

Goals and Definitions

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss what psychology is, as well as the different goals that are involved in this vast field. You will also consider how understanding more about psychology can help you improve your problem-solving and self and social awareness skills. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Definition of Psychology

The word **psychology** comes from both the Greek word “psyche,” which means the mind or soul, and the Greek word “logos,” which means reason, argument, or the study of. So, the word psychology means the study of the human mind and **behavior**, and it is important to notice each of the two parts of this definition.

The study of psychology examines the mind and all the different types of mental processing that occur within the brain every day. It also considers the behaviors that can be observed outside of the mind itself. It's easy to see how the **self and social awareness skill** complement this field. How you think and behave defines both the psychology field and the skill. That second part is key because psychology is a scientific study, meaning that it looks at things through **scientific observation** and uses evidence and data from experimentation and direct observation to reach conclusions.

Psychology aims to be an objective field of study. Because of this, psychology often examines things that are considered common sense. The more you understand the psychology behind something, the better you'll be at making decisions and problem-solving. Learning about psychological theories can help you decide on best practices at home, work, and school and develop your **problem-solving skill**.

When studying psychology, you might find that you are studying something that already feels familiar. While this may be true, studying science also means you're trying to see how those ideas apply to your own life and use them to aid your own problem-solving.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A common saying in English is that “birds of a feather flock together.” Conversely, there is also the saying that “opposites attract.” The first saying implies that similar people tend to gravitate towards each other, whereas “opposites attract” means that completely different people tend to gravitate towards each other.

Through psychology, you can take a look at both of these sayings and find that people do tend to hang out with people who are more similar to them. The first statement seems more accurate. While both sayings seem like common sense, psychology involves studying the mind and behavior to determine the objective truth behind such statements.



WATCH

Psychology is more than just a field of study. It's an approach to how you see and understand yourself and the world around you. Throughout this course, you'll hear real stories from real people who are using the same skills and concepts you're learning in this course to take control of their personal and professional futures! As you begin your journey in PSYC1010, watch this video to help better understand the importance of these skills. No matter where you work or what your career path, these skills matter.



TERMS TO KNOW

Psychology

The scientific study of mental activities and behavior.

Behavior

Any human activity.

Scientific Observation

Planned, systematic use of empirical evidence to study the world in an intersubjective fashion.

2. Goals of Psychology

The overall goal of the study of psychology is to gain knowledge about the mind and behavior, especially knowledge that can be beneficial to people. This is particularly true in a field like clinical psychology, which studies psychopathology and mental disorders to better understand the mind in order to help people.

There are four tools psychologists use:

- **Description:** When studying psychology, you want to describe behavior. Description is limited to what can be seen and heard. For example, if you see someone crying, you would report that you saw tears on their face. You would not say the person is sad, because you do not know that from observation. It is possible they have just won the lottery. It is important to only include factual information in descriptions. Psychologists cannot read minds.
- **Prediction:** You also want to try to predict what will happen next. Prediction involves understanding what you have learned well enough that you can say, with reasonable certainty, what would likely happen with a person in a given situation. Prediction also comes from knowing how the brain operates and probabilities of behavior.
- **Understanding:** Understanding comes from learning and talking to the subject to learn about their upbringing, history, environment, physical condition, and belief systems. Social awareness and sensitivity are important here. True understanding means not only making observations and predictions but also being able to explain why it's happening. If you have understanding, you can explain what's occurring, both within the brain and the body, to affect the mind and behavior.
- **Control/Change:** Finally, you want to be able to offer change options to help people control their behavior and their thoughts, which connects back to the overall goal of helping people and developing the self and social awareness skill.

Ultimately, those who study psychology want to benefit people by understanding the mind and behavior well enough to help them control the problematic aspects of their thoughts and behaviors. Ultimately, people have free will to choose, but psychology can help us live in a productive and healthy way.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the **definition of psychology** has two parts: Psychology not only involves studying what is happening inside the mind but the observable behavior that is occurring as well. You also saw a direct connection between the definition of psychology and the self and social awareness skill.

You now understand that while the overall **goal of psychology** is to gain knowledge of the mind and behavior in order to make decisions, solve problems, and to help others, there are four more specific goals of the study: **description** of what's occurring, **prediction** of what may occur, **understanding** of the underlying causes, and **control** of the more negative aspects of psychology.

Good luck!

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