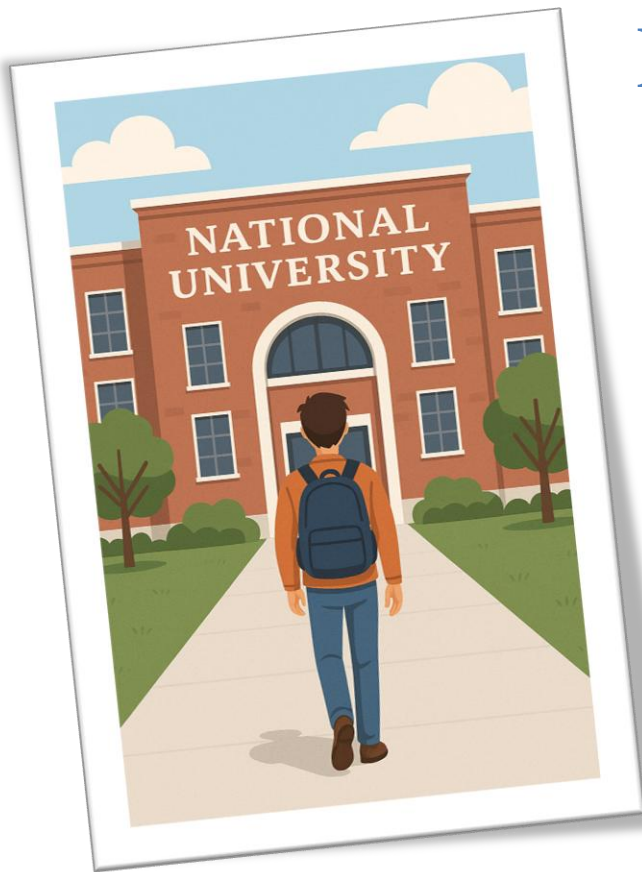


Straightforward & Easy to Read Study Guide for New PhD Students in Psychology



Guide and images by Martin CJ Mongiello
School of Psychology and Social Sciences, National University
PSY-7120 v2: Overview of the Psychological Concepts (9187202574)
Doctor Amanda Gibson, Ph.D.
August 30, 2025

Introduction

When first considering psychology, it was imagined as a profession chained to a small office, where clinicians dealt only with the most difficult human struggles — divorce, death, suicidal thoughts, compulsive behaviors, sexual risk-taking, or substance abuse. To be honest, that picture scared the writer, and it nearly turned studies away from the field entirely. What has since been discovered, however, is that psychology is vastly larger and more diverse than this narrow clinical stereotype (Myers & DeWall, 2021).

This assignment came about four months into psychology Ph.D. studies. Not being an expert at building a study guide for new Ph.D. students, if you are considering entering this field, or if you are in your very first week, then perhaps hearing from someone a few months ahead may offer perspective. It is reasonable to argue that such an author offers negligible scholarly merit and constitutes an illegitimate and inappropriate source, particularly when evaluated against rigorous standards for evidence-based practice (Carrington et al., 2024; Hill & Norcross, 2023). From that point of being, the approach here is not as an expert in psychology studies, but as a fellow traveler, sharing the first landmarks noticed along the way (Edelstein & Kujoth, 2013). At this point, National University is wise enough to know a student would have dropped this course quickly if discerning it was of no interest to study. Poor grades are often another indicator; while the author is currently maintaining an A grade in all classes to date and every single paper submitted, week after week.

The Breadth of Psychology

Psychology is not just about “fixing problems” — it is about understanding human thought, behavior, and experience in every context imaginable (Myers & DeWall, 2021). Some of the many fields within psychology include:

- **Clinical psychology** — assessment and treatment of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022).
- **Counseling psychology** — guiding individuals through life transitions, stress, and adjustment issues (American Psychological Association [APA], 2017).
- **Forensic psychology** — the police, courts, corrections, and the legal system.
- **Industrial–organizational psychology** — applying psychology to the workplace, leadership, and organizational culture (van Bommel et al., 2024; Korkmaz et al., 2022).
- **Health psychology** — the mind–body connection and promoting wellness.
- **Educational psychology** — how people learn and designing teaching methods (Ahmad et al., 2019; Dew et al., 2023).
- **Developmental psychology** — examining human growth across the lifespan.
- **Social psychology** — group dynamics, prejudice, persuasion, and relationships (Quinn et al., 2020; Rossella Canestrino et al., 2022).
- **Neuropsychology** — linking brain structure/function to cognition and behavior.
- **Sports psychology** — optimizing performance and mental resilience in athletes.
- **Military psychology** — service members, veterans, and defense readiness.
- **Environmental psychology** — how surroundings/settings affect human behavior.
- **Research psychology** — advancing the science of psychology through experimental and theoretical work (Carrington et al., 2024; Hill & Norcross, 2023; Hubert de Condé et al., 2024; Ladmanová et al., 2025).

In short, psychology is not a single road, but a vast network of pathways — from healing trauma to designing better workplaces, from advising juries to studying childhood development.

A new PhD student could step into the field with excitement, knowing that psychology's reach extends into nearly every corner of human society (Edelstein & Kujoth, 2013).

The Variety of Therapies

The second major insight I have gained is just how many kinds of therapies exist within psychology. At first, it may be assumed therapy is a single, uniform process — someone sits in an office, talks about their past, and a therapist listens carefully. What I have learned is that there are dozens of recognized approaches, each built on its own history, philosophy, and techniques. These therapies are not interchangeable; they are often very different from one another in both method and purpose (Edelstein & Kujoth, 2013; Hill & Norcross, 2023; Myers & DeWall, 2021).

- **Psychodynamic Therapy** — Rooted in Freud's work, this approach explores unconscious conflicts, early childhood experiences, and the influence of past relationships on present behavior (Edelstein & Kujoth, 2013).
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** — One of the most widely researched approaches, CBT focuses on identifying and changing unhelpful thought patterns and behaviors in a structured, goal-oriented way (Myers & DeWall, 2021).
- **Humanistic Therapy** — Grounded in the ideas of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, this approach emphasizes self-actualization, personal growth, and creating a supportive therapeutic relationship (*Ladmanová et al., 2025*; Edelstein & Kujoth, 2013).
- **Behavioral Therapy** — Uses principles of learning, such as reinforcement and conditioning, to help modify maladaptive behaviors (*Myers & DeWall, 2021*).

- **Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)** — Originally developed for borderline personality disorder, DBT blends CBT techniques with mindfulness and acceptance strategies (*American Psychiatric Association, 2022*).
- **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)** — Encourages individuals to accept their thoughts and feelings while committing to behavior that aligns with their values (*Montgomery et al., 2024*).
- **Family and Couples Therapy** — Focuses on relational dynamics, communication, and systems theory rather than treating one individual in isolation (Edelstein & Kujoth, 2013).
- **Exposure Therapy** — Often used in treating phobias and PTSD, this involves safely confronting feared stimuli to reduce avoidance and fear responses (*American Psychological Association, 2017*; Carrington et al., 2024).
- **EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)** — A structured therapy particularly for trauma, combining cognitive focus with guided eye movements to help process distressing memories (American Psychiatric Association, 2022; Carrington et al., 2024; Hill & Norcross, 2023; Hubert de Condé et al., 2024).

It is not necessary for new PhD students to memorize every therapeutic approach, rattle them off extemporaneously, or be prepared to impress a senior professor by naming each one on demand. Nor is it essential to describe every subtle distinction as though preparing for an exhaustive examination. What matters most at this stage is developing an awareness that multiple therapies exist, that they were designed for different purposes, and that they represent essential components of the field (Edelstein & Kujoth, 2013; Hill & Norcross, 2023). The purpose of this study guide is not to overwhelm but to present a broad framework that illustrates the wide range and varied practice of therapy within psychology.

The Importance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The third major point emphasized in this study guide is the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in psychology.

This is not a side issue — it is central to the field, and it will surface repeatedly no matter what branch of psychology you choose. Prior research has demonstrated that increasing inclusion directly improves both educational and research outcomes (Ahmad et al., 2019; Dew et al., 2023). Whether you work in clinical practice, industrial–organizational psychology, research, education, or counseling, the

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Psychology

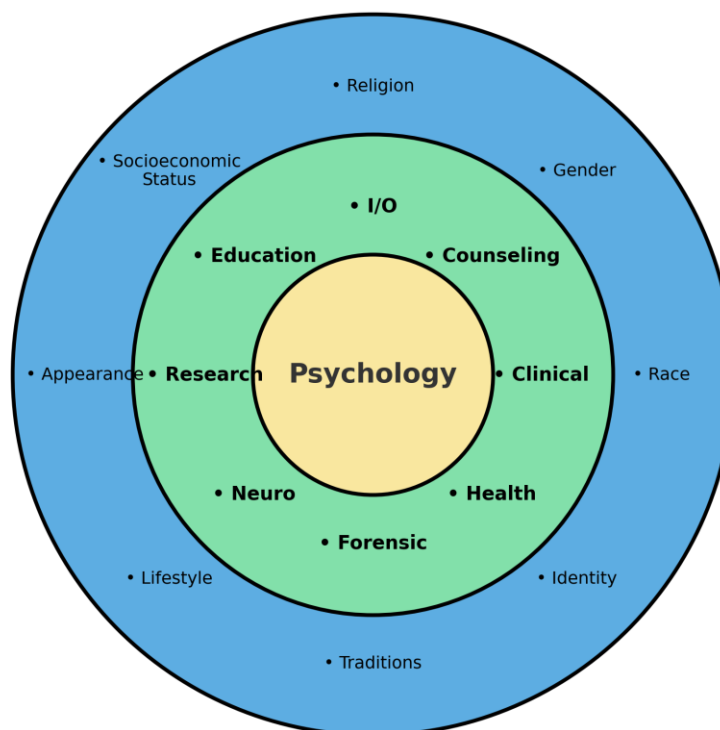


Figure 1. Psychology professions (middle circle) and the diversity of people (exterior circle) are shown as part of the profession.

Graphic courtesy Martin CJ Mongiello.

fact remains: the profession is built on human differences. Both the people working in the field and the clients or populations they serve bring with them incredible variety in background, culture, identity, and experience, underscoring ongoing blind spots and opportunities for growth identified in the broader DEI literature (van Bommel et al., 2024; Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023).

This is true on the practitioner’s side. In today’s psychology community, you will find colleagues from every walk of life, representing different races, religions, genders, and

socioeconomic backgrounds. It is equally true on the client side, where you may encounter a staggering range of personalities, appearances, and lifestyles. Not everybody feels comfortable walking into a session with a 350-pound Black man wearing a motorcycle jacket and a chain wallet — but that man may be your colleague, your client, or even your supervisor. Likewise, you may encounter a 90-pound Indian woman with a red bindi dot on her forehead, representing traditions and beliefs that are new to you, in the same workplace. Where this author lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, businesses already show this wide spectrum of diversity.

And diversity does not stop there. In many workplaces you will also meet people from the countryside, showing up in denim bib overalls, with long beards hanging all the way down to their stomachs. At first glance, they may resemble someone straight off the farm — yet that same individual might be an exceptionally skilled accountant or a sharp professional in another role. These contrasts remind us that appearances alone do not tell the full story of someone's identity or ability, reflecting broader findings in diversity and inclusion research that highlight the risks of bias and the importance of equitable evaluation of talent (Ahmad et al., 2019; van Bommel et al., 2024; Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). The key insight for a new PhD student is that diversity is not an occasional feature of the field — it is the field. You cannot separate psychological practice from cultural awareness. Every setting you step into will require you to bring cultural humility, respect, and an openness to learn from people who do not look like you, think like you, or live like you. This is not simply a matter of politeness; it is a professional obligation, one that will shape your coursework, your practicum, your research, and your future career. Diversity is massive, and it will remain one of the most important factors to keep in mind as you progress through your studies.

Ethics and the Code of Conduct

The fourth major point that belongs in this study guide is ethics. Relying heavily on the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017), it quickly becomes clear that ethics is not just a formality — it is the backbone of the field. Some ethical guidelines are obvious and feel like natural one-offs: do not harm people, respect confidentiality, and avoid exploiting others. But as you read deeper into the APA's Ethical Principles, you realize there are very specific rules that go far beyond common sense, particularly in relation to diagnostic accuracy and professional boundaries, which are also reinforced by the standards outlined in the *DSM-5-TR* (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

One of the most striking examples is the prohibition against relationships with clients. For a new student, this can be eye-opening. The rule is clear: psychologists must never engage in a sexual or romantic relationship with a current client under any circumstances. Even with former clients, there is a minimum “cooling off” period of two years, and even after that, such relationships are generally frowned upon. If they do occur, psychologists may be required to provide detailed documentation explaining the timing, reasoning, and circumstances, and they may still face professional scrutiny from the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (American Psychological Association, 2017) and diagnostic and practice standards outlined in the *DSM-5-TR* (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

The reason this is so important is that, as soon as people discover you are studying psychology at the PhD level, they will often gravitate toward you and treat you as a trusted confidant. They may share deeply personal, intimate, or troubling information with you, even if you are not a clinical practitioner. That trust creates a moment of vulnerability — and therefore a

moment of potential abuse of power. The ethics code exists to draw sharp boundaries and protect both the client and the professional from harm in those moments (American Psychological Association, 2017). These pinpoint specifics were eye-opening as a new student because they go beyond broad moral principles and drill down into situations you may not expect. They are not just about avoiding lawsuits or trouble with professional boards — they are about maintaining the integrity of the psychologist's role and protecting the dignity of the people you encounter (American Psychological Association, 2017; American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

As part of a study guide, it is recommended not only to read the APA Ethics Code but also to take the time to physically write down key points by hand. The *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* provide the framework for this reflection (American Psychological Association, 2017), while diagnostic standards further reinforce the necessity of ethical precision in professional practice (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Research has also shown that students who use pen and paper retain information more effectively than those who study exclusively with laptops or tablets, supporting the role of handwritten notes as a strategy for long-term retention of ethical principles (Myers & DeWall, 2021). Making handwritten notes on ethical standards can therefore help ensure that, when ethical challenges arise, psychologists are prepared to respond with clarity and professionalism.

Challenging Your Own Research

The fifth major point to highlight in this study guide is the importance of challenging existing stances and even one's own research. Academic writing is not solely about assembling citations that reinforce a position, but also about including sources and arguments that contradict it. This practice, emphasized in both psychotherapy and research methodology, reflects humility and discipline and has been identified as a marker of scholarly rigor (Carrington et al., 2024; Hill

& Norcross, 2023). Deliberately engaging detractors and presenting counterevidence demonstrates intellectual honesty by showing that the full scope of the research has been considered, rather than only evidence that supports one viewpoint. In addition, acknowledging limitations and competing perspectives gives readers and colleagues a meaningful “out,” allowing for engagement without polarization, which strengthens both credibility and scholarly impact (Ladmanová et al., 2025; van Bommel et al., 2024).

In psychology, this approach is not optional — it is essential. It reflects the reality that therapies are not universal and that no single model addresses all client needs (Edelstein & Kujoth, 2013; Carrington et al., 2024). The same principle applies outside the clinical setting. In industrial–organizational psychology, for instance, professionals may be asked to improve efficiency on a factory floor. There is no single psychological theory that can solve every problem, as organizational contexts require consideration of diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as leadership practices (van Bommel et al., 2024; Korkmaz et al., 2022). Instead, combining

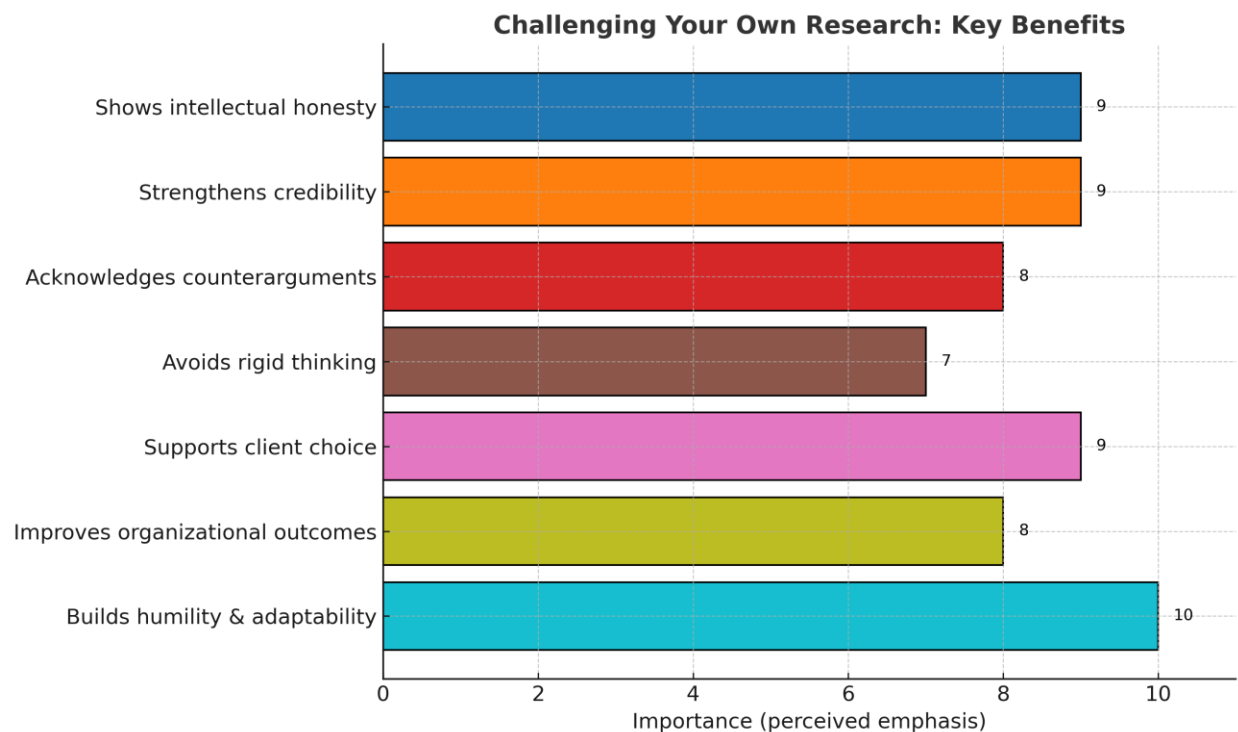


Figure 2: Courtesy Martin CJ Mongiello

perspectives, approaches, and methods creates the most effective outcomes, reflecting the broader breadth of psychology as a discipline (Myers & DeWall, 2021).

For emerging doctoral scholars, one of the most significant lessons is the recognition that incorporating evidence that contradicts existing positions are integral to the advancement of psychological science. Engaging with counterevidence demonstrates intellectual honesty and prevents the narrowing of inquiry to only supportive perspectives (Carrington et al., 2024; Hill & Norcross, 2023). This practice requires a willingness to adapt and evolve, aligning with broader calls for methodological rigor and inclusivity in research (van Bommel et al., 2024). Moreover, by acknowledging diverse outcomes identified across psychotherapy research, scholars strengthen both the credibility and applicability of their work (Ladmanová et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This brief study guide synthesizes foundational considerations for new doctoral students in psychology, emphasizing the breadth of the discipline across multiple domains (Myers & DeWall, 2021), the diversity of therapeutic modalities that inform clinical practice (Edelstein & Kujoth, 2013), the indispensability of ethical responsibility (American Psychological Association [APA], 2017), and the centrality of diversity, equity, and inclusion within both research and applied contexts (Ahmad et al., 2019; Dew et al., 2023; Dong et al., 2018; van Bommel et al., 2024). By outlining these elements, the guide situates psychology as a multifaceted and evolving field in which scholarly rigor must be balanced with cultural humility and ethical integrity (American Psychiatric Association, 2022; Hill & Norcross, 2023). Although not comprehensive, this resource provides an initial framework that orients novice scholars to the expectations, challenges, and complexities inherent in doctoral training in psychology (Carrington et al., 2024; Montgomery et al., 2024).

References

- Ahmad, A. S., Sabat, I., Trump-Steele, R., & King, E. (2019). Evidence-based strategies for improving diversity and inclusion in undergraduate research labs. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01305>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5-TR*. American Psychiatric Association Publishing.
- American Psychological Association. (2017). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct*. <https://www.apa.org/ethics/code>
- Carrington, B., Yeates, R., & Masterson, C. (2024). Understanding non-response in psychotherapy: A meta-synthesis. *Clinical Psychology Review, 114*, 102489. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2024.102489>
- Dew, M., Hunt, E., Perera, V., Perry, J., Ponti, G., & Loveridge, A. (2023). *Group Dynamics in Inquiry-based Labs: Gender Inequities and the Efficacy of Partner Agreements*.
- Dong, Y., Ma, H., Tang, J., & Wang, K. (2018). *Collaboration Diversity and Scientific Impact*.
- Edelstein, M., & Kujoth, R. (2013). *Therapy breakthrough: Why some psychotherapies work better than others*. Open Court.
- Hill, C. E., & Norcross, J. C. (2023). Research evidence on psychotherapist skills and methods: Foreword and afterword. *Psychotherapy Research, 33*(7), 821–840. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2023.2186281>
- Hubert de Condé, Emmanuelle Zech, & Jochem Willemsen. (2024). The person behind the therapist: a recall study on significant events that contribute to

- therapists' personal and professional development. *Research in Psychotherapy*, 27(2). <https://doi.org/10.4081/ripppo.2024.791>
- Ladmanová, M., Řiháček, T., Timulak, L., Jonášová, K., Kubantová, B., Mikoška, P., Polakovská, L., & Elliott, R. (2025). Client-identified outcomes of individual psychotherapy: a qualitative meta-analysis. *The Lancet. Psychiatry*, 12(1), 18–31. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(24\)00356-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(24)00356-0)
- Montgomery, M. R., Luca, M., & Gordon, F. A. (2024). The shifting sound of silence: A constructivist grounded theory. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research*, 24(1), 275–285. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12654>
- Myers, D. G., & DeWall, C. N. (2021). *Psychology* (13th ed.). New York: Worth Publishers.
- Quinn, K. N., Kelley, M. M., McGill, K. L., Smith, E. M., Whipps, Z., & Holmes, N. G. (2020). *Group roles in unstructured labs show inequitable gender divide*.
- Rossella Canestrino, Pierpaolo Magliocca, & Yang Li. (2022). The Impact of Language Diversity on Knowledge Sharing Within International University Research Teams: Evidence From TED Project. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.879154>
- van Bommel, H. M., Hubers, F., & Maas, K. E. H. (2024). Prominent Themes and Blind Spots in Diversity and Inclusion Literature: A Bibliometric Analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 192(3), 487–499. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05522-w>
- Veli Korkmaz, A., van Engen, M. L., Knappert, L., & Schalk, R. (2022). About and beyond leading uniqueness and belongingness: A systematic review of inclusive leadership research. *Human Resource Management Review*, 32(4), N.PAG. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2022.100894>

Wolbring, G., & Nguyen, A. (2023). Equity/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and Other EDI Phrases and EDI Policy Frameworks: A Scoping Review. *Trends in Higher Education* (2813-4346), 2(1), 168–237. <https://doi.org/10.3390/higheredu2010011>