

# Comprehensive Guide to AQA Psychology Revision

Welcome to your complete revision guide for AQA AS and A2 Psychology. This presentation covers effective revision strategies for all topics across both years of study, helping you to maximise your exam performance through structured approaches tailored to each area of the curriculum. Whether you're preparing for your AS examinations or completing your full A-level, these evidence-based revision techniques will help you master the content, application, evaluation and research methods required for success.



# Social Influence: Conformity and Obedience

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## Core Studies

Create flashcards for Asch's conformity experiments, Milgram's obedience studies, and Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment. For each study, identify the aim, method, results, and conclusions. Practise explaining these studies verbatim, as precise knowledge is essential for high marks.

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## Theoretical Understanding

Draw mind maps connecting types of conformity (compliance, identification, internalisation) with real-world examples. For obedience, create a table of factors affecting obedience levels (proximity, location, uniform, etc.) with evidence from variations of Milgram's study.

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## Application and Evaluation

Develop 'evaluation sandwiches' for each theory and study: point, evidence, explanation. Focus particularly on methodological issues in Zimbardo's work and ethical concerns in Milgram's research. Practise applying social influence concepts to contemporary scenarios like social media conformity.

When revising social influence, focus on understanding the interplay between individual and situational factors. Create comparison tables between conformity and obedience studies, noting similarities and differences in methodology and findings. Practise explaining real-world applications, such as how understanding conformity helps explain risky behaviour in adolescents or how knowledge of obedience factors has influenced modern workplace hierarchies.

# Memory: Models and Processes

## Multi-Store Model and Working Memory Model

Create detailed diagrams of both Atkinson and Shiffrin's Multi-Store Model and Baddeley and Hitch's Working Memory Model. For each component (e.g., phonological loop, visuo-spatial sketchpad), list its function, capacity and duration. Colour-code your notes to distinguish between different stores and processes.

Revise key studies supporting each model, including:

- Peterson and Peterson (1959) on short-term memory duration
- Baddeley (1966) on acoustic and semantic encoding
- Baddeley (1975) on the word length effect

Practise explaining how these studies provide evidence for specific components of memory models. Create flashcards with common examination questions about the strengths and limitations of each model.

## Types of Long-Term Memory and Forgetting

Construct a hierarchical diagram showing the different types of long-term memory (episodic, semantic, procedural). For each type, note distinctive features and provide personal examples to aid recall.

For theories of forgetting, create a comparison table covering:

- Trace decay theory
- Interference theory (proactive and retroactive)
- Retrieval failure (cue-dependent forgetting)

For each theory, note key studies, supporting evidence, and limitations. Practise applying these theories to real-life scenarios, such as explaining why you might forget information during an exam (retrieval failure) or why learning similar subjects consecutively might lead to confusion (interference).

# Attachment: Development and Disruption



## Formation of Attachment

Revise Bowlby's theory of attachment, focusing on the four phases of attachment development and the concept of monotropy. Create a timeline showing these phases with age ranges. Compare with learning theory explanations (classical and operant conditioning) and Schaffer and Emerson's stages.

For Ainsworth's Strange Situation, create detailed notes on the procedure and the four attachment types (secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-resistant, disorganised). Practise describing behaviours associated with each type.



## Cultural Variations

Create a comparison table of cross-cultural studies on attachment, including van IJzendoorn and Kroonenberg's meta-analysis. Note methodological issues with using the Strange Situation across cultures. Develop arguments about the universality versus cultural specificity of attachment patterns.



## Disruption and Deprivation

Summarise key studies on the effects of institutionalisation (Hodges and Tizard) and maternal deprivation (Bowlby's 44 juvenile thieves). Create a table showing short-term and long-term effects of separation and deprivation. Revise Romanian orphan studies and the concept of the sensitive period.

When revising attachment, focus on the interplay between theory and research evidence. Practise writing evaluation points that consider methodological issues, such as the ethics of separation studies or the validity of the Strange Situation. Develop application questions that link attachment theory to real-world contexts like day care provision or social policy on adoption and fostering.

# Approaches in Psychology

## The Biological Approach

Create detailed notes on the assumptions of the biological approach (genetics, neurochemistry, brain structure). Revise key studies supporting biological explanations, such as Raine's brain-scanning research on criminals. For evaluation, focus on reductionism and determinism criticisms. Practise applying the biological approach to explaining behaviours like aggression or mental disorders.

## The Cognitive Approach

Develop a mind map of cognitive concepts (schemas, heuristics, cognitive biases). Revise information processing models and their limitations. Create flashcards on key studies like Loftus and Palmer on eyewitness testimony. Practise explaining how cognitive psychology has influenced treatments like CBT.

## The Psychodynamic Approach

Summarise Freud's structural model (id, ego, superego) and psychosexual stages. Create a table of defence mechanisms with examples. Revise case studies like Little Hans and evaluate their scientific validity. Practise explaining concepts like the unconscious mind and repression with examples.

## The Behaviourist Approach

Create detailed notes on classical and operant conditioning, including key terminology. Revise studies by Pavlov, Skinner, and Watson and Rayner (Little Albert). Develop evaluation points focusing on environmental determinism and the role of cognition. Practise applying behavioural principles to explaining phobias or designing behaviour modification programmes.

When revising approaches, focus on comparing and contrasting different perspectives. Create tables that show how each approach would explain the same behaviour (e.g., depression or aggression). Practise integrating approaches in your answers, showing how they complement each other rather than simply competing. Develop strong evaluation points that consider issues like reductionism, determinism, and scientific credibility for each approach.

# Psychopathology: Understanding Disorders

## Definitions of Abnormality

Create a detailed comparison table of the four definitions of abnormality:

- Statistical infrequency
- Deviation from social norms
- Failure to function adequately
- Deviation from ideal mental health

For each definition, note key features, strengths, limitations, and examples. Practise applying these definitions to ambiguous cases, such as highly creative individuals or cultural practices that might seem unusual in Western contexts.

## Phobias

Revise the behavioural explanation of phobias (classical conditioning, social learning theory) and the behavioural approach to treating phobias (systematic desensitisation, flooding). Create a step-by-step guide to systematic desensitisation, including the construction of anxiety hierarchies. Develop evaluation points focusing on effectiveness rates and ethical considerations.

When revising psychopathology, focus on integrating explanations and treatments. Practise explaining how different approaches might complement each other in understanding and treating disorders. Develop application questions that link theoretical explanations to real-world treatment scenarios. Create comparison tables showing success rates, limitations, and ethical considerations for different treatment approaches.

## Depression

Create detailed notes on the cognitive explanation of depression (Beck's negative triad, Ellis's ABC model) and the cognitive approach to treating depression (cognitive behavioural therapy, rational emotive behaviour therapy). Revise studies supporting the effectiveness of CBT compared to drug treatments. Practise explaining how cognitive distortions contribute to depressive symptoms.

## Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Summarise the biological explanation of OCD (genetic factors, neural mechanisms) and the biological approach to treating OCD (drug treatments). Create a table showing different types of drugs used (SSRIs, tricyclics) with their mechanisms and side effects. Develop evaluation points considering the effectiveness of drug treatments versus psychological approaches like CBT.

# Research Methods and Scientific Processes

## Experimental Methods

Create detailed notes on experimental designs (independent groups, repeated measures, matched pairs) with advantages and disadvantages of each. Revise laboratory, field, and natural experiments, focusing on issues of internal and external validity. Practise identifying variables and potential confounds in research scenarios.

## Data Analysis

Create a decision tree for selecting appropriate statistical tests based on data types and research designs. Revise descriptive statistics (measures of central tendency, dispersion) and inferential tests (Mann-Whitney U, Wilcoxon, Chi-Square, Spearman's rho). Practise calculating and interpreting these statistics with example data sets.

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## Non-experimental Methods

Summarise observational techniques (participant, non-participant, overt, covert), self-report methods (questionnaires, interviews), and correlational analysis. For each method, note key strengths, limitations, and ethical considerations. Practise designing research studies using these methods for different psychological questions.

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## Scientific Processes

Develop notes on the scientific process in psychology, including formulating hypotheses, operationalising variables, and controlling extraneous variables. Revise issues of reliability and validity in research. Create flashcards on key terminology like 'double-blind procedure', 'demand characteristics', and 'order effects'.

Research methods appear throughout both AS and A2 examinations, so consistent revision is essential. Create a glossary of key terms and practise applying them to novel research scenarios. Develop skills in critically evaluating research designs by identifying methodological flaws and suggesting improvements. Practise interpreting data presented in different formats (tables, graphs) and drawing appropriate conclusions. Focus particularly on understanding when to use different statistical tests and how to interpret significance levels.

# Biopsychology: Brain and Behaviour

## The Nervous System

Create detailed diagrams of the central and peripheral nervous systems, including the somatic and autonomic divisions. For the autonomic nervous system, contrast sympathetic and parasympathetic functions. Revise the fight-or-flight response, noting the role of adrenaline and noradrenaline. Practise explaining how these systems interact in response to environmental threats.

## Neurons and Synaptic Transmission

Draw and label diagrams of sensory, relay, and motor neurons. Create a step-by-step flowchart of synaptic transmission, including the role of neurotransmitters. Revise the impact of drugs on synaptic transmission, focusing on agonists and antagonists. Practise explaining how specific neurotransmitters (dopamine, serotonin) relate to psychological disorders.

## Localisation of Brain Function

Create a labelled diagram of the brain showing key areas (frontal lobe, Broca's area, Wernicke's area, motor cortex, somatosensory cortex). Revise case studies supporting localisation (Phineas Gage, HM) and research on split-brain patients. Develop evaluation points considering plasticity and holistic functioning.

## Brain Scanning Techniques

Develop a comparison table of different scanning techniques (EEG, fMRI, PET, post-mortem examination), noting how each works, what it measures, spatial/temporal resolution, invasiveness, and limitations. Practise explaining how these techniques have contributed to our understanding of specific psychological processes or disorders.

When revising biopsychology, focus on understanding both structures and processes. Use colour-coding in your diagrams to help distinguish different systems and pathways. Create flashcards with unlabelled diagrams on one side and labels on the other to test your anatomical knowledge. Practise applying biological concepts to explain everyday behaviours and psychological disorders. Develop evaluation points that consider reductionism and the integration of biological factors with psychological and social influences.



# Issues and Debates in Psychology

## Nature-Nurture Debate

Create a continuum showing different psychological approaches positioned according to their emphasis on nature or nurture. Revise key studies in behavioural genetics, including twin and adoption studies. Develop nuanced arguments about the interaction between genetic predispositions and environmental influences. Practise applying this debate to specific behaviours like intelligence or aggression.

## Ethnocentrism and Cultural Bias

Create a list of ways in which psychological research might display cultural bias, from theory development to methodology and interpretation. Revise cross-cultural studies that challenge Western assumptions. Develop arguments about cultural relativism versus universal psychological principles. Practise identifying potential cultural biases in research scenarios.



## Free Will vs Determinism

Summarise different forms of determinism (biological, environmental, psychic) and their implications for human behaviour. Create a table showing how different approaches in psychology view human agency. Revise philosophical arguments about compatibilism. Practise discussing the implications of deterministic views for concepts like moral responsibility and the criminal justice system.

## Reductionism vs Holism

Develop notes contrasting reductionist approaches (breaking behaviour down to biological or environmental components) with holistic perspectives (considering the whole person in context). Create examples showing how different levels of explanation (social, psychological, neurological, genetic) might complement each other. Practise evaluating reductionist explanations of complex behaviours.

Issues and debates run throughout A-level Psychology and are excellent ways to demonstrate critical thinking in your answers. For each major topic you revise, consider how these debates apply. Create a grid with topics on one axis and debates on the other, filling in relevant points of discussion. Practise integrating these debates into your evaluation points for specific theories and studies. Develop sophisticated arguments that recognise the complexity of these issues rather than presenting simplistic either/or positions.

# Gender and Relationships

## Gender Development

Create detailed notes on the biological explanation of gender development, focusing on genetic and hormonal influences. Compare with psychological explanations including cognitive development theory (Kohlberg) and gender schema theory (Martin and Halverson). Revise social learning theory explanations, noting the role of modelling and reinforcement.

For each theory, develop evaluation points considering research evidence, cultural variations, and the nature-nurture debate. Practise applying these theories to explain gender-typical and gender-atypical behaviour in children and adults.

## Atypical Gender Development

Summarise research on gender identity disorder and the biological and psychological factors that may contribute to gender dysphoria. Revise case studies like David Reimer and their implications for understanding the relative influence of biology and socialisation. Create a timeline showing how views on gender identity have evolved within psychology.

When revising gender and relationships, focus on integrating biological, psychological, and social explanations. Create tables comparing different theoretical perspectives on the same phenomenon, such as gender development or partner selection. Develop sophisticated evaluation points that consider methodological issues, cultural variations, and historical changes in gender roles and relationship patterns. Practise applying theories to contemporary issues such as changing family structures or evolving concepts of gender identity.

## Sexual Selection and Human Relationships

Create a comparison table of evolutionary explanations of partner preferences, contrasting male and female selection criteria. Revise key studies supporting these explanations, including cross-cultural research. Develop evaluation points considering cultural variations and changes in modern society.

## Relationship Formation and Maintenance

Summarise theories of relationship formation including the reward/need satisfaction model and the filter model. Create a flowchart showing stages of relationship development. Revise factors affecting relationship success, including social exchange theory, equity theory, and investment models. Practise applying these theories to explain relationship satisfaction and breakdown in case studies.

# Schizophrenia and Addiction

## Schizophrenia: Classification and Diagnosis

Create a table of positive symptoms (hallucinations, delusions, disorganised speech) and negative symptoms (flat affect, avolition, alogia) of schizophrenia. Revise diagnostic criteria from ICD and DSM, noting changes over time. Develop evaluation points considering reliability and validity of diagnosis, cultural variations, and the concept of schizophrenia as a spectrum rather than a discrete disorder.

## Biological Explanations and Treatments

Summarise genetic, neuroanatomical, and biochemical explanations of schizophrenia, including the dopamine hypothesis. Create detailed notes on antipsychotic medications, their mechanisms of action, effectiveness, and side effects. Revise studies supporting biological explanations, including twin studies and brain imaging research. Practise evaluating these explanations, considering reductionism and the integration with psychological factors.

## Psychological Explanations and Treatments

Develop notes on cognitive explanations of schizophrenia, including theory of mind deficits and attributional biases. Summarise family dynamics theories and the concept of expressed emotion. Create detailed notes on CBT and family interventions for schizophrenia, including evidence for their effectiveness. Practise comparing biological and psychological approaches to treatment, considering combined approaches.

## Addiction: Risk Factors and Treatments

Create a mind map of risk factors for addiction, including genetic vulnerability, personality factors, and social influences. Revise biological and psychological explanations of addiction, including the role of neurotransmitter systems and learning processes. Summarise different treatment approaches, from drug therapies to cognitive-behavioural interventions and support groups. Develop evaluation points considering the effectiveness of different approaches for different substances and individuals.

When revising schizophrenia and addiction, focus on understanding the interplay between biological, psychological, and social factors. Create integrated explanations that recognise the complexity of these conditions rather than presenting different approaches as competing alternatives. Develop sophisticated evaluation points that consider methodological issues in research, ethical implications of different explanations, and the impact of explanations on treatment approaches and social attitudes. Practise applying your knowledge to case studies, explaining how different factors might interact in individual cases.

# Effective Exam Techniques for Psychology

## 1 Understanding Command Terms

Create a glossary of examination command terms (outline, describe, explain, evaluate, discuss) with examples of how to structure responses to each. Practise identifying what each command term requires in different question contexts. Remember that 'evaluate' questions require consideration of strengths and limitations, while 'discuss' questions often need balanced consideration of different perspectives.

## 3 Time Management Strategies

Create a timing plan for each examination paper, allocating minutes per mark. Practise writing under timed conditions, focusing on concise expression and prioritising relevant content. Develop strategies for planning longer essays quickly, such as jotting down key points before beginning to write. Remember to leave time for reviewing your answers and making corrections.

## 2 Structuring AO1, AO2, and AO3 Content

Develop templates for different question types, ensuring you understand the balance of assessment objectives required. For AO1 (knowledge and understanding), focus on accurate description of theories, studies, and concepts. For AO2 (application), practise applying theories to novel scenarios. For AO3 (evaluation), develop a bank of critical points for each major theory and study, considering methodological issues, alternative explanations, and real-world implications.

## 4 Using Evidence Effectively

Compile a bank of key studies for each topic, focusing on researcher names, dates, methodologies, and findings. Practise integrating these studies into your answers, using them to support theoretical points rather than describing them in isolation. Develop the skill of selecting the most relevant evidence for specific questions rather than trying to include everything you know.

In the weeks before your examinations, focus on active revision techniques rather than passive reading. Complete past papers under timed conditions and seek feedback on your responses. Create condensed revision notes that highlight connections between different topics and theories. Practise explaining psychological concepts to others, as teaching is one of the most effective ways to consolidate your understanding. Remember that examiners are looking for accurate knowledge, clear application, and thoughtful evaluation rather than simply the quantity of information you can recall.