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# Why choose Cambridge International?

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**Important: Changes to this syllabus**

**For information about changes to this syllabus for 2024, 2025 and 2026, go to page 60.**



## Key concepts

## International recognition and acceptance

Our expertise in curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment is the basis for the recognition of our programmes and qualifications around the world. Every year thousands of students with Cambridge International AS & A Levels gain places at leading universities worldwide. Our programmes and qualifications are valued by top universities around the world including those in the UK, US (including Ivy League universities), Europe, Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

UK NARIC, the national agency in the UK for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills, has carried out an independent benchmarking study of Cambridge International AS & A Level and found it to be comparable to the standard of AS & A Level in the UK. This means students can be confident that their Cambridge International AS & A Level qualifications are accepted as equivalent, grade for grade, to UK AS & A Levels by leading universities worldwide.

Cambridge International AS Level Psychology makes up the first half of the Cambridge International A Level course in psychology and provides a foundation for the study of psychology at Cambridge International A Level. The AS Level can also be delivered as a standalone qualification. Depending on local university entrance requirements, students may be able to use it to progress directly to university.



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## 2 Syllabus overview

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### Aims

The aims describe the purposes of a course based on this syllabus.

The aims are to enable students to develop:

- knowledge and understanding of psychological concepts, theories and research findings
- an understanding of psychological approaches, issues and debates and research methodology
- an awareness of the scientific method and range and limitations of psychological theory and practice
- improved skills in data analysis, evaluation and drawing conclusions
- an awareness of the relationships between psychological findings and everyday life
- an understanding of ethical issues in psychology
- an appreciation and understanding of individual, social and cultural diversity.

Cambridge Assessment International Education is an education organisation and politically



## Content overview

Cambridge International AS & A Level Psychology provides candidates with opportunities to consider the approaches, issues and debates and research methodology that underpin all aspects of psychology.

At AS Level candidates study four psychological approaches:

- Biological
- Cognitive
- Learning
- Social



There are three routes for Cambridge International AS & A Level Psychology:

Route	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Paper 4	
<b>1 AS Level only</b> (Candidates take all AS components in the same exam series)	yes	yes	no	no	
<b>2 A Level</b> (staged over two years) Year 1 AS Level*	yes	yes	no	noS 6772	yes





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## 3 Subject content

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This syllabus gives you the flexibility to design a course that will interest, challenge and engage your learners. Where appropriate you are responsible for selecting topics, subject contexts, resources and examples to support your learners' study. These should be appropriate for the learners' age, cultural background and learning context as well as complying with your school policies and local legal requirements.

Candidates for Cambridge International AS Level should study the AS Level content for Papers 1 and 2. Candidates for Cambridge International A Level should study the AS Level content and **two** of the specialist not

## AS Level issues and debates

At AS Level, the issues and debates that candidates will need to consider in relation to each of the core studies, where appropriate, are:

- the application of psychology to everyday life
- individual and situational explanations
- nature versus nurture
- the use of children in psychological research
- the use of animals in psychological research.

### 3.1.1 The core studies

The 12 compulsory core studies are listed below under the four approaches.

The requirements are the same for each of the four approaches at AS Level.

For each of the core studies, candidates should show understanding of:

- the **psychology** that is being investigated
- the **background** to the study
- the **aim(s)** of the study
- the **procedure** of the study, including all methodology as appropriate, such as the research methods used,

## Biological approach

Main assumptions of the biological approach:

- Behaviour, cognitions and emotions can be explained in terms of the working of the brain and the effect of hormones, genetics and evolution.
- Similarities and differences between people can be understood in terms of biological factors and their interaction with other factors.

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### Dement and Kleitman (sleep and dreams)

Dement, W and Kleitman, N (1957), The relation of eye movements during sleep to dream activity: An objective method for the study of dreaming. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 53(5): 339–46

The study by Dement and Kleitman investigated the relationship between rapid eye movements (REM) and dreaming. It included EEGs, REM and Non-REM sleep, used experimental and correlational methods and an interview technique.

The psychology being investigated includes: sleep; dreaming; ultradian rhythms.

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### Hassett et al. (monkey toy preferences)

Hassett, J M, Siebert, E R and Wallen, K (2008), Sex differences in rhesus monkey toy preferences parallel those of children. *Hormones and Behaviour*, 54(3): 359–64

The study by Hassett et al. was an experiment investigating sex differences for toy preferences in monkeys, whose behaviour is assumed to be more biologically controlled than that of children. Interactions with stereotypical boys' toys and girls' toys were observed and coded using a behavioural checklist. Human participants were not included in this study. To compare monkey toy preferences to those of children, data from another study was used.







## Social approach

Main assumptions of the social approach:

- Behaviour, cognitions and emotions are influenced by social contexts, social environments and groups.
- Behaviour, cognitions and emotions are influenced by the actual, implied or imagined presence of others.

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### Milgram (obedience)

Milgram, S (1963), Behavioral Study of Obedience. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67(4): 371–78

The study by Milgram investigated the conflict between obedience to authority and personal conscience and how far a person would go in obeying an instruction if it meant harming another person. This includes considering dispositional and situational hypotheses. A laboratory setting was used to measure obedience,

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**Types of data**

Candidates should be able to:

- describe what is meant by quantitative and qualitative data and subjective and objective data
- evaluate the use of types of data as collected in psychological research
- apply knowledge of types of data to a novel research situation.

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**Sampling of participants**

Candidates should be able to:

- describe what is meant by the sample and population, and the sampling techniques of opportunity sampling, random sampling and volunteer (self-selecting) sampling
- evaluate different sampling techniques as used in psychological research, including generalisations
- apply knowledge of sampling techniques to a novel research situation.

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**Ethics**

Candidates should be able to:

- describe ethical guidelines as used in psychological research, in relation to human participants:
    - minimising harm (and maximising benefit)
    - valid consent including informed consent
    - right to withdraw
    - lack of deception
    - confidentiality
    - privacy
    - debriefing
  - describe ethical guidelines as used in psychological research, in relation to animals:
    - minimising harm (and maximising benefit)
    - replacement
    - species
    - numbers
    - procedures
      - pain, suffering and distress
      - housing
      - reward, deprivation and aversive stimuli
  - evaluate studies based on ethical guidelines
  - apply knowledge of ethical guidelines to a novel research situation.
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### **Validity**

Candidates should be able to:

- describe validity, including ecological validity
- evaluate studies based on their validity:
  - subjectivity/objectivity
  - demand characteristics
  - generalisability
- apply knowledge of validity to a novel research situation.

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### **Reliability and replicability**

Candidates should be able to:

- describe different types of reliability, including inter-rater and inter-observer reliability, test-retest reliability
- evaluate studies based on their reliability
- apply knowledge of reliability to a given novel research situation
- understand replicability
- apply understanding of replicability to the planning of studies.

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### **Data analysis**

Candidates should be able to:

- present data based on (y)TJ0 Tc 0 i ( t)2610 (i)0.5 (s)7.1 ( b)4.ti-6.9 (n)TJ/Spa/ActualTextFEFF0009-BDC -1.241 -1.58
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## 3.2 A Level Content

The content of the AS Level course, including research methodology, is assumed knowledge for the assessment of Paper 3 and Paper 4. The core studies will not be the direct focus of questions on Paper 3 and Paper 4 but candidates will be expected to build upon their knowledge of approaches, issues and debates and psychological research methodology during their study of the A Level specialist options. The specialist options introduced at A Level explore how psychology can be applied in a range of contexts.

Candidates study how psychology is applied in **two** of the following areas:

- Clinical Psychology
- Consumer Psychology
- Health Psychology
- Organisational Psychology

### A Level issues and debates

At A Level, the issues and debates that candidates will need to consider in relation to each of the specialist options, as appropriate, are:

- the application of psychology to everyday life
- individual and situational explanations
- nature versus nurture
- the use of children in psychological research
- cultural differences
- reductionism versus holism
- determinism versus free-will
- idiographic versus nomothetic.

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Methodological concepts which are relevant to **all** of the A Level specialist options.

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### **Psychometric tests**

Candidates should be able to:

- describe and evaluate psychometric tests.
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### **Hypotheses**

Candidates should be able to:

- write and apply knowledge of null hypotheses and alternative directional (one-tailed) and non-directional (two-tailed) hypotheses.
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### **Validity**

Candidates should be able to:

- describe and evaluate studies based on their validity, including temporal validity.
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## Use of studies

Psychology is an applied subject and teachers are encouraged to illustrate the theory and application of the concepts, theories, evidence and research through the use of studies where appropriate.

There are **key studies** associated with each topic. We have listed the specific aspects of key studies that a candidate will be expected to know and understand. These aspects are listed at the start of each specialist option. It is not necessary for candidates to read the original study but you must provide them with a detailed summary of the key study which must cover all the aspects listed.

To aid teaching and ensure candidates can see how psychological research relates to the subject content we have provided some examples of studies which might be useful to you in your teaching. Where we say, 'including a study, e.g.', candidates will not be asked questions which require a specific knowledge of these studies, however candidates should use an example in their responses. Where an example is provided, it does not necessarily cover all the relevant content and you may provide a different example if you know of one which sufficiently covers the subject content using appropriate research methodology.

A full reference to all the key studies and example studies can be found in the *Reference List for 9990 AS & A Level Psychology*, available on the website.



For each of the key studies, candidates should show knowledge and understanding of:

- the **context** of the study and relationship to other studies
- the **main theories/explanations** included in the study
- the **aim(s)** and **hypotheses** of the study [if stated]
- the **design** of the study, including all methodology as appropriate, such as the research method(s) used, sample size and demographics [if known] and sampling technique [if known], procedure, technique for data collection
- the **results, findings and conclusions** of the study
- the **limitations** of the study

### 1.1.3 Treatment and management of schizophrenia

- biological treatments:
  - biochemical including typical and atypical antipsychotics
  - electro-convulsive therapy





## **1.5 Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)**

### **1.5.1 Diagnostic criteria for obsessive-compulsive disorder**

## Specialist Option 2: Consumer Psychology

Consumer Psychology is the study of human behaviour in relation to the retail environment. For this option candidates look at different areas of consumer environments (shops, restaurants and online) and consider how psychology can affect consumer patterns and decision-making. Candidates will also explore the reaction and preferences of consumers to the packaging of products, the marketing of products and the advertising of products. Candidates should have the opportunity to explore the different issues and debates relevant to the





## 2.2 The psychological environment

### 2.2.1 Environmental influences on consumers

- wayfinding in shopping malls; factors affecting wayfinding such as signs and you are here maps, including a study, e.g. Dogu and Erkip (2000).
- shopper behaviour focusing on spatial movement patterns including types of trip (short, round, central and wave) and the five types of spatial behaviour patterns (specialist, native, tourist, explorer, raider); the use of CCTV tracking, including a study, e.g. Gil et al. (2009).

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: reductionism versus holism, idiographic



## 2.4 The product

### 2.4.1 Packaging and positioning of a product

- gift-wrapping including beliefs of giver and recipient: why gifts are wrapped, types of wrapping.
- food package design (exemplified by the following key study).

**Key study** on food package design and taste perceptions: Becker et al. (2011).

- attention and shelf position including planograms, central gaze cascade effect, use of eye-tracking, including a study, e.g. Atalay et al. (2012).

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: reductionism versus holism, determinism versus free-will, generalisations from findings, objective and subjective data, validity.

### 2.4.2 Selling the product

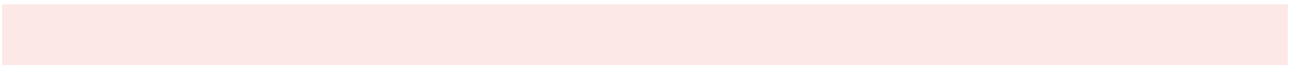
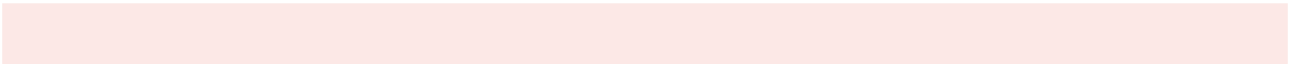
- sales techniques focusing on customer-focused, competitor-focused, product-focused techniques including effect of each on buyer–seller relationship.
- interpersonal influence techniques; focusing on disrupt-then-reframe including the need for cognitive closure and factors affecting the need for cognitive closure, including a study, e.g. Kardes et al. (2007).
- Cialdini's six ways to close a sale.

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: application to everyday life, cultural differences, determinism versus free-will, idiographic versus nomothetic, field experiments.

### 2.4.3 Buying the product

- the Engel Kollat Blackwell model of buyer decision-ir d velut ar 1.9 (i)frd 78Tj/T1b(r 1)3.7 (l)-6. (n d)-5.5 (i)-3.9 (s)-7.9 (r)-1

## 2.5 Advertising





For each key study candidates should be able to:

- describe and evaluate research methods used in and methodological concepts included in the study (for AS and A Level)
- describe and evaluate the psychological issues and debates (for AS and A Level) included in the study.

### **3.1 The patient–practitioner relationship**

#### **3.1.1 Practitioner and patient interpersonal skills** 18.2 (h17.00mm)TjEMunT (r24 (t)a)4 (l)-61(e)-13 (b)bbr27.3 (c10)-10.

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## **3.2 Adherence to medical advice**

### **3.2.1 Types of non-adherence and reasons why patients do not adhere**

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### 3.3 Pain

#### 3.3.1 Types and theories of pain

- functions of pain; types of pain: acute and chronic pain. Focus on phantom limb pain and mirror treatment to include a case study, e.g. MacLachlan et al. (2004).
- theories of pain: specificity theory, gate control theory.

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: individual and situational explanations, nature versus nurture, reductionism versus holism, determinism versus free-will, case study.

#### 3.3.2 Measuring pain

- subjective measures including clinical interview.
- psychometric measures and visual rating scales:
  - McGill pain questionnaire
  - visual analogue scale (exemplified by the following key study).

**Key Study** on comparing pain assessments by doctors, parents and children: Brudvik et al. (2016).

- behavioural/observational measures: UAB pain behaviour scale.

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: idiographic versus nomothetic, quantitative and qualitative data, interviews, observations, psychometrics, generalisations from findings.

#### 3.3.3 Managing and controlling pain

- biological treatment: biochemical.
- psychological treatments: cognitive strategies (attention diversion, non-pain imagery and cognitive redefinition).
- alternative treatments: acupuncture; stimulation therapy/TENS.

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: application to everyday life, cultural differences, reductionism versus holism, determinism versus free-will, idiographic versus nomothetic, objective and subjective data.

## 3.4 Stress

### 3.4.1 Sources of stress

- physiology of stress: the GAS Model and effects of stress on health.
- causes of stress: Holmes and Rahe's life events, work including a study, e.g. Chandola et al. (2008) and Friedman and Rosenman's Type A personality.

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: individual and situational explanations, reductionism versus holism, determinism versus free-will, idiographic versus nomothetic, generalisations from findings.

### 3.4.2 Measures of stress

- biological measures:

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### 3.5.2 Health promotion in schools and worksites

- schools with a focus on healthy eating, including a study, e.g. Tapper et al. (2003).
- worksites with a focus on health and safety, including a study, e.g. Fox et al. (1987).

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: use of children in research, experiments, longitudinal studies, quantitative and qualitative data, generalisations from findings.

### 3.5.3 Individual factors in changing health beliefs

- unrealistic optimism: reason for disregarding positive health advice, including a study, e.g. Weinstein (1980).
- positive psychology: defining positive psychology. Three focuses: pleasant life, good life, meaningful life, including a study, e.g. Seligman (2004).
- application of positive psychology (exemplified by the following key study).

**Key study** on using positive psychology in schools to improve mental health: Shoshani and Steinmetz (2014).

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: individual and situational explanations, cultural differences, idiographic versus nomothetic, psychometrics, generalisations from findings.

## Specialist Option 4: Organisational Psychology

Organisational psychology is the study of behaviours within the workplace. Candidates will need to consider how social, physical and psychological environments affect individual and group behaviour in the workplace. For this option, candidates will look at aspects of job role, satisfaction, motivation, safety and leadership. Candidates should have the opportunity to explore

For each key study candidates should be able to:

- describe and evaluate research methods used in and methodological concepts included in the study (for AS and A Level)
- describe and evaluate the psychological issues and debates (for AS and A Level) included in the study.

## **4.1 Motivation to work**

### **4.1.1 Need theories**

- Maslow's hierarchy of needs including five needs, including a study, e.g. Saeednia (2011).
- McClelland's theory of achievement motivation including need for achievement, affiliation and power.

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: application to everyday life, individual

## 4.2 Leadership and management

### 4.2.1 Traditional and modern theories of leadership

- universalist theories including great person, charismatic, and transformational leaders.
- behavioural theories including Ohio University and Michigan University behavioural explanations.
- Heifetz’s six principles in meeting adaptive challenges; responsibilities of an adaptive leader.

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: application to everyday life, individual and situational explanations, nature versus nurture, reductionism versus holism, generalisations from findings.

### 4.2.2 Leadership style

- Muczyk and Reimann’s four styles of leader behaviour.
- Scouller’s levels of leadership including public, private and personal levels
- Leadership style and gender (exemplified by the following key study).

**Key study** on leadership style and gender: Cuadrado et al. (2008)

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: application to everyday life, individual and situational explanation

### 4.2.3 Lead and follow leadership

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#### 4.4.3 Health and safety

- accidents at work focusing on human errors (errors of omission, commission, sequencing and timing) and system errors in operator–machine systems (machine controls and displays).
- reducing accidents at work: token economy, including a study, e.g. Fox et al. (1987).
- monitoring accidents (exemplified by the following key study).

**Key study** on the monitoring of accidents and risk events: Swat (1997).

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: individual and situational explanations, idiographic versus nomothetic, longitudinal studies, objective and subjective data, generalisations from findings.

### 4.5 Satisfaction at work

#### 4.5.1 Theories of job satisfaction

- theories of job satisfaction: Herzberg's two factor theory including hygiene and motivational factors.
- Hackman and Oldham's job characteristics theory including job characteristics and psychological states.
- techniques of job design: enrichment, rotation and enlargement, e.g. Belias and Sklikas, (2013).

Relevant issues and debates and methodology for this topic include: application to everyday life, cultural differences, reductionism versus holism, idiographic versus nomothetic, generalisations from findings.

#### 4.5.2 Measuring job-satisfaction

- job satisfaction rating scales and questionnaires focusing on the job descriptive index (JDI).
- Walton's quality of working life (QWL) including eight conditions and QWL evaluation scale.

Relevant issues and debates

Relevant issues and debates





## Planning studies for Paper 2

Candidates should be able to:

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- plan studies to include **general features**:
- procedure of the study
  - how the plan makes the study valid
  - how the plan makes the study reliable
  - types of data
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## Paper 3 – Specialist Options: Approaches, Issues and Debates

Written paper, 1 hour 30 minutes, 60 marks

This paper contains four specialist options. Candidates answer questions from the two options they have studied.

Candidates answer **all** the questions from these two specialist options.

There are four questions for each specialist option. Each specialist option will consist of:

- Short answer questions. There will be three questions consisting of structured short answer questions worth a total of 14 marks.
- Structured essay question, divided into two parts. There are 6 marks for the part (a) 'describe' question and 10 marks for the part (b) 'evaluate' question. The question will be based on a different topic area from those tested in the short answer questions.

Questions will require candidates to consider the subject content of the specialist options and approaches, issues and debates. The questions will be based on three topics or sub-topics within the studied specialist options. The topic areas for each specialist option will be different to the topic areas assessed in Paper 4.

## Paper 4 – Specialist Options: Application and Research Methods

Written paper, 1 hour 30 minutes, 60 marks

This paper contains two sections.

Section A – candidates answer questions on the two specialist options they have studied.

There will be two structured questions on each of the specialist options, and candidates will answer all parts of the questions from the two specialist options they have studied.

Questions will require candidates to consider the subject content and Key Studies of the specialist options, research methods and methodological concepts. The questions are based on two topics or sub-topics within the studied specialist options. The topic areas for each specialist option will be different to the topic areas assessed in Paper 3.

Section B – candidates answer one planning question from a choice of four (one for each specialist option). In the planning question candidates must plan a study (10 marks) and answer structured questions to evaluate the plan (14 marks).

For the planning question, candidates will apply their knowledge of research methods and practical issues





## Command words

Command words and their meanings help candidates know what is expected from them in the exam. The table below includes command words used in the assessment for this syllabus. The use of the command word will relate to the subject context.

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## 5 What else you need to know

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This section is an overview of other information you need to know about this syllabus. It will help to share the administrative information with your exams officer so they know when you will need their support. Find more information about our administrative processes at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide)

### Before you start

#### Previous study

We do not expect learners starting this course to have previously studied Psychology.

#### Guided learning hours

We design Cambridge International AS & A Level syllabuses based on learners having about 180 guided learning hours for each Cambridge International AS Level and about 360 guided learning hours for a Cambridge International A Level. The number of hours a learner needs to achieve the qualification may vary according to local practice and their previous experience of the subject.

#### Availability and timetables

All Cambridge schools are allocated to one of six administrative zones. Each zone has a specific timetable.

You can view the timetable for your administrative zone at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/timetables](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/timetables)

You can enter candidates in the June and November exam series. If your school is in India, you can also enter your candidates in the March exam series.

Check you are using the syllabus for the year the candidate is taking the exam.

Private candidates can enter for this syllabus. For more information, please refer to the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries*.

#### Combining with other syllabuses

Candidates can take this syllabus alongside other Cambridge International syllabuses in a single exam series. The only exceptions are:

- syllabuses with the same title at the same level.

#### Group awards: Cambridge AICE

Cambridge AICE (Advanced International Certificate of Education) is a group award for Cambridge International AS & A Level. It allows schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum by recognising the achievements of learners who pass exams in a range of different subjects.

Learn more about Cambridge AICE at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/aice](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/aice)







## After the exam

Grading and reporting



## Changes to this syllabus for 2024, 2025 and 2026

The syllabus has been reviewed and revised for first examination in 2024.

**You must read the whole syllabus before planning your teaching programme.**

### Changes to syllabus content

The syllabus content has been reviewed and revised.

The assessment objectives have been updated and the weighting in each paper has been adjusted slightly.

In AS Level, we have replaced five of the core studies with new studies which support the issues and debates and research methodology content more effectively.

The new studies are:

- Biological – Hassett et al. (monkey toy preferences) and Hölzel et al. (mindfulness and brain scans)
- Cognitive – Pozzulo et al. (line-ups)
- Learning – Fagen et al. (elephant learning)
- Social – Perry et al. (personal space).

In the research methodology section we have reviewed the content for clarity.

The main changes are:

- removal of natural experiments
- addition of longitudinal studies
- revision of the ethics in animal studies to reflect the new core studies
- reorganisation of data analysis.

In A Level, we have changed the titles of the specialist options and reviewed all the content.

We have reviewed the issues and debates. The changes are:

- longitudinal studies and psychometrics have moved into research methodology
- use of animals has been removed from A Level, as this is not relevant to A Level studies
- idiographic versus nomothetic has been added.

We have added a small amount of new research methodology to supplement the content from AS Level which is required for the A Level content.

We have taken a new approach to the use of studies. Overall we have reduced the number of studies which need to be taught, and have clarified what candidates need to know.

There are now five key studies in each specialist option. These must be taught and **we will assess** knowledge of these key studies.

In addition, there are a number of example studies throughout the content of the specialist options to help teachers illustrate the topic and research methodology appropriate to the topic. Example studies will **not** be assessed directly, however candidates should use an example in their responses.

We have also added a section at the end of each sub-topic of relevant issues and debates and methodology to help teachers focus their teaching on the most relevant aspects for each sub-topic.



**School feedback:**