

Teaching Guide

Chapter 2: Research methods in psychology

Topic map

Section number and name	Learning outcome	Number of hours (suggested)	Relevant material
2.1 Psychology versus psychobabble	The principles and research in psychology are distinguished from general interest in human behaviour in being supported by evidence of professionally suitable standing.	1	Figures 2.1–2.3 Activity 2.1
2.2 Quantitative research methods in psychology	Research in psychology uses tools from the range of quantitative methods. Experimental research is distinguished by having a test population and a control population, with an independent variable that the experimenter can manipulate.	2	Figures 2.4–2.15 Self-assessment questions 2.1 Activity 2.2
2.3 Qualitative research methods in psychology	Research in psychology uses tools from the range of qualitative methods.	1	Figure 2.16
2.4 Evaluating theories and research in psychology	The validity of a piece of research in psychology is constantly evaluated in terms of strengths, limitations and the degree to which its findings may be generalised to other populations.	1	Self-assessment questions 2.2
2.5 Ethical considerations	Research in psychology is required to conform to the code of professional ethics in order to be academically acceptable.	1	Figure 2.17 Self-assessment questions 2.3 Activity 2.3

2.1 Overview of Chapter 2

This introductory chapter focuses on the nature of the evidence required to support psychological claims about human behaviour. It introduces some of the tools applied in quantitative and quantitative investigations. It emphasises that the validity of a piece of research in psychology is constantly evaluated in terms of strengths and limitations, and in the degree that its findings may be generalised to other populations. In addition, research in psychology is required to conform to the code of professional ethics in order to be academically acceptable.

The concepts in this chapter are at an introductory level and are covered in more detail in *Chapter 10: Approaches to researching behaviour*. Some students may already know much of the content of this chapter, such as experimental designs and the content of classic studies such as Milgram. If this is the case, you may consider proceeding to the critical analysis of these studies, possibly as homework assignments. However, you may still decide to miss out this chapter and move directly to the core material, which frequently reiterates and exemplifies the principles introduced in this chapter. If so, be aware that the concepts of this chapter will support those and other chapters. That is especially true with the final section of ethical guidelines to research.

Suggested activities

Possible starter

Activity 2.2 (in Section 2.2) with Uncle Jim and the red sports car can be used to introduce quantitative, experimental methods in psychology as well as to introduce critical analysis of findings.

Main lesson content

- The critical thinking section on Milgram (1961) can be profitable even for those who know the details of the study, as it enables the students to assess the contribution of the study to understanding behaviours that are agentic (acting under orders).
- The ethics section can be livened up with a video, such as this one on YouTube: [5 psychology experiments you couldn't do today](#). This can be followed up for homework.
- The self-assessment questions can be used for review of the concepts.

Common misunderstandings and misconceptions

The fact that a study is non-experimental or non-quantitative in design does not necessarily reduce its validity. Students should be aware that not all research is suitable for quantitative experimental investigation, and that qualitative methods often yield detailed information that is not readily accessed by quantitative methods.

Supporting your students

The content of this chapter aims to spark the interest of the less involved students, and at the same time to provide more extensive scope for the able and ambitious. Unlike later chapters, it tends to present concepts within a more descriptive and narrative-type framework, which should be easily accessible to all students. The narrative-type framework could lead into students acting the Milgram scenario for a class or school assembly. The students can also discuss in groups how they might have acted if they participated as teacher-instructor in Milgram (1961) and the prison guard or prisoner in Zimbardo (1971).

Challenging your students

The Research Idea in Section 2.2.2 of the coursebook on Milgram (1961) and Zimbardo (1971) should enable students to develop their skills in critical analysis. More able students might work in groups to design research projects compatible with today's ethical standards, to investigate whether people change their behaviour for the worse when (a) acting under orders and (b) being given special responsibilities and uniforms. The emphasis should be on the ideas and the feasibilities of the investigations, not on the detailed planning taught later on in the programme.

Homework suggestions

- Students review *Section 2.5 Ethical Considerations*. They then watch the YouTube clip, [5 psychology experiments you couldn't do today](#) again, and write an ethical defence of any three of those five studies.
- Alternatively, they could work through the coursebook Activity 2.2 (in Section 2.2) on the 'sports car' research and Milgram (or possibly a combination of both activities).

Cross-references with other topics

This chapter may be seen as the gateway to the core, options and research methodology sections of the course. Some principles encountered in this chapter are developed in every remaining chapter in the course.

References

Milgram, S. (1961). *Dynamics of Obedience*. Washington: National Science Foundation.

Zimbardo, P. G. (1971). Coercion and compliance: The psychology of police confessions. In R. Perruci, & M. Pilisuk (eds), *The Triple Revolution Emerging*, Boston: Little, Brown, pp492–508.