

Definitions and Concepts for AQA Psychology A-level

Option 3: Forensic Psychology

Anger management: A cognitive behavioural treatment that aims to help offenders recognise triggers for anger, control their responses and develop more appropriate ways of dealing with frustrating situations.

Candidate genes: Specific genes investigated because they may be associated with a particular behaviour or characteristic, such as offending.

Centre of gravity: In geographical profiling, the approximate central point of an offender's crime locations, which may provide clues about where they live or operate.

Circle theory (Marauder vs Commuter): Canter and Larkin's model in geographical profiling proposing that an offender's spatial pattern creates a circle encompassing their crimes, classifying them as a *marauder* (offends within their home spatial area) or a *commuter* (travels out of their home area to offend).

Cognitive distortions: Errors or biases in thinking that can contribute to offending, such as justifying criminal behaviour or blaming others.

Crime: An act that breaks the law and can result in legal punishment.

Criminal socialisation: The process through which individuals learn criminal or anti-criminal attitudes and behaviours from their social environment.

Custodial sentencing: A punishment in which an offender is sent to prison or another custodial institution.

Data assimilation: A stage of the top-down approach in which information about the crime and offender is collected and examined before a profile is generated.

Data-driven forensics: An approach to criminal profiling that uses statistical analysis of crime data to identify patterns and characteristics associated with offenders.





Dark figure of crime: Crimes that are not recorded in official statistics, because they have not been reported or recorded by the police.

Deterrence: The aim of punishment to discourage offending, either by preventing the individual from reoffending or by discouraging others from committing crimes.

Differential association theory: Sutherland's (1939) theory that criminal behaviour is learned through interactions with others, including learning techniques for offending and attitudes that support or oppose breaking the law.

Disorganised offender: An offender whose crime scene is characterised by a lack of planning and organisation. The profile may suggest impulsive behaviour, but these characteristics are not reliable indicators of an offender's personality on their own.

Eysenck's theory of criminal personality: A theory proposing that criminal behaviour is associated with high levels of extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism, partly because these traits may affect how easily a person is socialised.

Geographical profiling: A bottom-up profiling technique that uses the locations of linked crimes to estimate the area in which an offender is likely to live or operate.

Hostile attribution bias: The tendency to interpret other people's actions as hostile or threatening, even when their intentions may be ambiguous or harmless.

Incapacitation: The aim of punishment to prevent an offender from committing further crimes by restricting their freedom, for example through imprisonment.

Interpersonal coherence: The idea in investigative psychology that an offender's behaviour during a crime may reflect how they behave in everyday relationships.

Investigative psychology: A bottom-up approach to offender profiling that uses psychological theories and statistical analysis of crime patterns to identify relationships between offences and generate hypotheses about offenders.

Jeopardy surface: In geographical profiling, a map showing the relative likelihood that an offender's base is located in different areas, based on the locations of their crimes.

Levels of moral reasoning: Kohlberg's theory proposing that moral development occurs in stages; offenders are more likely to reason at the *pre-conventional level* (focused on punishment avoidance and personal gain) rather than higher conventional or post-conventional levels.





MAOA: A gene involved in producing an enzyme that breaks down certain neurotransmitters. It has been investigated in research into the possible genetic contribution to antisocial and aggressive behaviour.

Minimalisation: A cognitive distortion in which offenders downplay the seriousness of their offence or the harm caused to victims.

Modus operandi: The particular method or pattern of behaviour an offender uses to commit a crime. It may change as the offender gains experience.

Neural explanation of offending: An explanation proposing that structural or functional brain abnormalities - such as reduced prefrontal cortex activity (impairing emotional regulation) or dysfunctional mirror neurons - contribute to offending behaviour, often linked to Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD).

Official statistics: Records of crimes known to and recorded by the police or other official agencies. They do not include every crime committed.

Offender profiling: The process of using information about a crime and its circumstances to infer characteristics of the likely offender and assist an investigation.

Offender surveys: Self-report measures in which people disclose their own offending behaviour, including offences that may not have been detected by the police.

Organised offender: An offender whose crime scene suggests planning and control. The profile may suggest an organised lifestyle, but crime-scene characteristics do not establish an offender's personality with certainty.

Prisonisation: The process through which prisoners adapt to the norms, values and behaviours of prison life, which may make adjustment to life outside prison more difficult.

Rehabilitation: The aim of punishment or treatment to help offenders change their behaviour and reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

Retribution: The aim of punishment to impose a penalty considered proportionate to the offence committed.

Restorative justice: An approach to justice that focuses on addressing the harm caused by crime by involving offenders, victims and, where appropriate, the wider community.

Telescoping: An error in self-report surveys in which respondents misremember when an event occurred, potentially reporting an event from outside the survey period as if it occurred within it.





Token economy: A behaviour-modification system in which individuals earn tokens for desirable behaviour and exchange them for rewards or privileges.

Typology: An offender-profiling approach that begins with established categories of offender and classifies a crime scene as organised or disorganised to generate a profile.

Victim surveys: Surveys asking people about crimes they have experienced, including incidents that may not have been reported to the police.

