



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



# GCSE subject criteria for psychology

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## Introduction

1. GCSE subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all GCSE specifications in psychology. They provide the framework within which an awarding body creates the detail of the specification.
2. Specifications must also meet the regulators' general requirements, including the common and GCSE criteria as defined in *The statutory regulation of external qualifications* (QCA/04/1293).
3. Subject criteria are intended to:
  - help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies
  - ensure that the rigour of GCSE is maintained
  - ensure that specifications build on the knowledge, understanding and skills established by the statutory curricula for England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and facilitate progression to A level and the further study of psychology
  - help higher education institutions, employers and other stakeholders such as students and parents/guardians know what has been studied and assessed.
4. Any GCSE specification that contains significant elements of psychology must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

## Aims and learning outcomes

5. GCSE specifications in psychology must encourage learners to be inspired, moved and changed by following a broad, coherent, satisfying and worthwhile course of study and to gain an insight into related sectors, such as science. They should encourage learners to develop a personal interest and enthusiasm for psychology and prepare them to make informed decisions about further learning opportunities and career choices.
6. GCSE specifications in psychology must enable learners to:
  - engage in the process of psychological enquiry to develop as effective and independent learners, and as critical and reflective thinkers with enquiring minds
  - develop an awareness of why psychology matters

- acquire knowledge and understanding of how psychology works and its essential role in society
- develop an understanding of the relationship between psychology and social, cultural, scientific and contemporary issues and its impact on everyday life
- develop an understanding of ethical issues in psychology
- develop an understanding of the contribution of psychology to individual, social and cultural diversity
- develop a critical approach to scientific evidence and methods.

## **Subject content**

7. The content of GCSE specifications in psychology must reflect the learning outcomes.
8. All specifications should include a rationale that clearly reflects the approach taken within the specification. This approach should include an emphasis on one or more of the following:
  - the implications of psychology for society
  - explaining, theorising and modelling in psychology
  - procedural knowledge of ethical practice in psychology.
9. GCSE specifications in psychology must require learners to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in the following contexts:
  - core areas of psychology: biological, social, cognitive, developmental and individual differences
  - applications of psychology: the use of psychology to explain and influence everyday behaviour and experience within appropriate, relevant, contemporary contexts.

10. Specifications must require learners to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills in the following areas:

**Data, theories and explanations:**

- collection of data from secondary sources including considering validity and reliability of evidence
- analysis and evaluation of qualitative and quantitative data
- interpretation of data to provide evidence for testing ideas and developing theories
- explanation of behaviour by developing and using scientific theories and models.

**Investigation and enquiry:**

- planning to conduct a psychological investigation and structuring a hypothesis
- evaluation of design and ethical implications of psychological enquiry.

**Evaluative and interpretative skills:**

- recalling, analysing, interpreting, applying and questioning information or ideas
- presenting information, developing arguments and drawing conclusions using psychological concepts, terminology and conventions.

**Applications and implications of psychology:**

- the use of contemporary psychological developments and their benefits and drawbacks
- how psychological knowledge and ideas change over time
- appreciation of the implications of culture in psychological enquiry
- relationship of psychological study to other areas of scientific enquiry and to society as a whole.

## Assessment objectives

11. All specifications in psychology must require candidates to demonstrate their ability to:

Assessment objectives		% weighting
AO1	Recall, select and communicate their knowledge and understanding of psychology and how psychology works	25–35
AO2	Apply skills, knowledge and understanding of psychology and how psychology works	30–40
AO3	Interpret, evaluate and analyse psychological data and practice	30–40

## Scheme of assessment

12. GCSE specifications in psychology must allocate 100% of the weighting to external assessment in the overall scheme of assessment.

13. Question papers must be targeted at the full range of GCSE grades.

## Grade descriptions

To be added later