

Questions & Answers about Chapter 1: What is Psychology

1. Define psychology. Explain the meaning of 'mental processes' as one of its key components.

Psychology is formally defined as a **science which studies mental processes, experiences and behaviour in different contexts**. **Mental processes** refer to the **internal activities of our minds**. These include activities like thinking, trying to solve a problem, knowing, remembering something, perceiving, and feeling. They are essentially our **states of consciousness or awareness**. While mental processes are reflected in brain activity, and can be observed using techniques like brain imaging, it is important to note that **brain activities and mental processes are interdependent but not identical**. The mind, unlike the brain, does not have a physical structure or location but emerges and evolves from our dynamic interactions and experiences.

2. Describe 'experiences' as a core component of psychology. How are they influenced by conditions?

Experiences are another fundamental aspect studied by psychologists, and they are **subjective in nature**. This means that **only the experiencing person can be aware or conscious of her or his experiences**; they cannot be directly observed by others. Experiences are **embedded in our awareness or consciousness**. Psychologists study various experiences, from pain in terminally ill patients or psychological pain in bereavement, to positive feelings in romantic encounters, and even esoteric experiences like a Yogi meditating or a drug addict getting a "high". The nature of an experience is complex, as it is **influenced by internal and the external conditions of the experiencer**. For example, discomfort in a crowded bus on a hot day might not be felt if one is excited about a picnic with friends, illustrating how a complex set of internal and external conditions shapes experience.

3. Differentiate between 'overt' and 'covert' behaviours with suitable examples.

Behaviours are defined as **responses or reactions we make or activities we engage in**. They can range from simple reflex actions, like blinking, to complex decisions, like choosing a movie. Behaviours can be categorized into two types:

- **Overt behaviours:** These are behaviours that **can be outwardly seen or sensed by an observer**. An example is running when you see a tiger, or talking to a friend.
- **Covert behaviours:** These are **internal behaviours** that are not directly observable by others. An example is feeling your heart pounding during an examination or your hand muscles twitching while trying to decide a move in a game of chess. Both overt and covert behaviours are **associated with or triggered by some stimulus** in the environment or internal changes.

4. Explain why the 'mind' was considered a taboo in psychology for many decades and how it has regained its importance.

For many decades, the 'mind' remained a **taboo in psychology because it could not be defined in concrete behavioural terms or its location could not be indicated**. It was difficult to objectively measure or observe the mind directly, which posed a challenge for psychology striving to be a scientific discipline. However, the term "mind" has **returned to psychology due to the contributions of neuroscientists like Sperry and physicists like Penrose**, who have given it the respect it deserved. Scientists now believe that a unified theory of the mind is a possibility, and while the **mind cannot**

exist without the brain, it is considered a separate entity. Documented cases of brain damage where the "mind" appeared intact (e.g., patients with removed occipital lobes still responding to visual cues, or a phantom limb sensation) have supported this distinction.

5. How has 'affective neuroscience' shown the relationship between the mind and the body? Give an example.

Previously, scientists believed there was **no relationship between the mind and the body, and that they were parallel to each other.** However, **recent studies in affective neuroscience have clearly shown that there is a relationship between mind and behaviour**, specifically demonstrating a strong mind-body connection. It has been shown that **using positive visualisation techniques and feeling positive emotions, one can bring about significant changes in bodily processes.** For example, Ornish's studies with patients having blocked arteries showed that when these individuals were made to visualize blood flowing through their blocked arteries, they **obtained significant relief after a period of practice, as the degree of blockage became significantly less.** This illustrates how mental processes can directly influence physical health.

6. Discuss how common sense explanations of human behaviour differ from scientific psychological explanations, using an example.

Common sense explanations of human behaviour often come up with ready explanations for why someone behaved in a certain manner, and people tend to develop their own theories. However, these popular theories are often based on **hindsight, explaining things after they have happened, and explain very little in terms of prediction.** For example, if a friend moves away, common sense offers contradictory sayings like "Out of sight, out of mind" and "Distance makes the heart grow fonder". Which saying is chosen depends on what happens *after* the friend leaves, demonstrating that the explanation follows the occurrence of behaviour rather than predicting it. In contrast, **psychology as a science looks for patterns of behaviour which can be predicted** before the behaviour occurs. Scientific knowledge generated by psychology often runs against common sense, providing empirical evidence that can contradict popular beliefs.

7. Describe Dweck's (1975) study and its findings, which challenged a common-sense notion about helping children who give up easily.

Dweck (1975) conducted a study to challenge the common-sense notion that to help children who give up easily, one should give them easy problems to boost their confidence. She took two groups of students who were trained for 25 days in solving math problems.

- The **first group** was given only easy problems, which they were always able to solve, leading to continuous success.
- The **second group** received a mix of easy and difficult problems. When they failed difficult problems, Dweck told them their **failure was due to lack of effort** and persuaded them to keep trying. After the training, a new set of math problems was given. Dweck found that those who had **always succeeded because they were given easy problems, gave up much faster when they faced failure** than those who had experience of both success and failure and were taught to attribute failure to their lack of effort. This directly contradicted the common belief, showing that persistence can be fostered through experience with challenges and by attributing failure to controllable factors like effort.

8. Trace the formal beginning of modern psychology, including the key figure and the approach he developed.

The formal beginning of modern psychology is traced back to 1879 when the first experimental laboratory was established in Leipzig, Germany, by Wilhelm Wundt. Wundt was interested in the study of **conscious experience** and aimed to analyze the constituents or **building blocks of the mind**. Psychologists during Wundt's time analyzed the **structure of the mind through introspection**, and were thus called **structuralists**. Introspection involved individuals describing in detail their own mental processes or experiences in psychological experiments. However, this method faced criticism because **introspective reports could not be verified by outside observers**, leading to the development of new perspectives in psychology.

9. Explain the functionalist approach in psychology. Who was its proponent, and what did it emphasize?

The **functionalist approach** to the study of the human mind was developed by American psychologist **William James**, who set up a psychological laboratory in Cambridge, Massachusetts. James believed that instead of focusing on the *structure* of the mind (as structuralists did), psychology should instead study **what the mind does and how behaviour functions in making people deal with their environment**. Functionalists focused on how specific behaviours enabled people to satisfy their needs. According to James, **consciousness as an ongoing stream of mental processes interacting with the environment** formed the core of psychology. John Dewey, an influential educational thinker, further applied functionalism, arguing that human beings seek to function effectively by adapting to their environment.

10. What was the central idea of Gestalt psychology? How did it differ from structuralism?

Gestalt psychology emerged in Germany in the early 20th century as a reaction to structuralism. Its central idea was that **when we look at the world, our perceptual experience is more than the sum of the components of the perception**. In other words, **what we experience is holistic; it is a Gestalt** (meaning "form" or "pattern"). It differed from structuralism which aimed to break down conscious experience into basic elements or "building blocks" of the mind. Gestalt psychologists argued that reducing experience to its basic parts loses the essential quality of the experience. For example, when light from a series of flashing bulbs falls on our retina, we actually experience movement of light, not just individual flashes. Similarly, a movie is experienced as continuous motion, not separate still pictures.

11. Discuss John Watson's contribution to psychology, leading to the establishment of Behaviourism.

John Watson was a key figure who brought about a significant shift in psychology around 1910. He **rejected the ideas of mind and consciousness as subject matters of psychology**. Watson was greatly influenced by the work of physiologists like Ivan Pavlov on classical conditioning. His primary objection was that the mind is not observable, and introspection, the method used to study consciousness, is subjective and cannot be verified by another observer. Watson insisted that **scientific psychology must focus only on what is observable and verifiable**. He, therefore, defined psychology as a **study of behaviour or responses (to stimuli) which can be measured and studied objectively**. This paved the way for **Behaviourism**, an approach that B.F. Skinner later significantly developed and popularized by applying it to a wide range of situations.

12. Explain the core tenets of the Humanistic Perspective in psychology. Who were its key proponents?

The **Humanistic Perspective** in psychology took a more positive view of human nature, emerging as a counterpoint to Freudian psychoanalysis and behaviourism. Key proponents of this perspective

were **Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow**. Humanists emphasized the **free will of human beings and their natural striving to grow and unfold their inner potential**. They argued that behaviourism, with its focus on behaviour being determined by environmental conditions, **undermines human freedom and dignity and takes a mechanistic view of human nature**. Instead, humanistic psychology highlights the unique human capacity for self-actualization and personal growth, focusing on the innate goodness and potential within each individual.

13. What is Cognitive Psychology, and how does it view the human mind, especially in modern constructivist thought?

Cognitive Psychology emerged by combining aspects of the Gestalt approach and structuralism, focusing on **how we know about the world**. **Cognition is defined as the process of knowing**, involving mental processes such as thinking, understanding, perceiving, memorizing, problem-solving, and decision-making. These processes enable our knowledge of the world to develop and help us interact with the environment. Some cognitive psychologists view the human mind as an **information processing system, much like a computer**, which receives, processes, transforms, stores, and retrieves information. However, modern cognitive psychology has evolved to view human beings as **actively constructing their minds through their exploration into the physical and the social world**, a perspective known as **constructivism**. Piaget's theory of child development is an example of a constructivist theory. Furthermore, Vygotsky suggested that the human mind also develops through **social and cultural processes**, viewing the mind as culturally constructed through joint interaction between adults and children.

14. Briefly describe the four phases of the development of modern psychology in India, as outlined by Durganand Sinha.

Durganand Sinha (1986) traced the history of modern psychology as a social science in India through four phases:

- 1. First phase (till Independence):** This phase was characterized by an **emphasis on experimental, psychoanalytic, and psychological testing research**, which primarily reflected the development of the discipline in Western countries.
- 2. Second phase (till the 1960s):** This was a phase of **expansion of psychology in India into different branches**. During this period, Indian psychologists desired an "**Indian identity**" by seeking to link **Western psychology to the Indian context**, using Western ideas to understand the Indian situation.
- 3. Third phase (post-1960s):** Psychology in India became more **problem-oriented**, focusing on **addressing the problems of Indian society**. There was a realization of the limitations of excessive dependence on Western psychology for the Indian social context.
- 4. Fourth phase (late 1970s onwards):** This phase is characterized by **indigenisation**, where Indian psychologists stressed the need for developing an understanding based on a **culturally and socially relevant framework**, moving away from purely Western models. Attempts were made to develop psychological approaches based on traditional Indian psychology from ancient texts.

15. Differentiate between Clinical Psychology and Counselling Psychology, and briefly explain their distinction from Psychiatry.

- **Clinical Psychology** deals with the **causes, treatment, and prevention of different types of psychological disorders** such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and chronic substance

abuse. Clinical psychologists have a degree in psychology with intensive training in treating these disorders.

- **Counselling Psychology** aims to **improve everyday functioning by helping people solve problems in daily living and cope more effectively with challenging situations**. Counselling psychologists often work with students, advising them on personal problems and career planning. While their work can overlap, counselling psychologists sometimes deal with less severe problems than clinical psychologists. **Distinction from Psychiatry:** Both clinical and counselling psychologists are distinct from **psychiatrists**. A **psychiatrist has a medical degree with years of specialized training in the treatment of psychological disorders**. The crucial distinction is that **psychiatrists can prescribe medications and give electroshock treatments, whereas clinical psychologists cannot**.

16. Explain the interdisciplinary relationship between Psychology and Medicine, providing examples of their collaboration.

Psychology and Medicine share a crucial interdisciplinary relationship, as doctors have realized that a "**healthy body requires a healthy mind**". This recognition has led to a significant increase in the employment of psychologists in hospitals. Psychologists play vital roles in medicine, such as:

- **Preventing people from engaging in health hazardous behaviours.**
- **Ensuring patients adhere to prescribed doctors' regimens.**
- **Providing psychological counselling to patients suffering from serious illnesses** like cancer, AIDS, and the physically challenged.
- **Supporting patients in Intensive Care Units and during post-operative care.** A successful doctor now considers both the **psychological as well as physical well-being** of the patients, highlighting the integrated approach between the two disciplines.

17. How does psychology interact with Computer Science? Discuss the advancements made due to this interdisciplinary approach.

Psychology and Computer Science share a significant interdisciplinary relationship, as the **effort of computer science from the very beginning has been in mimicking the human mind**. This can be seen in the design of computer structure, memory organization, and information processing (sequential and parallel). Computer scientists and engineers are not only striving to make computers more intelligent but also machines that can sense and feel. Developments in both psychology and computer science have brought about **significant advancement in the field of cognitive sciences**. For instance, areas like **human-computer interaction and artificial intelligence cannot possibly grow without psychological knowledge in cognitive processes**. The understanding of human cognitive functions directly informs the development of more advanced and human-like computing systems.

18. Discuss the relevance of psychological knowledge in the fields of Law and Criminology.

Knowledge of psychology is crucial for a skilled lawyer and a criminologist in addressing various questions critical to the legal system. These include:

- **Witness Memory:** How well a witness remembers details of an event (like an accident, street fight, or murder) and how accurately they can report these facts in court.
- **Jury Decisions:** What factors influence the decisions made by a jury.

- **Signs of Guilt/Falsehood:** Identifying dependable signs of guilt and falsehood.
- **Culpability and Punishment:** Understanding the factors considered important in holding a culprit responsible for their actions, and determining the just degree of punishment for a criminal act. Psychologists are actively involved in research on these issues, and the answers derived from their studies are intended to **help improve the legal system of the country in the future.**

19. How can the understanding of psychology be applied in Mass Communication?

Psychology plays a vital role in Mass Communication, especially given the significant influence of print and electronic media on our thinking, attitudes, and emotions.

- **Media Impact:** Psychology helps understand the **impact of media on the formation of attitudes and behaviour of children.** It sheds light on how media can shape individual and collective perspectives.
- **Effective Communication:** Psychology aids in **developing strategies for better and effective communication.**
- **Journalism:** Journalists, for instance, need to understand the **reader's interests, human motives, and emotions** to create impactful stories. Since most stories deal with human events, a story will have more impact and resonance if it is **based on a background of psychological knowledge and insight.**

20. Enlist and briefly explain four areas of everyday life where psychological knowledge is personally relevant.

The knowledge of psychology is highly **personally relevant** in our day-to-day lives, offering insights for self-understanding and growth. Four such areas include:

1. **Analysing Self and Relationships:** It helps individuals **analyse and understand themselves in relation to others.** This allows for a more balanced self-perception, helping to avoid "defensive behaviour" (rejecting feedback that contradicts self-opinion) or self-deprecating habits that hinder personal growth.
2. **Developing Good Habits:** Psychological principles can be used in a positive manner to **develop good habits of study.**
3. **Improving Learning and Memory:** The understanding of psychological principles can be applied to **improve learning and memory.**
4. **Problem-Solving and Decision-Making:** It assists in **solving personal and interpersonal problems by using appropriate decision-making strategies.** Additionally, it can be useful to **reduce or alleviate the stress of examination.** Thus, psychology is incredibly useful and rewarding from a personal perspective.