

CHAPTER 1

What is Psychology?

CBSE Class 11 · Psychology · Chapter 1

CBSE · Psychology · Class 11

WHAT THIS CHAPTER DOES

A

State the full scientific definition of psychology and explain its three pillars.

B

Explain why psychology is a **SCIENCE** and how it differs from common sense.

Boards prep that builds confidence, not anxiety.

TODAY'S MISSION

Today's mission

1

State the full scientific definition of psychology and explain its three pillars.

2

Explain why psychology is a SCIENCE and how it differs from common sense.

3

Trace the evolution of psychology from philosophy to the cognitive revolution.

4

Name the major branches of psychology and score 7/8 on this chapter.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Why this chapter matters

- 1 It is the foundation chapter — every term you meet later (cognition, behaviour, experience) is defined HERE.
- 2 Worth 6-8 marks of the annual paper, mostly easy pure-recall marks.
- 3 It changes how you see yourself and others — turning everyday curiosity about people into a disciplined, evidence-based science.

TOPIC

A

Fundamentals — what IS psychology?

TOPIC

The definition - the three pillars

MENTAL PROCESSES

Mental processes are the internal, covert activities of the mind: thinking, remembering, perceiving, reasoning, attending, problem-solving and using language. They cannot be seen directly, so a psychologist infers them from observable behaviour and from a person's own report — for example, we cannot

EXPERIENCE

Experience is the subjective, personal and internal dimension of psychology — the feelings, dreams, awareness and conscious states that belong to one individual and cannot be fully shared with anyone else. Your experience of pain, joy or a dream is private; no instrument reads it directly, which is

BEHAVIOUR

Behaviour is the response of an organism to its environment, and crucially it comes in two forms. OVERT behaviour is observable — walking, speaking, frowning, writing an exam. COVERT behaviour is internal and not directly visible — thinking, a racing heartbeat, a private feeling. The single most

THE KEY WORD: SCIENCE

The word that lifts the definition from folk wisdom to a discipline is SCIENCE. Psychology gathers data systematically through controlled observation, experiments, surveys and tests; it forms testable hypotheses; and it discards claims that the evidence refutes. It borrows methods from

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

The formal definition of psychology

“ Psychology is the **SCIENCE** that studies mental processes, experiences and behaviour in different contexts, using methods drawn from both the biological and the social sciences to gather and analyse data systematically.

STATEMENT

Three pillars — (1) mental processes (thinking, memory, perception), (2) experience (subjective inner states), (3) behaviour (overt + covert responses) — studied through systematic, evidence-based,

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Holding all three pillars together is what separates psychology from philosophy (which speculated about the mind) and from common sense (which guesses about behaviour)
- Each pillar opens a different window on the same human being.

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Never define psychology as merely 'the study of the mind' or 'the study of behaviour' alone. Drop a pillar and the definition is incomplete; drop the word 'science' and you have described folk psychology, not the discipline.

TOPIC

B

Psychology as a science — folk vs scientific

TOPIC

Why psychology is a science, not common sense

FOLK PSYCHOLOGY

Folk (or common-sense) psychology is the informal set of beliefs people hold about behaviour, picked up from proverbs, elders and personal experience. Its fatal weakness is that it is unsystematic and self-contradictory: common sense says both 'opposites attract' AND 'birds of a feather flock

SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Scientific psychology replaces guessing with a disciplined cycle: it states a clear, testable HYPOTHESIS, gathers DATA through controlled observation, experiments, surveys or tests, ANALYSES that data objectively, and then accepts, rejects or revises the hypothesis according to the

OBJECTIVITY & EVIDENCE

A science demands that conclusions rest on EVIDENCE rather than on opinion or authority. Psychologists therefore use operational definitions (defining a vague idea like 'anxiety' by something measurable, such as a questionnaire score), control groups, and statistical analysis to rule

WHY IT STILL FEELS PERSONAL

Psychology is a science whose subject matter is US, which creates a special challenge: we all have intuitions about behaviour, so the findings can feel 'obvious' once stated (the hindsight bias). But many common-sense beliefs collapse under testing — for example, the belief that

TOPIC

C

Understanding mind and behaviour

TOPIC

Mind, brain and the S-O-R model

MIND IS NOT THE BRAIN

The brain is a physical organ of about 1.4 kilograms; the MIND refers to the mental processes and experiences that arise from brain activity but are not identical to the lump of tissue. We can point to the brain on a scan, but we cannot point to a thought — we infer it. Psychology

OVERT AND COVERT BEHAVIOUR

Behaviour, the most public pillar, splits into OVERT behaviour (directly observable actions such as talking, running, smiling) and COVERT behaviour (internal responses such as thinking, imagining, an increased heart rate, or a private emotion). Both are legitimate subject

THE S-O-R MODEL

Behaviour is best understood through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. A STIMULUS is any change in the environment that the organism can detect (a loud sound, a question, a smell). The ORGANISM processes that stimulus through its mental processes, past

CONTEXT MATTERS

The definition says behaviour is studied 'in different CONTEXTS', and this is deliberate. The same person behaves differently at home, in school, with friends, or in a crowd, because behaviour is shaped by the physical, social and cultural setting. A student silent in class may be talkative at a

TOPIC

D

The evolution of psychology

WORKED EXAMPLE

1879 — Wundt opens the first psychology lab

- 1 Before 1879, questions about the mind belonged to PHILOSOPHY — thinkers speculated about mind and soul but did not test their ideas.
- 2 In 1879, Wilhelm WUNDT founded the FIRST psychology laboratory at the University of LEIPZIG, Germany.
- 3 By insisting on controlled, experimental study, Wundt SEPARATED psychology from philosophy and made it a science.
- 4 This is why Wundt is called the 'father of modern (experimental) psychology'. Remember: WUNDT, 1879, LEIPZIG — three facts, three potential marks.

TOPIC

Structuralism, Functionalism, Gestalt

STRUCTURALISM

Structuralism, founded by Wilhelm Wundt and carried forward by his student Edward Titchener, was the **FIRST** school of psychology. Its goal was to break **CONSCIOUSNESS** down into its most basic elements — sensations, images and feelings — much as a

FUNCTIONALISM

Functionalism arose as a reaction **AGAINST** structuralism and is associated above all with the American William James. Instead of asking 'what is consciousness made of?', functionalists asked 'what is consciousness **FOR?**' — they studied the **FUNCTION** or

GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

Gestalt psychology, which emerged in Germany, is captured by its famous slogan: 'the **WHOLE** is more than the sum of its parts.' Gestalt psychologists argued that we perceive objects and patterns as organised wholes, not as a collection of separate sensations — when

TOPIC

Behaviourism, Psychoanalysis, Humanistic

BEHAVIOURISM

Behaviourism, led by John B. Watson and later B. F. Skinner, made a radical move: it **REJECTED** the study of the mind and consciousness altogether as unscientific, because they cannot be directly observed. It argued that psychology should study only **OBSERVABLE** behaviour

PSYCHOANALYSIS

Psychoanalysis was founded by the Viennese physician Sigmund Freud, and it points psychology in the opposite direction from behaviourism — **INWARD**, to the hidden **UNCONSCIOUS**. Freud argued that much of our behaviour is driven by unconscious desires.

HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

Humanistic psychology arose in the mid-20th century as a '**THIRD FORCE**', reacting against **BOTH** behaviourism (too mechanical) and psychoanalysis (too pessimistic). Its leaders, Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, emphasised **FREE WILL**, personal growth.

TRY IT · SOLVE BEFORE YOU PEEK

Match the leader to the school: (a) Wundt (b) William James (c) Watson & Skinner (d) Freud (e) Rogers & Maslow.

SOLUTION

ANSWER (a) Wundt = Structuralism (and the first lab, 1879); (b) William James = Functionalism; (c) Watson & Skinner = Behaviourism; (d) Freud = Psychoanalysis; (e) Rogers & Maslow = Humanistic psychology.

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

The cognitive revolution

From the 1950s-60s onward, the **COGNITIVE REVOLUTION** brought the **MIND** back into scientific psychology, making mental processes — attention, perception, memory, language and thinking — central objects of study once again.

STATEMENT

After behaviourism had pushed the mind out of psychology, advances in linguistics, neuroscience and especially **COMPUTER SCIENCE** (treating the mind as an information-processing

WHY THIS MATTERS

- It reunited the scientific rigour that behaviourism prized with the rich inner mental life that behaviourism had ignored — giving us today's dominant cognitive approach.

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Do not call the cognitive revolution a 'person' or a single school led by one founder. It was a broad **SHIFT** across the discipline, fed by computer science and linguistics, not a club with one leader.

TOPIC

E

Branches of psychology

TOPIC

The core sub-fields you must know

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Cognitive psychology studies the higher **MENTAL PROCESSES** — attention, perception, memory, thinking, problem-solving, language and decision-making — often using the metaphor of the mind as an information-processing system. When a question describes someone forgetting

BIOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Biological psychology (also called physiological or biopsychology) examines how the **BODY** — the nervous system, the brain, hormones and genes — influences behaviour and mental processes. It asks how brain damage changes personality, how neurotransmitters affect mood, or how genes

DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Developmental psychology studies the physical, cognitive, social and emotional **CHANGES** that occur across the entire **LIFE-SPAN** — from conception and infancy through childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. It asks how children acquire language, how thinking

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social psychology studies how **INDIVIDUALS** think, feel and behave in **SOCIAL** situations — how we are influenced by the real or imagined presence of others. Its topics include attitudes, prejudice, conformity, obedience, group behaviour, persuasion and interpersonal attraction. When a case

TOPIC

Applied and professional branches

CLINICAL & COUNSELLING

Clinical psychology deals with the assessment, diagnosis and **TREATMENT** of psychological disorders and serious mental-health problems, using therapy and psychological testing. Counselling psychology, its close cousin, focuses more on the everyday **ADJUSTMENT** problems

INDUSTRIAL-ORGANISATIONAL

Industrial-Organisational (I/O) psychology applies psychological principles to the **WORKPLACE**. It studies employee selection and training, motivation, job satisfaction, leadership, productivity, and the design of work environments to make them more efficient and

EDUCATIONAL & HEALTH

Educational psychology studies how people **LEARN** and how teaching can be made more effective — covering motivation, learning difficulties, classroom dynamics and assessment. Health psychology examines how psychological factors (stress, lifestyle, beliefs) affect physical

OTHER SPECIALISED BRANCHES

Psychology has many further sub-fields, and CBSE expects awareness of the range. Sports psychology improves athletes' performance and motivation; environmental psychology studies the effect of physical surroundings (noise, crowding, design) on

TOPIC

F

Psychology, other disciplines, and everyday life

TOPIC

How psychology links to other disciplines

PHILOSOPHY & MEDICINE

Psychology was BORN from PHILOSOPHY: questions about mind, soul, knowledge and free will were philosophical for over two thousand years before Wundt made them experimental in 1879. Philosophy still shapes psychology's deepest questions about consciousness and the self. With MEDICINE, the

ECONOMICS & LAW

With ECONOMICS, psychology meets in the study of how people actually make DECISIONS — behavioural economics shows that real choices about money, risk and saving are shaped by emotion and bias, not by pure logic, overturning the older 'rational agent' assumption. With LAW, forensic and legal

COMPUTER SCIENCE & AI

The link with COMPUTER SCIENCE is one of the most important in modern psychology. The computer gave cognitive psychology its central metaphor — the mind as an information-processing system that takes input, stores and transforms it, and produces output. The traffic runs both ways:

SOCIOLOGY, EDUCATION, MORE

Psychology also borders SOCIOLOGY (which studies groups and societies as wholes, where social psychology studies the individual within them), ANTHROPOLOGY (cultural influences on behaviour), and EDUCATION (how learning and teaching

TOPIC

Psychology in daily life and as a career

PSYCHOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Psychology is not confined to clinics and laboratories; it is woven through daily life. It helps us manage stress and emotions, study and remember more effectively, communicate and resolve conflicts, understand prejudice, raise children, and make better decisions about

BECOMING A PSYCHOLOGIST

Becoming a psychologist is a journey of structured training. After Class 12, the typical path is a Bachelor's degree in psychology, then a Master's, and for many roles a further M.Phil or PhD plus supervised practical experience. Different careers need different specialisations

SKILLS A PSYCHOLOGIST NEEDS

Beyond degrees, a good psychologist needs particular SKILLS: careful observation, sharp analytical and reasoning ability, empathy and good communication to understand and help people, ethical sensitivity, and comfort with research methods and statistics for evidence-

ETHICS AND RESPONSIBILITY

Because psychologists work with people's minds, behaviour and personal information, the profession is bound by strong ETHICAL responsibilities: protecting confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, avoiding harm, and using findings for human welfare rather

TOPIC

What psychologists do

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Psychology is the study of the mind, so psychologists can read minds and tell what you are secretly thinking.

✓ **CORRECT** Psychology is the SCIENTIFIC study of mental processes and behaviour — it relies on systematic observation, measurement and data, not on telepathy. No psychologist can 'read' a private thought; they infer mental processes from observable behaviour and self-report, just as a physicist infers electrons from their effects.

TOPIC

Psychologist vs psychiatrist

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** A psychologist and a psychiatrist are the same thing.

✓ **CORRECT** A psychiatrist holds a medical degree (MBBS + MD Psychiatry), can prescribe medicines, and treats mental illness medically. A psychologist holds a degree in psychology (BA/MA/PhD), uses therapy, counselling, testing and research, and (in most settings) does NOT prescribe drugs. Both may treat the same client but with different tools.

TOPIC

Psychology as a science

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Psychology is just common sense / folk wisdom dressed up in big words.
- ✓ **CORRECT** Common sense (folk psychology) is unsystematic, often contradictory ('opposites attract' AND 'birds of a feather flock together'), and untested. Scientific psychology states testable hypotheses, gathers evidence through controlled methods, and discards claims that the data refute. The same proverb cannot be 'proven' both ways in science.

TOPIC

Scope of behaviour

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Behaviour means only the actions we can physically see, like walking or talking.

✓ **CORRECT** Behaviour in psychology includes BOTH overt (observable — running, speaking) and covert (internal — thinking, dreaming, feeling, heartbeat) responses. Mental processes like memory and reasoning are covert behaviours studied indirectly. Limiting 'behaviour' to visible action is the most common Class 11 definitional error.

TOPIC

Father of psychology

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Sigmund Freud founded psychology / is the father of psychology.

✓ **CORRECT** Wilhelm Wundt — not Freud — is regarded as the father of MODERN/experimental psychology, because he set up the FIRST psychology laboratory at the University of Leipzig in 1879, formally separating psychology from philosophy. Freud founded PSYCHOANALYSIS, one school within psychology, decades later. Mixing the two costs a full mark.

TOPIC

Schools of thought

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Behaviourism studies the unconscious mind and dreams.

✓ **CORRECT** Behaviourism (Watson, Skinner) DELIBERATELY rejected the study of the mind/ consciousness and focused ONLY on observable stimulus-response behaviour. It is PSYCHOANALYSIS (Freud) that studies the unconscious, dreams and free association. Students routinely swap these two — anchor: 'Behaviourism = behaviour you can SEE; Psychoanalysis = the hidden, unconscious'.

TOPIC

Branches of psychology

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Clinical psychology and counselling psychology are exactly the same branch.

✓ **CORRECT** They overlap but differ in focus: clinical psychology deals more with the diagnosis and treatment of serious psychological disorders, whereas counselling psychology focuses on everyday adjustment problems, personal and career issues of relatively well-functioning people. CBSE expects you to know they are distinct sub-fields.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

3-4 mark question: 'Define psychology' / 'Explain psychology as the scientific study of

- 1 STATE THE FORMAL DEFINITION VERBATIM**
1 m
Open with the textbook definition: 'Psychology is the science that studies mental processes, experiences and behaviour in different contexts, using methods drawn from both the biological and the social sciences to gather and analyse data systematically.' Quoting the definition cleanly earns the anchor mark.
- 2 UNPACK THE THREE PILLARS**
2 m
Explain each term: (i) MENTAL PROCESSES — internal activities like thinking, remembering, perceiving, reasoning; (ii) EXPERIENCE — subjective, personal, internal events such as feelings, dreams, awareness; (iii) BEHAVIOUR — the responses of an organism, BOTH overt (observable: walking, talking) and covert (internal: heartbeat, thoughts). Give one example each — the examples convert recall into understanding marks.
- 3 STRESS THE WORD SCIENCE**
1 m
Close by underlining that the key word is SCIENCE: the study is systematic, objective, evidence-based and uses controlled methods — distinguishing it from common-sense or folk psychology. This sentence is what lifts a 'definition' answer to full marks.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-mark question: 'Trace the evolution of psychology as a discipline' / 'Describe the major

1 PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS + THE 1879 MILESTONE

1 m

Begin with origin: psychology grew out of philosophy (questions about mind and soul go back to the Greeks). The decisive break came in 1879 when Wilhelm Wundt set up the FIRST psychology laboratory at the University of Leipzig, Germany — separating psychology from philosophy and making it an experimental science. State the year and place explicitly; both carry marks.

2 NAME AND CONTRAST THE SCHOOLS

3 m

March through the schools in order, one line each: STRUCTURALISM (Wundt/Titchener — analyse consciousness into its basic elements via introspection); FUNCTIONALISM (William James — study the FUNCTION/purpose of mental processes in adaptation); GESTALT (the whole is more than the sum of its parts — perception); BEHAVIOURISM (Watson, Skinner — study only observable stimulus-response behaviour, reject the mind); PSYCHOANALYSIS (Freud — the unconscious, dreams, free association); HUMANISTIC (Rogers, Maslow — free will, growth, self-actualisation, the 'third force').

3 END WITH THE COGNITIVE REVOLUTION

1 m

Conclude that the mid-20th-century COGNITIVE REVOLUTION brought the mind back into scientific focus — studying attention, memory, language and thinking, aided by linguistics, neuroscience and the computer analogy. This shows the discipline's full arc and earns the closing mark.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

4-6 mark case-study: a situation is described and the student must NAME the relevant branch

1 IDENTIFY THE CORRECT BRANCH
1 m

Read the stem for the keyword. 'Memory/attention/thinking' → COGNITIVE; 'brain/hormones/nervous system' → BIOLOGICAL; 'child growth/ageing/life-span' → DEVELOPMENTAL; 'group/attitudes/conformity' → SOCIAL; 'disorder/therapy/treatment' → CLINICAL; 'workplace/employee/productivity' → INDUSTRIAL-ORGANISATIONAL. Name the branch first and clearly.

2 DEFINE THE BRANCH + JUSTIFY WITH THE STEM
2 m

Give the one-line definition of that branch, then quote the cue from the passage: 'Because the passage describes Riya forgetting where she kept her keys, this is a problem of MEMORY, which is the subject matter of COGNITIVE psychology.' Tying the definition back to the evidence is where the application marks live.

3 ADD ONE REAL-WORLD APPLICATION
1 m

Finish with a use: 'A cognitive psychologist could design memory-training strategies or study why forgetting occurs.' Showing the branch's practical value secures the final mark and demonstrates higher-order understanding.

PYQ PATTERNS

Top PYQ patterns to drill

#1	Define psychology. Explain it as the scientific study of mental processes, experiences and behaviour. (3-4 marks)	Almost every annual + SQP
#2	How did psychology evolve as a discipline? / Who is the father of modern psychology and what was his contribution? (Wundt, 1879, Leipzig). (3-5 marks)	Annual + Pre-Board
#3	Differentiate between any two schools of thought (structuralism, functionalism, behaviourism, Gestalt, psychoanalysis). (3 marks)	SQP + School Annual
#4	Describe any three/four branches of psychology with their focus. (4-6 marks)	Annual + Pre-Board
#5	How is psychology related to other disciplines (philosophy / medicine / economics / computer science / law)? OR a case-study on applying psychology in everyday life. (4-6 marks)	SQP case-study + Annual

RECAP · MEMORISE THESE

5-line revision

1 Definition —
Psychology = the
SCIENCE of mental
processes,
experiences and
behaviour (overt +
covert), studied
systematically.

2 History — Wundt
founded the FIRST lab
at Leipzig in 1879 ->
structuralism,
functionalism,
behaviourism, Gestalt,
psychoanalysis,
humanistic ->
cognitive revolution.

3 Branches & links —
Core branches:
cognitive, biological,
developmental, social,
clinical/counselling, I/
O. Links to
philosophy, medicine,
economics, law,
computer science.

WHAT'S NEXT

What's next

- Chapter 2 — Methods of Enquiry in Psychology (how psychologists actually gather the scientific evidence this chapter kept mentioning).
- Sit the 15-MCQ Quick Drill (companion PDF) — under 20 minutes, target $\geq 12/15$.
- Then the full annual-pattern Paper — 30 marks, 60 minutes, real CBSE Class 11 pattern.

You now know what psychology really is.

Lock in the definitions, sit the drill, and beat the chapter.

[readyforboards.com](https://www.readyforboards.com)

Helpline: +91 70330 05444

Boards prep that builds confidence, not anxiety.