

OxfordAQA

International GCSE

Psychology (9218)

Subject specific vocabulary

Used in our International GCSE qualification.

Adaptive

When an individual's physical or psychological characteristics are able to change in order to fit different situations and environments. Being adaptive increases that individual's chances of survival and successful reproduction.

Agency

The ability to choose, carry out and control our own actions.

Allocation to conditions

Assigning participants into each of the conditions in an experiment.

Ambiguity

Being able to be interpreted or understood in more than one way.

Anonymity

Being unknown to most people; not able to be identified. Information collected for research cannot be connected to the participant.

Antisocial behaviour

Acting in ways that are socially unacceptable, differs from social norms and fails to respect other people's rights.

Attributions

The reasons we use to explain situations and the behaviour of ourselves and others.

Auditory area (of the brain)

An area of the temporal lobe that receives and processes sounds.

Authoritarian personality

A type of person who has a strong belief that authority figures should be obeyed, has a need for strong leadership, has traditional views about right and wrong, and looks down on people they view as of lower status than themselves.

Authority

When a person has the right to give orders and be obeyed, or when they are perceived by others to have the right to do so.

Autonomic functions

Bodily processes that happen without our conscious control – such as breathing, digestion and heart rate.

Autonomic nervous system (ANS)

The part of the peripheral nervous system that is responsible for autonomic functions. A system of nerve fibres running throughout the body, it connects the senses and the internal organs with the central nervous system. It helps to maintain homeostasis.

Bar chart

A type of graph that is used to display data in discrete categories. Numerical values are represented by the height or length of lines or rectangles.

Behaviour

The way a person, group or species acts in response to a situation or internal / external stimulus.

Behavioural therapy

A range of techniques which are used to change a person's response to specific situations.

Binocular depth cues

Sensory information that allows perception of depth or distance and is received from both eyes.

Biological explanation

Explanations for behaviour based on genetics and biological structures.

Body language

Conscious and unconscious postures, gestures and movements that express thoughts, attitudes and feelings. Also, a commonly used term for non-verbal communication.

Brain stem

At the base of the brain, this is the part that is connected to the spinal cord and controls messages between the brain and the rest of the body. It also controls bodily functions such as breathing and heart rate.

British Psychological Society (BPS) guidelines

The ethical guidelines that cover the work of all practising and research psychologists. Produced by the British Psychological Society in its Code of Ethics and Conduct (2006) and Code of Human Research Ethics (2014). Details how participants in psychological research should be treated.

Broca's area

An area in the frontal lobe related to speech production.

Bystander behaviour

The way that an individual acts when they see someone needing help.

Bystander intervention

When an individual goes to the aid of someone they see needing help.

Capacity

A measure of how much information can be stored.

Case study

An in-depth investigation of an individual, group, organisation or specific situation. Uses data gathered using a variety of methods and from a variety of sources.

Categories of behaviour (Behaviour categories)

Clearly defined, specific actions that can be observed and recorded as examples of the target behaviour.

Central executive

The controller of the components of the working memory model. It decides which of the incoming sensory information to pay attention to, and then allocates it to the other components.

Central nervous system (CNS)

Consists of the brain and spinal cord and acts as the body's processing centre. The main functions are coordinating incoming sensory messages and sending outgoing motor messages.

Cerebellum

A small, wrinkled structure at the base of the brain above the spinal cord. Important for motor skills such as movement, coordination and balance.

Closed posture

Adopting a position with arms folded across the body and/or crossing the legs. May indicate disagreement, irritation or feeling closed-off.

Coding

The altering of received information into a suitable form for it to be stored in the memory.

Cognition

All conscious and unconscious mental processes. Involved in the gaining and developing of knowledge and understanding through the senses, thought and experience. Includes thinking, planning and problem solving.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)

A type of talking therapy. A treatment that helps people to manage their problems and emotions. Focuses on how thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect feelings and actions. Shown to be effective for a variety of disorders including obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Cognitive explanation

Explanations for behaviour based on how people think (mental processes).

Cognitive neuroscience

The scientific study of the ways in which cognitive processes and the biological structures of the brain and the nervous system work together.

Collective behaviour

Actions that happen when people are part of a group. This behaviour may be different from the ways in which the same people would behave individually or when alone.

Communication

The sending or receiving of information between people (or animals).

Compulsions

Actions carried out by an individual to relieve the anxiety associated with their obsessions.

Conditions.

To investigate the effect of an IV (independent variable) on the dependent variable, participants take part in different trials/situations called conditions. Participants in each trial or situation will experience a different part of the IV.

Conformity

When perceived group pressure leads to someone changing their opinions, attitudes or behaviours in order to fit in with the accepted conventions and norms of other people.

Context

The surroundings for an event, thought or memory which enable these things to be more fully understood and may act as a cue to recall.

Convergence

Depth perception cue related to the extent that eyes have to turn inward in order to focus on images/objects.

Coping

The ability to use cognitive and behavioural strategies to manage the situations and deal with problems and responsibilities calmly and effectively.

Correlation

A mathematical technique used to establish the strength of a relationship between variables.

Correlational relationship

A connection or association between variables. This does not mean there is also cause and effect. When two variables are correlated, it only means that as one variable changes, so does the other.

Cortex

The outer layer of the brain where higher cognitive functions, such as speech, thinking and emotions, occur.

Counterbalancing

Used in repeated measures design to limit order effects. Half of the participants take part in the conditions in one order (A followed by B) while the other half take part in them in the opposite order (B followed by A).

Crowd

A large group of individuals who gather together temporarily for a common reason.

CT scan (Computerised Tomography)

A non-invasive, imaging machine scans the body or the brain using a series of X-rays and then creates a detailed 3D image.

Cultural norms

The types of customs, beliefs and behaviours that members of a particular community of people are likely to hold or use.

Cultural variation

Different communities of people will have differences in customs, beliefs and behaviours.

Culture

The way of life, especially the customs, beliefs and behaviours of a particular community of people at a particular time.

Decimal

Numbers where a point is used to separate whole numbers from parts. Numbers can be placed to the left or right of the point, to show values greater than one or less than one.

Deindividuation

The state of losing our sense of individuality and self-awareness when part of a group. Results in our feeling less responsibility for our actions and behaving differently to our norm.

Dependent variable (DV)

The thing that will be measured by a researcher to see if changing the Independent Variable (IV - see definition below) has had any effect.

Depth cue

Ways of perceiving depth or distance – can be binocular or monocular.

Development

The manner in which, over time, someone's cognitive, emotional, intellectual, and social abilities grow, change and become more advanced.

Dispositional factors

Personal characteristics which may affect a person's behaviour and choices.

Dual processing tasks

More than one activity/task is completed at the same time. This method was used by Baddeley and Hitch to investigate the different components of the working memory model.

Dual representation theory

A theory of post traumatic stress disorder that states a traumatic event leads to two types of memory being encoded at the time of the traumatic event.

Duration

How long information can be stored in the memory.

Ecological validity

The results of the investigation can be said to apply to real-life behaviour; they are an accurate account of behaviour in the real world.

Economy

A country or region's levels of production, trade, distribution and consumption of goods and services.

Effort after meaning

Making sense of something unfamiliar by changing it into more familiar terms.

Emoticon

A term created by combining 'emotion' + 'icon.' A non-verbal way of expressing emotions or moods. Generally seen in written communication that uses technology, such emails and texts.

Emotion

Moods or feelings that an individual experiences.

Encoding

Information taken into the memory is changed into a form that can be stored and later recalled.

Endocrine system

A system of glands in the body that produce chemicals called hormones.

Energy levels

A capacity for carrying out physical and mental activities.

Episodic buffer

A component of the working memory model that integrates information from the other components and from LTM

Episodic memory

Recollections of personal experiences or events (may include feelings as well as recall of what took place).

Estimate

The approximate value of a calculation or measure that is close enough to the correct value.

Ethical issues

Concerns about what is morally right and best for participants when researchers are carrying out research.

Evolve

To change slowly over a number of generations into a different form or state.

Excitation

A neurotransmitter binding with a receptor on the next neuron and increasing the likelihood that the next neuron will fire an electrical impulse.

Expectation

Beliefs or feelings about what it is that we will experience.

Experiment (the experimental method)

A research method in which the researcher manipulates the IV and measures the effect on the DV; this allows the researcher to identify a cause-and-effect relationship between the IV and DV.

Experimental design

How the participants are distributed across the conditions of an experiment.

Expertise

Competence, skill or knowledge in a particular area.

Extraneous variable (EV)

A variable that is not the IV but that might affect the DV. If EVs are not controlled, the researcher cannot be certain what caused any change that occurs in the DV.

Eye contact

When two people are looking at each other's eyes at the same time.

False memories

Remembering something that has never happened but feels as if it did.

Fiction

When an object, colour or movement is perceived but the construction is not actually there.

Field experiment

An experiment that is carried out in a natural / real life environment.

Fight or flight response

An automatic physiological reaction to actual or perceived threats. Triggers the ANS to release adrenalin and the body to take a number of steps so that an individual is ready for action.

FMRI scan (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging)

A non-invasive, imaging machine that scans the brain using radio waves. It measures blood oxygen levels and magnetic activity in order to show which parts of the brain are most active.

Fraction

Part of a whole number.

Frequency table

A type of table that is used to display data systematically to show how often something occurs.

Frontal lobe

One of the four major lobes of the cerebral cortex, the frontal lobe is at the front of the brain. Viewed as the brain's behaviour and emotional control centre; controls cognitive processes such as thought and memory and manages emotions and personality.

Gender

A person's sense of being either male or female, generally identified by social norms and behaviours and cultural roles.

Genetic vulnerability explanation

Having a biological predisposition/susceptibility towards developing conditions or disorders that can be in part, or fully hereditary.

Glands

An organ that produces and releases hormones into the bloodstream.

Height in plane

Distant objects are seen or shown as being higher in the visual field in relation to items that are nearer.

Hereditary

Being passed genetically from parent to child.

Histogram

A type of graph which represents the frequency of groups of continuous data by using frequency density via the area of rectangles. There are no gaps between the bars and they are arranged in numerical order.

Holistic

The belief that all the parts of something (such as human behaviour) are connected and are only fully able to be understood by looking at the 'bigger picture' or referring to the whole.

Hormones

Chemicals that are released by glands into the blood and carried to a target organ.

Hypothesis

A precise, measurable and testable statement that makes a prediction about the relationship between the (independent and dependent) variables that are being investigated.

Independent variable (IV)

The thing that is varied or changed by a researcher to see if it affects the DV.

Independent groups design

An experimental design where a different group of participants takes part in each condition of the study.

Inference

Reaching a conclusion based on the information you have before you and your past experiences. Our inferences are not always correct as we may not have the 'whole picture'.

Inhibition

A neurotransmitter binding with a receptor on the next neuron and decreasing the likelihood that the next neuron will fire an electrical impulse.

Innate

Inborn or genetic, rather than learned.

Instructions

Written or spoken information provided to participants before and during an experiment.

Interference

Forgetting, or failing to learn new information, because other information / memories get in the way. This is especially likely to occur if both things are very alike.

International Classification of Diseases (ICD)

A globally used list of symptoms and features of physical and mental health problems. Provides standard measures for diagnosis. Produced by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Inter-observer reliability

The extent to which the record sheets of two or more people carrying out an observation, match one another.

Interpretive cortex

Area of the brain where memories, or our interpretations of them, are stored.

Interventions

Actions taken to improve a physical or psychological disorder.

Interview

An investigative method where data is collected by directly asking questions of an individual or group. Interviews can vary in their degree of structure.

Isolation

Being lonely, emotionally, physically or socially distant / separate from others.

Laboratory experiment

An experiment that is carried out in an unnatural, controlled environment.

Language

A system of communication used by a specific group of people, unique to humans.

Language areas (of the brain)

Particular areas of the brain that carry out various functions that allow us to use and understand spoken and written words. Includes Wernicke's area in the temporal lobe and Broca's area in the frontal lobe.

Learned

Abilities or characteristics that are gained through experience rather than being present at birth.

Linear perspective

When parallel lines appear to converge or join together at some point in the distance.

Localised function

Different areas of the brain that are responsible for specific behaviours or functions.

Long-term memory store

Memory store that has a very large capacity and holds information for a long period of time.

Majority influence

When the opinions or behaviours of a large number of people influence the opinions or behaviours of a smaller number of people. This usually results in conformity.

Matched pairs design

An experimental design where people with similar qualities are grouped into pairs, then each member of the pair takes part in a different condition.

Mean

The average of a group of numbers, calculated by adding up all the numbers, then dividing by how many numbers there are.

Median

The middle number of a group of numbers, once they are ordered. When there is an even amount of numbers, the median is the average of the two middle numbers.

Mental health

An individual's emotional and psychological wellbeing. Enables one to cope and function in everyday life and society.

Mental health problems

Diagnosable conditions that affect an individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviours, making them less able to cope and function in everyday life and society.

Misinterpreted depth cues

When binocular or monocular depth cues are not understood accurately.

Mode

The number that appears most frequently in a group of numbers.

Modern living

The way of life for people in a time where there is advanced science, technology, engineering, etc.

Monocular depth cue

Ways of perceiving depth or distance that will work with just one eye.

Morality

Values and principles about what behaviours, attitudes or choices are seen as right and wrong or good and bad.

Motion parallax

Close objects in our visual field seem to move more / faster than objects that are further away in our visual field.

Motivation

Physiological and psychological drives and needs that we experience and that can affect a person's choices, actions and perception.

Motor area (of the brain)

A particular area of the brain that carries out various functions that allow us to plan, control and carry out different movements.

Motor neuron

Nerve cells that carry messages from the CNS to the muscles to make them move.

Movement

Changing your body's location or position.

Natural experiment

Research carried out into the effect that changes in the IV have on the DV, but it is nature or other factors outside the control of the researchers that assigns people to the conditions of the IV, such as their age or gender.

Nature

Refers to the argument that characteristics and behaviours are genetically influenced.

Negative correlation

An inverse relationship between two variables – when one variable decreases, the other increases.

Negative schemas

A pessimistic cognitive model/mental framework about the self, the world and the future. Based on previous information and experiences. Leads individuals to focus on what they see as negative when receiving or seeking to understand new information.

Neonates

Newborn babies, less than a month old.

Neurological damage

Damage or impairment to the nervous system that affects the ability of the brain, spinal column and nerves to function properly. Resulting in changes in behaviour and/or loss of function.

Neuronal growth

When a neuron frequently excites another neuron, it results in change or development in one or both of the neurons.

Neuron

A particular type of nerve cell that is involved in generating and transmitting electrical impulses from the body to the brain and back to the body. They are the basic building blocks of the nervous system.

Neurotransmitters

A brain chemical that transmits messages between neurons when it is released across the synaptic cleft by one neuron, and picked up by the next neuron. Can cause excitation or inhibition.

No correlation

When there is not any relationship between variables.

Non-verbal communication

Sending and receiving messages without using words.

Normal distribution

A symmetrical arrangement of data in which the majority of values are grouped in the centre and the rest taper off towards each end, forming a bell-shaped curve. The mean, median and mode all fall in the centre of the curve.

Null hypothesis

A hypothesis that states that there is no relationship between variables, and that none of the variables will directly affect any other variables.

Nurture

Refers to the argument that characteristics and behaviours are influenced by upbringing, environment and experiences.

Obedience

Following the direct orders given by someone who is seen as being in/having authority.

Observation study

An investigative method where researchers collect data about people's behaviour by watching them and recording what they see.

Obsessions

Unwanted thoughts or worries that repeatedly appear in your mind. They can make you feel very anxious.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder

A mental illness where the individual experiences obsessions (unwanted thoughts that repeatedly appear in their mind), and compulsions (behaviours carried out by the individual to relieve the anxiety associated with their obsessions).

Occipital lobe

One of the four major lobes of the cerebral cortex, the occipital lobe is at the back of the brain and is where visual information is processed.

Occlusion

When an object covers part of other objects in our visual field, this makes it appear to be closer to us than the partly covered objects.

Open posture

Adopting a position in which the arms are not folded across the body and legs are not crossed. May indicate being relaxed, being confident or being in agreement.

Opportunity sample

People are selected from the target population according to their availability and willingness to take part in research.

Parietal lobe

One of the four major lobes of the cerebral cortex, the parietal lobe is at the top of the brain and is responsible for processing sensations such as touch, temperature and pain. It is also responsible for integrating information from other areas to form complex behaviours.

Peer

People who are from the same social group, same age group, or who have the same social status, background, abilities or qualifications.

Peer influence

The effect that those who are similar to us can have on our opinions, behaviours and choices.

Percentage

The number of items expressed as a value out of 100.

Perception

How we organise, interpret and make sense of the sensory information that we receive from the world around us.

Perceptual set

A tendency or inclination to observe some aspects of sensory information from the world around us, but to not notice other aspects of it.

Peripheral nervous system (PNS)

A system of nerve fibres that connects and relays information between the central nervous system (CNS) and the rest of the body. It is made up of the somatic nervous system (SNS) and the autonomic nervous system (ANS).

Personality

The characteristics or qualities that make up an individual's unique way of being.

Personal space

The physical distance we like to have between ourselves and others so that we feel comfortable.

PET scan (Positron Emission Tomography)

An imaging test that measures the activity of cells in different parts of the body by detecting a radioactive dye which is absorbed by tissue and organs after being injected or swallowed.

Phonological loop

The component of the working memory model responsible for sound-based information.

Positive engagement

Being curious, interested and motivated in studies, work or life in general.

Post traumatic stress disorder

A disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a frightening, stressful or dangerous event.

Postural echo

Mirroring or having a similar body position to another person. May indicate being in agreement or friendliness.

Posture

The positioning of the body when standing or sitting.

Prediction

A statement that is made about likely outcomes, before anything has actually taken place.

Primary data

First-hand responses/information that researchers have collected directly from the participants in an investigation that has been specifically collected for that investigation.

Primacy effect

When more of the first information received is recalled than later information.

Procedural memory

Knowledge and information stored in the long term memory and used for carrying out motor skills / tasks.

Properties

Attributes or qualities that are associated with something.

Prosocial behaviour

Actions that are intended to help and benefit others.

Proximity

How near or far away something is.

Psychological explanation

Explanations for behaviour based on human thoughts and behaviours.

Qualitative data

Data that is descriptive and non-numerical, eg verbal or written answers to interview questions.

Quantitative data

Data that is numerical, such as totals or tallies of observed behaviour categories.

Questionnaire

A set of questions about a topic that is given to participants in order to gather information/data.

Randomisation

Using chance (eg tossing a coin) to decide order in an investigation.

Random sample

People who are members of the target population who all have the same probability of being selected.

Range

The difference between the smallest and largest values in a set of data.

Ratio

The relationship between two or more amounts; shows how big or small one is when compared to another.

Recall

To bring information or past experiences back into one's mind (similar to 'retrieval').

Recency effect

When more of the last information received is recalled than earlier information.

Recognition

By retrieving a memory, you are able to identify something or someone, previously known to you in some way.

Reconstructive memory

Changing or filling in gaps in our recollection of experiences or information so that it makes more sense to us.

Reductionist

The belief that something (such as human behaviour) is only fully able to be understood by simplifying it to its most fundamental and basic parts.

Relative size

The larger objects in the visual field appear to be closer than the smaller objects.

Relay neuron

A nerve cell in the central nervous system (CNS) that passes messages between sensory and motor neurons.

Repeated measures design

An experimental design where the same group of participants takes part in each condition of the study.

Reproduction

The sexual or asexual process that allows humans, animals, plants, etc, to make young of the same kind.

Retinal disparity

The difference between the sensory information received through each eye which is the result of the slightly different angles they have of the world. The more disparity the closer an image/object is.

Retrieval

Recovering information from a memory store.

Reuptake

A neurotransmitter being reabsorbed after it has been used during synaptic transmission.

Sample

A small group of people taken from the target population and who are used by the researchers in their investigation.

Sampling methods

Procedures used by researchers to attain a small group of people from the target population to be a part of their investigation.

Scatter diagram

A diagram for showing data with two variables which may reveal a relationship between them.

Schema

A mental framework we have of what we already know and believe about the world around us. These frameworks are based on previous information and experiences, helping us to organise and understand new information that we receive.

Secondary data

Second-hand information that researchers have collected from places such as public records or investigations published by other researchers.

Self-confidence

A sense of trust in your own capabilities, qualities, opinions and choices.

Semantic memory

Recollections of general knowledge rather than personal experiences or events.

Sensation

Information from the world around us that we receive through our sense organs.

Sensory deprived

An animal or human who receives limited or no information from one or more sensory organs.

Sensory neuron

A nerve cell that picks up information from the environment via sense receptors, like the skin, and carries it to the central nervous system (CNS).

Sensory processing

The brain and nervous system receives and interprets sensory information from the world around us.

Sensory register

Memory store for information received from the senses. Has a very large capacity but holds information for a very short period of time.

Serial position curve

A graph that shows the results of a serial position experiment and the serial position effect.

Serial position effect

The tendency for the recall of words at both the beginning and end of a list to be better than the recall of those in the middle. This effect demonstrates that the likelihood of recall of a word depends on its position in a list of words.

Short-term memory store

Memory store that has a capacity of approximately seven pieces of information and in which information is held for a limited period of time.

Signalling

A gesture, expression, action or sound that passes information.

Significant figures

All of the non-zero digits of a number and the zeros that are between them or that are the final zeros that express the accuracy/magnitude for a measurement.

Size constancy

Being able to perceive an object as being the same size, regardless of whether it is nearby or far away.

Social care

Providing personal care, protection or social support services to in-need or at-risk children and adults.

Social influence

The effects that other people can have on our opinions or behaviour.

Social loafing

The tendency of individuals to make less of an effort when they are working collectively with others than when they are on their own.

Social stigma

When a person's social, physical or mental condition are not approved of, and seen as wrong by others.

Society

A number of people who live together in a defined area or country and who share common values, laws and customs.

Somatic nervous system (SNS)

A system of sensory and motor neurons that run to and from the spinal cord and relay sensory information to and from the central nervous system (CNS). Also controls voluntary movements.

Somatosensory area (of the brain)

An area of the parietal lobe that is involved with the perception of touch, pain, pressure, etc.

Standardised procedures

When carrying out a study, the same method and set of instructions are used for all of the participants in a condition.

Status

A person's rank, social or professional position.

Storage

Holding information in the memory system for use at some point in the future.

Stratified sample

People are selected proportionally from a number of relevant subgroups within the target population.

Stroke

A sudden interruption to the blood supply in a part of the brain that is caused by a blockage of a blood vessel leading to part of the brain or by bleeding into the brain.

Survival

Continued existence of humans or animals.

Symptoms

Physical or mental features that are seen as indicating a condition, disease or disorder.

Synapse

The small gap between two neurons that allows signals to pass between them.

Synaptic transmission

Messages are passed from one neuron to another by sending neurotransmitters across the synaptic gap so that they can be picked up by the receptors on the next neuron.

Systematic sample

People are selected from the target population according to a fixed interval, such as every nth person on a list.

Target population

The large group of people the researcher wants to study and from which the sample is selected.

Temporal lobe

One of the four major lobes of the cerebral cortex, the temporal lobe is an area of the brain that is responsible for things such as comprehension and creation of spoken language.

Territory

An area defended against others by individuals or groups of animals or humans.

Thalamus

The part of the brain that relays sensory information to the cerebral cortex and regulates consciousness and alertness.

Therapies

Treatments that are used in order to relieve symptoms or heal a condition, disease or disorder.

Thought

The cognitive activity of thinking is a mental process which includes reasoning, considering, developing ideas and forming opinions.

Touch

Physical contact between people (and animals). Can be understood as a form of non-verbal communication.

Verbal communication

Sending and receiving messages using words.

Visual area (of the brain)

An area of the occipital lobe that receives visual information.

Visuo-spatial sketchpad

The component of the working memory model responsible for visual and spatial information.

Wernicke's area

An area in the temporal lobe related to speech comprehension.

Working memory model

A theory of how short-term memory works. It states STM can hold and process verbal and visual information. It consists of different components including the central executive, phonological loop, visuo-spatial sketchpad and episodic buffer.