

Definitions and Concepts for AQA Psychology AS-level

Topic 4: Approaches in Psychology

Behaviourist approach: A learning approach that suggests all children are born as “tabulae rasae” (blank slates), learning through their interactions with their environment.

Biological approach: A learning approach that views human behaviour as a result of genetics and proposes that individual psychology stems from internal physiology.

Classical conditioning: A form of learning which occurs by associating naturally occurring instinct with new stimuli, thus creating a “conditioned” response.

Cognitive approach: A learning approach which likens the human mind to a computer, with internal mental processes turning an input to an output. This approach suggests studying these internal processes by inference is the key to understanding human psychology.

Genotype: The genetic profile of an individual i.e. the genes they carry.

Identification: A form of learning according to the social learning theory, which suggests humans can learn by observing role models whom they perceive as similar to themselves. It suggests we internalise the beliefs of someone we “identify” with i.e. are similar to, perhaps in gender, age, or goals.

Imitation: A form of learning suggested by social learning theory, which proposes that people learn through copying the behaviour of a role model they identify with.

Modelling: When a role model enacts a behaviour that can be imitated by an observer.

Mediational processes: Internal processes that contribute to producing certain behaviours, hence “mediators” between observation and imitation.

Negative reinforcement: A behaviour performed in response to a negative stimulus in the expectation that the negative stimulus will be removed, for example a mother comforting a crying child. They learn to comfort their child again and again (reinforced behaviour) to avoid the child crying (negative stimulus).

Operant conditioning: A form of learning by direct consequences for behaviour, whether that be reinforcement (consequences that increase behaviour) or punishment (consequences that decrease behaviour).

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Phenotype: An organism's physical manifestation of their genotype.

Positive reinforcement: Administration of a positive stimulus that aims to increase a certain behaviour. An example would be giving a child a treat (positive stimulus) if they clean their room, so they clean their room more often (reinforced behaviour).

Schema: A mental framework based on previous information that allows us to interpret new information efficiently.

Social learning theory: A learning approach that combines the behaviourist ideas of learning through our environment and the cognitive ideas of involvement of internal mental processes. It proposes that new behaviors can be acquired by observing and imitating others.

Vicarious reinforcement: Indirect encouragement of behaviour through observation of consequences for other peoples' behaviour.

