Government of **Western Australia**
School Curriculum and Standards Authority

PSYCHOLOGY

GENERAL COURSE

Year 12 syllabus

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

This syllabus is effective from 1 January 2017.

Users of this syllabus are responsible for checking its currency.

Syllabuses are formally reviewed by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority on a cyclical basis, typically every five years.

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Rationale

Psychology is the scientific study of how people think, feel and act. It aims to answer important questions such as what factors influence human development. While there are other disciplines that overlap with psychology's main aim to understand humans, psychology is rigorous in its use of scientific method. This allows for systematic exploration into the complexities of human behaviour based on evidence gathered through planned investigations.

This course introduces students to a breadth of knowledge focusing on the psychology of self and others. Psychological knowledge helps us understand factors relating to individuals, such as: cognition, or the way we think; biological bases of behaviour; and personality, the enduring traits that distinguish individuals. Psychological knowledge also helps us understand the way that individuals function within groups. This consists of knowledge associated with socialisation, moral development, the formation of attitudes and also how people relate and communicate. On a larger scale, psychological knowledge can help us to understand how individuals function within different contexts and how this is influenced by culture, shaping people's values, attitudes and beliefs.

Psychology is very useful, both to individuals assisting us to improve ourselves and our relationships, and to society as a whole. It can be applied to any context in which humans are involved. Through this course, students gain valuable insights and understandings into both themselves and their worlds. Methods of communication studied enhance personal communication skills, both within the field of psychology and in the context of daily life. Students also develop important research skills as they engage in the exploration and evaluation of data to illustrate how empirical procedures are used to examine phenomena such as intelligence and personality.

This course is designed to integrate the understanding of scientific principles, the acquisition of psychological knowledge and the application of both in an enjoyable and contemporary way. The study of psychology is highly relevant to further studies in the health professions; education, human resources, social sciences, sales, media and marketing and management.

Course outcomes

The Psychology General course is designed to facilitate achievement of the following outcomes.

Outcome 1 – Psychological understandings

Students understand the bases of human behaviour.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- understand how human behaviour can be defined, and the relationship between the internal and external factors that influence how humans think, feel and act
- understand the different theoretical approaches to the various areas or domains of psychology
- understand psychology provides scientific explanations of behaviour with particular principles, procedures and approaches to data.

Outcome 2 – Investigating in psychology

Students use information gathering methods to explore and answer questions about human thinking, emotion and behaviour.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- develop and select questions and ideas or hypotheses and plan and conduct research to test these ideas in a reliable, valid and ethical way
- collect, record, classify, quantify and process data and information in organised, logical and ethical ways
- interpret and evaluate findings in relation to ideas or hypotheses being tested and reflect on the design of the research.

Outcome 3 – Applying and relating psychological understandings

Students select and apply knowledge, understandings and skills to the study of human behaviour.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- use psychological knowledge and understandings to explain thoughts, feelings and behaviour
- apply knowledge and understandings reflecting the values of the discipline of psychology
- explore and interpret human behaviour in the everyday world using psychological theory and principles.

Outcome 4 – Communication in psychology

Students use appropriate skills and processes to communicate their understanding of human behaviour.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- use psychological discourse
- interpret information received and communicate feelings, thoughts and ideas with purpose, understanding and critical awareness
- explain psychological understandings to a range of audiences for a range of purposes.

Organisation

This course is organised into a Year 11 syllabus and a Year 12 syllabus. The cognitive complexity of the syllabus content increases from Year 11 to Year 12.

Structure of the syllabus

The Year 12 syllabus is divided into two units which are delivered as a pair. The notional time for the pair of units is 110 class contact hours.

Unit 3

This unit expands on personality theories studies in Unit 1. Students apply knowledge and understandings to explore how personality can shape motivation and performance and how personality testing is used in vocational contexts. Students are introduced to different states of consciousness and the role of sensation, perception and attention in organising and interpreting information. Relational influences, including factors which determine friendships and conflict resolution, are explored. Students expand on their vocabulary of psychological terminology as they apply research methods and ethical principles.

Unit 4

This unit explores brain function and scanning techniques to illustrate the link between the brain and behaviour. Students learn about Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Kohlberg's theory of moral development and the role of nature and nurture. The impact of the environment on individuals is examined through the study of behaviours observed in groups, causes of prejudice and ways of reducing prejudice. Students continue to develop and apply their understanding of psychological research and data collection methods.

Each unit includes:

- a unit description – a short description of the focus of the unit
- unit content – the content to be taught and learned.

Organisation of content

For each unit the content is organised as follows:

Content organisers	Sub-organisers	
	Unit 3	Unit 4
Self	Biological influences/bases of behaviour	Developmental psychology
	Cognition	Personality
Others	Relational influences	Social psychology
	Communication	Culture and values
Research methods	Planning and conducting psychological research	
	Processing and evaluating psychological research	

Mathematical skills expected of students studying the Psychology General course

The Psychology General course requires students to use the mathematical skills they have developed through the Year 7–10 Mathematics Curriculum, in addition to the numeracy skills they have developed through the Science Inquiry Skills strand of the Science Curriculum.

Within the Science Inquiry Skills strand, students are required to gather, represent and analyse numerical data to identify the evidence that forms the basis of scientific arguments, claims or conclusions. In gathering and recording numerical data, students are required to make measurements using appropriate units to an appropriate degree of accuracy.

It is assumed that students will be able to:

- perform calculations involving addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of quantities
- perform approximate evaluations of numerical expressions
- express fractions as percentages, and percentages as fractions
- calculate percentages
- recognise and use ratios
- transform decimal notation to power of ten notation
- translate information between graphical, numerical and algebraic forms
- construct and interpret frequency tables and diagrams, pie charts and histograms
- describe and compare data sets using mean, median and inter-quartile range
- interpret the slope of a linear graph.

Representation of the general capabilities

The general capabilities encompass the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that will assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century. Teachers may find opportunities to incorporate the capabilities into the teaching and learning program for the Psychology General course. The general capabilities are not assessed unless they are identified within the specified unit content.

Literacy

Students develop literacy skills as they are introduced and become familiar with the specific discourse used in psychology. This course provides a specific and rich context for students to develop reading and writing abilities and skills in viewing and speaking as they apply language in different contexts and for different purposes. Students develop literacy capability as they learn key research and investigative skills which enhance their ability to access, interpret, analyse and challenge information, and evaluate the changing knowledge base in psychology. Students use language structures to formulate hypotheses, relate information, give explanations and construct evidence based arguments. Students communicate research findings using multiple ways of representing data to articulate and illustrate relationships they have observed or constructed.

Numeracy

Students develop numeracy skills as they process and evaluate psychological research, including the ability to display and interpret quantitative data, and apply processes of correlation and probability to inform the development of evidence-based conclusions.

Information and communication technology capability

In the Psychology General course, students develop information communication and technology (ICT) capability as they learn to effectively and appropriately access, create and communicate information and ideas, solve problems and work collaboratively. Students research psychological concepts and communicate understandings using a range of technologies. In particular, students use ICT to access information, collect and analyse data, and communicate ideas and information.

Critical and creative thinking

Students develop critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, consider alternatives and solve problems. In this course, critical and creative thinking is embedded in the skills of planning, conducting processing and evaluating psychological research. Students apply critical thinking skills to examine hypotheses, make predictions, solve problems and analyse and evaluate evidence.

Personal and social capability

Psychology seeks to explain how individuals think, feel and act. In this course, students develop personal and social capabilities as they engage in the study of key theories which seek to explain how emotions, empathy, self-understanding and relationships influence decisions and actions. Students learn about the impact of groups and effective communication processes, and are encouraged to reflect on how personal relationships can be improved. Personal and social capability is also enhanced as students apply psychological knowledge to make informed choices about issues that impact their lives and consider the application of psychological concepts to meet a range of personal and social needs.

Ethical understanding

In this course, students build a strong personal and socially oriented ethical outlook. Students learn about key psychological theories and the way in which the rights, integrity and propriety of people, who are the subject of psychological research, are held in high regard. Students develop the capacity to form and make ethical judgements through the study of ethics in psychology and explore and apply ethical guidelines as they engage in planning, conducting, processing and evaluating psychological research.

Intercultural understanding

Cultural attitudes and perspectives are important influences on behaviour and relationship development. Through the study of attitude formation and cultural influences on attitudes, students investigate the complexities of culture and its impact on beliefs and practices.

Representation of the cross-curriculum priorities

The cross-curriculum priorities address the contemporary issues which students face in a globalised world. Teachers may find opportunities to incorporate the priorities into the teaching and learning program for the Psychology General course. The cross-curriculum priorities are not assessed unless they are identified within the specified unit content.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have longstanding scientific traditions. They have developed knowledge about the world through observation, prediction, creating hypotheses and making generalisations. In this course, scientific methods which propose to explain human behaviour are consistent with those which have been practised and transmitted in Aboriginal culture from one generation to the next. The study of the scientific method used in psychology has close links to the way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples view their world and therefore contributes to a better understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia

Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia provides rich and engaging contexts for developing students’ scientific knowledge, understanding and skills. In this course, students learn about the diversity of cultures, traditions and beliefs and their impact on human behaviour, including the influence of traditional and contemporary Asian cultures.

Sustainability

Through the process of scientific investigation, students identify and understand relationships between variables and the notion of cause and effect. They develop skills in observation and analysis which enable them to examine relationships in the world around them and appreciate the contribution of science toward the development of a sustainable future.

Unit 3

Unit description

This unit expands on personality theories studied in Unit 1 by introducing students to important theorists including Bandura, Pavlov and Skinner. Students apply knowledge and understandings to explore how personality can shape motivation and performance. An analysis of the use of personality testing by organisations is undertaken. Students are introduced to different states of consciousness and the role of sensation, perception and attention in organising and interpreting information. Factors which determine friendships and conflict resolution are explored. Students expand on their knowledge of ethics in psychological research by examining the role of deception in experiments. Key terminology, such as sample and populations, are defined and an understanding of experimental and control groups is acquired.

Unit content

An understanding of the Year 11 content is assumed knowledge for students in Year 12. It is recommended that students studying Unit 3 and Unit 4 have completed Unit 1 and Unit 2.

This unit includes the knowledge, understandings and skills described below.

Self

Personality

- personality theories
  - trait theories – Eysenck, Costa and McCrae
  - humanistic theories – Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Rogers
  - behaviourist theories – Pavlov, Watson, Thorndike, Skinner
  - social learning theory – Bandura
- the relationship between personality, motivation and human performance
- advantages, disadvantages and issues related to personality testing by organisations

Cognition

- definition of
  - cognition
  - sensation
  - perception
  - attention span
- memory
  - multi store model of memory – Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968)
  - sensory register – duration, capacity
  - working memory (short-term memory) – duration, capacity
  - long-term memory – duration, capacity, procedural memory, declarative memory – semantic and episodic

    - strategies for enhancing retrieval of information and improving memory
        - state and context dependent cues
        - mnemonics
        - chunking
        - repetition

- states of consciousness
    - selective attention
    - divided attention
    - daydreaming
    - meditation
    - hypnosis
    - sleep

- physiological indicators of consciousness
    - brainwaves
    - heart rate
    - galvanic skin response

Others

Relational influences

- friendship formation/determinants of liking
    - proximity
    - similarity
    - reciprocity

- types of relationships
    - pro-social
    - anti-social

- types of solutions to resolve conflict
    - imposed
    - distributive
    - integrative

- techniques for resolving conflict
    - mediation
    - negotiation
    - counselling

Communication

- communication styles
    - social background – Bernstein
    - gender differences – Tannen
    - Robinson's social skills

- persuasive communication
  - source of the message
  - nature of the communication
  - characteristics of the audience

Research methods

Planning and conducting psychological research

- terminology
  - experimental, non-experimental
  - scientific, non-scientific
  - sample
  - population
- ethics in psychology research
  - participants' rights – confidentiality, voluntary participation, withdrawal rights
  - informed consent procedures
  - deception in research
- experimental research method
  - independent and dependent variables
  - operational hypotheses
  - controlled and uncontrolled variables
  - experimental and control groups
- non-experimental (descriptive) research methods
  - case studies, surveys, correlational studies
- qualitative methods for data collection
- objective quantitative measures in research
  - physiological measures
- subjective quantitative measures in research
  - checklists
  - rating scales – Likert scale

Processing and evaluating psychological research

- displaying quantitative data – tables, graphs, diagrams
- data interpretation
  - mode
  - mean
  - median
  - range
- use of correlation to establish association between variables
- statistical significance

Unit 4

Unit description

In this unit, the functions of the four lobes of the cerebral cortex are examined. Brain scanning techniques and relevant case studies are used to illustrate the link between the brain and behaviour. In developmental psychology, students learn about Piaget's theory of cognitive development and Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Group behaviours, including conformity, group polarisation and the bystander effect, are studied. The causes of prejudice and ways of reducing prejudice are explored. Students continue to develop and apply their understanding of psychological research and data collection methods.

Unit content

This unit builds on the content covered in Unit 3.

This unit includes the knowledge, understandings and skills described below.

Self

Biological influences/bases of behaviour

- functions of the four lobes of the cerebral cortex
  - frontal lobe – abstract thinking, problem solving, reasoning, decision making
  - parietal lobe – primary sensory cortex
  - occipital lobe – primary visual cortex
  - temporal lobe – primary auditory cortex
- methods of studying the brain
  - electroencephalography (EEG), computed axial tomography (CAT) scan, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI)
  - case studies – Phineas Gage, Henry Molaison (HM) and London taxi drivers
  - animal studies – Lashley, Sperry

Developmental psychology

- explanations of development
  - Piaget's theory of cognitive development
  - Kohlberg's theory of moral development
- cultural bias in developmental theories
- ways of studying influences on development
  - twin studies
  - adoption studies

Others

Social psychology

- group influences on behaviour
  - compliance
  - group polarisation
  - social status and power
  - conformity and obedience – Asch, Milgram, Zimbardo
  - bystander effect

Culture and values

- cultural diversity
  - conventions and expectations
  - cultures as social groups – collectivist, individualistic
- racism
  - causes of prejudice
  - reducing prejudice

Research methods

Planning and conducting psychological research

- terminology
  - experimental, non-experimental
  - scientific, non-scientific
  - sample
  - population
- ethics in psychology research
  - participants' rights– confidentiality, voluntary participation, withdrawal rights
  - informed consent procedures
  - deception in research
- experimental research method
  - independent and dependent variables
  - operational hypotheses
  - controlled and uncontrolled variables
  - experimental and control groups
- non-experimental (descriptive) research methods
  - case studies, surveys, correlational studies
- qualitative methods for data collection
- objective quantitative measures in research
  - physiological measures
- subjective quantitative measures in research
  - checklists
  - rating scales – Likert scale

Processing and evaluating psychological research

- displaying quantitative data – tables, graphs, diagrams
- data interpretation
  - mode
  - mean
  - median
  - range
- use of correlation to establish association between variables
- statistical significance

School-based assessment

The Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) Manual contains essential information on principles, policies and procedures for school-based assessment that needs to be read in conjunction with this syllabus.

Teachers design school-based assessment tasks to meet the needs of students. The table below provides details of the assessment types for the Psychology General Year 12 syllabus and the weighting for each assessment type.

Assessment table – Year 12

Type of assessment	Weighting
Investigation Students plan and conduct a study to answer a research question that can include predicting, hypothesising, designing, controlling variables, gathering and organising data and interpreting and/or evaluating research findings. Evidence can include: an experimental design brief, a formal investigation or laboratory report, research notes, journals, quantitative and/or qualitative analyses of data from observation checklists, and/or self or peer evaluation tools.	25%
Response Students apply knowledge and skills to analyse, interpret and evaluate data, and identify ethical issues. Evidence can include: reports, literature searches, tests, observations during the analysis process, evaluation forms and/or journals.	40%
Project Students communicate psychological knowledge, skills and processes in familiar and unfamiliar contexts. Evidence can include: observation checklists, evaluation forms, questionnaires, posters, observations during discussion, journals, video and/or audio recordings, group work, role plays and/or oral presentations.	20%
Externally set task A written task or item or set of items of 50 minutes duration developed by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority and administered by the school.	15%

Teachers are required to use the assessment table to develop an assessment outline for the pair of units.

The assessment outline must:

- include a set of assessment tasks
- include a general description of each task
- indicate the unit content to be assessed
- indicate a weighting for each task and each assessment type
- include the approximate timing of each task (for example, the week the task is conducted, or the issue and submission dates for an extended task).

All assessment types must be included in the assessment outline at least twice with the exception of the externally set task which only occurs once.

The set of assessment tasks must provide a representative sampling of the content for Unit 3 and Unit 4.

Assessment tasks not administered under test/controlled conditions require appropriate validation/authentication processes.

Externally set task

All students enrolled in the Year 12 General Psychology course will complete the externally set task developed by the Authority. Schools are required to administer this task in Term 2 at a time prescribed by the Authority.

Externally set task design brief – Year 12

Time	50 minutes
Format	Written
	Conducted under invigilated conditions
	Typically between two and six questions/items
	Questions can require students to refer to source material
Content	The Authority informs schools during Term 3 of the previous year of the Unit 3 syllabus content on which the task will be based

Refer to the WACE Manual for further information.

Grading

Schools report student achievement in terms of the following grades:

Grade	Interpretation
A	Excellent achievement
B	High achievement
C	Satisfactory achievement
D	Limited achievement
E	Very low achievement

The teacher prepares a ranked list and assigns the student a grade for the pair of units. The grade is based on the student's overall performance as judged by reference to a set of pre-determined standards. These standards are defined by grade descriptions and annotated work samples. The grade descriptions for the Psychology General Year 12 syllabus are provided in Appendix 1. They can also be accessed, together with annotated work samples, through the Guide to Grades link on the course page of the Authority website at www.scsa.wa.edu.au

To be assigned a grade, a student must have had the opportunity to complete the education program, including the assessment program (unless the school accepts that there are exceptional and justifiable circumstances).

Refer to the WACE Manual for further information about the use of a ranked list in the process of assigning grades.

Appendix 1 – Grade descriptions Year 12

A	**Understanding and applying concepts** Explains and applies a range of theoretical approaches and domains in the fields of psychology related to the way humans think, feel and act, both individually and in a group. Makes direct reference to psychological theories, principles and concepts to describe and explain in detail links to human behaviour in the everyday world. Uses a range of appropriate psychological terminology consistently and accurately adapts language to suit specific audiences and purposes. Expresses ideas in a concise, accurate and logical way and supports answer with relevant examples. Uses frameworks to develop a detailed, comprehensive response.
	Research Methods Uses frameworks to conduct a scientific investigation and write a detailed, comprehensive report that includes all sections. Identifies relevant ethical considerations and discusses in detail how they are managed. Explains key terms comprehensively; makes links to relevant theories and supports with relevant research. Formulates an operational hypothesis. Organises data logically and presents it in a range of forms including tables and graphs; processes data using appropriate statistics. Describes trends in data, relates findings to the hypothesis and develops scientific explanations that are consistent with the data. Suggests specific changes that would improve the techniques used or the design of the investigation.

B	**Understanding and applying concepts** Identifies and explains key theoretical approaches and domains in the fields of psychology related to the way humans think, feel and act, both individually and in a group. Makes direct reference to psychological theories, principles and concepts to describe and explain human behaviour in the everyday world. Expresses ideas in an accurate and logical way, using appropriate psychological terminology and supports their answer with relevant examples. Uses frameworks to develop a comprehensive response.
	Research Methods Uses frameworks to conduct a scientific investigation and write a report that includes all sections. Identifies and describes relevant ethical considerations. Explains key terms; makes reference to research without explanation. Formulates a hypothesis and may include some operationalised variables. Presents data in a range of forms including tables and graphs; processes data using mostly appropriate statistics. Summarises and explains patterns in the data in relation to the research prediction. Gives general suggestions for improving the investigation.

C	**Understanding and applying concepts** Describes theoretical approaches and domains in the fields of psychology related to the way humans think, feel and act, both individually and in a group. Makes direct reference to psychological theories, principles and concepts to describe human behaviour in the everyday world. Adequately expresses ideas, using psychological terminology, and includes some examples. Follows frameworks to organise ideas.
	Research Methods Uses frameworks to conduct an investigation and write a report, of which some sections are brief or have information omitted. Lists some ethical considerations. Briefly explains some key terms and may refer to research studies. Formulates a research question or poses a general hypothesis. Presents data with minor inaccuracies; processes data using statistics with some omissions. Identifies some patterns in the data to describe simple findings that have a few inaccuracies but relate to the research prediction. Identifies the main difficulties experienced in conducting the investigation.

D	**Understanding and applying concepts** Shows a limited recall of theoretical approaches and domains in the fields of psychology. Identifies patterns and describes human behaviour using everyday language. Inadequately expresses ideas; uses minimal psychological terminology and insufficient structure in response.
	Research Methods Follows frameworks, using insufficient structure in response. Sometimes confuses ethical considerations with the values underpinning research. Provides limited description of some key terms. Provides an inaccurate or irrelevant hypothesis. Provides unprocessed data with inaccurate or irrelevant statistics. Demonstrates minimal skill in the planning, designing, organising and explaining investigation findings. Identifies some often irrelevant difficulties in conducting an experiment.

E	Does not meet the requirements of a D grade and/or has completed insufficient assessment tasks to be assigned a higher grade.