

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Session 2 Educational psychology



What exactly is psychology? While it may seem like a very basic question, it is one of the most common questions asked by students new to the study of psychology. During your first lecture of an introductory psychology class, your instructor might spend some time going around the room asking students to explain what they think psychology involves. During my first psychology class, one girl made a dramatic point of waving her fingers over another student's head and pretending to read his thoughts. Unfortunately, such misconceptions about psychology abound and part of the confusion stems from stereotyped portrayals of psychologists in popular media as well as the diverse careers paths of those holding psychology degrees.

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The simplest definition of psychology is that it is the study of the mind and behavior. Research in psychology seeks to understand and explain thought, emotion and behavior. Applications of psychology include mental health treatment, performance enhancement, self-help, ergonomics, and many other

areas affecting health and daily life. It's difficult to capture everything that psychology encompasses in just a brief definition, but topics such as development, personality, thoughts, feelings, emotions, motivations, and social behaviors represent just a portion of what psychology seeks to understand and explain.

Let's take a closer look at this common question.

Question: What Is Psychology?

There's a lot of confusion out there about psychology. According to some popular television programs and movies, psychologists are super-sleuths that can use their understanding of the human mind to solve crimes and predict a criminal's next move. Other popular depictions present the psychologist as a gray and bearded older gentleman, seated in a stately office lined with books, who spends his days listening to clients ramble on about their difficult childhoods.

So what's the truth about psychology? The fact is that there is a little bit of truth in these stereotypical portrayals, but there is actually a lot more to psychology than you might initially think. There is a tremendous diversity in psychology careers, and it is perhaps this enormous range of career paths that contributes to some of the misconceptions about psychology and what psychologists do. Sure, there are psychologists who help solve crimes and there are plenty of professionals who help people deal with mental health issues. But did you know that there are also psychologists who help create healthier workplaces or that design and implement public health programs? Or that there are others psychologists who investigate topics such as airplane safety, computer design, and military life?

So what exactly is psychology?

Answer:

Psychology is both an applied and academic field that studies the human mind and behavior. Research in psychology seeks to understand and explain how we think, act and feel. As most people already realize, a large part of psychology is devoted to the diagnosis and treatment of mental health issues, but that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to applications for psychology. In addition to

mental health, psychology can be applied to a variety of issues that impact health and daily life including performance enhancement, self-help, ergonomics, motivation, productivity, and much more.

Early Psychology

Psychology evolved out of both philosophy and biology. Discussions of these two subjects date as far back as the early Greek thinkers including Aristotle and Socrates. The word psychology is derived from the Greek word *psyche*, literally meaning 'life' or 'breath.' Derived meanings of the word include 'soul' or 'self.'

A Separate Science

The emergence of psychology as a separate and independent field of study truly came about when [Wilhelm Wundt](#) established the [first experimental psychology lab](#) in Leipzig, Germany in 1879.

Wundt's work was focused on describing the structures that compose the mind. This perspective relied heavily on the analysis of sensations and feelings through the use of [introspection](#), a highly subjective process. Wundt believed that properly trained individuals would be able to accurately identify the mental processes that accompanied feelings, sensations and thoughts.

Schools of Thought

Throughout psychology's history, a number of different [schools of thought](#) have formed to explain human thought and behavior. These schools of thought often rise to dominance for a period of time. While these schools of thought are sometimes perceived as competing forces, each [perspective](#) has contributed to our understanding of psychology. The following are some of the major schools of thought in psychology.

- [Structuralism](#)
- [Functionalism](#)
- [Psychoanalysis](#)
- [Behaviorism](#)

- Humanism
- Cognitivism

Psychology Today

Today, psychologists prefer to use more objective scientific methods to understand, explain, and predict human behavior. Psychological studies are highly structured, beginning with a hypothesis that is then empirically tested. The discipline has two major areas of focus: academic psychology and applied psychology. Academic psychology focuses on the study of different sub-topics within psychology including personality, social behavior and human development. These psychologists conduct **basic research** that seeks to expand our theoretical knowledge, while other researchers conduct **applied research** that seeks to solve everyday problems.

Applied psychology focuses on the use of different psychological principles to solve real world problems. Examples of applied areas of psychology include **forensic psychology**, ergonomics, and **industrial-organizational psychology**. Many other psychologists work as therapists, helping people overcome mental, behavioral, and emotional disorders.

Psychology Research Methods

As psychology moved away from its philosophical roots, psychologists began to employ more and more scientific methods to study human behavior.

Contemporary researchers employ a variety of scientific techniques including **experiments**, **correlational studies**, **longitudinal research**, and others to test, explain, and predict behavior.

Areas of Psychology

Psychology is a broad and diverse field. A number of different subfields and specialty areas have emerged. The following are some of the major areas of research and application within psychology:

- **Abnormal Psychology** is the study of abnormal behavior and psychopathology. This specialty area is focused on research and treatment of a variety of **mental disorders** and is linked to **psychotherapy**, and **clinical psychology**.
- **Biological Psychology**, also known as **biopsychology**, studies how biological processes influence the mind and behavior. This area is closely linked to neuroscience and utilizes tools such as MRI and PET scans to look at brain injury or brain abnormalities.
- **Clinical Psychology** is focused on the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental disorders. It is also considered the largest employment area within psychology.
- **Cognitive Psychology** is the study of human thought processes and cognitions. Cognitive psychologists study topics such as attention, memory, perception, decision-making, **problem-solving**, and language acquisition.
- **Comparative Psychology** is the branch of psychology concerned with the study of animal behavior. This type of research can lead to a deeper and broader understanding of human psychology.
- **Developmental Psychology** is an area that looks at human growth and development over the lifespan. Theories often focus on the development of cognitive abilities, morality, social functioning, identity, and other life areas.

- **Forensic Psychology** is an applied field focused on using psychological research and principles in the legal and criminal justice system.
- **Industrial-Organizational Psychology** is a field that uses psychological research to enhance work performance, select employee, improve product design, and enhance usability.
- **Personality Psychology** looks at the various elements that make up individual personalities. Well-known personality theories include **Freud's structural model of personality** and the "**Big Five**" theory of personality.
- **School Psychology** is the branch of psychology that works within the educational system to help children with emotional, social, and academic issues.
- **Social Psychology** is a discipline that uses scientific methods to study social influence, social perception and social interaction. Social psychology studies diverse subjects including group behavior, social perception, **leadership**, nonverbal behavior, conformity, aggression, and prejudice.



Question: What Are the Four Major Goals of Psychology?

Answer:

Psychology is the scientific study of the mind and behavior. While you might understand what psychology is, many people are not quite so certain about what psychology does. What purpose does psychology serve? What are its goals?

The four key goals of psychology are:

To Describe

One of the first goals of psychology is simply to describe behavior. Through describing the behavior of humans and other animals, we are better able to understand it and gain a better perspective on what is considered normal and abnormal. Psychology researchers utilize a range of research methods to help describe behavior including [naturalistic observation](#), [case studies](#), [correlational studies](#), surveys, and [self-report inventories](#).

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To Explain

As you might imagine, psychologists are also interested in explaining behavior in addition to merely describing it. Why do people do the things they do? What factors contribute to development, personality, social behavior, and mental health problems? Throughout psychology's history, many different theories have emerged to help explain various aspects of human behavior. A few examples of such theories including [classical conditioning](#) and [attachment theories](#). Some theories focus on just a small aspect of human behavior (known as mini-theories), while others serve as all-encompassing theories designed to explain all of human psychology (known as grand theories).

To Predict

Not surprisingly, another major goal of psychology is to make predictions about how we think and act. Once we understand more about what happens and why it happens, we can use that information to make predictions about when, why, and how it might happen again in the future.

Successfully predicting behavior is also one of the best ways to know if we truly understand the underlying causes of our actions. Prediction can also allow psychologists to make guesses about human behavior without necessarily understanding the mechanisms underlying the phenomena. For example, if researchers notice that scores on a specific aptitude test can be used to predict high school dropout rates, that information can then be used to estimate how many students in a particular group might drop out of school each year.

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To Change

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, psychology strives to change, influence, or control behavior in order to make positive and lasting changes in people's lives. In our previous example, researchers might take what they know about the link between scores on an aptitude test and dropout rates and use the

information to develop programs designed to help students stay in school. From treating mental illness to enhancing human well-being, changing human behavior is a huge focus of psychology.

In Review

So as you have learned, the four primary goals of psychology are to describe, explain, predict, and change behavior. In many ways, these goals are similar to the kinds of things you probably do every day as you interact with others. When dealing with a child, for example, you might ask questions like "What is he doing?" (describing), "Why is he doing that?" (explaining), "What would happen if I responded in this way?" (predicting), and "What can I do to get him to stop doing that?" (changing).

Obviously, psychologists and other social scientists ask many of the same types of questions. The big difference is that psychologists utilize the **scientific method** to rigorously test and systematically understand both human and animal behavior

Timeline of Modern Psychology

While the roots of psychology can be traced back to early Greek thought, psychology did not become a separate field until the 1870's. This psychology timeline traces important events in the history of psychology.



Psychology is the study of the human mind and behavior. While explorations of these two subjects dates back thousands of years, the formal science of

psychology is actually quite young. During the late 1800s, Wilhelm Wundt formed the first experimental laboratory devoted to the study psychology, officially marking the beginning of psychology as a discipline separate from philosophy and physiology.

If you are new to the study of psychology, then you probably have quite a few questions. [What exactly is psychology?](#) What do psychologists do and where do they work? What can a person do with a psychology degree? We'll tackle some of these all-important questions in this quick introduction to the subject of psychology.

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Why Should People Study Psychology?

There are lots of great reasons to study psychology! For many people, their first real experience learning about psychology happens when they take an introductory class in college to fulfill a general education requirement. Some young students are fortunate to have the opportunity to take [AP Psychology](#) classes in high school, which can be a great way to become more familiar with the subject.

Some people then choose to study psychology in much greater depth and opt to either major or minor in the subject in college. Even if you don't plan to become a psychology major, you can still benefit a great deal from learning more about this topic. Psychology is rich and fascinating and touches on every single aspect of who we are. By studying psychology, you can learn more about who you are as an individual including your own development, personality, thoughts, and behaviors.

Psychology can also provide a basis for better understanding other people. By knowing what makes people tick and what motivates them, you will be able to gain greater insight into what makes people do the things they do. Psychology can

make you a better communicator, a better leader, and even a better friend. What you do with your knowledge is really up to you!

What Are Some of the Different Topics Studied by Psychologists?

Psychology delves into virtually every aspect of how people think and behave. Have you ever wondered why some people are outspoken while others are quiet? Ever want to know why people seem to behave differently in large groups than they do when they are alone? Do you ever marvel at the amazing way young children seem to develop new skills and abilities so quickly? These are just a few of the questions that [psychologists](#) explore.

It might also surprise you to learn that there are many, many different types of psychologists. There are three main types that most can be categorized as:

- *Applied psychologists* who work on applying psychological knowledge to solving real-life problems
- *Mental health psychologists* who utilize their knowledge to diagnose, treat, and prevent mental illnesses and psychological distress
- *Research psychologists* who perform experiments to learn more about the mind and behavior

There are also many different [branches of psychology](#) and each branch is devoted to the study of a specific topic within psychology. Developmental psychology, for example, centers on the study of how people develop throughout the lifespan. Some of the other main branches of psychology include social psychology, cognitive psychology, personality psychology, health psychology, and forensic psychology.

What Are Some of the Things a Person Can Do With a Psychology Degree?

Earning a [bachelor's degree in psychology](#) is a popular option, and there are a number of different entry-level careers you might want to consider. For example, those with an undergraduate degree can hold positions as case workers or psychiatric technicians, while others choose to use their knowledge of the mind and behavior in other fields including sales, marketing, or human resources.

Learn more about some of the [career options that are available with a bachelor's degree in psychology](#).

However, it is important to note that you can't become a licensed psychologist with an undergraduate degree. In fact, the term psychologist is a protected term, meaning that you cannot legally call yourself a psychologist unless you meet specific educational and training requirements. Many students opt to go on to graduate school in order to earn either a master's or doctorate degree. This opens up a wide range of career options depending upon the specialty area you choose, and can also pave the way to a higher salary.

So What Exactly Do Psychologists Do?

There is an enormous variety in the work that psychologists perform. Some work in the field of mental health where they assess, diagnose, and treat psychological conditions. Others devote their time to researching psychological topics in order to add to our existing understanding of how people think and act. Still other professionals investigate specific real-world problems and come up with solutions to resolve these issues.

Learn more about some of the places [where psychologists work and what they do](#).

Where Can I Learn More About Psychology?

One great way to start is to sign up for our [free Psychology 101 email course](#). Over a 10-week period, you will receive a weekly lesson that covers some of the basic topics in psychology. You might also want to consider signing up for our [weekly newsletter](#) as well.

Psychology can be fun, interesting, and exciting! Even if you do not plan on becoming a psychology major, learning about topics such as personality, social behavior, love, and development can help you better understand yourself as well as the other people in your life.