

AP Psychology

Course Description

The AP Psychology course introduces students to the systematic and scientific study of human behavior and mental processes. While considering the psychologists and studies that have shaped the field, students explore and apply psychological theories, key concepts, and phenomena associated with such topics as the biological bases of behavior, sensation and perception, learning and cognition, motivation, developmental psychology, testing and individual differences, treatments of psychological disorders, and social psychology.

This course aligns with the *Portrait of the Crusader* in that students employ psychological research methods, including ethical considerations, as they use the scientific method, evaluate claims and evidence, and effectively communicate ideas.

Course Essential Questions

- How does the methodology of the research affect the outcome of a study?
- How do ethical guidelines impact psychological research?
- How do biological and environmental factors influence our behaviors and mental processes?
- How do we perceive and understand ourselves?
- What motivates us to think and act the way we do?
- How does the bias of a researcher affect their conclusions?

Course Outline

Unit 1: Scientific Foundations of Psychology

Focus Questions:

- How have philosophical and physiological perspectives shaped the development of psychological thought?
- What are the strengths and limitations of applying theories to explain behavior?
- How do ethical issues inform and constrain research practices?

Concepts/Skills:

- Identify the research contributions of major historical figures in psychology.
- Describe and compare different theoretical approaches in explaining behavior.
- Distinguish the different domains of psychology.
- Differentiate types of research with regard to purpose, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Discuss the value of reliance on operational definitions and measurement in behavioral research.
- Identify independent, dependent, confounding, and control variables in experimental designs.
- Describe how research design drives the reasonable conclusions that can be drawn.
- Distinguish between random assignment of participants to conditions in experiments and random selection of participants, primarily in correlational studies and surveys.
- Predict the validity of behavioral explanations based on the quality of research design.
- Apply basic descriptive statistical concepts, including interpreting and constructing graphs and calculating simple

descriptive statistics.

- Distinguish the purposes of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.
- Describe how ethical and legal guidelines protect research participants and promote sound ethical practice.

Summative Assessments:

- Historical Figures Social Media Project
 - Stranger Observation Paper
 - Unit test
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Unit 2: Biological Bases of Behavior

Focus Questions:

- How can biology influence our behavior and mental processes?
- What happens when a particular neurotransmitter is absent from the body?
- What is psychology's abiding interest in how heredity, environment, and evolution work together to shape behavior?
- How can traits and behaviors be selected for their adaptive value?

Concepts/Skills:

- Identify key research contributions of scientists in the area of heredity and environment.
- Discuss the effect of the endocrine system on behavior.
- Describe the nervous system and its subdivisions and functions.
- Identify basic processes and systems in the biological bases of behavior, including parts of the neuron.
- Identify basic processes of transmission of a signal between neurons.
- Discuss the influence of drugs on neurotransmitters.
- Describe the nervous system and its subdivisions and functions in the brain.
- Identify the contributions of key researchers to the study of the brain.
- Recount historic and contemporary research strategies and technologies that support research.
- Identify the contributions of key researchers to the development of tools for examining the brain.
- Discuss the role of neuroplasticity in traumatic brain injury.
- Identify the contributions of key researchers to the study of neuroplasticity.
- Describe the various states of consciousness and their impact on behavior.
- Identify the major psychoactive drug categories and classify specific drugs, including their psychological and physiological effects.
- Discuss drug dependence, addiction, tolerance, and withdrawal.
- Identify the contributions of major figures in consciousness research.
- Discuss aspects of sleep and dreaming.

Summative Assessments:

- Group discussion: Choosing the genetics of your baby
 - Sleep and dream analysis
 - Unit test
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Unit 3: Sensation and Perception

Focus Questions:

- How do we process the information we receive from our environments?
- How does our interpretation of the information we receive from the environment influence our behaviors and mental processes?
- How do experience and culture influence perceptual processes?

Concepts/Skills:

- Discuss basic principles of sensory transduction, including absolute threshold, difference threshold signal detection, and sensory adaptation.
- Identify the research contributions of major historical figures in sensation and perception.
- Discuss the role of attention in behavior.
- Describe the vision process, including the specific nature of energy transduction, relevant anatomical structures and specialized pathways in the brain for each of the senses.
- Explain common sensory conditions.
- Explain the role of top-down processing in producing vulnerability to illusion.
- Describe the hearing process, including the specific nature of energy transduction, relevant anatomical structures, and specialized pathways in the brain for each of the senses.
- Describe taste and smell processes, including the specific nature of energy transduction, relevant anatomical structures, and specialized pathways in the brain for each of the senses.
- Describe sensory processes, including the specific nature of energy transduction, relevant anatomical structures, and specialized pathways in the brain for each of the senses.

Summative Assessments:

- Sensation and Perception Labs
 - Optical Illusion project
 - Unit test
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Unit 4: Learning

Focus Questions:

- How do we learn?
- How do our experiences influence our behaviors and mental processes?

Concepts/Skills:

- Identify the contributions of key researchers in the psychology of learning.
- Interpret graphs that exhibit the results of learning experiments.
- Describe the essential characteristics of insight learning, latent learning, and social learning.
- Apply learning principles to explain emotional learning, taste aversion, superstitious behavior, and learned helplessness.
- Provide examples of how biological constraints create learning predispositions.
- Describe basic classical conditioning phenomena.
- Distinguish general differences between principles of classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning.

- Predict the effects of operant conditioning.
- Predict how practice, schedules of reinforcement, other aspects of reinforcement, and motivation will influence quality of learning.
- Suggest how behavior modification, biofeedback, coping strategies, and self-control can be used to address behavioral problems.

Summative Assessments:

- Unit test
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Unit 5: Cognitive Psychology

Focus Questions:

- What roles do memory and thinking play in our behaviors?
- What is intelligence and how can we study it to understand it?
- How does culture influence the definition of intelligence?
- What are the best practices for creating culture-fair tests?

Concepts/Skills:

- Compare and contrast various cognitive processes.
- Describe and differentiate psychological and physiological systems of memory.
- Identify the contributions of key researchers in cognitive psychology.
- Outline the principles that underlie the construction and encoding of memories.
- Outline the principles that underlie effective storage of memories.
- Describe strategies for retrieving memories.
- Describe strategies for memory improvement and typical memory errors.
- Describe and differentiate psychological and physiological systems of short-and-long-term memory.
- Identify problem-solving strategies as well as factors that influence their effectiveness.
- List the characteristics of creative thought and creative thinkers.
- Identify problem-solving strategies as well as factors that create bias and errors in thinking.
- Define intelligence and list characteristics of how psychologists measure intelligence.
- Compare and contrast historic and contemporary theories of intelligence.
- Identify the contributions of key researchers in intelligence research and testing.
- Explain how psychologists design tests, including standardization strategies and other techniques to establish reliability and validity.
- Interpret the meaning of scores in terms of the normal curve.
- Describe relevant labels related to intelligence testing.
- Synthesize how biological, cognitive, and cultural factors converge to facilitate acquisition, development, and use of language.

Summative Assessments:

- Cognition lab stations
 - Unit test
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Unit 6: Developmental Psychology

Focus Questions:

- What influence do temperament and other social factors have on attachment and appropriate socialization?
- How does the interaction of nature and nurture (including cultural variations) affect physical development and determination of behavior?

Concepts/Skills:

- Explain the process of conception and gestation, including factors that influence successful prenatal development.
- Discuss maturation of motor skills.
- Identify the contributions of major researchers in developmental psychology in the area of social development in childhood.
- Discuss the interaction of nature and nurture (including cultural variations), specifically social development, in the determination of behavior.
- Explain how parenting styles influence development.
- Explain the maturation of cognitive abilities (Piaget's stages, informational process).
- Identify the contributions of major researchers in the area of cognitive development in childhood.
- Discuss the maturational challenges in adolescence, including related family conflicts.
- Characterize the development of decisions related to intimacy as people mature.
- Predict the physical and cognitive changes that emerge through the lifespan, including steps that can be taken to maximize function.
- Identify the contributions of key researchers in the area of adulthood and aging.
- Identify the contributions of major researchers in the area of moral development.
- Compare and contrast models of moral development.
- Describe how sex and gender influence socialization and other aspects of development.

Summative Assessments:

- Gender roles in Disney movies
 - Unit test
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Unit 7: Motivation, Emotion, and Personality

Focus Questions:

- Why do some people respond to stress in a healthier way than others?
- How do cultural influences shape emotional expression (including variations in body language)?
- How can cultural context facilitate or constrain personality development, especially as it relates to self-concept?

Concepts/Skills:

- Identify and apply basic motivational concepts to understand the behavior of humans and other animals.
- Compare and contrast motivational theories, including the strengths and weaknesses of each.
- Describe classic research findings in specific motivations.
- Identify contributions of key researchers in the psychological field of motivation and emotion.
- Discuss the biological underpinnings of motivation, including needs, drives, and homeostasis.
- Compare and contrast major theories of emotion.

- Discuss theories of stress and the effects of stress on psychological and physical well-being.
- Describe and compare research methods that psychologists use to investigate personality.
- Identify the contributions of major researchers in personality theory.
- Compare and contrast the psychoanalytic theories of personality with other theories of personality.
- Compare and contrast the behaviorist and social cognitive theories of personality with other theories.
- Compare and contrast the humanistic theories of personality with other theories of personality.
- Compare and contrast trait theories of personality with other theories of personality.
- Identify frequently used assessment strategies, and evaluate relative test quality based on reliability and validity of the instruments.

Summative Assessments:

- Motivation Playlists
- Gratitude letters
- Personality collage
- Unit test

Unit 8: Clinical Psychology

Focus Questions:

- Why is a psychological perspective necessary in the treatment of disorders?
- How are psychological disorders treated?

Concepts/Skills:

- Recognize the use of the most recent version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association as the primary reference for making diagnostic judgments.
- Describe contemporary and historical conceptions of what constitutes psychological disorders.
- Discuss the intersection between psychology and the law.
- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of various approaches to explaining psychological disorders.
- Identify the positive and negative consequences of diagnostic labels.
- Discuss the major diagnostic categories, including neurodevelopmental disorders, neurocognitive disorders, schizophrenia spectrum, and other psychotic disorders, and their corresponding symptoms.
- Discuss the major diagnostic categories, including anxiety disorders, bipolar and related disorders, depressive disorders, obsessive-compulsive and related disorders, and their corresponding symptoms.
- Discuss the major diagnostic categories, including dissociative disorders, somatic symptom and related disorders, and trauma and stressor-related disorders, and their corresponding symptoms.
- Discuss the major diagnostic categories, including feeding and eating disorders, personality disorders, and their corresponding symptoms.
- Describe the central characteristics of psychotherapeutic intervention.
- Identify the contributions of major figures in psychological treatment.
- Describe major treatment orientations used in therapy and how those orientations influence therapeutic planning.
- Summarize the effectiveness of specific treatments used to address specific problems.
- Compare and contrast different treatment methods.

Summative Assessments:

- Analyze an episode project
 - Unit test
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Unit 9: Social Psychology

Focus Questions:

- How can attribution theory explain motives?
- What impact do social-cultural influences have on self-concept and relationships with others?

Concepts/Skills:

- Anticipate the impact of self-fulfilling prophecy on behavior.
- Identify important figures and research in the areas of attitude formation and change.
- Discuss attitude formation and change, including persuasion strategies and cognitive dissonance.
- Identify the contributions of key researchers in the areas of conformity, compliance, and obedience.
- Explain how individuals respond to expectations of others, including groupthink, conformity, and obedience to authority.
- Describe the structure and function of different kinds of group behavior.
- Predict the impact of the presence of others on individual behavior.
- Describe processes that contribute to differential treatment of group members.
- Describe the variables that contribute to altruism and aggression.
- Describe the variables that contribute to attraction.

Summative Assessments:

- Media and consumer behavior project
 - Social norms project
 - Unit test
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Resources

Myers, David G. Myers' Psychology For AP, New York: Worth Publishers.

Additional resources may include:

- Halonen, Jane and Gray, Cynthia. The Critical Thinking Companion for Introductory Psychology (2nd edition). New York: Worth Publishers, 2001.
 - Hock, Roger R. Forty Studies That Changed Psychology (6th edition). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2009.
 - Membership in the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (TOPPS): <http://www.apa.org>, Journals, publications, and specialty divisions.
 - The American Psychological Society (APS): <http://www.psychologicalscience.org>
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Grading Policy

- Tests: 35 - 45 %
- Quizzes: 15 - 25 %
- Labs: 15 - 25 %
- Classwork: 10 - 20 %
- Student Preparation: 15 - 25 %