

## Teaching Guide

### Chapter 1: Introduction to psychology

#### Topic map

Section number and name	Learning outcome	Number of hours (suggested)	Relevant material
1.1 Changing approaches to psychology	Psychology may be defined as the disciplined study of mind and behaviour. This discipline tends to be characterised by empiricism and positivism.	1	Figures 1.1–1.5 Table 1.1
1.2 The microscope analogy applied to IB psychology	The IB programme at both levels focuses on and applies the biological, cognitive and socio-cultural approaches to understanding a range of behaviours of the individual.	1	Figure 1.6
1.3 How far is psychology a science?	Psychology may be increasingly considered to be scientific, in view of its paradigms and associated theories and hypotheses being subjected to testing based on empirical, positivist and refutable data.	1	
1.4 Ongoing general debates in psychology	Many investigations in psychology are related to underlying general issues affecting psychology as a whole: the nature–nurture debate, the reductionist–holism debate, the freewill–determinism debate and the nomothetic–ideographic debate.	1	Figure 1.7
1.5 Cultural issues	Investigations in psychology need to take into account the dangers of cultural biases such as ethnocentricity, methodological bias and gender bias.	0.5	Self-assessment questions 1.1 Activity 1.1

1.6 Practical value of psychology	Academic experience in psychology can be a gateway to an increasing number of associated career opportunities.	0.5	
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## 1.1 Overview of Chapter 1

Though individuals have always been curious about how and why others act, the study of human behaviour as an organised and systematic academic discipline largely developed in the 20th century. This introductory chapter presents ongoing debates in psychology as well as the degree to which approaches in psychology may be considered scientific.

The main purpose of Chapter 1 is to present the academic frameworks of psychology at a basic level. This is important since many individuals initially think of psychology as interesting folk wisdom, rather than the systematic study of developing theory and research on human behaviour.

None of the material in this chapter is directly examined at IB level, although the principles provide essential background that might be profitably used in examination answers.

As the teacher, you will have to decide how much time to spend on this chapter. If your students already have a fundamental background in psychology (for example, at GCSE level), you may consider giving a single summary lesson consolidating the essence of Chapter 1 (and Chapter 2) and then immediately proceed to the core chapters: 3, 4 and 5. If, however, your students are approaching psychology for the first time, it may be worth following the starter and subsequent activities. Your students' expectations of the course may be somewhat of a surprise. That is particularly likely in the international classroom where students' different cultures and perceptions of human behaviour interact.

The lesson framework for Chapter 1 should be viewed as the recommended maximum time allocation. Virtually all the principles mentioned there are reinforced in the subsequent chapters. As this chapter is relatively short, one set of activities and other key materials are put forward for the topics, as opposed to the later chapters where they are presented topic by topic.

### Suggested activities

#### Possible starter

Ask the students to brainstorm this question: 'In choosing psychology, what do you expect to learn about?' Typical answers could be wanting to know 'Why do I feel sick before an exam?', 'Why do people become depressed?', 'How can I attract the person I want?', 'How will psychology help me get my own way?' and 'Why are some people mean?' Keep a record of the students' responses. You may wish to refer to them later.

Select one of the questions proposed by the students, for example 'Why are people mean?' Then elicit a possible theory, such as 'Many teenagers are mean because they were treated meanly in their childhood.' Ask them to suggest (a) what data they would need to test the theory, (b) how they might obtain that data, (c) why ideally that data should come from many people (empiricism) and (d) what the evidence would have to show in order to support that theory (positivism).

## Main lesson content

- Why is it fun to be scared? Roller coasters, bungee-jumps and horror movies are all in high demand. After brainstorming reasons, you can divide the class into up to seven groups. Assign one of the seven approaches to psychology in Section 1.1 to each group. Ask them to suggest why we like to scare ourselves. Try this TEDEd video by Margee Kerr: [Why is being scared so fun?](#) Students can then discuss the approach taken by the video and whether the alternative suggestions proposed by groups could be as valid. The assignment may be completed by use of the item in the homework suggestion section below.
- Does personal stress increase the likelihood of contracting infectious disease? You can introduce the critical thinking exercise in Section 1.3 on the research of Kiecolt-Glaser et al. (1984). This can be an opportunity for the class to apply their understanding of *Section 1.3 How far is psychology a science?* in assessing how far that research may be regarded as scientific. This issue also overlaps with Theory of Knowledge.
- Self-assessment questions 1.1 can be used for review of the concepts. Activity 1.1 is recommended as a means of rounding off the introduction to psychology.

## Common misunderstandings and misconceptions

The four debates in psychology presented in Section 1.4 do not necessarily imply absolute positions, such as nature to the exclusion of nurture and vice versa. Rather, in each of the four debates, the position of individual psychologists tends to be at a point on the spectrum.

## Supporting your students

Try not to overload those students who require more support at this very early stage. *Section 1.3 How far is psychology a science?* may be best left to Theory of Knowledge rather than incorporated at this stage.

## Challenging your students

Show the video [Top 10 facts - psychology](#) by LEMMiNO, which you can find on YouTube. Ask the students to select the three claims made by the video that they would like to challenge, and explain what evidence they would need to do so.

## Homework suggestion

- Students can review the TEDEd video [Why is being scared so fun?](#) They can then click on the *Discuss* tab and view alternative explanations for 'why being scared is fun'. (If they are already familiar with the different approaches, they can draw a table to classify those explanations under biological / cognitive / socio-cultural approaches). Students can then select and justify what they believe are the three best explanations offered by the viewers in the discussion and consider what explanations other approaches might offer to the same question.

## Cross-references with other topics

To avoid any confusion, this first chapter is probably best studied as a stand-alone introduction, rather than being cross-referenced to other chapters.

## Reference

Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K., Garner, W., Speicher, C. E., Penn, G. M., Holliday, J., & Glaser, R. (1984). Psychosocial modifiers of immunocompetence in medical students. *Psychosomatic Medicine*; 46: 7–14.