

HOW TO REVISE FOR PSYCHOLOGY A-LEVEL

A complete guide to

- **Getting organised & motivated, & how to manage your time**
- **Constructing and following a revision timetable**
- **Day-to-day work in the months before the exam**
- **How to summarise topics effectively**
- **Exam strategy and technique**

MOTIVATION, EFFORT & HOURS

There is no great mystery about how to study for Psychology A-level. Being an insightful, creative genius plays little part in any A-level. To be honest, **hard work, focus** and **determination** have got a lot more to do with it. Many students, although they're not naturally that 'academic' still score A and A* grades through sheer hard work.

Before you start you need to satisfy yourself that you have good **syllabus notes** to work from. Although most textbooks are fine in places they have a tendency to either not give enough detail on certain topics or give too much information (which can be just as bad). Hopefully, you have a great teacher who's made sure your syllabus notes are fine. If you're uncertain, use the syllabus notes available from [Simply Psychology](#) or [PsychLogic](#) – these have been specifically designed to be **exactly suited to the content of the AQA A-level syllabus**.

You will also need **lists of past paper questions** to practise so you'll know exactly what to expect in the exam. Again – your textbook or teacher's notes should contain these.

PsychLogic provides **full lists of past paper questions and model answers** stretching back years (all relevant to the new syllabus).

As long as you have great syllabus notes and lots of past paper questions the rest is really up to you. **If you want to score an A* or A grade you need to *act* like someone who's going to score these grades.** You are competing against people who are going to put in a hell of a lot of hard work so you need to work as hard as or harder than them. And you need to think about what hard work really is. Successful people will tell you that they've often put in 10 or 12 hours a day... The good news is that with thorough planning and an early start, you can still have a life and get a great A-level grade. But – you will need to *push* yourself.

Self-defeating statements like 'I can't do it' are not going to help. Hard work is hard at first, but the more hard work you put in the more your stamina and concentration grow. Seeing yourself improve is incredibly reinforcing. You'll feel good about yourself and understand that you can change.

There are a million books about getting motivated but it's really very simply. You've just got to want it... and then do it. Take it day-by-day. If you do all the work you're supposed to do in a day then you're on the road to success. Just get up again tomorrow and do it again.

REVISION TIMETABLES

To do well, it's essential you get organised and plan your time logically and rationally to make sure you cover everything on the syllabus in an adequate amount of depth. If you follow the plan below, by the time you sit the exams you'll be feeling confident that there's really nothing the exam board can ask you which you are not prepared for.

1. Calculate the number of subjects and subject units you are sitting

For example: A-level Psychology Biology & Economics: 3 written papers each
3 subjects x 3 units = 9 units

2. Decide on a day to begin revision

The earlier the better. I suggest around **January 20th**.

This is about 18 weeks before the A-levels start in late May.

Although this may sound like a long time, using the example of the student sitting the 3 A-levels above: 18 weeks / 9 units = 2 weeks per unit.

3. Construct a revision timetable

Make a **diary in a Word or Excel** (so you can edit as you go) listing every date between the 1st day of revision and the date of your last exam.

- Mark on all **exam dates**
- Allocate different days to **particular subjects**
- Allocate different subject days to **particular units**
- Allocate different unit days to **particular topics**
- Allocate different topic days to **particular sub-topics**

REVISION TIMETABLE - example

DATE	PSYCHOLOGY	BIOLOGY	ECONOMICS
Mon 4 th March	SUBJECT: Psychology UNIT: 1 TOPIC: Social Influence SUB-TOPICS: Types of conformity: internalisation, identification and compliance Asch's research and variables affecting conformity: group size, unanimity and task difficulty		
Tues 5 th March		Biology	
Wed 6 th March			Economics
Thu 7 th March	SUBJECT: Psychology UNIT: 1 TOPIC: Social Influence SUB-TOPICS: Explanations for conformity:		

	informational social influence and normative social influence		
Fri 8th March		Biology	
Sat 9th March			Economics
Sun 10th March	SUBJECT: Psychology UNIT: 1 TOPIC: Social Influence SUB-TOPICS: Conformity to social roles as investigated by Zimbardo		
Mon 11th March		Biology	
Tues 12th March			Economics
Wed 13th March	SUBJECT: Psychology UNIT: 1 TOPIC: Social Influence SUB-TOPICS: Milgram's obedience research and situational variables affecting obedience: proximity, location and uniform		
Thu 14th March		Biology	
Fri 15th March			Economics
Sat 16th March	SUBJECT: Psychology UNIT: 1 TOPIC: Social Influence SUB-TOPICS: Explanations for obedience: agentic state and legitimacy of authority		

Once you have made a basic template you need to take other factors into account and re-adjust the timetable accordingly

- Some units are **'worth' more** than others: e.g. unit 1 may be 40%, unit 2 60%. (In AQA Psychology all units are worth the same.)
- You may find certain subjects or units **harder** than others. (In AQA Psychology students tend to do a little worse on unit 2 than unit 1 and 3.)
- As you hit exam season look at the **timing of your exams**: for example, you may have 8 days off between your penultimate and your last exam.

You also need to take into consideration how much **free time you have on different days**.

- For example: you should be free all day long during half-term, Easter holidays and every weekend.
- Your timetable may have free days, mornings or afternoons.
- Some days may be very busy, but you should still try to fit in some revision during free periods or in the evening.

It's worth spending a lot of time and effort to make sure your **revision plan is rationally planned to use your time most effectively and cover everything in equal depth**. Spending a couple of days working on this is fine.

The only thing you need to do then is **follow** it.

In relation to the question of **how much time** you should spend on revision each day, the decision is up to you. If you want to get top grades you should work as hard as you possibly can – this may mean 6-8 hours a day on a free day. Try working from 9-11, 12-2, 3-5, 6-8.

Get some fresh air and move around between study periods. At the beginning of your revision programme you will find working for long periods exhausting. However, the more you work and the longer you work for the more your stamina and powers of concentration will grow. A-levels are not supposed to be easy and to be honest it's hardly going to be the most fun time of your life.

DAY-TO-DAY WORK

1. Each of the major **topics** you study are broken up into **sub-topics**. These will be clearly labelled in your textbook/teacher's notes.
2. Read the relevant **Syllabus Notes** for the **sub-topic** you are covering. Slowly and carefully. Go back if you don't understand something. Use a dictionary. Learn new words and concepts. Then read it again.
3. Then make a **written summary of that sub-topic** on an A4 sheet of paper. I find bullet-pointing information most helpful. Other people prefer a mind map. From this summary, make **another written summary on a 3x5" postcard sized card**. See below for a worked example for the Unit 1 Social Influence sub-topic of 'Asch's research and variables affecting conformity: group size, unanimity and task difficulty'. **Making these summaries will help reinforce material in your mind.**
4. Your textbook/teacher's notes should contain lots of examples of **past paper questions**. With the **Syllabus Notes** still open, start looking through the relevant **questions** for that **sub-topic**.
5. Once you understand which syllabus material should go with which question, try revising the material for a question then **answering that question under timed conditions without your textbook/notes**. Use the summaries you've made to help revise the material.
6. **Learn and revise 1 sub-topic** at a time before moving on to the next. For each topic make sure you make the 2 summaries mentioned above.
7. Slowly and thoroughly work your way through the sub-topics and lists of questions one-by-one.
8. **The only way of guaranteeing you'll do well in the final exam is to test yourself under timed conditions**. If you practise past paper questions until you know each one by heart, you will walk into the exam knowing that you are going to get a fantastic grade. There's nothing they can ask you that you haven't already answered in one way or another under timed conditions.

If you feel you don't have good syllabus notes or full lists of past paper questions visit www.psychlogic.org which provides full concise syllabus notes for all topics and a huge bank of past paper questions with full-mark model answers.

NOTES

RESEARCH METHODS.

Although **Research Methods** is a **unit 2** topic **you will be asked Research Methods questions in all 3 papers**. Research Methods carries **more than twice the weight of any other topic in the syllabus** so it is hugely important that you master it. It is also very logical and more a question of understanding material rather than memorising it. Also, Research Methods questions tend to be short. For example, with a 3 mark question you are either going to get it wrong (0 marks), very basic (1 mark), okay-ish (2 marks) or right (3 marks). If you keep on getting these short questions right you are going to pick up a lot of marks. However, if you do drop marks on Research Methods it's very easy to drop down a grade.

NAMES & DATES. You should try and remember researchers' names but if you can't it's okay to just write 'a psychologist found' or 'research found' or 'X found' or 'X conducted a study' or 'it has been argued' **You do not need to know dates** – so don't bother remembering them.

SUMMARIES OF SUB-TOPICS – WORKED EXAMPLE

As mentioned above you should make **2 summaries for each sub-topic**: 1 on an **A4 sheet of paper** and then a super-concise summary on a **3x5" postcard**.

The examples below are based on the **Unit 1 Social Influence sub-topic of 'Asch's research and variables affecting conformity: group size, unanimity and task difficulty'**.

Try and copy this style: picking out and bullet-pointing the main **names, theories, concepts, terminology, research evidence and points of evaluation**.



These summaries are vital for reinforcing material you've just learnt in your memory and will be invaluable when it comes to revising and practising questions under timed conditions.

A4 SUMMARY

UNIT 1 - SOCIAL INFLUENCE

'ASCH'S RESEARCH AND VARIABLES AFFECTING CONFORMITY: GROUP SIZE, UNANIMITY AND TASK DIFFICULTY'

Asch study

- Procedure
 - Conforming to obviously wrong answer – perceptual-judgement task
 - 123 P's (participants) 'vision test'. 1 P with 6-8 confederates
 - Line task
- | A | B | C |
|--|--|---|
|  |  | |
- 18 times different lines
 - 12/18 trials confederate give wrong answer. Do P's conform?
- Findings
 - Of 12 incorrect answer trials 36.8% P's conformed
 - 25% no conformity, 5% complete conformity
 - Reasons – doubted accuracy of vision (informational social influence), avoid disapproval (normative social influence)
- Evaluation
 - Insignificant, no moral importance, low cost. Lack of ecological validity – can't generalise
 - Perrin – 'child of time' 50's USA. Repeated study in 70's with science/engineering students – 1 conformed out of 396
 - Male USA students – low population validity, ethnocentric
 - Ethics – deception, humiliation (protection from harm)
 - Lucas – high vs. low self-efficacy. Situational + individual differences

Asch – variations – increase/decrease conformity

- Task difficulty
 - Asch – lines more similar = higher conformity
 - Rosander – social media. Positive correlation between question difficulty & conformity to false answers
- Group size
 - 1 or 2 confederates = little conformity = 3% & 13%. Majority of 3 = 33%
 - Campbell – size of majority depends on conformity task. Film (personal preference) = bigger group, more conformity. Clearly wrong answer = bigger group, no more conformity effects beyond majority of 3
- Unanimity
 - Dissenter creates non-unanimous majority – conformity drops to 5.5%. Independent behaviour. Even different but wrong answer increases independent behaviour

3x5" POSTCARD SUMMARY

UNIT 1 - SOCIAL INFLUENCE

'ASCH'S RESEARCH AND VARIABLES AFFECTING CONFORMITY: GROUP SIZE, UNANIMITY AND TASK DIFFICULTY'

Asch study

- 123 P's. 1 P with 6-8 confederates
- 12/18 trials confederate give wrong answer.
- 36.8% P's conformed, 25% no conformity, 5% complete conformity
- Informational social influence, normative social influence
- No moral importance - ecological validity – can't generalise
- Perrin – 'child of time' 50's. 70's science/engineering students – 1/396 conforms
- Male USA students – low population validity, ethnocentric
- Ethics – deception, humiliation (protection from harm)
- Lucas – high vs. low self-efficacy

Asch – variations – increase/decrease conformity

- Task difficulty
 - Asch – lines more similar = higher conformity
 - Rosander – positive correlation question difficulty & conformity
- Group size
 - 1 = 3%, 2 = 13%, 3 = 33%
 - Campbell – film vs. clearly wrong
- Unanimity
 - Dissenter, non-unanimous majority – conformity drops to 5.5%

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Questions fall into a number of different styles/categories.

- **'Multiple choice'** questions – the easiest – simply choose the correct option(s). If you're unsure, eliminate the incorrect answers and have an educated guess.
- **'Identify'** questions – usually requires a single word answer just asking you to state something: for example: 'name 1 type of conformity'.
- **'Explain'** questions – could be 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 marks.
- **'Describe a study'** questions – usually procedures and findings – what researchers did and what they found.
- **'Evaluate'** questions. Judging a theory or study's in terms of its strengths and weaknesses, or other commentary (see Simply Psychology doc on essay writing and AO skills).
- **'Criticise'** questions. Same as evaluate but weaknesses/limitations only.
- **'Strengths'** questions. Same as evaluate but strengths only.
- **'Discuss'** or **'Describe and evaluate'** questions. If 8 marks long, ½ needs to be description (4 marks), ½ needs to be evaluation (4 marks). In the A-level, the longest questions of this type you'll be asked will be 16 marks: a 20-25 minute essay.
- **'Context'** questions – could be short or up 16 marks. You'll be asked to read a short passage about behaviour in a real-life situation and relate psychological theory/research to this behaviour/situation. To score well you must relate psychological theory/research to the person/situation.
- **Research Methods** questions – generally fairly short.

- For full details on essay writing and answering longer research methods questions see the Simply Psychology docs '*How to Write AQA Psychology Essays for 16 Marker Questions*' and '*How to Answer 'Design a Study' Research Methods Questions*'.

IN THE EXAM – STRATEGY & TECHNIQUE

Timing is crucial in exams. Many students fail to finish the paper, miss out questions and often drop down a grade as a result of this.

The rule is 1 ¼ minutes per mark.

You may find that some of the smaller value questions can be completed very quickly. Any time saved here should go towards the longer essays.

During the exam you need to constantly bear these time limits in mind to give yourself enough time to answer all questions set. I cannot overstate how important this is.

You should write hard and fast from the start of the exam to the end. Every mark counts. You will be awarded marks for anything (of relevance) that you write down, even if it's a plan, a diagram, a few words. Examiners do not take marks away for errors. You are not marked on spelling, grammar, tidiness, etc.

In the 2017 series of exams there was only a 9% gap between an A and B. These marks could be scored in the last 5 minutes of the exam. Do not stop writing...

2 strategies, and strengths and weaknesses of each.

- Answer questions in linear order from the start to the end of the question paper. The advantage of this is that you are answering series of questions on the same topics as you go through the paper. A possible disadvantage is that you will not get the advantage listed below...
- Answer all short-answer questions (1, 2, 3 marks) then mid-length (4, 6 mark) then long (8, 12, 16 mark). Short answer questions are often very quick to answer. This will have the effect of 'banking' spare time for your longer 8, 12, 16 mark questions (where it's harder to score full marks). You may find, therefore, that rather than having 20 minutes to write your 16 mark essay you have 25 or 30 minutes. This extra time = more marks = higher grade. The downside of this technique is that you're skipping between topics which might cause confusion/slower thinking but needn't really.