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UPSC PSYCHOLOGY SYLLABUS

2026



Complete Syllabus

Detailed Syllabus as per
UPSC Guidelines



Detailed Topics

Unit-wise Breakdown of
All Topics



Exam Pattern

Marks & Structure
(Compulsory & Optional)



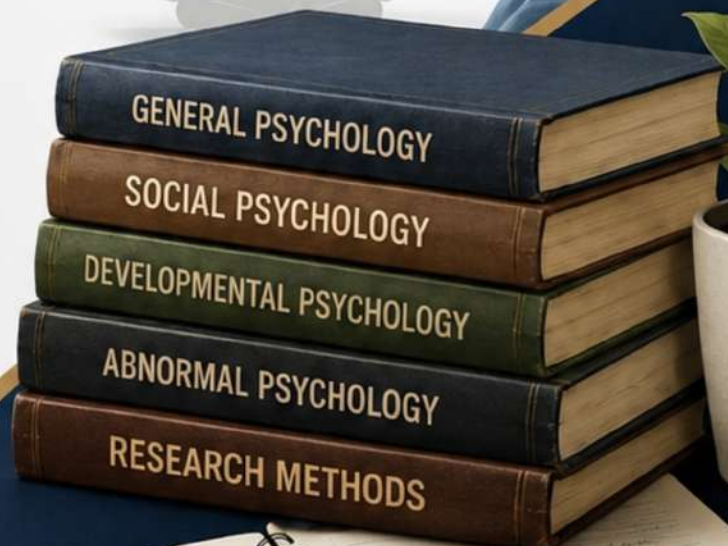
Preparation Tips

Strategy, Resources &
Recommended Books



UPSC 2026 Focus

Important Topics &
PYQ Insights



UPSC Psychology Optional Syllabus

Paper - I

Foundations of Psychology

1. **Introduction:** Definition of Psychology; Historical antecedents of Psychology and trends in the 21st century; Psychology and scientific methods; Psychology in relation to other social sciences and natural sciences; Application of Psychology to societal problems.
2. **Methods of Psychology:** Types of research: Descriptive, evaluative, diagnostic and prognostic; Methods of Research: Survey, observation, case-study and experiments; Characteristics of experimental design and non-experimental designs; quasi-experimental designs; Focused group discussions, brain storming, grounded theory approach.
3. **Research methods:** Major steps in psychological research (problem statement, hypothesis formulation, research design, sampling, tools of data collection, analysis and interpretation and report writing); Fundamental versus applied research; Methods of data collection (interview, observation, questionnaire and case study). Research Designs (Ex-post facto and experimental). Application of statistical techniques (t-test, two-way ANOVA, correlation and regression and factor analysis) item response theory.
4. **Development of Human Behaviour:** Growth and development; Principles of development, Role of genetic and environmental factors in determining human behaviour; Influence of cultural factors in socialization; Life span development — Characteristics, development tasks, promoting psychological well-being across major stages of the life span.
5. **Sensation, Attention and Perception:** Sensation: concepts of threshold, absolute and difference thresholds, signal-detection and vigilance; Factors influencing attention including set. and characteristics of stimulus; Definition and concept of perception, biological factors in perception; Perceptual organization-influence of past experiences, perceptual defense-factor influencing space and depth perception, size estimation and perceptual readiness; The plasticity of perception; Extrasensory perception; Culture and perception, Subliminal perception.
6. **Learning:** Concepts and theories of learning (Behaviourists, Gestaltist and Information processing models). The processes of extinction, discrimination and generalization. Programmed learning, probability learning, self-instructional learning, concepts, types and the schedules of reinforcement, escape, avoidance and punishment, modelling and social learning.

7. **Memory:** Encoding and remembering; Short-term memory, Long-term memory, Sensory memory, Iconic memory, Echoic memory: The Multistore model, levels of processing; Organization and Mnemonic techniques to improve memory; Theories of forgetting: decay, interference and retrieval failure: Metamemory; Amnesia: Anterograde and retrograde.
8. **Thinking and Problem Solving:** Piaget's theory of cognitive development; Concept formation processes; Information processing, Reasoning and problem solving, Facilitating and hindering factors in problem solving, Methods of problem solving: Creative thinking and fostering creativity; Factors influencing decision making and judgement; Recent trends.
9. **Motivation and Emotion:** Psychological and physiological basis of motivation and emotion; Measurement of motivation and emotion; Effects of motivation and emotion on behaviour; Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation; Factors influencing intrinsic motivation; Emotional competence and the related issues.
10. **Intelligence and Aptitude:** Concept of intelligence and aptitude, Nature and theories of intelligence-Spearman, Thurstone, Guilford Vernon, Sternberg and J.P. Das; Emotional Intelligence, Social intelligence, measurement of intelligence and aptitudes, concept of IQ deviation IQ, constancy of IQ; Measurement of multiple intelligence; Fluid intelligence and crystallized intelligence.
11. **Personality:** Definition and concept of personality; Theories of personality (psychoanalytical, socio-cultural, interpersonal, developmental, humanistic, behaviouristic, trait and type approaches); Measurement of personality (projective tests, pencil-paper test); The Indian approach to personality; Training for personality development; Latest approaches like big 5 factor theory; The notion of self in different traditions.
12. **Attitudes, Values and Interests:** Definitions of attitudes, values and interests; Components of attitudes; Formation and maintenance of attitudes. Measurement of attitudes, values and interests. Theories of attitude changes, strategies for fostering values. Formation of stereotypes and prejudices; Changing other's behaviour, Theories of attribution; Recent trends.
13. **Language and Communication:** Human language—Properties, structure and linguistic hierarchy, Language acquisition—predisposition, critical period hypothesis; Theories of Language development—Skinner and Chomsky; Process and types of communication—effective communication training.

14. **Issues and Perspectives in Modern Contemporary Psychology:** Computer application in the psychological laboratory and psychological testing; Artificial intelligence; Psych cybernetics; Study of consciousness sleep-wake schedules; dreams, stimulus deprivation, meditation, hypnotic/drug induced states; Extrasensory perception; Intersensory perception; Simulation studies.

Paper – II

Psychology: Issues and applications:

1. **Psychological Measurement of Individual Differences:** The nature of individual differences. Characteristics and construction of standardized psychological tests. Types of psychological tests. Use, misuse and limitation of psychological tests. Ethical issues in the use of psychological tests.
2. **Psychological well-being and Mental Disorders:** Concept of health-ill health positive health, wellbeing causal factors in Mental disorders (Anxiety disorders, mood disorders; schizophrenia and delusional disorders; personality disorders, substance abuse disorders). Factors influencing positive health, wellbeing; lifestyle and quality of life; Happiness disposition.
3. **Therapeutic Approaches:** Psychodynamic therapies. Behaviour therapies. Client centered therapy. Cognitive therapies. Indigenous therapies (Yoga, Meditation). Biofeedback therapy. Prevention and rehabilitation of the mentally ill; Fostering mental health.
4. **Work Psychology and Organisational Behaviour:** Personnel selection and training. Use of Psychological tests in the industry. Training and human resource development. Theories of work motivation. Herzberg, Maslow, Adam Equity theory, Porter and Lawler, Vroom; Leadership and participatory management; Advertising and marketing; Stress and its management; Ergonomics; consumer psychology; Managerial effectiveness; Transformational leadership; Sensitivity training; Power and politics in organizations.
5. **Application of Psychology to Educational Field:** Psychological principles underlying effective teaching-learning process. Learning styles. Gifted, retarded, learning disabled and their training. Training for improving memory and better academic achievement. Personality development and value education. Educational, vocational guidance and Career counselling. Use of Psychological tests in educational institutions; Effective strategies in guidance programmes.

6. **Community Psychology:** Definition and concept of Community Psychology. Use of small groups in social action. Arousing Community consciousness and action for handling social problems. Group decision making and leadership for social change. Effective strategies for social change.
7. **Rehabilitation Psychology:** Primary, secondary and tertiary prevention programmes—role of psychologists. Organising of services for rehabilitation of physically, mentally and socially challenged persons including old persons. Rehabilitation of persons suffering from substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, criminal behaviours. Rehabilitation of victims of violence. Rehabilitation of HIV/AIDS victims, the role of social agencies.
8. **Application of Psychology to disadvantaged groups:** The concepts of disadvantaged, deprivation social, physical, cultural and economic consequences of disadvantaged and deprived groups. Educating and motivating the disadvantaged towards development; Relative and prolonged deprivation.
9. **Psychological problem of social integration:** The concept of social integration. The problem of caste, class, religion and language conflicts and prejudice. Nature and manifestation of prejudice between the ingroup and outgroup. Casual factors of such conflicts and prejudices. Psychological strategies for handling the conflicts and prejudices. Measures to achieve social integration.
10. **Application of Psychology in Information Technology and Mass Media:** The present scenario of information technology and the mass media boom and the role of psychologists. Selection and training of Psychology professionals to work in the field of IT and mass media. Distance learning through IT and mass media. Entrepreneurship through e-commerce. Multilevel marketing. Impact of TV and fostering value through IT and mass media. Psychological consequences of recent developments in Information Technology.
11. **Psychology and Economic development:** Achievement motivation and economic development. Characteristics of entrepreneurial behaviour. Motivating and Training people for entrepreneurship and economic development; Consumer rights and consumer awareness, Government policies for promotion of entrepreneurship among youth including women entrepreneurs.
12. **Application of Psychology to environment and related fields:** Environmental Psychology effects of noise, pollution and crowding. Population Psychology: Psychological consequence of population explosion and high population density. Motivating for small family norms. Impact of rapid scientific and technological growth on degradation of environment.

a) **Application of psychology in other fields:**

- a. Military Psychology: Devising psychological tests for defence personnel for use in selection, Training, counseling; training psychologists to work, with defence personnel in promoting positive health; Human engineering in defence.
- b. Sports Psychology: Psychological interventions in improving performance of athletes and sports. Persons participating in Individual and Team Games.
- c. Media influences on pro and anti-social behaviour.
- d. Psychology of Terrorism.

13. **Psychology of Gender:** Issues of discrimination, Management of diversity; Glass ceiling effect, Self-fulfilling prophesy, Women and Indian society.