
introduction

Recommended reading: 'Psychology and You',
Introduction and Chapter 12

'We're all Psychologists?'

Introduction

A very warm welcome to all students of our Adult Psychology programme!

With this Lesson you are beginning the exciting journey of exploring your own feelings, personality and abilities. In today's rapidly changing world we need information about ourselves more than ever. 'Adult Psychology' aims to provide you with an exciting introduction to the science of the mind.

This programme has been compiled by experts in the various fields of psychology with the aim of giving you a unique insight into this rapidly expanding field of study. As you complete each Lesson of the programme your knowledge of psychology will increase. As you go on it will become clear to you that psychology is a wide field of study with many applications and sub-areas.

The writers are also practising professional psychologists so they bring a practical approach to the topic. The material you will be working through consists of the most modern scientific findings in the wide field of psychology. No technical competence is assumed and the Key Words at the end of each Lesson underlie the main points made in the Lesson.

Through enrolling in this course of study you can be assured of a qualification in psychology which will stand comparison with the highest standards in the field.

The relationship with your instructors is crucial here. Instructors will be only too happy to clarify points for you. That is their role.

It only remains to wish you success in this programme. Enjoy your studies in psychology.

▲ objectives of the programme

Adult Psychology represents an exciting innovation in bringing relevant psychological research to your needs. Psychology is an organized body of scientific literature. However, it is also a very practical subject. Here are some common situations in which psychological explanations are often sought:

- My child won't sleep at night. Why?
- I think my personality is a problem for me. Can I change it?
- My aunt won't leave her house since she was mugged. What causes this?
- My son has trouble with his letters in school. How can I help him?
- Sometimes I feel I could scream at work. Is this stress?

The list of such possible situations is endless. However, the main point here is that psychology, and the psychologist, is concerned with the internal reactions of people. Because of the private nature of this material people are often very wary of 'shrinks' or mind readers. In fact, good psychology collaborates with individuals in helping them to a better quality of life. Increasingly, psychology is being used in society to improve life for everybody.

Some recent examples of psychology being used for beneficial purposes are:

- In counselling victims after air disasters or earthquakes.
- In providing better systems of rehabilitation for offenders.
- In counselling victims of sexual abuse.
- In designing better air traffic-control for airports.

Adult Psychology has some specific aims for students. You might like to refer to the Course Objectives at the end of the Lesson. Here are some of the skills you should have achieved at the end of the Programme:

- Know what psychology has to offer you and your family.
- Understand how psychological research influences our society.
- Be able to put psychological explanations on other people's actions.
- Be able to discuss psychology with reasonable confidence.
- Be able to distinguish good psychology from pop psychology.
- Be able to apply psychological principles to your own problems in life.

Programme objectives will re-state these in terms of what you hope personally to gain from the course.

▲ beginning psychology

In fact, we all began psychology as soon as we were born. Many studies have shown that newborn infants are pre-programmed to make sense of their surroundings from the very beginning. At more subtle levels, this process continues throughout our whole lives.

Everyone is a psychologist. Everyone has models of other people stored in the brain. We all have our theories as to why people do what they do. The difference between so-called professional psychology and common-sense approaches to people's motives, etc. is that, if they are good, practising psychologists bring a degree of objectivity, expertise and sensitivity to each situation. In addition, most trained psychologists undergo many years of study and research before starting to apply their skills in the real world.

But what is this word psychology about? Your reading will provide you with certain definitions. Look at them now [Chapter 1]. We can list the really important aspects which any good definition of psychology should make clear, i.e.:

- Private
- Meaningful
- Subjective
- Emotions
- Prediction

etc.

Traditionally, students were proffered something like:

Definition

‘Psychology is the Science of Behaviour’

or

‘Psychology is the scientific study of mental life’

Such definitions, while useful in their way, say little about what actually concerns us. Consequently, I would like to offer you my definition, based on many years of study and clinical work with people.

What Is Psychology Concerned With?

- Psychology is concerned with the private experiences of people;
- With how they construct their meanings in life;
- With their understanding of other people and their knowledge of themselves;
- People are primary — all psychological explanations are human constructions.

In a word:

- Psychology is the scientific discussion of human experience.

To benefit from this programme of study you must have an open mind. Try not to have preconceptions about the subject. Public perceptions of what psychologists do are usually very wide off the mark.

You can be assured that your idea of psychology and what psychologists do will be very different at the end of this programme of study!



Self-Assessment Exercise 1

— *Not to be submitted*

Your Friends' Knowledge of Psychology

Aim:

To see how different people view psychology.

Simply ask a sample of your friends/family two questions:

1. What does the word psychology mean to you?
2. What do psychologists do?

Now compare the responses you get with the definitions of psychology given.

NOTE:

Does anyone make the point that psychology can be applied to ordinary life, e.g. designing a car instrument panel for ease of recognition or designing pill containers so that patients remember to take them?