AP Psychology Curriculum

Michelle Williams

Unit 1: Psychology’s History and Approaches September

What is Psychology?

1-1: Describe the evolution of scientific psychology from its early pioneers to

contemporary concerns

1-2: Describe the evolution of psychology as defined from the 1920’s through

today.

Contemporary Psychology

1-3: Summarize the nature-nurture debate in psychology, and describe the

principle of natural selection

1-4: Identify the three main levels of analysis in the biopsychosocial

approach, and explain why psychology’s varied perspectives are

complementary

1-5: Identify some of psychology’s subfields, and explain the difference

between clinical psychology and psychiatry

Tips for Studying Psychology

1-6: Describe several effective study techniques

Unit 2: Research Methods: Thinking Critically with Psychological Science September

The Need for Psychological Science

2-1: Define hindsight bias and explain how overconfidence contaminates our

everyday judgments.

2-2: Explain how the scientific attitude encourages critical thinking.

How Do Psychologists Ask and Answer Questions?

2-3: Describe how psychological theories guide scientific research.

2-4: Compare and contrast case studies, surveys, and naturalistic observation

explain the importance of random sampling

2.5: Describe positive and negative correlations, and explain how

correlational measures can aid the process of prediction but not

provide evidence of cause-effect relationships.

2.6: Describe how people form illusory correlations, and explain the human

tendency to perceive order in random sequences.

2.7: Explain how experiments help researchers isolate cause and effect,

focusing on the characteristics of experimentation that make this

possible

Statistical Reasoning in Everyday Life

2.8: Discuss the importance of statistical principles, and explain how data

may be depicted graphically

2.9: Describe the three measures of central tendency, and tell which is most

affected by extreme scores

2.10: Describe two measures of variation

2.11: Identify three principles for making generalizations from samples

2.12: Explain how psychologists decide whether differences are meaningful

Frequently Asked Questions About Psychology

2.13: Explain the value of simplified laboratory conditions in discovering

general principles of behavior

2.14: Discuss whether psychological research can be generalized across

cultures and genders

2.15: Explain why psychologists study animals, and discuss the ethics of

experimentation with both animals and humans

2.16: Describe how personal values can influence psychologists’ research and

its application, and discuss psychology’s potential to manipulate

people

Unit 3: Biological Bases of Behavior - September/

3A: Neural Processing and the Endocrine System October

Introduction

3A.1: Explain why psychologists are concerned with human biology, and

describe the ill-fated phrenology theory

Neural Communication

3A.2: Describe the parts of a neuron, and explain how its impulses are

generated

3A.3: Describe how nerve cells communicate

3A.4: Describe how neurotransmitters influence behavior, and explain how

drugs and other chemicals affect neurotransmission

The Nervous System

3A.5: Identify the two major divisions of the nervous system, and describe

their basic functions

The Endocrine System

3A.6: Describe the nature and functions of the endocrine system and its

interaction with the nervous system

3B: The Brain October

Introducing the Brain and The Tools of Discovery

3B.1: Describe several techniques for studying the brain

Older Brain Structures

3B. 2: Describe the components of the brainstem, and summarize the

functions of the brainstem, thalamus, and cerebellum

3B.3: Describe the structure and functions of the limbic system, and

explain how one of these structures controls the pituitary gland

The Cerebral Cortex

3B.4: Describe the structure of the cerebral cortex, and explain the various

functions of the four lobes

3B.5: Summarize some of the findings on the functions of the motor cortex

and the sensory cortex, and discuss the importance of the association

areas

3B.6: Identify the brain areas involved in language, and explain how these

areas coordinate to produce speech

3B.7: Discuss the brain’s plasticity following injury or illness

Our Divided Brain

3B.8: Describe split-brain research, and explain how it helps us understand

the functions of our left and right hemispheres

Right-Left Differences in the Intact Brain

3B.9: Describe the distinct functions of the brain’s two hemispheres, and

discuss research findings on brain organization and handedness

The Brain and Consciousness

3B.10: Describe research that leads cognitive neuroscientists to infer how the

brain’s dual-processing affects our perception, memory, and attitudes

on conscious and unconscious levels

3C – Genetics, Evolutionary Psychology, and Behavior October

Behavior Genetics: Predicting Individual Differences

3C.1: Identify the types of questions that interest behavior geneticists, and

describe the elements of heredity: chromosome, DNA, genes, and

genome

3C.2: Describe how twin and adoption studies help us differentiate

hereditary and environmental influences on human behavior

3C.3: Explain what is meant by heritability, and give examples of the

interaction of gene and environment on specific traits

3C.4: Identify the potential uses of molecular genetics research

Evolutionary Psychology: Understanding Human Nature

3C.5: Describe the area of psychology that interests evolutionary

psychologists, and point out some possible effects of natural

selection in the development of human characteristics

3C.6: Identify some gender differences in sexuality and mating preferences,

and describe evolutionary explanations for those differences

3C.7: Summarize the criticisms of evolutionary explanation of human

behaviors, and describe the evolutionary psychologists’ responses to

those criticisms

Reflections on Nature and Nurture

3C.8: Discuss some of the ways heredity and environment interact to both

“control” who we are and allow us to become who we want to be

Unit 4: Sensation and Perception November

Sensing the World: Some Basic Principles

4.1: Contrast sensation and perception, and explain the difference between

bottom-up and top-down processing

4.2: Discuss how our perceptions are directed and limited by selective

attention, noting how we may or may not be affected by unattended

stimuli

4.3: Distinguish between absolute and difference thresholds, and discuss

whether we can sense and be affected by subliminal or unchanging

stimuli

Vision

4.4: Describe the characteristics of visible light, and explain the process by

which the eye converts light energy into neural messages

4.5: Discuss the different levels of processing that occur as information

travels from the retina to the brain’s cortex

4.6: Define parallel processing, and discuss its role in visual information

processing

4.7: Explain how the Young-Hemholtz and opponent-process theories help

us understand color vision

Hearing

4.8: Describe the auditory process, including the stimulus input and the

structure and function of the ear

4.9: Contrast place and frequency theories, and explain how they help us to

understand pitch and perception

4.10: Describe how we pinpoint sounds, and contrast the two types of

hearing loss

4.11: Describe how cochlear implants function, and explain why Deaf culture

advocates object to these devices

Other Senses

4.12: Describe the senses of touch, and distinguish between kinesthesis and

the vestibular sense

4.13: State the purpose of pain, and describe the biopsychosocial approach

to pain

4.14: Describe the senses of taste and smell, and comment on the nature of

sensory interaction

Perceptual Organization

4.15: Describe Gestalt psychology’s contribution to our understanding of

perception, and identifying principles of perceptual grouping in form

perception

4.16: Explain the binocular and monocular cues we use to perceive depth

4.17: State the basic assumptions we make in our perception of motion, and

explain how these perceptions can be deceiving

4.18: Explain how perceptual constancies help us to organize out sensations

into meaningful perceptions

Perceptual Interpretation

4.19: Describe the contributions of restored vision, sensory deprivation, and

perceptual adaptation research to our understanding of the nature-

nurture interplay in our perception

4.20: Define perceptual set, and explain why the same stimulus can evoke

different perceptions in different contexts

Is There Extrasensory Perception?

4.21: Identify the three most testable forms of ESP, and explain why most

research psychologists remain skeptical of ESP claims

Unit 5: States of Consciousness November

Introduction

5.1: Discuss the significance of consciousness in the history of psychology

Sleep and Dreams

5.2: Describe the cycle of our circadian rhythm, and identify some events that

can disrupt this biological clock

5.3: List the stages of the sleep cycle, and explain how they differ

5.4: Describe individual differenced in sleep duration and the effects of sleep

loss, noting five reasons that we need sleep

5.5: Identify major sleep disorders

5.6: Describe the most common content of dreams, and compare the five

major perspectives on why we dream.

Hypnosis

5.7: Discuss the characteristics of people who are susceptible to hypnosis,

and evaluate claims that hypnosis can influence people’s memory,

will, health, and perception of pain

5.8: Give arguments for and against hypnosis as an altered state of

consciousness

Drugs and Consciousness

5.9: Discuss the nature of drug dependence and addiction, and identify three

common misconceptions about addiction

5.10: Explain how depressants affect nervous system activity and behavior,

and summarize the findings on alcohol use and abuse

5.11: Identify the major stimulants, and explain how they affect neural

activity and behavior

5.12: Describe the physiological and psychological effects of hallucinogens,

and summarize the effects of LSD and marijuana

5.13: Discuss the biological, psychological, and social-cultural factors that

contribute to drug use

Unit 6: Learning December

Introduction

6.1: Define learning, and identify three forms of learning

How Do We Learn?

6.2: Describe how we learn, and explain habituation

Classical Conditioning

6.3: Define classical conditioning and behaviorism, and describe the basic

components of classical conditioning

6.4: Summarize the process and adaptive value of acquisition, higher-order

conditioning, extinction, spontaneous recovery, generalization, and

discrimination

6.5: Discuss the importance of cognitive processes and biological

predispositions in classical conditioning

6.6: Summarize Pavlov’s contribution to our understanding of learning and to

improvements in human health and well-being

Operant Conditioning

6.7: Identify the two major characteristics that distinguish classical

conditioning from operant conditioning

6.8: Describe the process of operant conditioning, including the shaping

procedure

6.9: Identify the different types of reinforcers, and describe the major

schedules of partial reinforcement

6.10: Discuss how punishment and negative reinforcement differ, and list

some drawbacks of punishment as a behavior-control technique

6.11: Explain the importance of cognitive processes and biological

predispositions in operant conditioning

6.12: Describe the controversy over Skinner’s views of human behavior, and

identify some ways to apply operant conditioning principles at school,

in sports, at work, and at home

6.13: Identify the major similarities and differences between classical and

operant conditioning

Learning by Observation

6.14: Describe the process of observational learning and Bandura’s findings

on what determines whether we will imitate a model

6.15: Discuss the impact of prosocial modeling and the relationship between

watching violent TV and antisocial behavior

Unit 7: Cognition

7A: Memory January

The Phenomenon of Memory and Information Processing

7A.1: Describe Atkinson-Shiffrin’s classic three-stage processing model of

memory, and explain how the concept of working memory clarifies

the processing that occurs in short-term memory

7A.2: Describe the types of information we encode automatically, and

contrast effortful processing with automatic processing, giving

examples of each

7A.3: Compare the benefits of visual, acoustic, and semantic encoding in

remembering verbal information, and describe some memory-

enhancing encoding strategies

7A.4: Contrast two types of sensory memory, and describe the duration and

capacity of working/short-term memory

7A.5: Describe the capacity and duration of long-term memory, and discuss

the biological changes that may underlie memory formation and

storage

7A.6: Distinguish between implicit and explicit memory, and identify the

main brain structure associated with each

7A.7: Contrast the recall, recognition, and relearning measures of memory,

and explain how retrieval cues help us access stored memories

7A.8: Describe the impact of environmental contexts and internal emotional

states on retrieval

Forgetting

7A.9: Explain why we should value our ability to forget, and discuss the roles

of encoding failure and storage decay in the process of forgetting

7A.10: Explain what is meant by retrieval failure, and discuss the effects of

interference and motivated forgetting on retrieval

7A.11: Explain how misinformation, imagination and source amnesia can

distort out memory of an event, and discuss why it is difficult to

distinguish between true and false memories

7A.12: Discuss whether young children’s eyewitness reports are reliable and

the controversy over reports of repressed and recovered memories

7A.13: Explain how an understanding of memory can contribute to effective

study techniques

7B: Thinking, Problem Solving, Creativity, and Language January

Thinking

7B.1: Define cognition, and describe the roles of categories, hierarchies,

definitions, and prototypes in concept formation

7B. 2: Compare algorithms, heuristics, and insight as problem-solving

strategies, and identify the factors associated with creativity

7B.3: Explain how confirmation bias and fixation can interfere with effective

problem solving

7B.4: Explain how the representativeness and availability heuristics can

cause us to underestimate or ignore important information and

describe the drawbacks and advantages of overconfidence in decision

making

7B.5: Describe the effects that belief perseverance, intuition, and framing can

have on our judgments and decision making

Language

7B.6: Describe the basic structural units of a language, including the rules

that enable us to communicate meaning

7B.7: Trace the course of language acquisition from the babbling stage

through the two-word stage

7B.8: Discuss Skinner’s and Chomsky’s contributions to the nature-nurture

debate over how children acquire language, and explain why

statistical learning and critical periods are important concepts in

children’s language learning

7B.9: Discuss Whorf’s linguistic determinism hypothesis in relation to

current views regarding thinking and language, and describe the value

of thinking in images

Unit 8: Motivation and Emotion

8A: Motivation February

Motivational Concepts

8A.1: Define motivation as psychologists use them today, and identify four

perspectives useful for studying motivated behavior

8A.2: Describe Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

Hunger

8A.3: Describe the physiological determinants of hunger

8A.4: Discuss psychological, cultural, and situational influences on hunger

and eating

8A.5: Explain how the eating disorders demonstrate the influence of

psychological forces on physiologically motivated behavior

8A.6: Describe research findings on obesity and weight control

Sexual Motivation

8A.7: Describe the human sexual response cycle, and discuss the impact of

hormones on sexual motivation and behavior

8A.8: Discuss the impact of external stimuli and fantasies on sexual

motivation and behavior

8A.9: Discuss some of the factors that influence adolescent sexual behavior,

and describe trends in the spread of sexually transmitted infections

8A.10: Summarize current views on the number of people whose sexual

orientation is homosexual, and discuss the research on environmental

and biological influences on sexual orientation

The Need to Belong

8A.11: Describe the adaptive nature of social attachments, and discuss both

healthy and unhealthy consequences of our need to belong

8B- Emotions, Stress, and Health February

Theories of Emotion

8B.1: Identify the three components of emotion, and contrast the James-

Lange, Cannon-Bard, and two-factor theories of emotion

Embodied Emotion

8B.2: Describe the physiological changes that occur during emotional

arousal, and discuss the relationship between arousal and

performance

8B.3: Describe the relationship between physiological states and specific

emotions, and discuss the effectiveness of the polygraph in detecting

lies

8B.4: Explain the role of cognition in emotion, and discuss how neurological

processes may enable us to experience some emotions prior to

conscious thought

Expressed Emotion

8B.5: Describe our ability to perceive and communicate emotions

nonverbally, and discuss gender differences in this capacity

8B.6: Discuss the culture-specific and culturally universal aspects of

emotional expression, and describe the effects of facial expressions on

emotional experience

Experienced Emotion

8B.7: Name several basic emotions, and describe two dimensions

psychologists use to differentiate emotions

8B.8: State two ways we learn our fears, and discuss some biological

components of fear

8B.9: Identify some common causes and consequences of anger, and assess

the catharsis hypothesis

8B.10: Identify some potential causes and consequences of happiness, and

describe two psychological phenomena that help explain the

relatively short duration of emotions

Stress and Health

8B.11: Identify the role of health psychologists in studying the effects of

stress on health and illness, and discuss the concept of stress as a

process that involves cognitive appraisal

8B.12: Describe the biology of the fight-or-flight response as well as the

physical characteristic and phases of the general adaptation syndrome

8B.13: Discuss the health consequences of catastrophes, significant life

changes, and daily hassles

8B.14: Discuss the role of stress in causing coronary heart disease, and

contrast Type A and Type B personalities

8B.15: Define psychophysiological illness, and describe the effects of stress

on immune system functioning, including its role in the progression of

AIDS and cancer

Unit 10: Personality February

Introduction and The Psychoanalytic Perspective

10.1: Define personality, and explain how Freud’s treatment of psychological

disorders led to his study of the unconscious mind

10.2: Describe Freud’s view of personality structure in terms of the id, ego,

and superego

10.3: Identify Freud’s psychosexual stages of development, and describe the

effects of fixation on behavior

10.4: Discuss how defense mechanisms serve to protect the individual from

anxiety

10.5: Contrast the views of the neo-Freudians and psychodynamic theorists

with Freud’s original theory

10.6: Describe two projective tests used to assess personality, and discuss

some criticisms of them

10.7: Summarize psychology’s current assessment of Freud’s theory of

psychoanalysis, including its portrayal of the unconscious

Humanistic Perspective

10.8: Describe the humanistic perspective in terms of Maslow’s focus on self-

actualization and Rogers’ emphasis on people’s potential for growth

10.9: Explain how humanistic psychologists assessed personality, and

discuss the major criticisms of the humanistic perspective on

personality

The Trait Perspective

10.10: Discuss psychologists’ interests in personality types, and describe

research efforts to identify fundamental personality traits

10.11: Discuss the value of using personality inventories to assess traits, and

identify the Big Five trait dimensions

10.12: Summarize the person-situation controversy, and explain its

importance as a commentary on the trait perspective

The Social-Cognitive Perspective

10.13: Describe the social-cognitive perspective, and discuss the important

consequences of personal control and optimism

10.14: Explain why social-cognitive researchers assess behavior in realistic

situations, and state the major criticism of the social-cognitive

perspective

Exploring the Self

10.15: Explain why psychology has generated so much research on the self,

and discuss the importance of self-esteem to human well-being

10.16: Discuss some evidence for self-serving bias, and contrast defensive

and secure self-esteem

10.17: Identify some ways a primarily individualist culture differs from a

primarily collectivist culture

Unit 11: Testing and Individual Differences March

What is Intelligence?

11.1: Discuss the difficulty of defining intelligence, and explain what it means

to reify intelligence

11.2: Present arguments for and against considering intelligence as one

general mental ability

11.3: Compare Gardner’s and Sternberg’s theories of intelligence

11.4: Describe the four aspects of emotional intelligence, and discuss

criticisms of this concept

11.5: Describe the relationship between intelligence and brain anatomy

11.6: Discuss findings on the correlations among perceptual speed, neural

processing speed, and intelligence

Assessing Intelligence

11.7: Discuss the history of intelligence testing

11.8: Distinguished between aptitude and achievement tests, and describe

modern tests of mental abilities such as the WAIS

11.9: Discuss the importance of standardizing psychological tests, and

describe the distribution of scores in a normal curve

11.10: Explain the meanings of reliability and validity in terms of test

construction, and describe two types of validity

The Dynamics of Intelligence

11.11: Describe the stability of intelligence scores over the life span

11.12: Describe the two extremes of the normal distribution of intelligence

Genetics and Environmental Influences on Intelligence

11.13: Discuss the evidence for the genetic contribution to individual

intelligence, and explain what psychologists mean by the heritability

of intelligence

11.14: Discuss the evidence for environmental influences on individual

intelligence

11.15: Describe gender differences in abilities

11.16: Describe ethnic similarities and differences in intelligence test scores,

and discuss some genetic and environmental factors that might

explain them

11.17: Discuss whether intelligence tests are biased, and describe the

stereotype threat phenomenon

Unit 12: Abnormal Psychology March

Perspectives on Psychological Disorders

12.1: Identify the criteria for judging whether behavior is psychologically

disordered, and discuss the controversy over the diagnosis of

attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder

12.2: Contrast the medical model of psychological disorders with the

biopsychosocial approach to disordered behavior

12.3: Describe the goals and content of the DSM-IV-TR, and discuss the

potential dangers and benefits of using diagnostic labels

Anxiety Disorders

12.4: Define anxiety disorders, and contrast the symptoms of generalized

anxiety disorder and panic disorder

12.5: Explain how a phobia differs from the fears we all experience

12.6: Describe the symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder

12.7: Describe the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, and discuss

survivor resiliency

12.8: Discuss the contributions of the learning and biological perspectives to

understanding the development of anxiety disorders

Somatoform Disorders

12.9: Describe somatoform disorders, and explain how the symptoms differ

from other physical symptoms

Dissociative Disorders

12.10: Describe the symptoms of dissociative disorders

12.11: Define dissociative identity disorder, and discuss the controversy

regarding its diagnosis

Mood Disorders

12.12: Define mood disorders, and contrast major depressive disorder and

bipolar disorder

12.13: Explain the development of mood disorders, paying attention to the

biological and social-cognitive perspectives

Schizophrenia

12.14: Describe the symptoms of schizophrenia, and differentiate delusions

and hallucinations

12.15: Distinguish the five subtypes of schizophrenia, and contrast chronic

and acute schizophrenia

12.16: Outline some abnormal brain chemistry, functions, and structures

associated with schizophrenia, and discuss the possible link between

prenatal viral infections and schizophrenia

12.17: Discuss the evidence for a genetic contribution to the development of

schizophrenia, and describe some psychological factors that may be

early warning signs of schizophrenia in children

Personality Disorders

12.18: Contrast the three clusters of personality disorders, and describe the

behaviors and brain activity associated with antisocial personality

disorder

Rates of psychological Disorders

12.19: Discuss the prevalence of psychological disorders, and summarize the

findings on the link between poverty and serious psychological

disorders

Unit 13: Treatment of Psychological Disorders March/

Introduction April

13.1: Discuss how psychotherapy, biomedical therapy, and an eclectic

approach to therapy differ

The Psychological Therapies

13.2: Define psychoanalysis, and discuss the aims, methods, and criticisms of

this form of therapy

13.3: Contrast psychodynamic therapy and interpersonal therapy with

traditional psychoanalysis

13.4: Identify the basic characteristics of the humanistic therapies, and

describe the specific goals and techniques of Carl Rogers’ client-

centered therapy

13.5: Explain how the basic assumption of behavior therapy differs from

those of traditional psychoanalytic and humanistic therapies, and

describe the techniques used in exposure therapies and aversive

conditioning

13.6: State the main premise of therapy based on operant conditioning

principles, and describe the views of proponents and critics of

behavior modification

13.7: Contrast cognitive therapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy, and give

some examples of cognitive therapy for depression

13.8: Discuss the rationale and benefits of group therapy, including family

therapy

Evaluating Psychotherapies

13.9: Explain why clients and clinicians tend to overestimate the

effectiveness of psychotherapy, and describe two phenomena that

contribute to clients’ and clinicians’ misperceptions in this area

13.10: Discuss some of the findings of outcome studies in judging the

effectiveness of psychotherapies, and describe which psychotherapies

are most effective for specific disorders

13.11: Evaluate the effectiveness of eye movement desensitization and

reprocessing (EMIR) and light exposure therapies

13.12: Describe the three benefits attributed to all psychotherapies

13.13: Discuss the role of values and cultural differences in the therapeutic

process, and identify some guidelines for selecting a therapist

The Biomedical Therapies

13.14: Define psychopharmacology, and explain how double-blind studies

help researchers evaluate a drug’s effectiveness

13.15: Describe the characteristics of antipsychotic, antianxiety,

antidepressant, and mood-stabilizing drugs, and discuss their use in

treating psychological disorders

13.16: Describe the use of brain stimulation techniques and psychosurgery in

treating specific disorders

13.17: Explain how therapeutic life-style change reflects the idea that

humans are integrated biopsychosocial systems

13.18: Explain the rationale of preventive mental health programs

Unit 14: Social Psychology April

Social Thinking

14.1: Describe the three main focuses of social psychology, and explain how

the fundamental attribution error impacts our judgment of others

14.2: Define attitude, and explain how attitudes and actions affect each other

Social Influence

14.3: Describe the chameleon effect, and discuss Asch’s experiments on

conformity, noting the difference between normative and

informational social influence

14.4: Describe Milgram’s experiments on obedience, and explain how the

conformity and obedience studies can help us understand our

susceptibility to social influence

14.5: Describe the conditions in which the presence of others is likely to

result in social facilitation, social loafing, or deindividuation

14.6: Discuss how group interaction can facilitate group polarization and

groupthink

14.7: Describe how behavior is influenced by cultural norms

14.8: Identify the characteristic common to minority positions that

successfully sway majorities

Social Relations

14.9: Identify the three components of prejudice, and contrast overt and

subtle forms of prejudice

14.10: Discuss the social factors that contribute to prejudice, and explain how

scapegoating illustrates the emotional component of prejudice

14.11: Cite three ways that cognitive processes help create and maintain

prejudice

14.12: Explain how psychology’s definition of aggression differs from

everyday usage, and describe various biological influences on

aggression

14.13: Outline psychological and social-cultural triggers of aggression, noting

the relationship between violent video games and aggressive behavior

14.14: Describe the influence of proximity, physical attractiveness, and

similarity on interpersonal attraction

14.15: Describe the effect of physical arousal on passionate live, and identify

two predictors of enduring companionate love

14.16: Define altruism, and describe the steps in the decision-making process

involved in bystander intervention

14.17: Explain altruism from the perspective of social exchange theory and

social norms

14.18: Explain how social traps and mirror-image perceptions fuel social

conflict, and discuss effective ways of encouraging peaceful

cooperation and reducing social conflict

AP Test in May – After AP Test: Complete Appendix A-C in textbook