

College Guild  
P.O. Box 696 Brunswick, Maine 04011

# What's On Your Mind?

## Unit 1 of 6

### ~ Introduction to Psychology ~

**Welcome to the College Guild course What's On Your Mind?**

**Overview:** This course will cover the basic concepts in various fields of psychology, including social psychology, child psychology, moral psychology, and more!

**Guidelines for all College Guild courses:**

- 1. Answer all the questions that are in bold print, using black or blue ink or dark pencil if possible.** After we receive and review your completed unit, we will send you feedback from your reader along with your original work and the next unit. You don't need to return the questions — it saves us both postage.
2. There is no **specific deadline** to complete any unit, but we would get concerned if we hadn't heard back from you after two months.
3. Remember how often the mail service loses things. **If you don't hear back from us after a month, please write to make sure we received your unit** and sent out the next one.
4. Let us know if you need a dictionary, free to students who complete the first unit.

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#### Psychology — The study of the mind

Before we dive into the course, it is important to establish a distinction between the mind and the brain. The brain is a physical organ responsible for processing our seven senses (taste, touch, sight, sound, smell, movement [proprioception], and balance [vestibular]). It is also responsible for controlling our movement, speech, and emotions. Different from the brain, the mind is an abstract concept that we cannot see. The mind is our consciousness.

Diagrams of the brain and its basic functions can be found in the appendix.

- 1. What comes to mind when you think about the word “psychology”?**

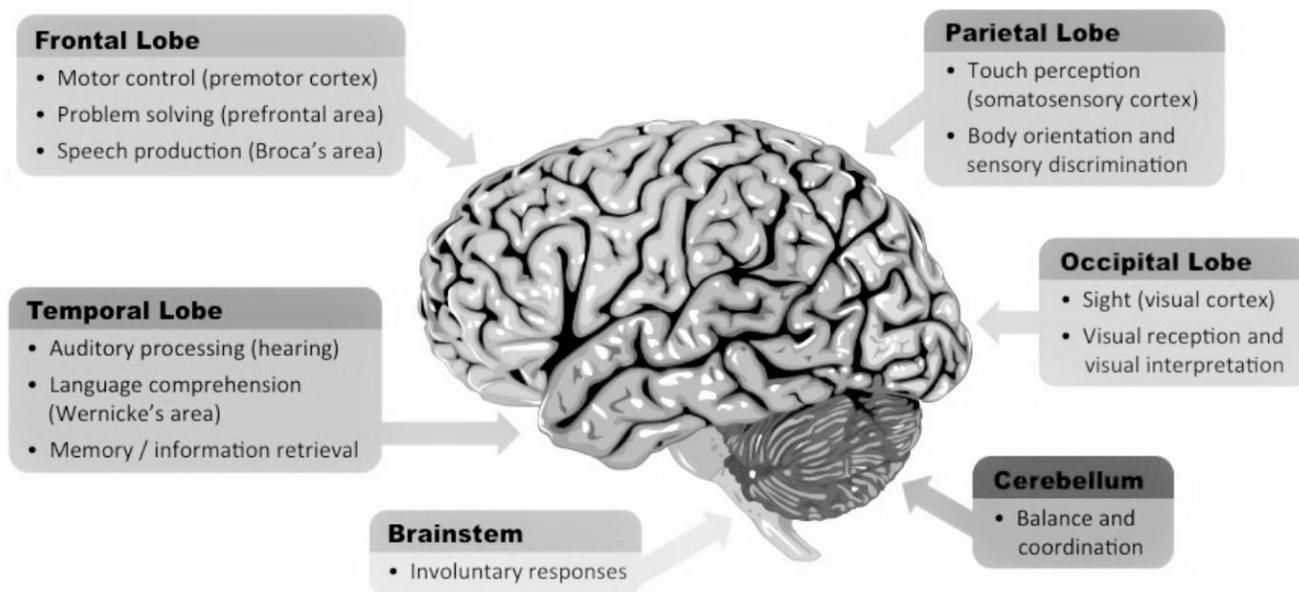
Psychology was first established as a field of study in 1879 when Wilhelm Wundt founded the first laboratory for psychology. Since then, psychology has developed into a widely studied field that examines human thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. In this unit we will look at some of the main questions that form the basis of psychology, as well as two famous psychologists, Sigmund Freud and Ivan Pavlov.

### Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud is considered the father of modern psychology. He developed psychoanalysis, which is the treatment of psychopathology (mental disorders) through discussions between a psychologist and the patient — what we know today as therapy. Despite the fact that most of his theories have been disproven, he developed concepts still used in psychology research today, including *free association* and *repression*.

Free association occurs when someone is presented with words or images and asked to express their immediate reaction. The aim of free association is to reveal an automatic expression of the unconscious — the part of our mind we aren't aware of, but that influences our behavior.

Through free association, individuals are sometimes able to access “repressed” memories, or memories that have been blocked out of memory because of their association with high levels of stress or trauma. Prompted with the word “beach,” most people might immediately think “sand.” However, imagine you are



someone who often went to the beach as a child and once almost drowned while learning to swim. As a result of the trauma, your mind might repress this memory. Then, instead of sand, your subconscious might

automatically associate the word “beach” with “drown” because of the stress you experienced in that moment.

**2. Use these examples to practice “free associating.”**

In other words, write down the first word that comes to your mind when reading these words. (If you’d like, you can ask a friend to do the same and see if you choose similar or different words for each prompt.)

- Flower
- Basketball
- Macaroni
- Hat
- Computer
- Fork



“We weren’t what I would call a ‘touchy-feely’ family”

Here are some quotes from Sigmund Freud:

*“Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways.”*

*“The mind is like an iceberg. It floats with one-seventh of its bulk above water.”*

*“The only person with whom you have to compare yourself is you in the past.”*

**3. Choose one of these quotes. What does it mean to you?**

**4. What is the value of making connections between words? How do you think free association might be used to help someone experiencing mental distress?**

**5. How might it hurt them?**

When people think of therapy, they usually picture something like the image above (the cactus and his therapist).

**6. Why might lying down be helpful in psychoanalysis?**

Nature vs. nurture

Nature v. nurture is one of the biggest debates that psychologists try to resolve. The nature v. nurture debate strives to determine which of our behaviors are due to the genes passed down to us through our parents (nature), and which are a product of the environment we are raised in (nurture). Typically, psychologists find that the driving forces behind our behaviors are a combination of both nature and

nurture. For example, certain personality traits can be passed down through your parents, but your social environment can determine how you express them. Here are some examples:

Situation	Nature	Nurture
I got an A+ on my test!	I did well on my test because I inherited my intelligence from my parents and I am naturally smart.	I did well on my test because I have a friend that motivates me to do well and we studied very hard together.
I didn't make the basketball team.	I didn't make the basketball team because I inherited being short from my parents and that is not helpful in basketball.	I didn't make the basketball team because I did not practice or workout all summer and did not meet the required skill level as a result.

As you can see in the second example, both explanations for not making the basketball team could be true. If you are short and trying out for the basketball team with players at your skill level who happen to be tall, you may be cut from the team because of your height (nature). But if you're short *and* competing against players that have been practicing all summer, you may not make the team because you did not properly prepare (nurture).

**7. What are some physical traits that a person might inherit from their parents?**

**8. What is a personality trait that a person might inherit from their parents?**

**9. What are some personality traits or behaviors that might be a result of your social environment (nurture)?**

**10. Write your own example of a situation in which both nature and nurture are responsible for an individual's behavior.**

#### The mind-body connection

The study of psychology is also helpful for explaining certain processes that take place outside of the brain or mind. Often, when we experience emotions, other parts of our bodies are activated in response. When we experience an emotion, a part of our brain called the *thalamus* activates the *autonomic nervous system*. This is the system in our body that controls actions we don't always think about before doing. For example, we don't think about it every time we blink our eyes, take a breath, or digest our food. This is taken care of by our autonomic nervous system. When we experience emotions, this automatic system often triggers reactions in our bodies. For example, when we are afraid, our hearts start to beat faster.

**12. Describe a positive emotion that might result in a physical response.**

**13. Describe a negative emotion that might result in a physical response.**

**14. Crying is a physical response that can come from both joy and sadness (positive and negative). Why do you think this is?**

Autonomic nervous system responses support the science behind lie detectors. They aim to measure an individual's physical responses (sweating, faster heart beat) to determine whether or not they are experiencing the nervousness that often accompanies telling a lie.

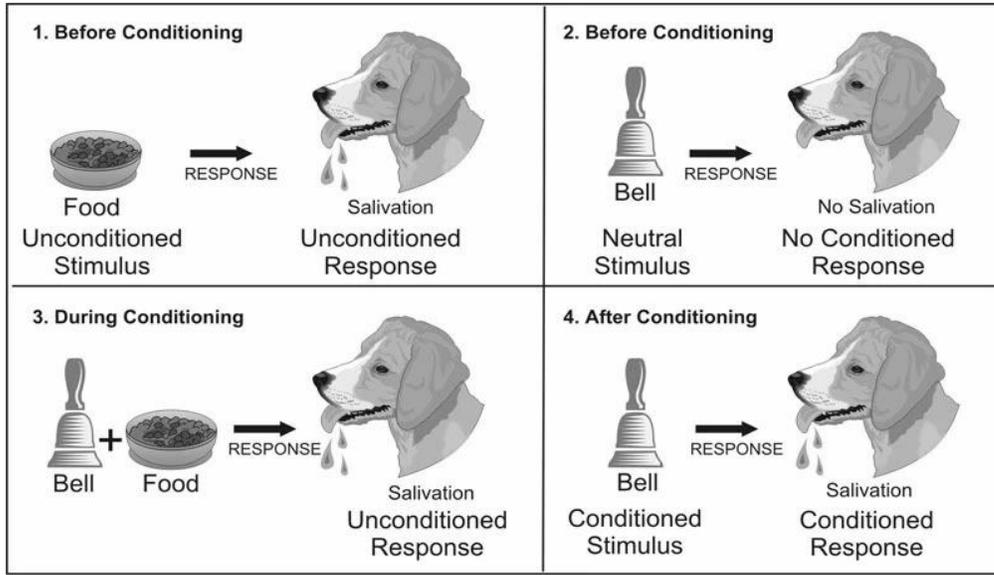
**15. What is your opinion of lie detector evidence?**

#### Conditioning

Psychologists have found that physical responses can be changed in certain circumstances. Through a process called "conditioning," we can essentially train ourselves to have a selected response to almost any stimulus.

Ivan Pavlov was the first to develop studies on conditioning in the 1890s using his dog. Pavlov found that every time he put food in front of his dog, the dog would begin to drool (salivate). Salivation is a natural response to a food stimulus. However, Pavlov thought to pair the food with another stimulus in order to create an association between the two. To do so, Pavlov began to ring a bell every time he fed his dog. After some time, the dog began to associate the ringing of the bell with food.

Eventually, Pavlov removed food from the equation. When he rang the bell without providing any food, the dog began to salivate. In this way, Pavlov had conditioned his dog to salivate when he heard a bell.



**Classical Conditioning**

**16. What is another behavior we could train an animal to do? Using your answer and the stimulus of your choice, draw a diagram like the one above on a separate piece of paper.**

It can be particularly challenging to come up with studies for psychology experiments. Unlike in other sciences like chemistry or physics, psychology uses human subjects who must be studied carefully in order to avoid harm. Participants also frequently drop out. In the next unit, we will discuss the unique processes for designing and carrying out psychology experiments!

**17. What is another reason that human experiments are challenging?**

**18. Write a fictional story about an individual who has signed up to be a subject in a psychology study. (You can write it from the perspective of the psychology researcher or the volunteer.)**

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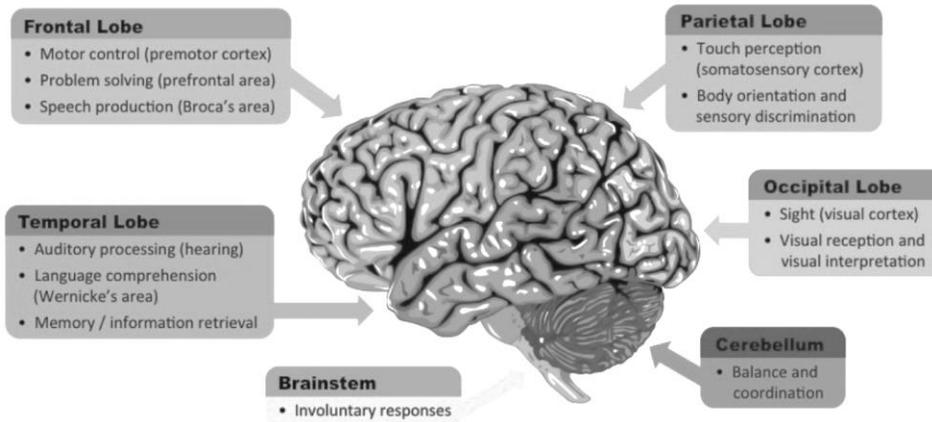
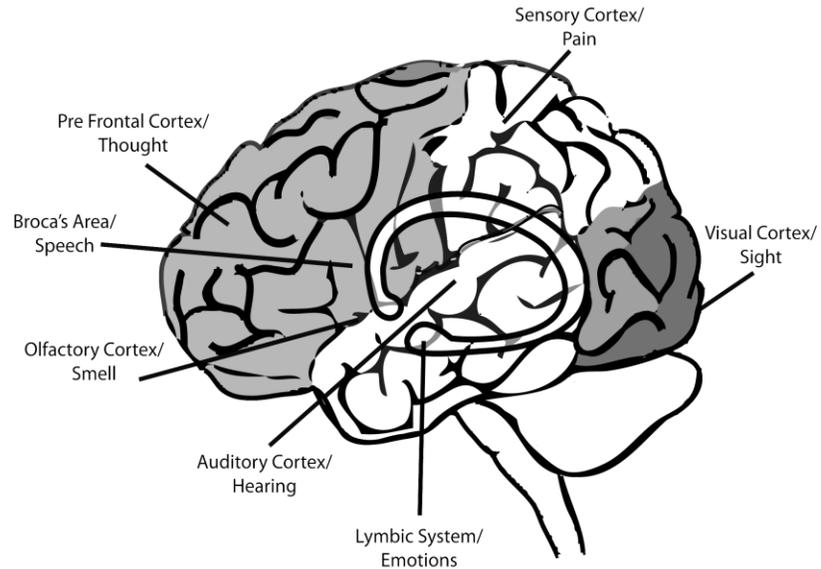
**Glossary:**

- Stimulus: Something that awakens activity or energy in someone or something
- Unconditioned: Before the neutral stimulus is introduced
- Psychopathology: The scientific study of mental disorders

**Resources:**

- <https://www.psychotherapy.net/humor/34>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201304/top-10-list-psychology-s-big-questions-and-the-answers>
- [https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/sigmund\\_freud](https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/sigmund_freud)

## Appendix A



*Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes*