Unit 1.1

Foundations of Psychology — Prologue

Table of Contents

**Table of Contents**

[I. The Study of Psychology 2](#_Toc369511996)

[Learning Objective 1: Describe the characteristics and goals of psychology as a multidisciplinary science and articulate key issues involved in the study of the mind and behavior 2](#_Toc369511997)

[Classroom Lectures 2](#_Toc369511998)

Lecture 1.1.1: Student Conceptions of Psychology [2](#_Toc369511999)

[Classroom Activities 3](#_Toc369511998)

[Activity 1.1.1: Misconceptions About Psychology 3](#_Toc369512005)

[Activity 1.1.2: What IS Psychology? 4](#_Toc369512005)

[Handout 1.1.2: What IS Psychology? 5](#_Toc369512006)

[Acitivity 1.1.3: Is It Science? 6](#_Toc369511999)

[Activity 1.1.4: Pick Five](#_Toc369512000) 6

Writing [Exercises/Assignments 6](#_Toc369512007)

[Exercise 1.1.1: Shrinks 6](#_Toc369512008)

[Exercise 1.1.2: What Makes People Tick? 6](#_Toc369512009)

[Exercise 1.1.3: Dr. Phil and You 7](#_Toc369512010)

[Polling Breaks 7](#_Toc369512011)

[Poll 1.1.1: Is Psychology a Science? 7](#_Toc369512012)

[Review Questions 7](#_Toc369512013)

[Q1.1.1: The Goals of Psychology 7](#_Toc369512014)

[Q1.1.2: What’s on Your Mind? 7](#_Toc369512015)

[Discussion Board 8](#_Toc369512016)

[D1.1.1: Control 8](#_Toc369512017)

[D1.1.2: What about the Rest of Us? 8](#_Toc369512018)

[Journal/Blog Entries 8](#_Toc369512019)

[Entry 1.1.1: Your Preferences 8](#_Toc369512020)

[Online Connections 8](#_Toc369512024)

[Videos 8](#_Toc369512025)

[Websites 8](#_Toc369512026)

[Recommended Reading 9](#_Toc369512027)

# The Study of Psychology

## Learning Objective 1: Describe the characteristics and goals of psychology as a multidisciplinary science and articulate key issues involved in the study of the mind and behavior

### Classroom Lectures

#### Lecture 1.1.1: Student Conceptions of Psychology

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

The first day of class is always a good time to gather data that can be used throughout that first day, while covering the first chapter, or even during the entire semester. Although most students have some basic knowledge about biology, grammar, or music when they enroll for such a course, students who enroll in introductory psychology usually lack an understanding of the topic. Thus, an interesting exercise for the initial class meeting is to pass out index cards and ask students to write their name and their definition of psychology. You can also ask them to note three topics that they expect to cover during the course.

You can use this information in various ways:

1. Contrast students’ definitions of psychology with the definition in the text. Student definitions (and anticipated topics) often center on the professional aspect of psychology but not the scientific. Use “Demo: The Clinical Bias Within Psychology” (found in Unit 1.3) to further illustrate the one-sided view of psychology that students have brought with them. This is also a good time to begin to indoctrinate them with the idea that Psychology is empirical.

2. Point out to students that although their definitions may not match that specified in the book, psychology is an ever-evolving discipline whose definition has changed considerably over the years. Consider the definitions given by some of psychology’s pioneers:

*Psychology is the Science of Mental Life, both of its phenomena and their conditions. (James, 1890, p. 1)*

*Psychology is the science of mind . . . the science of that which thinks, feels, and wills, in contrast with physics as the science of that which moves in space and occupies space.* (Hoffding, 1893, p. 1)

*Psychology, the science of mental facts or mind, . . . deals with the thoughts and feelings of human beings and seeks to explain the facts of intellect, character and personal life.* (Thorndike, 1907, p. 1)

*Psychology is more exactly defined as science of the self in relation to, or conscious of, its environment.* (Calkins, 1919, p. 1)

*Psychology is that division of natural science which takes human activity and conduct as its subject matter. It attempts to formulate through systematic observation and experimentation the laws and principles which underlie man’s reactions*. (Watson, 1919, p. 1)

Point out to your students that these early psychologists “missed the boat,” just as the students probably did. They, too, left out one side of psychology, the applied side. This observation will set the stage for an important point: Applied psychology was slow to develop compared to psychology as a science.

3. Save the cards until later in the course. At that time, pass out new cards and ask students to complete the exercise again, this time defining psychology and listing the three most memorable topics covered during the term. Then give them their original cards from the first day of class. Discuss the changes in their definitions. Are the topics that they remember vividly the same that they expected to cover in the course?

Calkins, M. W. (1919). *A first book in psychology* (4th ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Hoffding, H. (1893). *Outlines of psychology*. London: Macmillan.

James, W. (1890). *The principles of psychology*. New York: Holt.

Pillsbury, W. B. (1922). *The fundamentals of psychology* (2nd ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Thorndike, E. L. (1907). *The elements of psychology* (2nd ed.). New York: A. G. Seiler.

Watson, J. B. (1919). *Psychology from the standpoint of a behaviorist*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.

### Classroom Activities

#### Activity 1.1.1: Misconceptions About Psychology

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

Students will bring a number of misconceptions about psychology to your course. You may want to tap these false beliefs for your own information or for a lively discussion in class. You can determine what some of the misconceptions are in at least two different ways:

1. Pass out a blank index card to each student at the beginning of the first class session. Tell the students to write down five things they already know about psychology. Be sure to tell them not to put their name on the card. Anonymity will encourage students to be more candid, giving you a larger number and wider range of misconceptions. You can discuss the misconceptions as soon as the cards have been turned in, but it may be better to wait until the next class period so you have time to sort through the cards and ascertain any major trends. A discussion of your students’ misconceptions will give you the opportunity to set a more realistic foundation for your course.

2. Give your students a paper-and-pencil test concerning common misconceptions in psychology. Griggs and Ransdell (1987) identified a set of 15 misconceptions that have received at least 50% true responses in at least two of the four studies cited (Gardner & Dalsing, 1986; Griggs & Ransdell, 1987; Lamal, 1979; Vaughan, 1977). Their list of 15 misconceptions appears in HM 1-1. You can use all of them or merely a sample. The items are rank-ordered from those most often rated as true to those least often rated as true. Remember, however, that even the lowest ranked items still received at least 50% true responses in at least two studies.

Should your students become distressed over endorsing a high percentage of these items as true, you can point out that Griggs and Ransdell (1987) found that students who had taken a high school psychology course performed no better on this test than students who had not taken such a course. Also, Gardner and Hund (1983) found that faculty members (primarily those teaching subjects other than social science and those with MA degrees) found this test to be a difficult task. Psychology is a difficult subject that deals with controversial topics. Challenge your students to question what they read and not to blindly accept “facts” at face value.

Gardner, R. M., & Dalsing, S. (1986). Misconceptions about psychology among college students. *Teaching of Psychology, 13,* 32–34.

Gardner, R. M., & Hund, R. M. (1983). Misconceptions of psychology among academicians. *Teaching of Psychology, 10,* 20–22.

Griggs, R. A., & Ransdell, S. E. (1987). Misconceptions tests or misconceived tests? *Teaching of Psychology, 14,* 210–214.

Lamal, P. A. (1979). College students’ common beliefs about psychology. *Teaching of Psychology, 6,* 155–158.

Vaughan, E. D. (1977). Misconceptions about psychology among introductory psychology students. *Teaching of Psychology, 4,* 138–141.

#### Activity 1.1.2: What IS Psychology?

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

***Resources and Materials***

1. Copies of Handout 1.1.1

***In-Class Time:*** 10 to 15 minutes

***Out-of-Class Time:*** 20 to 30 minutes

***Procedure***

1. Ask five people what they think psychology is. Ask each to give a brief statement with a definition of psychology, or a description of what it is that psychologists study. Select volunteers from various ages, genders, and sociocultural backgrounds (e.g., major fields of interest, country of origin).
2. Record pertinent data about each subject (gender, approximate age, and sociocultural background) and the verbatim response to your question. Do not add to the response or try to clarify it.

***Reflections***

Ask students to gather in small groups to discuss the following and prepare a brief report to give in class:

* What are some of the common elements in the statements?
* How do the popular notions about psychology differ from the definition given in the text?
* What are some misconceptions about the field of psychology?

Adapted from *Handout 1.1: What is Psychology?* by David Topor

Coon, D. and Mitterer, J. (2011). *Instructor’s Resource Manual* for *Psychology: Modules for Active Learning* (12th edition), pp. 32-33. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

##### Handout 1.1.2: What IS Psychology?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **RESPONDENT** | **GENDER** | **AGE** | **BACKGROUND** | **RESPONSE** |
| 1 |  |  |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |  |  |
| 3 |  |  |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |  |  |
| 5 |  |  |  |  |

Adapted from *Handout 1.1: What is Psychology?* by David Topor

Coon, D. and Mitterer, J. (2011). *Instructor’s Resource Manual* for *Psychology: Modules for Active Learning* (12th edition), p. 32-33. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

#### Activity 1.1.3: Is It Science?

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

Bring a bag of fortune cookies to class. Have each student read his or her fortune and then explain how it might be “true” or “accurate” in some way. Use this as a lead-in to a discussion of the characteristics of science.

*Thinking Critically About Astrology* by David Topor.

Coon, D. and Mitterer, J. (2011). *Instructor’s Resource Manual* for *Psychology: Modules for Active Learning* (12th edition), p. 26. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

#### 

#### Activity 1.1.4: Pick Five

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

Ask students to take out a sheet of paper and write five adjectives that apply to scientists. Once they have completed the list, ask them to write down five adjectives that apply to psychologists. Ask for volunteers to share their adjectives and use it as a lead-in to discuss psychology as a science.

### Writing Exercises/Assignments

#### Exercise 1.1.1: Shrinks

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

Ask students to write a one- to two-paragraph response to the following questions. Would you go to a psychologist or psychiatrist if you were depressed or anxious? Why or why not? Would you seek assistance for other things in your life, such as buying a house, a medical ailment, managing debt, improving their game/sport, moving, finding a job, etc.? How is getting help with other parts of one’s life different from getting help with mental health problems, and why?

Adapted from *Perceptions about Psychologists* by David Topor

Coon, D. and Mitterer, J. (2011). *Instructor’s Resource Manual* for *Psychology: Modules for Active Learning* (12th edition), p. 23. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

#### Exercise 1.1.2: What Makes People Tick?

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

Everyone has his or her own personal beliefs about "the way people are" or "what makes people tick." For example, you might believe that men are better than women at math and that this difference is a result of the way girls are treated in schools. You might believe that depression is the result of stressful life experiences.

Alternatively, you may simply be puzzled by certain aspects of human behavior and not really have an explanation for it. For example, why do such deep divisions exist between various ethnic groups? Why is it sometimes so difficult to remember people's names?

List five "theories" (beliefs or hunches) that you have about people's behavior and five aspects of human behavior that puzzle you.

*Journal Entry 1.2: Intuitive Questions and Hunches About People* by Gregory Robinson-Riegler

Nairne, J. (2009). *Instructor’s Resource Manual* for *Psychology: The Adaptive Mind* (5th edition), p. 14. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

#### Exercise 1.1.3: Dr. Phil and You

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

Television shows featuring “psychologists” (not everyone providing advice is actually a psychologist) are a staple of “reality” television. Watch an episode of such a show and write a review, being certain to include an evaluation of the likely “success” of the advice offered. What does the general public learn about psychology from these shows? What misperceptions exist? Why do you think that academic psychologists have such negative views of TV/radio “psychologists”?

### Polling Breaks

#### Poll 1.1.1: Is Psychology a Science?

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

Is psychology a science and in the same category as the bench sciences of physics, chemistry, or biology?

### Review Questions

#### 

#### Q1.1.1: The Goals of Psychology

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

What are the goals of psychology? Provide an example of each and discuss why each of the goals is important.

#### Q1.1.2: What’s on Your Mind?

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

Describe the relationship between the mind and the brain, the mind and personality, the mind and memories, and the mind and behavior.

### Discussion Board

#### D1.1.1: Control

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

One of the “goals” of psychology is to control behavior. Is that a legitimate goal for science? Should there be “controls” on the work of psychologists to control behavior?

#### D1.1.2: What about the Rest of Us?

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

Early psychologists were, for the most part, White men. How might this have influenced early conceptualizations of psychology and the development of early theories?

### 

### Journal/Blog Entries

#### Entry 1.1.1: Your Preferences

###### Topic: Introduction Subtopic: History Concept: Psychology

Consider the different disciplines of psychology. Which is most interesting to you and why?

### Online Connections

#### 

#### Videos

Paul Bloom: The Psychology of Everything (October, 2012). *bigthink* (48:16 minutes)

This video provides an overview psychology, the disciplines within it, and its application to life using case studies of compassion, racism, and sex.

#### Websites

Characteristics of Science

<http://www.storybehindthescience.org/pdf/characteristics.pdf>

The American Psychological Association

<http://www.apa.org>

All About Psychology

<http://www.all-about-psychology.com/>

### Recommended Reading

Goodwin, C. J. (2012). *A history of modern psychology* (4th ed.)*.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Hock, R. R. (2013). *Forty studies that changed psychology: Explorations into the history of psychological research* (7th ed.)*.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall.

Wertheimer, M. (2012). *A brief history of psychology* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Psychology Press.