



Definitions and Concepts for AQA Psychology A-level

Topic 5: Approaches in Psychology

Attention: The extent to which an individual focuses on and notices a behaviour being demonstrated by a role model.

Behaviourist approach: An approach that suggests behaviour is learned through interactions with the environment.

Biological approach: An approach that explains behaviour in terms of biological factors such as genetics, brain structure and physiology.

Classical conditioning: A form of learning through association, in which a new stimulus becomes associated with a stimulus that naturally produces a response.

Cognitive approach: An approach that focuses on internal mental processes, such as thinking, memory, attention and perception, and uses models to explain how they work.

Cognitive neuroscience: The scientific field concerned with the study of biological mechanisms and brain structures that underpin cognitive processes.

Congruence: A state in which a person's ideal self and actual self are closely matched.

Conditions of worth: The standards a person believes they must meet in order to receive approval and positive regard from others.

Conscious: The part of the mind containing thoughts and feelings that a person is currently aware of.

Defence mechanism: An unconscious way of protecting an individual from anxiety-producing thoughts and feelings.

Denial: A defence mechanism in which a person refuses to accept or acknowledge a reality that causes anxiety.

Displacement: A defence mechanism in which unacceptable emotions are redirected from their original target towards a safer or less threatening target.





Electra complex: A proposed psychosexual conflict in which a young girl develops unconscious sexual feelings towards her father and jealousy towards her mother.

Ego: One of the three components of personality in the psychodynamic approach. It operates according to the reality principle and mediates between the demands of the id, superego and reality.

Evolution: The process by which inherited characteristics that increase an organism's chances of survival and reproduction become more common across generations.

Extinction: The gradual disappearance of a conditioned response when the conditioned stimulus is repeatedly presented without the unconditioned stimulus.

Free will: The idea that individuals have control over their behaviour and are able to make their own choices.

Genotype: An individual's genetic makeup.

Generalisation: The tendency for a conditioned response to occur in response to stimuli that are similar to the conditioned stimulus.

Humanistic approach: An approach that focuses on the whole person and emphasises free will, personal growth and the drive towards achieving one's full potential.

Id: One of the three components of personality in the psychodynamic approach. It is the primitive part of the personality that operates according to the pleasure principle and seeks immediate gratification of basic desires.

Identification: A process in social learning theory in which an individual is more likely to imitate a role model they perceive as being similar to themselves or someone they want to be like.

Imitation: The process of copying the behaviour of a role model.

Incongruence: A state in which a person's actual self and ideal self do not match.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs: A theory proposing that human needs are arranged in a hierarchy, with basic needs generally needing to be satisfied before higher-level needs such as self-actualisation can be achieved.

Mediational processes: Internal mental processes that occur between observing a behaviour and deciding whether to imitate it.





Modelling: The process in which a role model demonstrates a behaviour that can be observed and potentially imitated by another person.

Motor reproduction: The ability of an individual to physically reproduce a behaviour they have observed.

Motivation: The degree to which an individual wants or expects to benefit from performing a behaviour, affecting whether they are likely to imitate it.

Negative reinforcement: A consequence that increases the likelihood of a behaviour being repeated because it removes or avoids an unpleasant stimulus.

Operant conditioning: A form of learning in which behaviour is shaped by its consequences, with reinforcement increasing the likelihood of behaviour being repeated.

Oedipus complex: A proposed psychosexual conflict in which a young boy develops unconscious sexual feelings towards his mother and jealousy towards his father.

Phenotype: An individual's observable characteristics, resulting from the interaction between their genotype and environmental factors.

Positive reinforcement: A consequence that increases the likelihood of a behaviour being repeated by providing a desirable stimulus.

Preconscious: The part of the mind containing thoughts and memories that are not currently conscious but can be brought into conscious awareness.

Psychodynamic approach: An approach that explains behaviour in terms of conscious and unconscious motivations and conflicts, including the influence of early childhood experiences.

Psychosexual stages: Freud's (1905) theory that personality develops through a series of stages in childhood, each associated with a different erogenous zone.

Punishment: An unpleasant consequence following a behaviour that decreases the likelihood of that behaviour being repeated.

Repression: A defence mechanism in which upsetting or traumatic memories are unconsciously pushed out of conscious awareness and into the unconscious mind.

Retention: The process of storing an observed behaviour in memory so that it can be recalled later.





Schema: A cognitive framework of information gained from experiences that helps a person interpret the world and build and organise their knowledge and understanding.

Self-actualisation: The achievement of one's full potential and fulfilment of personal growth needs.

Social learning theory: An approach suggesting that behaviour can be learned through observing and imitating others, with cognitive processes influencing whether observed behaviour is reproduced.

Spontaneous recovery: The reappearance of an extinguished conditioned response after a period of rest.

Superego: One of the three components of personality in the psychodynamic approach. It represents internalised moral standards and operates according to the morality principle.

Theoretical models: Simplified representations used to explain and understand complex psychological processes or behaviour.

Unconditional positive regard: Accepting and valuing a person without conditions, regardless of their behaviour or characteristics.

Unconscious: The part of the mind containing thoughts, memories and desires that are outside conscious awareness but can influence behaviour.

Vicarious reinforcement: An increase in the likelihood of a behaviour being imitated after observing another person being rewarded for performing that behaviour.

