

1 Introduction

How this Book Works

Psychology is a broad and diverse subject. On your degree course you will find that you have to master material that ranges from the hard science that comprises contemporary psychobiology to the more interpretative skills required in some areas of social and cultural psychology. You will be trained to use a range of research methods: experiments, interviews, questionnaires and the rest. Alongside this you will need to know how to manipulate and interpret the data that these methods generate. You will find that you will need to write in a variety of different formats: essays and practical reports primarily, but you might also have to produce posters, leaflets and bibliographies. This diversity is challenging.

This book is designed to help you to meet these challenges by introducing you to a range of study skills and providing you with ways to practice those skills.

This book is structured around three basic themes: *Organisation*, *Communication* and *Reflection* (OCR). We aim to provide you with advice and guidance on how you can develop the skills you need to be organised in order to communicate your ideas effectively and to understand what others are trying to communicate to you. As you will see, an important part of the development of these skills is continual reflection on what you have achieved with the aim of improved future performance. You will get more out of every facet of your course if you can develop these skills. For example, you will attend a large number of lectures during your time at university, as they are major vehicles for the delivery of the knowledge you need to become a psychologist. We will show you in Chapter 5 how to make the most of lectures. But in essence it comes down to this. A lecture is where a psychology tutor will *communicate* with you. You need to be *organised* to get the most out of a lecture, and in this context this means you have to be *prepared*. After the lecture you should *reflect* on what you have learned so that you put that knowledge to good use in other teaching situations and, of course, in your essays and examinations. In our experience, students who struggle in their studies do so because they are inadequately organised, are

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unreflective, and so fail to get the most out of what lecturers are trying to communicate to them. These students do less well than they are able as they fail to communicate their ideas to lecturers, which results in frustration in class and low marks in assessments.

Personal Development Planning (PDP)

PDP is a process that all students at university are now required to participate in. The objective is to provide students with a framework through which they can understand what and how they learn, and to enable them to plan, review and take responsibility for their own learning, performance and achievements. Throughout your course, therefore, you will be asked to reflect on the skills you are developing that will help you with your career once you leave, whether or not this is in the area of professional psychology. It is expected that this will help you when applying for jobs or further courses of study.

You will be required to develop and maintain a personal development record (PDR) that should include:

- **A personal record of your learning and achievement (provided by the university).**
- **A skills checklist and personal plan completed by you at the beginning of the course and updated regularly so that you can monitor progress throughout the course.**
- **Reflective self-evaluation of your personal input to each semester's units.**

As PDP is a new initiative it is impossible to say now how it is likely to be introduced on your degree course. However, it should become clear as you read through this book that the skills that you learn, especially those based around the OCR themes, are exactly what you require to get the most out of the PDP process.

How to Use this Book

We encourage you to read this book straight through when you first buy it, so you get a basic idea of what it contains and the skills you need to acquire in order to succeed on your psychology degree. But skills are acquired over time with practice, not all at once, so you should expect to turn to this book time and time again. The book should accompany you throughout your degree course, as it is a resource that you can use whenever you need help. For example, when you have to write a coursework essay, it should be part of your preparation to re-read the section of this book that deals with essay writing, and do again the exercises we suggest. You might then reflect on the extent to which you followed our advice in previous essays, and how you might do so more

thoroughly this time around. We want to stress right at the beginning, however, that we are providing advice and guidance on how to study, not rigid rules that can be thoughtlessly applied. The major message of this book is that you need to take control of your studies if you are to succeed. You can begin to do this if you use this book as an aid to develop for yourself the method of study that works for you.

We have tried to break the text up with various kinds of boxes that should help you to identify the learning content of each chapter. The Learning outcomes placed in a box at the beginning of each chapter highlight what you should have learned by its end. We provide examples and illustrations to provide concrete exemplification of the major study skills that the chapter is discussing. Exercises and learning aids are there to enable you to practice important skills. It is important that you complete the exercises and use the learning aids as you will not get full benefit from this book unless you use it actively to develop your skills.

What You will Find in this Book

In Chapter 2 we provide a very brief overview of the nature of a psychology degree. We also give you advice about what you need to sort out in the first few weeks and what to do when things go wrong. In the Chapter 3 we talk about 'Managing Yourself and Others'. You might think that's unusual for a study skills book, but it's actually the most important skill for success in a psychology degree. Whilst intelligence is required for success on a psychology degree, good organisation is essential to get the most out of the intelligence you possess. It is essential that you take control of your learning and this chapter will help you to do that.

In Chapter 4 we outline how you go about 'Doing Psychology'. We begin by explaining the scientific method, which sounds a bit intimidating but actually just explains what we are trying to do as psychologists when we examine behaviour and cognition. We also look at how research can help us to increase our knowledge and understanding of psychology. In particular, we focus on the key things you need to understand – and be able to report – about statistics.

In Chapter 5 we focus on 'Teaching Situations' such as lectures, seminars and tutorials, and discuss how you can get the most out of each of these by appropriate preparation and follow-up. In the following chapter we provide a brief overview of the various 'Assessments' that you will have during your degree and outline various ways in which you can improve your marks. In Chapter 7 we discuss 'Using Resources Effectively' and highlight how you can use the Internet and other electronic resources as well as books and journal papers.

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In Chapter 8 we help you with ‘The Psychology Project’ or dissertation. In particular, we help you to come up with a good project idea. ‘Good’ means that your idea should be feasible for an undergraduate project, i.e., that you can complete it in the time allocated, that you have access to the appropriate resources (including participants) and that it is ethically sound. In the final chapter, ‘Future Directions’, we outline the various career paths available to psychologists. It is important to read this chapter as soon as possible, since to be able to follow your preferred career path in psychology it is very useful to have done relevant work experience or to have chosen particular units of study. Finally, there is an Index so you can find information about particular tasks or ideas more easily.

Note on Referencing

As this is a study skills book and not a scholarly monograph or a journal article, we have not provided reference lists at the end of chapters or at the end of the book. We thought it would be more helpful to the reader to include the full reference of any study we refer to within the text itself.

Final Introductory Words

Psychology is great fun. People are complex and it is fascinating to try to figure out why and how they do what they do. It is a shame, therefore, when students struggle and don’t enjoy their study. Reading this book will give you the skills to enjoy your time studying for and succeeding in your psychology degree.