
AP Psychology Exam Prep

Complete Review Bundle

Grades 11 - 12

- ◆ 9 Unit Concept Summaries
- ◆ 150 AP-Style Multiple Choice Questions + Answer Key
 - ◆ 10 FRQ Practice Prompts + Scoring Guides
 - ◆ 200 Key Terms Flash Cards
 - ◆ Essay Framework Guide
 - ◆ Exam Pacing Strategy
- ◆ Full Practice Test Simulation

UM Printables

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SECTION 1

Unit Concept Summaries

UNIT 1

Scientific Foundations of Psychology

Unit Overview

This unit introduces the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. You will explore the historical development of psychology, its major perspectives, research methods, and statistical analysis. These foundations are essential for evaluating psychological research and underpin every subsequent unit on the exam.

1. History & Approaches

Psychology's roots trace to philosophy and biology. **Wilhelm Wundt** established the first psychology laboratory in 1879 in Leipzig, Germany, marking psychology's formal emergence as a science. **William James**, the father of American psychology, wrote *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) and championed **functionalism**, which focused on the purpose of behavior and mental processes. **Sigmund Freud** developed **psychoanalysis**, emphasizing the unconscious mind. **John B. Watson** and later **B. F. Skinner** redefined psychology as the science of observable behavior (**behaviorism**). The **cognitive revolution** of the 1950s-60s brought the study of mental processes back to the forefront.

Major Psychological Perspectives:

Biological: How genes, brain structures, and hormones influence behavior and mental processes.

Behavioral: Observable behavior and the role of learning (conditioning); rejects study of internal processes.

Cognitive: Internal mental processes such as thinking, memory, and problem-solving; the mind as information processor.

Humanistic: Personal growth, free will, and self-actualization (Maslow, Rogers).

Psychodynamic: Unconscious drives and childhood experiences shape behavior (Freud and neo-Freudians).

Sociocultural: How social and cultural contexts (ethnicity, gender, SES) shape behavior and thinking.

Evolutionary: Behavior as adaptive through natural selection; focuses on survival and reproductive advantages.

2. Research Methods

Psychologists use a variety of research methods, each with distinct strengths and limitations:

- **Experiment:** The only method that establishes cause-and-effect. Manipulates an independent variable (IV) and measures a dependent variable (DV). Requires random assignment to control for confounding variables.
- **Correlational Study:** Examines the relationship between two variables without establishing causation. Correlation coefficients range from -1.0 to +1.0. *Correlation does NOT imply causation.*
- **Naturalistic Observation:** Observing behavior in its natural environment without intervention. High ecological validity but cannot establish cause-and-effect.
- **Case Study:** In-depth examination of a single individual or group. Provides rich detail but findings cannot be generalized broadly.

- **Survey:** Questionnaires or interviews given to a representative sample. Wording effects, response bias, and sampling methods affect validity.

3. Research Design Essentials

Independent Variable (IV): The variable deliberately manipulated by the researcher.

Dependent Variable (DV): The variable measured; the outcome.

Confounding Variable: An extraneous factor that varies with the IV and could affect the DV.

Random Assignment: Assigning participants to groups by chance to minimize pre-existing differences.

Operational Definition: A precise statement of how a variable will be measured or manipulated.

Population vs. Sample: Population = entire group of interest; Sample = subset studied.

Random Sampling: Every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected.

Stratified Sampling: Population is divided into subgroups; random samples are drawn from each.

Convenience Sampling: Using readily available participants; prone to bias.

4. Statistical Analysis

- **Measures of Central Tendency:** Mean (average), Median (middle score), Mode (most frequent). The mean is most affected by outliers; the median is more resistant to skew.
- **Measures of Variability:** Range (max - min), Standard Deviation (average distance from mean), Variance (SD squared).
- **Normal Distribution:** Bell-shaped, symmetrical curve. ~68% of scores fall within 1 SD, ~95% within 2 SDs, and ~99.7% within 3 SDs of the mean.
- **Skewed Distributions:** Positive skew = tail to the right (mean > median). Negative skew = tail to the left (mean < median).
- **Statistical Significance:** Results are significant when the probability (p-value) they occurred by chance is less than 5% ($p < .05$). Does not indicate practical significance or effect size.
- **Type I Error:** Rejecting a true null hypothesis (false positive).
- **Type II Error:** Failing to reject a false null hypothesis (false negative).

5. Ethics in Research

- **Informed Consent:** Participants must be informed about the study and voluntarily agree.
- **Deception:** May be used only when justified by scientific value; participants must be debriefed afterward.
- **Debriefing:** After the study, the true purpose is explained and any deception is revealed.
- **Confidentiality:** Participants' identities and data must be protected.
- **IRB (Institutional Review Board):** Committee that reviews research proposals for ethical compliance.
- **Animal Research:** Must justify the use of animals, minimize suffering, and follow ethical guidelines.

★ **AP Exam Tip:** Research methods and statistics are tested throughout the entire exam — not just in Unit 1. Be prepared to identify IVs, DVs, research methods, and statistical concepts in FRQs across all units.

UNIT 2

Biological Bases of Behavior

Unit Overview

This unit examines how biological processes — from individual neurons to brain regions to the endocrine system — influence behavior and mental processes. Understanding the biological basis of behavior is fundamental to many other units, including clinical psychology and sensation/perception.

1. The Neuron

Dendrites: Receive signals from other neurons; branch-like extensions from the soma.

Soma (Cell Body): Contains the nucleus; integrates incoming signals.

Axon: Carries electrical impulses (action potentials) away from the cell body.

Myelin Sheath: Fatty insulation around the axon that speeds neural transmission; gaps = nodes of Ranvier.

Axon Terminals: Release neurotransmitters into the synaptic cleft.

Action Potential: Brief electrical charge traveling down the axon; follows the all-or-none principle.

Resting Potential: Neuron's stable negative internal charge when not firing (~-70 mV).

Threshold: Minimum level of stimulation required to trigger an action potential.

Refractory Period: Brief period after firing during which the neuron cannot fire again.

2. Neurotransmitters

Chemical messengers that cross the synaptic cleft between neurons. Key neurotransmitters:

Acetylcholine (ACh): Muscle movement, memory, learning. Depletion linked to Alzheimer's disease.

Dopamine: Movement, reward, pleasure. Excess linked to schizophrenia; deficit linked to Parkinson's disease.

Serotonin: Mood, hunger, sleep. Low levels associated with depression.

Norepinephrine: Arousal, alertness. Involved in fight-or-flight response.

GABA: Major inhibitory neurotransmitter; reduces neural activity; low levels linked to anxiety.

Glutamate: Major excitatory neurotransmitter; involved in learning and memory. Overexcitation can cause seizures.

Endorphins: Natural pain relievers; linked to 'runner's high.'

3. The Nervous System

Central Nervous System (CNS): Brain and spinal cord.

Peripheral Nervous System (PNS): All nerves outside the CNS.

- **Somatic Nervous System:** Controls voluntary movements of skeletal muscles.

- **Autonomic Nervous System (ANS):** Controls involuntary functions (heart rate, digestion).

- **Sympathetic Division:** Activates fight-or-flight response; increases heart rate, dilates pupils.

- **Parasympathetic Division:** Promotes rest-and-digest; slows heart rate, constricts pupils.

Reflexes: Simple, automatic responses to stimuli; processed in the spinal cord before the brain.

4. Brain Structures

Brainstem: Medulla (breathing, heart rate), Pons (sleep/arousal, facial expressions), Reticular Formation (alertness, arousal).

Cerebellum: Coordinates voluntary movement, balance, and motor learning.

Thalamus: Sensory relay station (except olfaction); directs sensory input to appropriate cortical areas.

Hypothalamus: Regulates hunger, thirst, body temperature, and endocrine functions via the pituitary.

Amygdala: Processes fear and emotional responses; part of the limbic system.

Hippocampus: Critical for forming new explicit/declarative long-term memories (not storage).

Cerebral Cortex: Outer neural layer of the cerebrum; responsible for higher-order thinking.

- **Frontal Lobes:** Decision-making, planning, motor control, personality, speech production (Broca's area).

- **Parietal Lobes:** Sensory processing (somatosensory cortex), spatial awareness.

- **Temporal Lobes:** Auditory processing, language comprehension (Wernicke's area).

- **Occipital Lobes:** Visual processing (primary visual cortex).

Corpus Callosum: Large band of nerve fibers connecting the two hemispheres for interhemispheric communication.

Plasticity: The brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections, especially after injury.

5. Brain Lateralization & Imaging

Left Hemisphere: Language, logic, sequential processing. Damage can cause aphasia.

Right Hemisphere: Spatial abilities, facial recognition, emotional processing, big-picture thinking.

Split-Brain Research: Sperry & Gazzaniga studied patients with severed corpus callosum. Information in the left visual field goes to the right hemisphere and vice versa.

Brain Imaging: EEG (electrical activity), CT scan (structure), MRI (detailed structure), fMRI (brain activity via blood flow), PET scan (metabolic activity using radioactive glucose).

6. The Endocrine System

Pituitary Gland: 'Master gland' — regulates other endocrine glands; controlled by the hypothalamus.

Adrenal Glands: Release adrenaline (epinephrine) and cortisol during stress.

Thyroid Gland: Regulates metabolism. Overactive = hyperthyroidism; underactive = hypothyroidism.

Pineal Gland: Secretes melatonin, regulating sleep-wake cycles.

Gonads: Ovaries and testes; release sex hormones (estrogen, testosterone).

7. Genetics & Behavior

Chromosomes & Genes: Humans have 46 chromosomes (23 pairs). Genes are DNA segments coding for proteins.

Heritability: Proportion of trait variation attributable to genetic factors *within a population*. Does NOT apply to individuals.

Twin Studies: Compare MZ (identical) and DZ (fraternal) twins to estimate genetic influence.

Adoption Studies: Separate nature from nurture by comparing adopted children to biological and adoptive parents.

Epigenetics: Environmental factors influence gene expression without changing DNA sequence (e.g., methylation).

Nature vs. Nurture: Modern psychology recognizes that both genes and environment interact to shape behavior.

★ **AP Exam Tip:** Be able to link brain structures to specific behaviors. FRQs often ask you to explain how a brain region contributes to a behavior or how damage affects functioning. Know the neurotransmitters and their associated disorders cold.

UNIT 3

Sensation and Perception

Unit Overview

Sensation is the process by which sensory receptors detect and encode stimulus information. Perception is the process of organizing and interpreting sensory information to give it meaning. This unit covers how we sense the world and how our brain constructs our experience of reality.

1. Basic Principles of Sensation

Absolute Threshold: Minimum stimulation needed to detect a stimulus 50% of the time.

Difference Threshold (JND): Minimum difference between two stimuli detected 50% of the time.

Weber's Law: The JND is a constant proportion of the original stimulus (e.g., 2% for weight).

Signal Detection Theory: Predicts when we detect a faint stimulus amid background noise; depends on experience, expectations, motivation, and fatigue.

Sensory Adaptation: Diminished sensitivity to constant stimulation (why you stop noticing background noise).

Subliminal Stimuli: Below the absolute threshold; can produce subtle, fleeting effects but cannot persuade behavior.

Priming: Exposure to one stimulus influences response to another, often without conscious awareness.

2. Vision

- **Wavelength → Color:** Short = blue/violet, medium = green, long = red/orange.
- **Amplitude → Brightness:** Greater amplitude = brighter perceived light.
- **The Eye:** Cornea (protective) → Pupil (opening, regulated by iris) → Lens (accommodation) → Retina (photoreceptors).
- **Rods:** Peripheral retina; dim-light vision; black & white; ~120 million per eye.
- **Cones:** Fovea; bright-light vision; color & detail; ~6 million per eye.
- **Visual Processing Pathway:** Photoreceptors → Bipolar cells → Ganglion cells → Optic nerve → Thalamus → Visual cortex (occipital lobe).
- **Blind Spot:** Where the optic nerve exits the retina; no photoreceptors.
- **Young-Helmholtz Trichromatic Theory:** Three cone types (R, G, B); explains color vision at the receptor level.
- **Opponent-Process Theory:** Three opponent pairs (red/green, blue/yellow, black/white); explains afterimages and processing at the ganglion cell level.
- **Feature Detectors:** Neurons in the visual cortex that respond to specific features (edges, lines, angles). Hubel & Wiesel's Nobel Prize research.
- **Parallel Processing:** The brain simultaneously processes color, motion, form, and depth.

3. Hearing (Audition)

- **Frequency → Pitch:** Lower frequency = lower pitch; higher frequency = higher pitch. Measured in Hz.

- **Amplitude → Loudness:** Measured in decibels (dB). Prolonged exposure to >85 dB can cause damage.
- **Auditory Pathway:** Outer ear (pinna) → Ear canal → Eardrum → Ossicles (hammer, anvil, stirrup) → Oval window → Cochlea (basilar membrane, hair cells) → Auditory nerve → Thalamus → Auditory cortex (temporal lobe).
- **Place Theory (Helmholtz):** Different frequencies vibrate different places on the basilar membrane; best for high frequencies.
- **Frequency Theory:** Basilar membrane vibrates at the same frequency as the sound wave; best for low frequencies (up to ~1000 Hz).
- **Volley Principle:** Groups of neurons fire in alternation to encode frequencies above 1000 Hz.
- **Conduction Deafness:** Damage to mechanical system (ossicles, eardrum). Hearing aids can help.
- **Sensorineural Deafness:** Damage to cochlea or auditory nerve. Cochlear implants may help.

4. Other Senses

- **Smell (Olfaction):** Only sense bypassing the thalamus initially. Receptors in nasal cavity → olfactory bulb → limbic system. Strongly linked to memory and emotion.
- **Taste (Gustation):** Five basic tastes: sweet, salty, sour, bitter, umami. Taste buds on papillae. Flavor = taste + smell + texture (supertasters have more papillae).
- **Touch:** Skin senses include pressure, warmth, cold, and pain. Gate-control theory: spinal 'gate' blocks or allows pain signals to the brain.
- **Pain:** Influenced by biological, psychological, and social-cultural factors. Phantom limb sensations: brain still senses missing limb.
- **Kinesthesia:** Position and movement of body parts via receptors in muscles, tendons, and joints.
- **Vestibular Sense:** Balance and head position via semicircular canals in the inner ear.

5. Perceptual Organization & Interpretation

- **Gestalt Principles:** The whole differs from the sum of its parts. Key principles: figure-ground, proximity, similarity, continuity, closure, connectedness.
- **Depth Perception:** Binocular cues: retinal disparity (images differ between eyes), convergence (eyes turn inward). Monocular cues: relative size, interposition, relative height, relative motion (motion parallax), linear perspective, light & shadow, texture gradient.
- **Perceptual Constancy:** Perceiving objects as unchanging: shape constancy, size constancy, color constancy, brightness constancy.
- **Perceptual Set:** Mental predisposition to perceive one thing and not another. Influenced by schemas, context, expectations, and motivation.
- **ESP (Extrasensory Perception):** Claims of perception without sensory input. Not supported by replicable scientific research.

★ **AP Exam Tip:** Be able to distinguish between sensation (bottom-up processing) and perception (top-down processing). FRQs may ask you to apply Gestalt principles, depth cues, or threshold concepts to real-world scenarios. Know visual and auditory pathways step by step.

SECTION 3

MCQ Answer Key

Multiple Choice Answer Key (1-150)

Q	A	Q	A	Q	A	Q	A	Q	A
1	B	2	A	3	C	4	B	5	B
6	D	7	B	8	A	9	C	10	B
11	C	12	B	13	B	14	B	15	C
16	B	17	C	18	B	19	B	20	B
21	B	22	C	23	C	24	A	25	B
26	C	27	D	28	C	29	C	30	B
31	B	32	B	33	C	34	B	35	C
36	B	37	D	38	B	39	C	40	C
41	A	42	B	43	B	44	C	45	C
46	B	47	C	48	B	49	B	50	B
51	C	52	B	53	D	54	B	55	C
56	A	57	A	58	C	59	B	60	C
61	B	62	A	63	C	64	C	65	B
66	C	67	B	68	C	69	B	70	B
71	B	72	B	73	B	74	B	75	B
76	C	77	C	78	C	79	B	80	C
81	B	82	B	83	B	84	B	85	B
86	B	87	C	88	B	89	A	90	B
91	C	92	C	93	A	94	B	95	B
96	B	97	B	98	A	99	C	100	B
101	B	102	B	103	A	104	C	105	B
106	B	107	B	108	C	109	C	110	B
111	B	112	B	113	B	114	B	115	B
116	B	117	A	118	B	119	A	120	B
121	B	122	B	123	B	124	B	125	B
126	A	127	C	128	B	129	B	130	A
131	B	132	B	133	C	134	C	135	D
136	B	137	B	138	B	139	A	140	B
141	B	142	B	143	C	144	B	145	A
146	C	147	A	148	B	149	C	150	B

SECTION 5

Key Terms Flash Cards (200 Terms)

200 Key Terms Flash Cards

Cut along the lines to create physical flash cards. Term on the left, definition on the right.

Term	Definition	Term	Definition
Hindsight bias	The tendency to believe, after learning an outcome, that one would have foreseen it.	Critical thinking	Thinking that does not blindly accept arguments and conclusions; examines assumptions and evidence.
Theory	An explanation using an integrated set of principles that organizes observations and predicts behaviors/events.	Hypothesis	A testable prediction, often implied by a theory.
Operational definition	A statement of the procedures used to define research variables.	Replication	Repeating the essence of a research study, usually with different participants, to see if basic findings extend.
Case study	An observation technique in which one person is studied in depth.	Naturalistic observation	Observing and recording behavior in naturally occurring situations without trying to manipulate or control.
Survey	A technique for ascertaining the self-reported attitudes or behaviors of a particular group.	Population	All the cases in a group being studied, from which samples may be drawn.
Random sample	A sample that fairly represents a population because each member has an equal chance of inclusion.	Correlation coefficient	A statistical index of the relationship between two things (from -1 to +1).
Scatterplot	A graphed cluster of dots representing the values of two variables.	Illusory correlation	Perceiving a relationship where none exists, or perceiving a stronger relationship than actually exists.
Experiment	A research method in which an investigator manipulates one factor to observe the effect on some behavior.	Random assignment	Assigning participants to experimental and control groups by chance.
Double-blind procedure	An experimental procedure in which both participants and research staff are ignorant about who has received treatment.	Placebo effect	Experimental results caused by expectations alone; any effect on behavior caused by the administration of an inert substance.

Full Practice Test Simulation

How to Simulate the AP Exam

To get the most accurate measure of your readiness, replicate actual test conditions. Find a quiet room, set a timer, and do not use any notes or resources.

- **Step 1: Select 100 MCQs** from the 150 provided in Section 2. (Choose a mix from Units 1-9).
- **Step 2: Select 2 FRQs** from the 10 provided in Section 4.
- **Step 3: Set a timer for 70 minutes** and complete the 100 MCQs. Stop exactly when the timer goes off.
- **Step 4: Take a 10-minute break.** (The real exam has a brief break between sections).
- **Step 5: Set a timer for 50 minutes** and complete the 2 FRQs.
- **Step 6: Score your test** using the guides below.

AP Psychology Score Calculation Worksheet

Follow the steps below to calculate your composite score and estimated AP score.

Step	Calculation	Your Score
1. MCQ Raw Score	Number of correct answers out of 100	____ / 100
2. MCQ Weighted Score	Multiply Raw MCQ Score by 0.667	____ / 66.7
3. FRQ Raw Score	Sum of points earned on both FRQs	____ / 14
4. FRQ Weighted Score	Multiply Raw FRQ Score by 2.381	____ / 33.3
5. Composite Score	Add Weighted MCQ + Weighted FRQ	____ / 100

Estimated AP Score Conversion

Note: AP Score cutoffs fluctuate slightly each year based on curve equating. The ranges below represent typical composite score ranges for each final AP grade.

Composite Score Range	AP Score	Qualification
0 - 35	1	No Recommendation
36 - 55	2	Possibly Qualified
56 - 74	3	Qualified
75 - 89	4	Well Qualified
90 - 100	5	Extremely Well Qualified

★ **Interpreting Your Score:** If you scored a 3 or higher, you are on track for college credit at most institutions! If you scored below a 3, review the units where you missed the most MCQs, re-study those concept summaries, and try another simulation in a few days.



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