

A-Level Psychology

Glossary · Key Terms Glossary

Edexcel Psychology (9PS0)

Key Terms Glossary

71 entries

The essential key terms across the whole Edexcel Psychology course, with precise exam-ready definitions.

A - E

Agentic state	A psychological state in which a person sees themselves as the agent of an authority figure and so feels no personal responsibility for their own actions.
Aim	A general statement of the purpose of a study, setting out what the researcher intends to investigate.
Anonymity	An ethical safeguard in which participants take part without their identity being recorded or revealed.
Atavistic form	Lombroso's idea that criminals are an evolutionary throwback whose physical features mark them out as biologically primitive.
Authoritarian personality	A cluster of traits, including submission to authority and hostility to out-groups, thought to make a person more likely to obey and to be prejudiced.
Bandura's social learning theory	The idea that behaviour, especially aggression, is learned by observing and imitating role models and is more likely when the model is reinforced.
Classical conditioning	Learning by association, in which a neutral stimulus is paired with an unconditioned stimulus until it alone produces a conditioned response.
Clinical interview	A flexible, often semi-structured conversation used by a clinician to gather detailed information for diagnosis or research.
Cognitive priming	The idea that exposure to a cue, such as media violence, activates related thoughts that make linked behaviour more likely shortly afterwards.
Comorbidity	The presence of two or more disorders in the same person at the same time, which can make diagnosis less reliable.
Concordance rate	The probability that one twin shows a trait given that the other twin has it, used to estimate the genetic contribution to a behaviour.
Confounding variable	An uncontrolled variable that changes systematically with the independent variable and so offers an alternative explanation for the results.
Cue-reactivity	The way cues linked to a behaviour, such as gambling sounds, trigger arousal and craving that maintain an addiction.
Debriefing	Informing participants of the true aims after a study and checking they leave in at least the same state in which they arrived.
Deindividuation	A loss of personal identity and self-restraint that can occur in crowds and makes antisocial behaviour more likely.
Demand characteristics	Cues in a study that lead participants to guess its purpose and change their behaviour, reducing validity.

Diagnosis	The process of identifying a disorder by matching a person's symptoms to the criteria in a classification system such as the DSM.
Dispositional explanation	An account of behaviour that locates the cause in a person's own personality or character rather than the situation.
Dopamine	A neurotransmitter linked to reward and pleasure that is implicated in schizophrenia and in addictive behaviours.
Ecological validity	The extent to which findings from a study can be generalised to real-life settings and behaviours.
Ethical guidelines	The standards, such as consent and protection from harm, that govern how psychologists must treat participants.
Ethnocentrism	The tendency to judge other cultures using the standards of one's own, often treating it as the norm.

F - J

Free will	The view that people are able to choose their own behaviour rather than having it determined by internal or external forces.
Generalisability	The degree to which the results from a sample can be applied to the wider target population.
Hawthorne effect	A change in participants' behaviour simply because they know they are being observed and studied.
Holism	The view that behaviour can only be understood by looking at the whole system rather than breaking it into parts.
Hypothesis	A precise, testable statement predicting the relationship between the variables in a study.
Imitation	Copying the behaviour of a model, a key process in social learning theory.
Independent variable	The variable that the researcher manipulates or selects in order to see its effect on the dependent variable.
Informed consent	Agreement to take part given after the participant has been told enough about the study to make a real choice.
Inter-rater reliability	The extent to which two or more observers produce the same records or ratings of the same behaviour.
Interquartile range	A measure of dispersion giving the range of the middle 50 percent of an ordered set of scores.

K - O

Levels of processing	The idea that information processed deeply for meaning is remembered better than information processed shallowly.
Localisation of function	The principle that specific areas of the brain are responsible for particular behaviours and mental processes.
Longitudinal study	Research that follows the same participants over an extended period to track changes over time.
Meta-analysis	A method that statistically combines the results of many separate studies to produce an overall measure of effect.
Multi-store model of memory	Atkinson and Shiffrin's model proposing that memory flows through separate sensory, short-term and long-term stores.

Nature	The view that behaviour is shaped by innate, inherited and biological factors.
Negative reinforcement	Strengthening a behaviour by removing an unpleasant stimulus when the behaviour occurs.
Neurotransmitter	A chemical messenger that carries signals across the synapse between neurons.
Neutralisation	In criminological psychology, the techniques offenders use to justify their actions and silence guilt.
Nurture	The view that behaviour is shaped by experience, learning and the environment.
Objectivity	Gathering and interpreting data in a way that is free from the researcher's personal bias or expectation.
Observational learning	Acquiring new behaviours by watching a model, central to Bandura's theory of aggression.
Operant conditioning	Learning in which behaviour is shaped by its consequences, with reinforcement increasing and punishment decreasing it.
Operationalisation	Defining a variable precisely in terms of how it will be measured or manipulated in a study.

P - T

Peer review	The independent evaluation of research by other experts before it is published, used to check its quality.
Positive reinforcement	Strengthening a behaviour by following it with a pleasant or rewarding consequence.
Primary data	Information collected first-hand by the researcher directly for the current study.
Punishment	An unpleasant consequence that follows a behaviour and makes it less likely to be repeated.
Qualitative data	Non-numerical data, such as words or images, that describe the quality and meaning of behaviour.
Quantitative data	Numerical data that can be counted or measured and analysed statistically.
Random allocation	Assigning participants to conditions by chance so that each has an equal probability of being in any group.
Reconstructive memory	The idea that recall is an active process in which gaps are filled using schemas, so memory can be distorted.
Reductionism	Explaining complex behaviour by breaking it down to its simplest component parts, such as genes or neurons.
Relapse	The return of an addictive behaviour after a period of abstinence.
Reliability	The consistency of a measure or study, such that the same procedure produces the same results when repeated.
Schema	A mental framework of beliefs and expectations, built from experience, that organises and interprets information.
Secondary data	Information that already exists, having been collected by someone else or for another purpose.
Self-report	A method in which participants describe their own thoughts, feelings or behaviour, as in questionnaires and interviews.
Social identity theory	Tajfel's explanation that prejudice arises from categorising people into in-groups and out-groups and favouring one's own group.
Standard deviation	A measure of dispersion showing the average amount by which scores differ from the mean.

Standardisation	Keeping procedures and instructions identical for every participant so the study can be fairly repeated.
Statistical infrequency	Defining abnormality as behaviour that is statistically rare within the population.
Synaptic transmission	The process by which a signal passes from one neuron to the next across the synapse using neurotransmitters.
Token economy	A behaviour-management system in which tokens earned for desired behaviour are later exchanged for rewards.

U - Z

Unconditioned response	A natural, unlearned reaction produced automatically by an unconditioned stimulus.
Unconditioned stimulus	A stimulus that produces a response automatically without any learning.
Validity	The extent to which a study or measure actually assesses what it claims to assess.
Vicarious reinforcement	Learning the consequences of a behaviour by seeing a model rewarded, which makes imitation more likely.
Working memory model	Baddeley and Hitch's model of short-term memory as an active system of several specialised components.