

Experimental Psychology



LENGTH OF COURSE

4 years (MSci is EP), 3 years (BA)

MINIMUM A-LEVEL GRADE REQUIREMENTS

A*AA

A-LEVELS REQUIRED

One or more science subjects (including psychology) or Maths at A-level is recommended, though not compulsory.

ADMISSIONS TEST

Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA);
Part 1: multiple choice questions on verbal and non-verbal reasoning
Part 2: essay question (not marked, but can be read by tutors)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Experimental Psychology is a scientific discipline, involving the formation and testing of ideas, and analysis of previous experiments and theories. Students will examine the science of mental life, delving into the biological processes throughout the brain and body, and looking at how the environment and individual differences can influence those processes and who we are as people.

STRUCTURE OF MODULES

1st year - 1st & 2nd terms:

Introduction to Psychology, Introduction to Neurophysiology and Introduction to Probability and Statistics. Prelim examinations.

1st year - 3rd term & 2nd year - 1st & 2nd terms:

6 core practicals (2 teach term). Perception, Cognition, Behavioural Neuroscience, Developmental Science, Social Psychology, Individual Differences and Clinical Psychology, and Experimental Design and Methods.

2nd year - 3rd term & 3rd year:

Choose either 3 advanced options, or 2 advanced options and a dissertation. Lab-based 'block' practicals and a research project.

APPROXIMATE NO. OF CONTACT HOURS PER WEEK

Tutorials: 2-3 hours, **Lectures:** 8 hours, **Labs:** 2 hours

WHY PSYCHOLOGY AT OXFORD?

At Oxford, the course is very scientific, so it is complimented by A-levels in biology and chemistry very well. This means that you can continue learning about the human body and biological processes. I also considered studying medicine but found that I enjoyed the theoretical side of some elements of EP, which left more room to debate, form your own opinions and consider new theories and ideas, more so than straight biology or medicine. Many people are surprised by how scientific the degree is. You learn a lot of biology and a lot of the course overlaps with biomedicine and medicine. There are also some elements of physics in the Perception module (but don't worry about this, it's not too much and most EP students haven't studied physics beyond GCSE).

TUTORIAL TESTIMONIAL

In tutorials you will go over content that has been covered in lectures. Often, you will be given a few articles to read prior to the tutorial, and you will then be asked questions about it during the tutorial, looking at the hypothesis, methods, findings, limitations of the study, etc. You may also have tutorial which focus on your essays and the content covered in those. The tutorials vary between tutors. You will generally have between 2 and 3 tutorial each week.

LABS TESTIMONIAL

In your second year you will have core practicals. In these you will have one two-hour long session each week, where you will participate in a study and then conduct data analysis on the findings.

PERSONAL STATEMENT TIPS

- Mention one or two books but not too many as you'll never end up reading them.
- Rather than saying "I read xxx", say, "From reading xxx I learned that ___", and discuss that a little. It's important to show your knowledge of psychology and ability to think analytically, so pick out a few topics / concepts you enjoy and discuss them a little.
- Remember to also keep it personal though, talking about why what you're discussing interests you – it's not an essay!

INTERVIEW TIPS

- Prior to your interview you will likely be given an article to read for half an hour. In your interview you will be asked lots of questions on this.
- Before your interview, practise reading articles and talking about the aims, experimental design, limitations of the studies etc.
- Also practise interpreting graphs. This is what you'll likely be asked to do in your interview.
- In the interview, always say what you're thinking. They're testing how you think not what you know, so be sure to always vocalise your thought process, and don't worry about being incorrect. E.g., if you don't know the answer to a question, say "I'm not quite sure, but ___" and express whatever it is

TSA TIPS

- Practice well in advance (test is typically late Oct, if not very early Nov, so start in summer holidays after year 12).
- Try TSA specimen test first, then go through "first tier" supplementary resources (e.g. "Think you can Think?" book, and 1-2 other TSA books), then "second tier" resources like relevant BMAT and GMAT questions and of course, the actual TSA past papers (don't use them all up too early).
- Don't just mindlessly complete and mark papers, then move onto the next one. Create a spreadsheet with your marks from everything (all tiers of resources), and see which questions you got right/wrong, and write a list of things you need to improve on.
- Practice in exam conditions.
- Prepare for section 1 more than the essay section as it's more important.

STUDYING

As mentioned previously, you will have 2-3 tutorial a week. Each of these will have some work associated with it. In your Prelims you will have 2 essays and a problem sheet a week. The problem sheet will be based off of the one 'Intro to Stats and Probability' module lecture you have had that week. These usually take about a day to complete. Each essay will be based on the content from the following weeks lectures. You will have to do reading from textbooks and relevant articles to formulate an answer to the question. The day the essay is due is more busy than others. In second year, you will generally have 12 tutorials each term, half of which require an essay. The other 6 will require some other work like presentation of an article, or another, lighter task set by your tutor. Alongside these deadlines you will have 2 core practical which each count for ~1.5% of your final grade. These will either be shorter assignments or lab reports. The days in the build up to the lab report deadlines are generally the busiest of term.

CAREER PROSPECTS

Careers in psychology can be pursued following post-graduate studies. This can lead you into clinical psychology, etc. A psychology degree can be applied to many corporate careers in consultancy, human resources, business, marketing, etc. You can also go into education, research, medicine, finance, commerce industry, the media and information technology.

RECOMMENDED READING/VIEWING

- Keizer, K., Lindenberg, S., Steg, L. (2010). **The Spreading of Disorder**. Science, 322(5908), 1681-1685 <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/322/5908/1681/tab-pdf>. This is a good article to read in preparation for interviews to familiarise yourself with the format of articles.
- **'The Invisible Gorilla'** by Chabris & Simons. This is an interesting read. Not too complex but is a nice introduction to cognition and also contains a fun study that's very easy to read about, and often used as an example for failures of cognition.
- Pinker, S. (1995). **The Language Instinct: The New Science of Language and Mind**. Another interesting read. It looks slightly more at linguistics and the formation of language, which is something that is covered a lot in PPL (Linguistics specifically), but is also relevant to your second year study of Cognition.
- Sacks, O. (2011). **The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat**. This is a classic psychology book. The title references a patient with visual agnosia, a neurological condition that left him unable to recognise faces and objects.
- **The Psychologist** (magazine). A monthly publication of The British Psychological Society has back issues freely available on its archive at <http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk>. Also see the **BPS Research Digest** at <http://bps-research-digest.blogspot.co.uk/>
- Hewstone M., Fincham F. and Foster J. (2005). **Psychology**. This textbook is a nice introduction to Social Psychology for if you want to have a read around certain concepts.