cognitive	Behaviour is influenced by mental processes (thinking, memory, attention). The mind works like an information processor. Internal representations (schemas) guide behaviour.	Beck, Ellis, Atkinson & Shiffrin
Biological	Behaviour has a biological basis — genetics, neurochemistry, brain structure, evolution. Mind is identical to the brain (monism). Behaviour has been shaped by natural selection.	Darwin, Raine
Psychodynamic	Unconscious processes drive behaviour. Early childhood experiences are crucial. The mind has three parts: id, ego, superego. Unresolved conflicts cause psychological disorders.	Freud, Jung, Erikson
Humanistic	People have free will and are motivated by a desire for self-actualisation. Psychology should focus on subjective experience and individual potential.	Maslow, Rogers
Social Learning Theory	Behaviour is learned through observation and imitation of others (models). Vicarious reinforcement, identification, and self-efficacy are important. Bridges behaviourism and cognitive psychology.	Bandura

Classical and Operant Conditioning

Classical Conditioning (Pavlov)

Learning through association. A neutral stimulus is repeatedly paired with an unconditioned stimulus until it produces the same response on its own.

Operant Conditioning (Skinner)

Learning through consequences. Behaviour that is reinforced is repeated; behaviour that is punished is avoided.

Example: Pavlov's dogs learned to salivate (conditioned response) at the sound of a bell (conditioned stimulus) because it had been paired with food (unconditioned stimulus).

- Positive reinforcement: Adding a reward
- Negative reinforcement: Removing something unpleasant
- Punishment: Adding something unpleasant or removing a reward

Social Learning Theory — Bandura's Bobo Doll Study (1961)

Bandura showed that children learn through observation and imitation. Children who watched an adult model behave aggressively towards a Bobo doll were more likely to imitate this behaviour — especially if they saw the model being rewarded (vicarious reinforcement).

Key Concepts in SLT

- Modelling: Observing and imitating the behaviour of others
- Vicarious reinforcement: Learning from seeing others rewarded or punished
- Identification: Being more likely to imitate people we identify with (similar, admired)
- Self-efficacy: Belief in one's own ability to succeed — influences whether we attempt behaviours
- Mediational processes: Attention → Retention → Motor reproduction → Motivation

Freud's Psychodynamic Approach

Sigmund Freud proposed one of the most influential — and controversial — theories in psychology. He argued that most of our mental life is unconscious, and that psychological distress arises from unconscious conflicts.

The Structure of the Mind

- Id: Primitive, unconscious, pleasure principle
- Ego: Conscious mediator, reality principle
- Superego: Moral conscience, internalised rules

Defence Mechanisms:

- Repression: Forcing threatening memories into the unconscious
- Displacement: Redirecting feelings onto a safer target
- Regression: Returning to behaviours of an earlier stage

Psychosexual Stages

Freud proposed five stages of development: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital. Unresolved conflicts at a stage cause a fixation that shapes adult personality and can lead to psychological problems.

Evaluation:

Freud's ideas are largely unfalsifiable (cannot be disproved), making them unscientific. However, his concepts of the unconscious and defence mechanisms have influenced therapy and culture enormously.

Activity 8 — Approach Comparison

How would each of the following approaches explain the development of a phobia of spiders? Write a brief explanation for each approach in the table below.

Approach	Explanation of spider phobia
Behaviourist	
Cognitive	
Biological	
Psychodynamic	
Social Learning Theory	

WEEK 5 | Psychopathology & Research Methods

Mental Health and Scientific Investigation

Part A — Psychopathology

Psychopathology is the study of psychological disorders — their characteristics, causes, and treatments. Before we can treat a condition, we need to define what is abnormal. This is surprisingly difficult.

Definitions of Abnormality

Definition	Explanation	Limitation
Statistical Infrequency	Behaviour is abnormal if it is statistically rare in the population. E.g. an IQ below 70.	Rare behaviours are not always undesirable (e.g. genius). Does not consider personal distress.
Deviation from Social Norms	Behaviour that violates the unwritten rules of a culture or society. E.g. talking to oneself in public.	Norms vary between cultures and time periods. Can be used to oppress minority groups.
Failure to Function Adequately	Unable to cope with the demands of everyday life. Rosenhan & Seligman's criteria (distress, maladaptiveness, unpredictability, etc.).	Who decides what 'adequate functioning' is? Some disorders (e.g. mania) may not impair functioning.
Deviation from Ideal Mental Health	Jahoda (1958): mentally healthy people have positive self-attitudes, self-actualisation, autonomy, etc. Abnormality = absence of these.	The criteria are idealistic — almost no one meets them all. Culture-specific.

OCD — Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

OCD is characterised by obsessions (intrusive, recurring, unwanted thoughts or images) and compulsions (repetitive behaviours performed to neutralise anxiety). It is a good case study for evaluating the different approaches.

Biological Explanation

- Genetic: Family and twin studies suggest a heritable component

Cognitive-Behavioural Explanation

- Faulty thinking: Catastrophising, overestimation of threat

- Neural: Abnormally low serotonin levels; overactivity in orbitofrontal cortex
- Behavioural: Compulsions are negatively reinforced because they temporarily reduce anxiety

Biological Treatment: Drug Therapy

SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors) increase serotonin availability. Effective for many patients, but do not address the root cause and symptoms often return when drugs stop.

CBT Treatment: ERP

Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP): Gradual exposure to feared stimuli while preventing the compulsive response. Highly effective and produces lasting change.

Part B — Research Methods

Research methods is a topic that runs through the whole of A Level Psychology. You must understand how psychologists conduct research, and be able to evaluate studies in terms of their methodology. This section introduces the key concepts.

The Scientific Process

Scientific research follows a cycle: Theory → Hypothesis → Empirical study → Analysis → Conclusions → Theory revision. Psychology aims to be scientific, using controlled methods to establish cause and effect.

Research Methods Overview

Method	Strengths	Limitations
Laboratory Experiment	High control → high internal validity; can establish cause & effect; replicable	Artificial environment → low ecological validity; demand characteristics
Field Experiment	Natural setting → high ecological validity; participants may not know they're being studied	Less control → lower internal validity; ethical issues
Natural Experiment	Studies naturally occurring variables; can study things that would be unethical to manipulate	No direct control; cannot randomly allocate participants → confounding variables
Observation (Naturalistic)	High ecological validity; real spontaneous behaviour	No control; observer bias; ethical issues if covert
Self-Report (Questionnaire)	Can gather large amounts of data quickly; can investigate private experiences	Social desirability bias; response bias; lacks depth

Interview	Can explore complex experiences in depth; can follow up responses	Time-consuming; interviewer effects; harder to analyse
Case Study	Rich, detailed data; can study rare conditions; generates hypotheses	Cannot generalise; researcher bias; poor reliability
Correlation	Establishes whether variables are related; ethical when manipulation is impossible	Cannot establish cause and effect; third variable problem

Key Research Methods Terminology

Key Term	Definition
Hypothesis	A testable, precise prediction about the relationship between variables
Independent Variable (IV)	The variable the researcher deliberately manipulates
Dependent Variable (DV)	The variable the researcher measures
Extraneous Variable	Any variable other than the IV that might affect the DV
Confounding Variable	An extraneous variable that has actually varied systematically with the IV
Operationalisation	Defining variables in a way that allows them to be measured objectively
Reliability	The consistency of a measure — does it produce the same results each time?
Validity	Whether a study measures what it claims to measure
Internal Validity	Whether the results are due to the IV and not another variable
Ecological Validity	Whether findings generalise to real-world settings
Random Sampling	Every member of the target population has an equal chance of being selected
Opportunity Sampling	Using whoever is available and willing

Demand Characteristics	Cues in the research setting that lead participants to guess the study's aim and change their behaviour
Ethical Guidelines	Rules to protect participants: informed consent, right to withdraw, debrief, confidentiality, protection from harm

Activity 9 — Research Methods Practice

A psychologist wants to investigate whether listening to music improves revision performance. Design a study to investigate this.

1. Write a suitable hypothesis:

2. Identify the IV and DV and operationalise each one:

3. What research method would you use and why?

4. Identify two ethical considerations and explain how you would address them:

5. What type of sampling would you use and what are its limitations?

WEEK 6 | Exam Skills & Independent Research

Thinking Like a Psychologist

In your final week, the focus shifts to developing the skills that will help you succeed at A Level: critical evaluation, extended writing, and independent reading. The AQA exam rewards students who can construct well-evidenced arguments, not just recall facts.

Understanding the Assessment Objectives

AO	What it means	Key command words
AO1	Knowledge and Understanding	Outline, describe, identify, state, name, define, what is meant by…
AO2	Application	Apply, explain how, use the study to, referring to the scenario…, in this context…
AO3	Analysis & Evaluation	Evaluate, discuss, assess, to what extent, critically consider…

The PEEL Structure for Extended Writing

For 8–16 mark questions, each paragraph should follow the PEEL structure:

P	**Point**	Make your argument/claim clearly in the first sentence.
E	**Evidence**	Support your point with a study, theory, or fact.
E	**Explain**	Explain HOW the evidence supports your point, and link to any counter-evidence.
L	**Link**	Link back to the question. Show why this point matters to your overall argument.

Worked Example — Evaluating a Study

Example: Evaluating Milgram's (1963) research into obedience

A strength of Milgram's research is that it has high internal validity. Milgram carefully controlled the setting — the same script was used with all participants, the same apparatus, and confederates were standardised in their responses. This means that differences in obedience rates between his variations can more confidently be attributed to the variable being changed (e.g. proximity of the experimenter) rather than

other factors. Therefore, the study provides reliable evidence about the situational factors that influence obedience.

However, a significant limitation is the lack of internal validity due to demand characteristics. Some participants may not have fully believed the shocks were real — Perry (2012), who re-analysed Milgram's original recordings, found that many participants voiced doubts. If participants did not believe in the reality of the set-up, their behaviour does not truly reflect obedience in a real situation. This weakens the conclusion that ordinary people will harm others when ordered by an authority figure.

Critical Thinking Challenges

The questions below require you to think beyond the material you have read. There are no single correct answers — the mark is in the quality of your reasoning.

Activity 10 — Critical Thinking

1. 'Psychology can never truly be a science because human behaviour is too unpredictable.' Explain your thoughts on this statement and research arguments to agree and disagree

2. 'The most important influence on a person's behaviour is their upbringing, not their genes.' Summarise your thoughts on this statement, do you agree or disagree.

Independent Reading and Research

A Level Psychology rewards students who read beyond the textbook. Below are some accessible books and resources to explore over the summer:

Recommended Reading & Resources

Books (accessible, no prior knowledge needed):

- The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat — Oliver Sacks (neurological case studies)
- Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking — Susan Cain
- Thinking, Fast and Slow — Daniel Kahneman (cognitive psychology)
- Bad Science — Ben Goldacre (critical thinking about research)
- The Psychopath Test — Jon Ronson (abnormal psychology)
- Mindset — Carol Dweck (motivation and learning)

Online Resources:

- Simply Psychology (simplypsychology.org) — accessible summaries of all AQA topics
- Psychologist World (psychologistworld.com) — articles on studies and research
- BBC Radio 4 'All in the Mind' podcast — current psychology research and interviews
- TED Talks on psychology — search 'psychology TED' on YouTube
- Crash Course Psychology (YouTube) — short videos on all the major topics

Activity 11 — Reading Log

Read at least one of the resources above and complete this reading log.

Resource / Book title:

Three key ideas I learned:

Which area of psychology does this connect to and why?

A question it raised for me:

Revision Checklists

Use these checklists to track your confidence with the key topics. Rate yourself: ✓ = confident | ~ = needs more work | ✗ = not sure yet.

Social Influence

☐	I can define conformity and explain the difference between compliance, identification and internalisation
☐	I can describe Asch's conformity experiment and discuss its findings
☐	I can explain normative and informational social influence
☐	I can describe Milgram's baseline obedience study and its findings
☐	I can explain how Milgram's situational variables affected obedience rates
☐	I can explain agentic state and legitimate authority
☐	I can discuss ethical issues raised by Milgram's research
☐	I can explain what factors help people resist conformity and obedience

Memory

☐	I can describe the Multi-Store Model including capacity, duration and encoding for each store
☐	I can evaluate the MSM with reference to research evidence
☐	I can describe the components of the Working Memory Model
☐	I can distinguish between episodic, semantic and procedural memory
☐	I can explain interference theory and retrieval failure as explanations for forgetting
☐	I can describe Loftus and Palmer's research into eyewitness testimony
☐	I can explain the factors affecting the accuracy of eyewitness testimony

Attachment

☐	I can describe the stages of attachment development (Schaffer & Emerson)

☐	I can explain the learning theory and Bowlby's theory of attachment
☐	I can describe Ainsworth's Strange Situation and the three types of attachment
☐	I can discuss cultural variations in attachment with reference to Van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg
☐	I can explain Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation
☐	I can discuss the effects of privation with reference to research evidence

Approaches

☐	I can outline the key assumptions of the behaviourist approach
☐	I can explain classical and operant conditioning with examples
☐	I can outline the key assumptions of the cognitive approach
☐	I can describe Social Learning Theory and Bandura's Bobo Doll study
☐	I can outline Freud's psychodynamic approach including the structural model and psychosexual stages
☐	I can outline the key assumptions of the biological and humanistic approaches
☐	I can compare different approaches on issues such as free will vs determinism and nature vs nurture

Psychopathology

☐	I can describe and evaluate the four definitions of abnormality
☐	I can describe the characteristics of OCD
☐	I can explain the biological explanation for OCD including genetic and neural explanations
☐	I can explain the cognitive-behavioural explanation for OCD
☐	I can describe drug therapy as a treatment for OCD
☐	I can describe CBT/ERP as a treatment for OCD

Research Methods

☐	I can identify and define independent and dependent variables
☐	I can write a suitable operationalised hypothesis
☐	I can explain different experimental designs (independent groups, repeated measures, matched pairs)
☐	I can outline the strengths and limitations of laboratory, field and natural experiments
☐	I can describe different sampling methods and evaluate them
☐	I can explain the difference between reliability and validity
☐	I can identify ethical guidelines and explain how they apply to psychology research

Glossary of Key Terms

Test yourself: cover the right-hand column and try to write your own definition for each term.

Key Term	Definition
Agentic state	The condition of acting as an agent of another person, following their instructions without moral responsibility
Ainsworth	Psychologist who devised the Strange Situation to classify infant attachment types
Attachment	A strong, reciprocal emotional bond between an infant and a caregiver
Atkinson & Shiffrin	Psychologists who proposed the Multi-Store Model of Memory (1968)
Baddeley & Hitch	Psychologists who proposed the Working Memory Model (1974)
Behaviourism	An approach to psychology focusing only on observable behaviour, learned through conditioning
Bowlby	Psychologist who proposed the evolutionary theory of attachment and maternal deprivation theory
Classical conditioning	Learning through association — pairing a neutral stimulus with an unconditioned stimulus
Cognitive approach	An approach to psychology that focuses on mental processes such as memory, perception and thinking
Compliance	A type of conformity where behaviour is changed publicly but not privately
Conformity	A change in behaviour or beliefs to match those of a social group
Critical period	A window of time (Bowlby: first 2.5 years) during which an experience must occur for normal development
Demand characteristics	Cues in a study that lead participants to guess its aim and modify their behaviour
Ecological validity	The extent to which findings from a study generalise to real-world settings

ERP	Exposure and Response Prevention — a CBT technique for treating OCD
Hypothesis	A testable, precise prediction about the relationship between variables
Internalisation	A deep type of conformity involving genuine change in private beliefs
Internal working model	A mental framework developed in childhood that guides future relationships (Bowlby)
Loftus	Psychologist who researched eyewitness testimony and the misinformation effect
Milgram	Psychologist who studied obedience using the electric shock paradigm (1963)
Misinformation effect	When post-event information distorts memory for the original event
Monotropy	Bowlby's concept that infants form one primary attachment above all others
Obedience	Complying with a direct instruction from an authority figure
Operant conditioning	Learning through consequences — reinforcement increases behaviour, punishment decreases it
Operationalisation	Defining variables in a measurable, objective way
Privation	Complete failure to form any attachment — distinguished from deprivation (loss of attachment)
Psychodynamic approach	Approach to psychology based on Freud's ideas about the unconscious, id, ego, superego
Reliability	The consistency of a measurement — does it produce the same results on different occasions?
Secure attachment	The most common and healthy type of attachment; infant uses caregiver as a safe base
Self-efficacy	An individual's belief in their own ability to succeed at a task (Bandura)

Social learning theory	Learning through observation and imitation of models; emphasises vicarious reinforcement
Strange Situation	Ainsworth's controlled observation procedure to classify infant attachment types
SSRI	Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor — a drug treatment that increases serotonin levels
Validity	Whether a test or study measures what it claims to measure
Vicarious reinforcement	Learning by observing others being rewarded or punished for their behaviour
Working memory	Baddeley & Hitch's model of short-term memory as a multi-component active system

Notes & Personal Study Log

Use this page to record what you have completed, any questions you want to ask your teacher, and any interesting things you discovered through your independent research.

What I completed:

☐	Introduction — What is Psychology?
☐	Week 1 — Social Influence
☐	Week 2 — Memory
☐	Week 3 — Attachment
☐	Week 4 — Approaches
☐	Week 5 — Psychopathology & Research Methods
☐	Week 6 — Exam Skills & Independent Research
☐	All revision checklists
☐	Glossary revision

Questions I want to ask my teacher:

Most interesting thing I discovered:

The topic I am most confident about:

The topic I need to work on most:

Welcome to A Level Psychology!

We hope you have enjoyed this introduction. We can't wait to meet you in September!