

PSYCHOLOGY



What is Psychology?

Psychology is the scientific study of the human mind and behaviour. It is both a social and a biological science. As a social science, Psychology studies humans in interaction with other members of the same species. As a biological science, it regards humans as the product of evolution, and so emphasizes the biological perspective, comparing and contrasting human behaviour with that of other species. Psychology has various interdisciplinary aspects, involving knowledge drawn from other areas such as anthropology, biology, biochemistry, computer science, linguistics, mathematics, philosophy, physiology and sociology.

What do psychologists do?

Psychologists work in a wide variety of areas, engaging in many different activities. For example, psychologists teach at both the university and college levels. They do pure and applied research in many settings, including universities, school boards, government agencies and industry. Psychologists also work in business or industrial settings, in areas such as management/employee relations, personnel selection, training and efficiency, or organizational behaviour. They may also be employed as consultants by school boards, government, and industry.

Psychologists may specialize in clinical or counseling occupations, helping people to cope with emotional or psychological difficulties. This is accomplished by evaluating the needs of clients through the use of interviews and other assessment tools, such as personality inventories, questionnaires and aptitude tests, and by developing and implementing treatment plans to address these needs. Psychologists in this area work in hospitals, social service agencies, public health agencies, schools, or in private practice.

How do I become a Psychologist?

To become a professional psychologist, you must first obtain advanced training in psychology *after* your bachelor's degree. An experimental psychologist, one who does research in a variety of settings, must have a Doctoral degree (a Ph.D.). A clinical psychologist, one who works in a human services context, must fulfill the requirements of the professional organization of his or her province, state or country. In Canada, the minimum requirement in some provinces is a doctoral degree (e.g., a Ph.D.), although it is possible to practice in certain provinces with a master's degree (M.A. or M.Sc.), sometimes under the title "Psychologist," sometimes under the title of "Psychological Associate." In the province of Québec, a doctoral degree is required in order to become a member of the Professional Order of Psychologists (i.e, L'Ordre des psychologues du Québec).

Admission to graduate programs in psychology is very competitive. You should acquire research experience while completing your Bachelor's degree, preferably through the completion of an undergraduate thesis. A thesis is a written report of an independent research project carried out under the supervision of a professor. In the McGill Psychology Department, this type of research experience can best be acquired through the completion of the Honours program. If you are not in the Honours program, courses are available which also provide students with the opportunity to complete an undergraduate research project (PSYC 450D, PSYC 494D, PSYC 395 and PSYC 495). You may also want to work in a professor's lab as a research assistant. Graduate schools usually prefer applicants with as much research experience as possible. If you are interested in an applied area of psychology, such as clinical or counseling, you should also try to acquire some volunteer or paid experience in the field. But do not do this to the total exclusion of research experience. Clinical programs also want their prospective students to have done research. As a matter of fact, to most universities, this is far more important than applied experience. Remember, clinical training is usually given as part of a Ph.D. program, and Ph.D. programs all require that you do a doctoral dissertation.

What can I do with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology?

The B.A. or B.Sc. in psychology is not a professional qualification, and does not entitle the individual to be a psychologist. You can always continue your studies and become a psychologist, which is described in the previous section. With a B.A. or B.Sc. in Psychology you may work as a researcher in a hospital, university, government or industrial setting. You may also find employment in the human services in hospitals, clinics, group homes or other institutions, under the supervision of a registered psychologist, counselor or social worker. Students sometimes work in the areas of human resources, public relations, advertising and marketing. Basically, your bachelor's degree provides you with a solid background which may be applied to many areas, depending on your personal interests and skills.

Undergraduate training in psychology can also be a good preparation for a variety of other fields, such as business and industry, counseling, education, human communication sciences (speech therapy), law, medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and social work.

What are some areas of specialization in Psychology at the Graduate level (i.e., Master's, Ph.D.)?

It is truly during graduate education that students become increasingly proficient and knowledgeable in an area of psychological specialization. Some specialty areas in psychology that require a graduate education are Clinical Psychology, Experimental Psychology, Counselling Psychology, School Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Forensic Psychology, Industrial/Organizational Psychology, Health Psychology, and Physiological Psychology. For further information regarding the different areas of specialization in psychology, please consult the Canadian Psychological Association's website (<https://cpa.ca/professionaldevelopment/studyofpsychology/>).

Information About A Career in Psychology:

- McGill University Career Planning Service. *What can I do with my studies in Psychology*. https://mcgill.ca/caps/files/caps/major_psychology.pdf
- Canadian Psychological Association. *A Career in Psychology*. <http://www.cpa.ca/students/career/>
- American Psychological Association. *Psychology as a Career*. Washington, D.C.: Author. <https://www.apa.org/careers/resources/guides/careers>

Useful Addresses:

- Ordre des Psychologues du Québec : <https://www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/>
- Canadian Psychological Association : <http://www.cpa.ca/>
- American Psychological Association : <https://www.apa.org/>