

Optimised study content

High recommended content to study.

A concise revision checklist for Psychology ATAR Year 12 (Units 3 & 4, syllabus effective 2026): the highest-frequency content across recent ATAR examinations. Items marked **HIGH PRIORITY** recur across multiple papers — study these first. For full explanations of each concept, see the companion document "Optimised study content with concept explanations."

About the past papers. All six exams (2020–2025) were reviewed. Only the **2024 and 2025** papers reflect the current syllabus. The **2020–2023** papers are from the previous syllabus and contain much retired content (neural transmission, hormones, brain lobes, attachment, parenting styles, Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson, personality theories, conformity/obedience/social facilitation, attribution, cognitive dissonance, communication styles, sense of community, conflict resolution, post-traumatic growth) — do not study it. Use the older papers only for the enduring topics flagged "long-running" below.

Every extended response carries two standing criteria (up to 5 marks): use precise psychological terminology, and reference sources (researcher + year, e.g. "Pavlov, 1902").

Unit 3 — Memory and learning

Models of memory **HIGH PRIORITY** (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2025)

- Processes of memory: encoding, storage, retrieval.
- Multi-store model (Atkinson and Shiffrin, 1968): sensory register, short-term, long-term — know duration, capacity, encoding for each.
- LTM types: implicit (procedural); explicit/declarative (semantic, episodic).
- Working memory model (Baddeley and Hitch, 1974; Baddeley, 2000): central executive, phonological loop, visuospatial sketchpad, episodic buffer.

Memory formation and the brain **HIGH PRIORITY**

- Hippocampus (explicit memory; Henry Molaison case study); cerebellum (implicit/procedural); amygdala (emotional memory, fear).
- Causes of memory loss: CTE (trauma); Alzheimer's (degenerative); Wernicke-Korsakoff Syndrome (drug-induced) — two features of each.

Remembering and forgetting **HIGH PRIORITY**

- Recall, recognition, relearning.
- Levels of processing (Craik and Lockhart, 1972): shallow vs deep; study — Craik and Tulving (1975).
- Rehearsal: maintenance vs elaborative; Ebbinghaus forgetting curve (1885).
- Four types of forgetting: retrieval failure, interference (proactive/retroactive), motivated forgetting, decay.

Theories of learning **HIGH PRIORITY** (2020, 2021, 2022, 2024, 2025)

- Classical conditioning: NS, UCS, UCR, CS, CR; acquisition, generalisation, discrimination, extinction, spontaneous recovery. Studies — Pavlov (1902); Watson and Rayner (1920).
- Operant conditioning: antecedent-behaviour-consequence; reinforcement and punishment (positive/negative); schedules. Studies — Thorndike (1898); Skinner (1938).
- Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977): attention, retention, reproduction, motivation; vicarious reinforcement. Study — Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961).
- Behaviour modification: systematic desensitisation (classical); token economies (operant).

Common error: negative reinforcement (increases behaviour by removing something unpleasant) is not punishment (decreases behaviour).

Unit 4 — Motivation, wellbeing and health

Motivation **HIGH PRIORITY**

- Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan): amotivation, extrinsic, intrinsic; needs — autonomy, competence, relatedness.
- Maslow's hierarchy (1954): physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem (deficiency), self-actualisation (growth); 1970 expansion — cognitive, aesthetic, transcendence.

Wellbeing **HIGH PRIORITY**

- Diener's subjective wellbeing (1984): life satisfaction + positive affect + negative affect.
- Ryff's six-factor model (1989): autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, self-acceptance.

Stress **HIGH PRIORITY** (also 2023)

- Definition; eustress vs distress (Selye, 1983).
- General Adaptation Syndrome: alarm, resistance, exhaustion.
- Social Readjustment Scale (Holmes and Rahe, 1967); Transactional Theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) — appraisal, problem-/emotion-focused coping.

Sleep

- Purpose: evolutionary, restorative.

- Sleep–wake cycle: circadian rhythm; NREM (×3) and REM (most dreaming); measured by EEG.
- Sleep deprivation: partial vs chronic; causes; acute vs chronic effects. Study — He et al. (2020).

Science inquiry (Units 3 & 4) HIGH PRIORITY *(every paper, 2020–2025)*

- Ethics — human participants (protection from harm, informed consent, withdrawal, deception, confidentiality, privacy, voluntary participation, debriefing); animals (three Rs); ethics committee.
- Variables: independent, dependent, control, extraneous, confounding.
- Sampling: convenience, snowballing, random, stratified; random allocation.
- Hypothesis (directional/non-directional) vs inquiry question.
- Reliability (test-retest, inter-rater) and how to improve it; validity (internal, external).
- Correlation (Pearson's r): state strength AND direction; correlation $\neq$ causation.
- Mean and median; data displays (line, scatterplot, column, histogram).
- Data types: objective vs subjective; qualitative vs quantitative.

Revision order: (1) learning theories + studies; (2) memory models, brain structures, forgetting; (3) Maslow, Diener, Ryff; (4) stress and GAS; (5) Science inquiry. Practise applying each theory to a scenario and always cite the theorist and year.