

IS A LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY RIGHT FOR YOU?

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Advanced Level (A Level) Psychology has been on a steady rise in popularity, drawing students from various academic backgrounds. Its interdisciplinary appeal makes it an intriguing choice, whether as a core subject or a complement to studies in the sciences, business, or humanities. However, determining whether it's a right fit for you hinges on your unique personal, academic, and professional interests and goals.

A Levels often serve as prerequisites for university admissions, providing in-depth pathways to your academic pursuits. So, the first question to ask yourself is whether you envision yourself studying Psychology at university. If the answer is yes, taking it for A Level will provide you with a head start. While it's not a mandatory requirement for most universities, it is considered desirable to have for A Levels because you'll be equipped with a fundamental understanding of the topics encountered later.

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Dr Reifad Zaman, an educator with nearly a year of experience teaching the subject at Vertical Horizon, opines, "If students are aiming to study psychology abroad, I would encourage them to take for A Levels for various reasons. However, it may be redundant for students who wish to pursue it at Bangladeshi universities, given that meeting the criteria for admission into public universities is more important as those are the only universities offering a bachelors in Psychology."

Even if Psychology isn't your intended major, studying it for A Levels helps develop strong analytical and critical thinking skills. You'll also learn to sift through theories and case studies to support your point, and consequently, enhance your ability in written communication. This prepares you for research and essay-heavy courses at university and can be beneficial in other career pathways such as media, communications, and business — all of which can benefit from an understanding of human psychology.

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Furthermore, if you're contemplating the idea of a career

in psychology, counselling, social work, or if you have a general passion for mental health, A Level Psychology will provide you with in-depth insights into the contributing factors. While in no way meant to be a substitute for a professional degree, it can certainly help you have a head start in being more compassionate when it comes to taking care of other people.

While the topics you study can vary slightly depending on what exam board you take, most courses cover a similar range of topics and offer an extensive introduction to the core areas of human psychology, including social, cognitive, developmental and biological psychology. Personal favourites from my course were Psychopathology and Research Methodology.

However, due to its relatively lower popularity compared to other subjects, the unique challenges posed get swept under the rug. Like any other subject at A Level, the workload is substantial, with psychology in particular requiring a fair amount of memorisation. I would highly recommend picking a more popular exam board so you don't end up in the same boat as me when it comes to resources (for starters, a book tailored to my specification does not exist).

Furthermore, the mark schemes seemed oddly specific, making it challenging to score well, even with a strong grasp of the content. A Level Psychology is not as much common sense as I had assumed initially, and while an aptitude for essay writing can be an advantage, the subjective nature in terms of grading can make it difficult to ensure a high grade.

Dr Zaman also notes a significant surge in

student interest post-pandemic, emphasising the growing recognition of the importance of mental health fuelled by pop culture casting psychology in a very positive light.

However, misconceptions extend to the content covered, which goes well beyond the pop-psychology terms that flood our social media feeds. Students are required to delve into topics and research that don't necessarily align with their personal interests or ethical standards, given the historical context of certain studies. The material can become monotonous, especially for those lacking passion. Moreover, individuals dealing with mental health issues themselves can find certain content to be triggering at times.

So, to navigate the decision of picking your subjects effectively, seek guidance from teachers, school counsellors, or career advisors. Request them to provide insights into how A Level Psychology fits into your overall plans. Review the curriculum to ensure that the topics covered align with your interests so you enjoy at least a good portion of the coursework.

More importantly, be prepared to invest the effort necessary to succeed at it just like any other subject for A Levels, consisting heavily of countless hours of revision and mastering exam technique.

