

How I Studied for the Psychology CLEP Exam

by Annie Margarita Yang

I took the Psychology CLEP exam two weeks ago and passed with a 72 out of 80. Passing score was 50 and I got three college credits. I spent one week preparing for this exam because I was about to go on vacation and didn't want to take it in another city. I thought it was best to always use the test center that I'm most familiar with to reduce my exam anxiety. Don't do what I did—I highly suggest you spend more than two weeks studying for this exam. This exam was much harder than I thought. Other people who took the exam said the same on online forums. I was surprised I got a 72 because it was one of the most difficult exams I've taken so far. It probably had a high grading curve.

Below are the exam details as written by the College Board.

Description of the Examination

The Introductory Psychology examination covers material that is usually taught in a one-semester undergraduate course in introductory psychology. It stresses basic facts, concepts, and generally accepted principles in the thirteen areas listed in the following section.

The examination contains approximately 95 questions to be answered in 90 minutes. Some of these are pretest questions that will not be scored. Any time candidates spend on tutorials and providing personal information is in addition to the actual testing time.

Knowledge and Skills Required

Questions on the Introductory Psychology examination require candidates to demonstrate one or more of the following abilities.

- Knowledge of terminology, principles, and theory
- Ability to comprehend, evaluate, and analyze problem situations
- Ability to apply knowledge to new situations

The subject matter of the Introductory Psychology examination is drawn from the following topics. The percentages next to the main topics indicate the approximate percentage of exam questions on that topic.

History, Approaches, Methods (8-9%)

- History of psychology
- Approaches: biological, behavioral, cognitive, humanistic, psychodynamic
- Research methods: experimental, clinical, correlational
- Ethics in research

Biological Bases of Behavior (8-9%)

- Endocrine system
- Etiology
- Functional organization of the nervous system
- Genetics
- Neuroanatomy
- Physiological techniques

Sensation and Perception (7-8%)

- Attention
- Other senses: somesthesia, olfaction, gustation, vestibular system
- Perceptual development
- Perceptual processes
- Receptor processes: vision, audition
- Sensory mechanisms: thresholds, adaptation

States of Consciousness (5-6%)

- Hypnosis and meditation
- Psychoactive drug effects
- Sleep and dreaming

Learning (10-11%)

- Biological bases
- Classical conditioning
- Cognitive process in learning
- Observational learning
- Operant conditioning

Cognition (8-9%)

- Intelligence and creativity
- Language
- Memory
- Thinking and problem solving

Motivation and Emotion (7-8%)

- Biological bases
- Hunger, thirst, sex, pain
- Social motivation
- Theories of emotion
- Theories of motivation

Developmental Psychology (8-9%)

- Dimensions of development: physical, cognitive, social, moral
- Gender identity and sex roles
- Heredity-environment issues
- Research methods: longitudinal, cross-sectional
- Theories of development

Personality (7-8%)

- Assessment techniques
- Growth and adjustment
- Personality theories and approaches
- Research methods: idiographic, nomothetic
- Self-concept, self-esteem

Psychological disorders and health (8-9%)

- Affective disorders
- Anxiety disorders
- Dissociative disorders
- Health, stress, and coping
- Personality disorders
- Psychoses
- Somatoform disorders
- Theories of psychopathology

Treatment of psychological disorders (7-8%)

- Behavioral therapies
- Biological and drug therapies
- Cognitive therapies
- Community and preventive approaches
- Insight therapies: psychodynamic and humanistic approaches

Social Psychology (7-8%)

- Aggression/antisocial behavior
- Attitudes and attitude change
- Attribution processes
- Conformity, compliance, obedience
- Group dynamics
- Interpersonal perception

Statistics, Tests, and Measurement (3-4%)

- Descriptive statistics
- Inferential statistics
- Measurement of intelligence
- Mental handicapping conditions
- Reliability and validity
- Samples, populations, norms
- Types of tests

College Board - CLEP Psychology

The first thing I did was watch crash course videos on Introductory Psychology because the resource is free. It went over the bare bones basics of a psychology 101 class in a funny way. I cannot truly say I actually learned something using this resource because I easily forgot everything right after watching it. What I can say though was that it was an overview/summary of all the material I needed to learn and provided a good framework for the information I studied using other resources.

Youtube - Crash Course Psychology

The next resource I used was REA. I purchased the Kindle version of the book on Amazon for \$17 (it is now \$19) because I read in the reviews that it's cheaper than buying the physical book and a separate access code for the practice exams. If you buy the kindle version, you get a discount and can get online practice exams access code for only \$1.99. I actually got the online practice exams for free because my access code gave me exams for the wrong subject and then I had to contact customer service to fix it.

I followed a specific method with this book. I read through this book once. After that, I used index cards and hand wrote flashcards based on the bolded vocabulary found in each chapter. I made sure my flashcards were divided by chapter by writing the chapter number on each flashcard because I didn't want to get confused. After that, I practiced the flashcards by reading the word out loud and then trying to verbalize the definition without looking at the back. Once I got that down, I did it backwards by reading the definition out loud and then trying to think of the word the definition was for. After that, I

scrambled the flashcards (making sure they were still grouped by chapter) and followed the same process again to make sure I wasn't memorizing based on the order but based on actually knowing the material.

Then I took the online diagnostic exam, which I got an 86% on. I thought I did pretty well.

The next day, I took practice exam #1. I got a 73%. REA tells me the topics I should review based on the questions I got wrong. So I practiced flashcards again, but this time only the chapters I needed to review. There were words in the exam I didn't know and weren't in the REA book either, so I created new flashcards for those too.

The next day, I took practice exam #2. This time I got an 87%. It was my highest grade so far. Again, I reviewed my weak topics and created new flashcards for words that were found on the practice test but not found in the book.

Amazon - REA Introductory Psychology

While using REA, I used a little bit of InstantCert. I didn't fully utilize this resource because I was getting fairly exhausted from creating my own flashcards. I probably reviewed only half the topics on InstantCert.

InstantCert

I believe my study plan worked because it incorporated different ways of memorizing and ingraining the knowledge into my memory. There was visual (crash course), kinesthetic (writing flashcards), and auditory (reading flashcards out loud).

Now, about the exam itself. It was difficult because there was a lot of information I didn't study or think would be on the exam. For example, John Watson was not included in my studies as an influential person in the field of psychology. I studied everyone else *but* him. My mind went blank. There were FOUR questions about him and his work and I had no clue what he did. I had to use my scrap paper and write down the answer choices from all four questions and try to figure out what was the connecting choice that made sense among all of them. After getting home and doing a google search, it turns out I answered correctly.

I was so scared because, in the beginning, I had to skip a lot of the questions. It wasn't until toward the middle when I started feeling confident about my answers. I ended up making educated guesses on about 25 out of 95 questions. They were questions I would never know the answer to because they were not included in my study resources and were very specific. To give you an idea, they asked which of the following chemicals would be used in a tranquilizer? The options had names of chemicals I can't even pronounce. Or which of the five stages of the Kubler Ross model involves expecting divine intervention to extend one's life? Or why would SSRIs be the preferred prescription for depression? Or what happens when you admit pseudopatients into psychiatric hospitals? Another question related to this

was, what is the psychological term that describes why this behavior occurs?

That's all I can say. Good luck to you on this exam.

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