Essential tools and courses for studying psychology

December 18, 2024 • 9 minutes

Written by Dillon Price

Reviewed by Christina Neider, EdD, Dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

In this article

- Psychology courses to explore
- Effective study techniques
- Essential research tools

Imagine a career in which you're the one helping others manage stress, build resilience and face life's challenges head-on. Studying psychology prepares you with useful skills that can potentially make a difference in people's lives. Plus, it opens the door to a variety of career paths ↗ such as management, healthcare, education, community service and business.

To earn your psychology degree and develop relevant career-related skills, you'll need to complete key courses and tap into the tools discussed in this article as they can help you better learn psychology fundamentals.

Advice for students studying psychology

If you are studying psychology, you can use a variety of tools and methods to deepen your understanding of this field. Engaging in hands-on research, for example, can help you gain skills that distinguish you in grad school applications and potentially future psychology career opportunities.

Why? Because conducting research teaches you how psychology is grounded in science ↗. This helps you move beyond theories to actively explore human behavior and mental processes. Research also encourages teamwork and communication, as projects often involve collaboration with professors, peers and even graduate mentors. Some may even collaborate with employers and communities.

Additionally, research requires you to build teamwork and communication skills since you work with others to tackle complex questions. Conducting research and presenting findings helps you grow personally and professionally. All in all, research experience helps you prepare to work in dynamic environments where shared insights can drive progress.

Courses for psychology students

When you learn about psychology, you might complete courses that focus on personality theories; multicultural factors and diversity; ethics; research and statistics; abnormal psychology; learning and cognition; social psychology; biological psychology; and lifespan and human development.

These courses serve as the foundation for psychology learning. They prepare students for more focused paths such as industrial-organizational psychology programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as applied psychology/media and technology.

Multicultural psychology and diversity courses focus on cultural and systemic influences in theory, research and practice. Students explore the role of culture in psychological issues and learn to identify key cultural factors in development and practice.

Additionally, courses on personality theories cover the foundational theories that shape our understanding of human behavior. In these courses, students examine the biological and social factors that drive personality development.

Effective study techniques for psychology students

To effectively learn about psychology, students should build study habits and techniques that fit their situation. For example, concepts taught in psychology courses can come to life through real-world examples and case studies. Sometimes, the instructor facilitates this experience by including such aspects in a lecture or presentation. Other times, students may contribute through weekly activities that require them to find and incorporate research studies and journal articles. By sourcing this information themselves, students learn how evidence shapes psychology practices and supporting theories.

Group work and discussions allow students to exchange ideas and deepen their understanding in a supportive peer environment. Finally, university libraries and writing centers offer pathways to build research and writing skills too.

Strategies for effective note-taking and information retention

Note-taking can improve information retention and help you understand complex topics with clarity. Note-taking can be more involved than just writing down key points. For example, the outline method is an organized and straightforward way to take notes by creating a hierarchy of topics. The Cornell method, another option, divides pages for cues, notes and summaries.

If you're a visual learner, consider the boxing method when studying psychology. This method groups notes in boxes according to content, while the charting method is helpful for factual, structured content. Other choices are mapping, which allows you to visually connect abstract ideas, and the sentence method, which is more ideal for rapid note-taking in fast-paced lectures.

For psychology students, certain tools can help streamline note-taking. For example, Evernote® offers a flexible platform for organizing notes with tags and syncing them across devices, which makes it easy to access research insights from anywhere.

OneNote provides a digital notebook experience that lets students write, record and structure notes, making it ideal for organizing study sessions and collaborating with peers.

For managing sources, Zotero simplifies collecting and citing research articles, supporting smooth bibliography creation for papers. Similarly, Mendeley helps students organize extensive research libraries, collaborate, and generate citations easily.

Time management tips for psychology students

Managing time effectively can help you achieve goals without feeling overwhelmed. As a student, balancing academics, work and personal commitments may seem challenging, but learning solid time management skills can help make a difference.

Start by tracking your daily activities to spot time wasters. Write down each task and assess if you're using time efficiently. Once you've analyzed your habits, get your priorities in order and focus on the important tasks first.

Also, set a structured daily and weekly plan. Focus on major tasks when you're most productive. Organize your workspace to eliminate distractions, avoid multitasking and focus on one task at a time to boost productivity.

Finally, set aside time for relaxation. Taking breaks supports mental well-being and helps you recharge, so you might be able to handle your responsibilities more effectively.

Techniques for improving memory and critical thinking

Memory typically works in three stages: encoding, storing and retrieving. To better recall information, organize it logically, use associations and create visuals. Mnemonic devices such as rhymes or acronyms can help make concepts stick. Repetition, active recall with flash cards, and saying information aloud can help solidify your recall.

It's also important to develop critical thinking skills when studying psychology. Learning such skills can sharpen decision-making and problem-solving abilities. They can also help you analyze information from various perspectives. For example, analytical thinking allows you to break down data into actionable insights. You can then identify trends and cause-effect relationships.

Open-mindedness can help you view situations without bias, so you can reach more accurate conclusions. In problem-solving, critical thinking helps you define issues clearly, brainstorm solutions and choose optimal paths forward.

Additionally, reflective thinking allows you to analyze your own assumptions and outcomes, so you can continually improve your approach. Lastly, learning about psychology involves in-depth research. You'll need to know how to gather and assess reliable insights from multiple sources to ensure the validity of information.

Essential research tools for psychology students

When studying psychology, research tools can make a difference in your academic studies and, as a result, your career. Equip yourself with psychology resources such as reliable databases, analysis software and visualization tools. In the following section, you'll find resources to learn psychology in both academic and professional settings.

Importance of research tools in psychology studies

Research tools can help you assess, synthesize and apply insights across diverse areas of psychology. These tools can make it easier to connect theoretical knowledge to real-world applications. This can also help make your findings more credible.

For example, databases and data analysis software can potentially help you save time on conducting research, validate your findings with confidence, perform better academically and acquire the critical thinking skills that employers value in psychology-related careers. Not all students will find these software programs used in their courses.

Top online databases for psychology research

Looking to add the top online databases to your psychology toolkit? PsycINFO® from the American Psychological Association offers a comprehensive library of more than 4 million psychology-focused records, including journals, books and conference materials. The database is ideal for in-depth research on mental health, social behavior and cognition topics.

If you're looking for an online database that covers psychology's connection to health and wellness, consider PubMed. This database provides more than 30 million free, peer-reviewed citations in the medical and biomedical sciences.

Web of Science® offers more than 100 million records across numerous psychology disciplines. It's particularly useful for psychology students interested in neuropsychology and similar topics.

Lastly, Google Scholar™ is a powerful, free search engine that connects psychology students and researchers with a wealth of academic literature such as research papers, theses and journals. This database offers broad, scholarly resources to support in-depth study and evidence-based insights.

Software for data analysis and visualization

Data analysis and visualization can help students make sense of complex information and communicate findings clearly. SPSS® offers a reliable platform for statistical analysis and handles everything from basic descriptive statistics to advanced methods such as ANOVA (which means analysis of variance) and regression.

If you're looking to explore data on a detailed level, consider adding R™ to your psychology toolkit. This programming language program provides open-source flexibility for more advanced statistical computing and graphics.

NVivo is ideal for qualitative data. Psychology students use it to organize and analyze text, audio and video data from interviews or case studies. The software Tableau creates charts, graphs and dashboards that make data insights easy to grasp and share.

Ready to start studying psychology?

While University of Phoenix does not use all of the tools mentioned above in their programs, it does offer a library collection of resources focused on psychology, including:

- More than 1,000 journals in the field of psychology.
- DSM Library, which provides access to DSM-5, as well as other psychiatry-focused books and journals. DSM Library is a critical resource for clinical practice used by health professionals, social workers, and forensic and legal specialists to diagnose and classify mental disorders.
- ProQuest One Psychology includes behavioral, clinical, cognitive, developmental, experimental, industry, and social psychology content.
- BioMed Central provides research covering health and science-related topics.

- Mental Measurements Yearbook with Tests in Print has test instruments used in counseling, human services, psychology and related professions.
- Oxford Scholarship Online – Psychology provides access to more than 200 psychology e-books from Oxford Scholarship Online.

If you're interested in studying psychology, University of Phoenix has online programs for working adults with the flexibility and convenience to balance career, family and education. University of Phoenix offers online psychology undergraduate and graduate programs ⧉ with access to resources, interactive tools and support services.

The psychology degrees UOPX offers are:

- Bachelor of Science in Applied Psychology with a concentration in Media and Technology ⧉
- Bachelor of Science in Industrial-Organizational Psychology ⧉
- Master of Science in Industrial-Organizational Psychology ⧉
- Master of Science in Psychology ⧉
- Master of Science in Psychology–Direct Assessment ⧉

If you're ready to begin learning about psychology, reach out to UOPX for more information ⧉ on our online psychology degree programs.

Evernote is a registered trademark of Evernote Corporation.

NVivo is a registered trademark of LUMIVERO, LLC.

Tableau is a registered trademark of Salesforce Inc.

PsycINFO is a registered trademark of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

OneNote is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corp.

Google Scholar is a trademark of Google LLC.

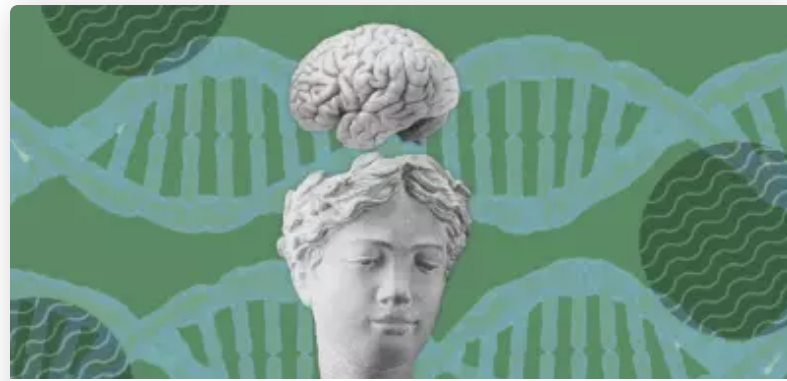*Mendeley is a registered trademark of Elsevier Limited.*

Web of Science is a registered trademark of Camelot UK Bidco Limited.

SPSS is a registered trademark of IBM Corporation.

R is a trademark of The R Foundation.

Web of Science is a registered trademark of Camelot UK Bidco Limited.

Read more articles like this:

Is Psychology a Science?

ONLINE DEGREES

January 11, 2022 • 7 minutes

Mental Health After the Pandemic

UNIVERSITY LIFE

May 10, 2021 • 3 minute read

Essentials for Studying Psychology

ONLINE DEGREES

December 18, 2024 • 9 minutes

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dillon Price is a detail-oriented writer with a background in legal and career-focused content. He has written and edited blogs for dozens of law firms, as well as Law.com. Additionally, he wrote numerous career advice articles for Monster.com during the company's recent rebranding. Dillon lives in Western Massachusetts and stays in Portugal each summer with his family.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Christina Neider is the dean of the University of Phoenix College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Neider's career spans more than 30 years in academia, healthcare and the U.S. Air Force. She has held several academic leadership roles at University of Phoenix, and she is the Vice President of membership for the Arizona Chapter of the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society.

This article has been vetted by University of Phoenix's editorial advisory committee.
Read more about our editorial process.