

Preparing for the AP[®] Psychology Examination

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I. Overview

After studying and working on psychology all year, you will take the AP[®] Psychology exam in early May. Not only will you be able to apply all that you have learned, but you will have an opportunity to earn college credit for your efforts! If you earn a “passing score” on the exam, you may be eligible to receive credit at a college or university. This means you will have demonstrated a level of knowledge equivalent to that of students completing an introductory psychology course. You may gain credit hours, advanced placement in a course sequence, and possibly a savings in tuition!

For these reasons, it is to your advantage that you do your best on the exam. Doing your best requires that you have a plan to prepare and review for the exam in addition to having a strong conceptual understanding of the content you’ve learned all year. The material that follows is designed to help you as you prepare for and take the AP[®] Psychology exam.

Every year the number of students attempting the AP[®] Psychology exam grows. In 2017 alone, 303,000 bright students took the AP[®] Psychology exam, and 64% of them earned a 3 or higher and have a good chance of earning college credit. And just think, many students taking the exam probably didn’t prepare as well as you have! After working through this *Strive Guide* along with your textbook, you will be well poised to earn a high score on the exam!

According to the College Board[®], AP[®] test scores carry the following recommendations:

AP [®] Score	Qualification	Our Translation
5	Extremely well qualified	Extremely well-qualified psychology rock star!
4	Well qualified	Likely to earn college credit
3	Qualified	Possibly earn college credit
2	Possibly qualified	Will probably not earn college credit
1	No recommendation	No credit, but you're still better off for having taken the course!

Maximizing your performance on any AP[®] exam requires a well thought out preparation and review plan. The next section suggests a schedule for preparing for your AP[®] Psychology exam. Keep in mind that this suggested schedule will need to be modified to fit your individual circumstances. In particular, you will need to adjust the schedule based on any other AP[®] exams and activities that you will also have during this very busy time of year!

II. Sample Schedule

What follows is a general guide for creating a plan to prepare and review for the AP[®] Psychology exam. While each student's routine and method of studying will differ, consider these suggestions for creating your own plan to maximize your performance on the exam!

1. At the start of your AP[®] Psychology course

During the first few weeks of your class, familiarize yourself with the course outline and AP[®] exam information, both of which are presented in the next few sections. It has been said that any student can hit a target that is clear and holds still for them. If you know where you are going, it is far easier to get there. The course outline clearly indicates the topics you will study and the exam format is the same from year to year. Additional information on the exam is available on the College Board's[®] AP[®] Central website.

2. During your AP[®] Psychology course

As you work through each unit, be sure to read the textbook and do all assigned practice questions. Use this guide to help you organize your notes, define key terms, and practice important concepts. Be sure to complete all the problems in this guide and note any concepts that give you difficulty, and be sure to spend time with those difficult concepts. It is important to understand the level at which the material will be tested and to see how questions testing that material are typically written. You can find sample exam questions in the practice exam section of this *Strive Guide* and on the College Board's[®] AP[®] Central website.

3. Six weeks before the exam

About six weeks before the exam, you should begin planning for your exam preparation and review. If you are currently taking more than one AP[®] course, be sure you know when each exam will be given and plan accordingly. Remember that all AP[®] exams are given over a two-week period in May, so check when your AP[®] Psychology exam will be in relation to other AP[®] exams you will be taking.

4. Four weeks before the exam

In early April, you should be wrapping up your studies in the course. This is a good time to attempt a practice test. Your teacher may provide one and you should take one of the practice exams in this section. Be sure to note any concepts that give you difficulty to determine how much additional studying you will need and what specific areas you should

emphasize as you allocate your additional study time. There are still several weeks of class left at this point and plenty of time for you to review, practice, and solidify your understanding of the key concepts in the course.

5. *The week before the exam*

The week before the exam, you should be done with your studies and should practice, practice, practice. Take this time to refresh your memory on the key concepts and review the topics that gave you the most trouble during the year. Use another practice test to help you get used to the exam format. Be sure to allow 70 minutes for the multiple-choice section and 50 minutes for the free-response section.

6. *One or two nights before the exam*

Schedule time for one last review of the course material to make sure it is fresh in your mind. You can take one last practice exam, take time for a flash card review, or meet with a study group. Your final review session should not be too long or intense. Make sure you arrange to get a good night's sleep the night before the exam!

7. *The day of the exam*

You have prepared and reviewed as much as possible and are ready for the exam! Make sure you eat a good breakfast, have everything you need to take to the exam with you, and get to your exam site early on the day of your exam. Good luck!

III. The AP[®] Psychology Course Outline

The course outline for AP[®] Psychology is provided below. This outline lists the topics covered in the course and the percentage of the exam devoted to that material. Additional information on the course outline can be found at the College Board's[®] AP[®] Central website.

Course Content Overview

The topics for AP[®] Psychology are divided into fourteen major themes, outlined below.

Topic Outline

I. History and Approaches (2–4%)

A. History of Psychology

B. Approaches

1. Biological

2. Behavioral

3. Cognitive

4. Humanistic

5. Psychodynamic

6. Sociocultural

7. Evolutionary

8. Biopsychosocial

C. Subfields in Psychology

II. Research Methods (8–10%)

A. Experimental, Correlational, and Clinical Research

B. Statistics

1. Descriptive

2. Inferential

C. Ethics in Research

III. Biological Bases of Behavior (8–10%)

A. Physiological Techniques
(e.g., imaging, surgical)

B. Neuroanatomy

C. Functional Organization of Nervous System

D. Neural Transmission

E. Neuroplasticity

F. Endocrine System

G. Genetics

H. Evolutionary Psychology

- IV. Sensation and Perception (6–8%)**
- Thresholds and Signal Detection Theory
 - Sensory Mechanisms
 - Attention
 - Perceptual Processes
- V. States of Consciousness (2–4%)**
- Sleep and Dreaming
 - Hypnosis
 - Psychoactive Drug Effects
- VI. Learning (7–9%)**
- Classical Conditioning
 - Operant Conditioning
 - Cognitive Processes
 - Biological Factors
 - Social Learning
- VII. Cognition (8–10%)**
- Memory
 - Language
 - Thinking
 - Problem Solving and Creativity
- VIII. Motivation and Emotion (6–8%)**
- Biological Bases
 - Theories of Motivation
 - Hunger, Thirst, Sex, and Pain
 - Social Motives
 - Theories of Emotion
 - Stress
- IX. Developmental Psychology (7–9%)**
- Life-Span Approach
 - Research Methods (e.g., longitudinal, cross-sectional)
 - Hereditry–Environment Issues
 - Developmental Theories
 - Dimensions of Development
 - Physical
 - Cognitive
 - Social
 - Moral
 - Sex and Gender Development
- X. Personality (5–7%)**
- Personality Theories and Approaches
 - Assessment Techniques
 - Growth and Adjustment
- XI. Testing and Individual Differences (5–7%)**
- Standardization and Norms
 - Reliability and Validity
 - Types of Tests
 - Ethics and Standards in Testing
 - Intelligence
- XII. Abnormal Behavior (7–9%)**
- Definitions of Abnormality
 - Theories of Psychopathology
 - Diagnosis of Psychopathology
 - Types of Disorders
 - Anxiety
 - Bipolar and Related
 - Depressive
 - Dissociative
 - Feeding and Eating
 - Neurodevelopmental
 - Neurocognitive
 - Obsessive–Compulsive and Related
 - Personality
 - Schizophrenia Spectrum and Other Psychotic
 - Somatic Symptom and Related
 - Trauma- and Stressor-Related
- XIII. Treatment of Abnormal Behavior (5–7%)**
- Treatment Approaches
 - Psychodynamic
 - Humanistic
 - Behavioral
 - Cognitive
 - Biological
 - Modes of Therapy (i.e., individual, group)
 - Community and Preventive Approaches
- XIV. Social Psychology (8–10%)**
- Group Dynamics
 - Attribution Processes
 - Interpersonal Perception
 - Conformity, Compliance, Obedience
 - Attitudes and Attitude Change
 - Organizational Behavior
 - Aggression/Antisocial Behavior
 - Cultural Influence

IV. Exam Format

The AP[®] Psychology test is divided into two sections. The first section consists of 100 multiple-choice questions, which counts for two-thirds of the exam grade. The second section is composed of two free-response questions, which count for one-third of the exam grade. The number of questions you will be asked from each section of the course outline corresponds to the percentages provided in the course outline. For example, "I. History and Approaches: 2-4%" means that anywhere from two to four questions on this topic will be asked on the multiple-choice section.

Multiple-Choice Section

You will have 70 minutes to complete the 100 questions on the multiple-choice section of the exam. This time translates to roughly 42 seconds per question. Each multiple-choice question has five answer choices (A-E), only one of which is correct. Each correct answer earns you one point, while each question answered incorrectly (or left blank) earns you no points. This means it is in your best interest to answer every question, even if you need to make an educated guess! You are trying to rack up as many points as possible. So when in doubt, give it your best shot and guess; you just might get lucky. The worst thing that can happen is that no point will be earned. It is also worth noting that AP[®] exams do not include "all of the above," "none of the above" or "true/false" questions.

Free-Response Section

The second section of the exam is made up of two free-response questions. This section is meant to evaluate your mastery of scientific research principles and the ability to synthesize and apply information across different psychological domains to a novel situation or prompt. Once you turn to the free-response section, take a few minutes to read over the questions and map out your responses.

Plan to give each question about 25 minutes' time. Spend the first 3-5 minutes planning your answer for each question and then write away for the remaining time!

V. Planning Your Exam Preparation and Review

This book has been designed to help you identify your areas of strength and areas in which you need improvement. If you have been working through all the questions in both the book and this *Strive Guide*, you should have a good idea of which topics are in need of additional study or review. The practice tests that are included in the last section of the book are designed to help you get familiar with the format of the exam as well as check your understanding of the key concepts in the course. Plan on taking both of these tests as part of your preparation and review. Allow yourself 70 minutes for the first section and 50 minutes for the second section of the test and coordinate with your teacher to access the full answer keys. For each question you missed, determine whether it was a simple mistake or whether you need to go back and study that topic again. After you complete the tests, continue reviewing before the exam date. The best preparation for the exam (other than having a solid understanding of psychology) is to practice as many multiple-choice and free-response questions as possible. Ask your teacher or refer to the College Board's[®] AP[®] Central website for additional resources to help you with this!

VI. Test-Taking Tips

Once you have mastered all of the concepts and have built up your psychological science skills, you are ready to begin reviewing for the actual exam.

General Advice

Relax and breathe deep! Remember that everyone else taking the exam is in a situation identical to yours. You've spent a lot of time preparing for the exam, and you will most likely do just fine.

Read each question carefully before you begin working. This is especially important for problems with multiple parts or lengthy introductions. Underline key words, phrases, and information as you read the questions.

Multiple-Choice Questions:

- Examine the question carefully. What topic is being tested? What is the purpose of the question? After deciding on an answer, make sure you haven't made a careless mistake or an incorrect assumption.
- If an answer choice seems "too obvious," think about it. If it's so obvious to you, it's probably obvious to others, and chances are good that it is not the correct response.
- Since there is no penalty for a wrong answer, it is to your advantage to attempt every question or make an educated guess, if necessary.
- Be sure to keep your eye on the clock and don't spend too much time on any one question.

Free-Response Questions:

- Read each question carefully, sentence by sentence, and underline key words or phrases. Look for action verbs, as they will help you identify what you need to include in your answer.
- Be sure to address all parts of the question and tie in all portions of your response back to the prompt.
- Always answer each question in context.
- Respond to the prompt in the order that the question is asked.
- Do not write an introduction or conclusion, and do not repeat the question. This is not the time for flowery language and style; be as clear, concise, and correct as possible.
- Remember to write your answer in paragraph form using complete sentences. It's important to not use outlines for your answer. Even if a response is correct, it will not be scored if it is presented in an incomplete sentence.
- Use psychological terms in your answers.
- Even if the question does not ask for a definition, it is good to include one because it can serve to bolster your example or application.

Communicate Your Thinking Clearly.

- Organize your thoughts before you write, just as you would for an English paper.
- Write neatly. The AP[®] Exam Readers cannot score your response if they can't read your writing!
- Write efficiently. Say what needs to be said, and move on. Don't ramble.
- The burden of communication is on you. Don't leave it to the Reader to make inferences, because the point will not be rewarded.
- When you finish writing your answer, look back. Does the answer make sense? Did you address the context of the question?

Follow Directions.

- Read your psychology textbook! Most exam questions start with a paragraph that describes the context of the problem. You need to be able to pick out important psychology cues. The only way you will learn to do that is through hands-on experience.
- Practice writing. Your success on the AP[®] Psychology exam depends on how well you explain your reasoning.
- Practice with as many questions as you can in the weeks leading up to the exam.