GENERAL

aqa psychology a2 revision

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AQA Psychology A2 Revision Guide

Introduction

Preparing for the AQA Psychology A2 exam can feel like navigating a dense forest of theories, terminology, and evidence. Whether you're a first year student or a seasoned researcher, the key to success lies in a structured, focused revision plan that blends conceptual understanding with practical application. This comprehensive guide is designed to help you master the core content of the AQA Psychology A2 syllabus while equipping you with proven exam techniques, study tools, and time management strategies. By following the steps outlined below, you'll be able to transform the breadth of material into a coherent, exam ready knowledge base.

Understanding the AQA Psychology A2 Curriculum

The AQA Psychology A2 syllabus is divided into four main strands, each offering a distinct lens through which to examine human behaviour. Familiarising yourself with these strands is the first step toward effective revision:

- Biological Psychology – Focuses on how biological processes such as brain structure, neurotransmitters, and hormones influence behaviour.
- Cognitive Psychology – Explores mental processes like memory, perception, decision making, and language.
- Social Psychology – Investigates how the presence, actions, or attitudes of others shape individual thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- Developmental Psychology – Covers the psychological changes that occur across the lifespan, from infancy to old age.

Each strand contains a set of learning outcomes that are assessed through a mixture of short answer, essay, and data interpretation questions. Knowing the exact learning outcomes for each strand allows you to target your revision and avoid covering irrelevant material.

Key Themes and Topics to Master

Below is a detailed breakdown of the core concepts you must understand for each strand. Use this list as a checklist when creating your revision notes.

- Biological Psychology\n \n Brain structure and function: cortex, limbic system, basal ganglia, cerebellum, brain stem.
- Neurotransmitters and hormones: dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, cortisol, adrenaline.
- Neuroplasticity, learning, and memory mechanisms.
- Psychopathology: anxiety disorders, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder.
- Research methods: experimental design, ethical considerations, double blind studies.

- Information processing model: encoding, storage, retrieval.
- Memory types: short term, long term, working memory, chunking.
- Perception: Gestalt principles, depth cues, perceptual set.
- Decision making: heuristics, biases, prospect theory.
- Problem solving and creativity: insight, algorithmic vs. heuristic approaches.
- Language development and processing.

- Attraction, love, and relationships.
- Group dynamics: conformity, obedience, groupthink, diffusion of responsibility.
- Attitudes and persuasion: Elaboration Likelihood Model, cognitive dissonance.
- Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.
- Social influence: compliance, compliance tactics, social facilitation.

- Attachment theory: secure, anxious, avoidant, disorganized.
- Cognitive development: Piaget, Vygotsky, information processing models.
- Emotional development: emotional regulation, theory of mind.
- Identity formation: Erikson's stages, self concept, self esteem.
- Life span changes: adolescence, adulthood, ageing.

Effective Revision Strategies for AQA Psychology A2

Divide the syllabus into manageable chunks—one strand per week if you have eight weeks. This prevents overload and allows you to focus on depth rather than breadth.

Use flashcards (physical or apps like Anki) to test yourself on key terms, theories, and researchers. Schedule reviews at increasing intervals to cement long term memory.

Explaining a theory out loud forces you to organise your thoughts and uncover weak points. If you can teach it, you understand it.

After reviewing a strand, immediately answer a related past paper question. This helps you apply theory to practice and train your exam technique.

Visualising relationships between theories and evidence can clarify complex interactions, especially within the biological strand where mechanisms interlink.

Work in focused intervals (e.g., 45 minutes of study followed by a 10 minute break). This maximises concentration and reduces fatigue.

Understand the AQA marking rubric: knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Tailor your answers to hit each criterion.

Exam Format and Question Types

The AQA Psychology A2 exam is a single paper, 2 hours 15 minutes, comprising a mix of question types that test a range of skills. Familiarise yourself with each type to avoid surprises on exam day.

Worth 8–10 marks. You must demonstrate depth, critical analysis, and a structured argument. Use the introduction–body–conclusion format, and include relevant research evidence.

These questions present a graph, table, or experimental design. You must interpret results, discuss implications, and sometimes critique methodology. Practice reading data quickly and accurately.

These require you to weigh the strengths and weaknesses of a theory or study, often using the "pros and cons" format. Show balanced judgement and reference specific evidence.

Apply a theory or concept to a real world scenario. Demonstrate how the theory explains the situation, citing empirical support.

Past Paper Practice and Marking Schemes

Past papers are the gold standard for revision. They reveal the exam board's style, the depth of knowledge expected, and the distribution of marks. Follow these steps to maximise their effectiveness:

Set a timer, sit in a quiet space, and answer the questions without any external aids. This builds stamina and helps you manage time during the actual exam.

After each paper, compare your answers to the official marking scheme. Identify where you lost marks—was it lack of depth, missing evidence, or weak structure?

Use the insights from your self mark to adjust your study focus. If you consistently lose marks on evaluation questions, spend extra time practising critical analysis.

Exchange papers with classmates and provide constructive feedback. Fresh eyes often spot errors or gaps you might have missed.

Sample Revision Plan (8 Week Schedule)

Below is a sample timetable that balances content coverage with exam practice. Adjust the schedule to fit your personal commitments.

1. Week 1: Biological Psychology\n \n Monday–Wednesday: Brain structure & function.
2. Thursday–Friday: Neurotransmitters & hormones.
3. Saturday: Past paper SAQs on biological strand.

- Monday–Wednesday: Memory & perception.
- Thursday–Friday: Decision making & problem solving.
- Saturday: Past paper essay on cognitive theory.

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