

Based on the qualitative nature of the subject matter under consideration, the entire syllabus of psychology can be grouped into following three broad categories, which is followed by an elaborate description of each:

- Core psychology
- Applied psychology
- Research methods in psychology and psychometry

Core Psychology: This is the heart and soul of psychology and is what usually conjures up in mind when one hears the word “psychology”. It deals with such things as major theories, personalities, studies etc in psychology. It covers the entire paper1 of the syllabus (except the chapters on “methods of psychology” and “research methods), and the portion on psychological disorders and therapies from paper2 (abnormal psychology in short).

How good you perform overall in psychology depends on how well you have mastered this portion of the syllabus. It forms the bedrock of all your psychological knowledge on which will rest the knowledge of the other two areas of syllabus—so spend a good deal of your time here.

Following is the list of books that I personally came across, and which you will too in all likelihood, during my three odd years’ of preparation. These books deal with this area of the syllabus (core psychology):

- Robert A. Baron
- Saundra K. Ciccarelli & J. Noland White
- Clifford T. Morgan, Richard A. King et al. (popularly known as just “Morgan and King”)
- Atkinson & Hilgard
- Braj Kumar Mishra (it’s nothing but junk in my opinion; stay away from this)
- Books on specific topics (social psychology by Robert A. Baron; abnormal psychology by James N. Butcher et al.)
- Psychology NCERT, 11th and 12th (preferably old editions)

If you are terrified to see such a long list of books, don’t be! This is just a list of books to let you know what all lies out there—only a handful of them are to be actually read.

Here is what you are supposed to do: first off, you need to pick a book which will serve as your fundamental book which you will learn all basic psychology from. This fundamental book in my opinion should be either Baron or Ciccarelli, and NOT any other book in any case (ignore all the books I mentioned above). I would suggest you to go with Baron, since this is what most people do, although ciccarelli is just as good, if not more. Since this book will lay the base of all your psychological knowledge, multiple and meticulous readings of this book will be required—the salience of this point cannot be overstated. Although one book will cover preponderant (some 90%) of this part (core psychology) of the syllabus, some topics will either not be found, or the coverage might not be of desired quality or depth, in which case you need a secondary book. So if Baron is your fundamental book, Ciccarelli should serve as your secondary source. And treat

your secondary source as secondary—do not wind up reading the secondary source just like the fundamental one (I say this because it's easy to go adrift, and it happened with me). These two books, in tandem, with unequal stress (far more stress on the fundamental book), will cover all the basics.

I want to make a brief comparison between these two most important books (Ciccarelli and Baron) at this point. I have seen both books at close quarters and can well vouch for their superlative quality. I mention below topics covered well in one book with respect to the other.

Chapters well covered in Ciccarelli: states of consciousness (although refer Baron for dreams and hypnotism sections); personality (at least a few portions of it); social psychology (many important concepts not found in Baron will be found here)

Chapters well covered in Baron: developmental psychology; sensation, attention and perception; thinking and problem solving; intelligence and aptitude.

Other chapters not mentioned above (e.g., learning, memory etc.) are covered well in both the books, so you can do them from any—I recommend Baron since it's your fundamental book anyway.

Other books that I mentioned above are either not to be used at all, or are to be used very, very sparingly. For example, psychology NCERTs will be required for topics on Indian perspective on psychology—eg, Indian view of personality and self, PASS theory of intelligence, yoga, meditation etc. Typically one question is asked from this area, and it is not covered in foreign books (Baron, Ciccarelli etc.). NCERT should also be used for the “*language and communication*” chapter, since it's not covered entirely in either of the two basic books, although the coverage in NCERT itself is below par. You can also see other books for selected topics for other chapters, but it's better to stay off them in my estimation.

A word of caution is in order here: DO NOT make Morgan & King as your fundamental book! I have read this book entirely (I will spare you the details as to why), only to discover to my chagrin that it was an exercise in futility! Not that anything is wrong with the book per se—on the contrary, it is one of the most hallowed books in all psychological literature, and rightly so. The only problem is that it is miserably out of date. The latest study that has been quoted in this book is from 1985, if my memory serves me right. Much has happened in psychology since that has found its way in the mainstream psychology textbooks as well as the UPSC syllabus. So steer clear of this book. That said, this book can, however, help in these sections which are not covered in other books: Chomsky's theory of transformative grammar; critical period hypothesis in language acquisition; biofeedback (covered comparatively better here in this book).

There are some grey areas in the UPSC syllabus which will never be found in *any* book, let alone Ciccarelli or Baron—at least, I never did! Such areas include, for example, the chapter on language and communication (not covered well in both the books); the concepts in syllabus like signal detection and vigilance (covered in baron but very briefly); probability learning;

metamemory; artificial intelligence; difference between expert and novice (from the *thinking* chapter); measurement of emotion; measurement of attitude, value and interest (although it is covered in A.K. SINGH; more on that later); theories of attitude change (although it can be found in the book on social psychology by Baron); computer applications in the psychological laboratory and psychological testing, psychocybernetics, intersensory perception; concept of well being, positive health, happiness disposition; indigenous therapies like yoga and meditation (you can see NCERT for these); biofeedback therapy (Morgan and King covers it well) etc. There might be some others too beside these, but I think I have covered most of them.

For such topics, I have to say few things. First, such topics aren't too many. Second, google the terms and make notes out of these. Third, questions from these areas tend to be very repetitive; so make sure to browse through the past question papers to keep a watchful eye on such topics (eg, metamemory, difference between expert novice etc. are often asked). Fourth, I will try to attach a few handouts/ pdfs, if possible. *Language and communication* chapter isn't covered well in both the basic books that I mentioned. For this, I am attaching a book on developmental psychology by Shaffer and Kipp. Chapter 9 of this book (*Development of language and communication skills*) covers the language part in greater depth. You can have the entire chapter printed, but initial few pages of the chapter, that cover the theories of language acquisition, are highly recommended (I did only this much from this chapter; rest of the things on language I did from Ciccarelli and NCERT). See if you can put rest of the chapter to any productive use.

To conclude, this (core psychology) is *the* most important portion of the syllabus—not as much because it might fetch you good marks in the syllabus that it covers(it might well not!) as due to the fact that it lays the foundation of your entire psychology optional. How well you apply concepts in paper2 (which basically what paper 2 is all about) is contingent on your hold on basic psychology. So read your basic book *multiple times* until the concepts seep well and firmly into your memory. The nugget of wisdom “*read one book hundred times than hundred books one time*” applies very aptly here.

Applied Psychology: This part of the syllabus covers all but first three chapters of the paper2, viz. “psychological measurement of individual differences”, “psychological well being and mental disorders”, and “therapeutic approaches”. As the name itself indicates, we are to *apply* the psychological knowledge to different areas, eg. education, societal problems, rehabilitation of the mentally ill, work place etc. As I said in the foregoing discussion too, you are better placed to tackle this portion if you have mastered the basic psychology.

You might be tempted to know what book has to be referred for this portion; but let me tell you *there is absolutely no book* to speak of for this area! I have searched all and sundry for a good book, but all in vain (and trust me when I say I have gone to great lengths for searching it)—none perhaps even exists! However, a “book” by **Smark Swain** (a formerly successful student in this exam) does exist, but in all fairness it's more like notes of a good student, and not a standard textbook. In any case, all of us, inclusive of me and those who succeeded before me, are highly indebted to Smarak sir. I want to take this opportunity to extend my deepest gratitude to him on the behalf of entire UPSC psychology community, for without his book paper2 would have been really in shambles!

Having said that, there *do* exist books for particular chapters, eg. work psychology and education psychology. These areas of psychological applications have become sub-disciplines of

psychology in their own right, and full-fledged text books exist for them. But you would be better off without them in my opinion. Besides, I will share what's relevant. But for other areas (eg, community psychology, psychology of economic development, environmental psychology, and the like) no book will be found—at best research papers or articles on psychology websites or Wikipedia (this is useful source, given used sparingly) will be found.

The glaring paucity of books in this area of syllabus had been a constant thorn in my side for at least half of my UPSC journey. It niggled me so much that at times I even called into question my very decision of having taken psychology optional. But now that I am past my preparation phase, in retrospect, I can well say that this supposed predicament was in fact *a blessing in disguise*. I say this because paper2 is in fact easier than paper1, and requires far, far less labour, given you know how to go about. You will be as much delighted to know as I myself was that in my first mains exam (I reached the interview stage here), I scored better in paper2—135 in paper1 and 145 in paper2, to be precise! In my third and final attempt too, when I have got finally what all of us want, I scored handsomely in paper2 (150 marks). So the cardinal point that I want to deliver is that paper2, far from being your weakness, can be your strength—I explain below just how.

Here are the broad contours of the strategy for paper2 (applied psychology):

- First off, master the basic psychology. Multiple revisions of your basic book from paper1 will be required before you can “*feel*” how to “*apply*” the psychological knowledge in applied psychology. The sound foundation laid here will surely stand you in good stead for approaching applied psychology.
- Stop hunting for books, and purchase Smarak Swain. Read the entire book except the chapter (es) on psychological disorders and therapies (which are already covered in Baron/ Ciccarelli). Reading this book can at times feel very boring and insipid exercise—but you have to endure a bit, as we don't have much option. The concepts do not flow here as elegantly as they did in Ciccarelli or Baron. Anyhow, the book has good qualities to its credit too. First, it covers all the things mentioned in syllabus very systematically. Second, the coverage of topics is fairly good and many new concepts are presented. The author hasn't said the things in the book out of thin air as one might possibly suspect; he has pieced together things from various standard sources. You can verify this any time by seeing any standard source on the topic (I have myself discovered this fact time and again). Third, you will learn here how to apply basic psychology in different chapters.

So, in a nutshell, read this book religiously, and revise it multiple times.

- There are certain chapters in paper1 which specifically have many applications in specific chapter (es) of paper2. So try to apply the concepts from these chapters specifically. I mention them below:
 1. **Learning and memory:** has application in educational psychology, particularly the chapter on memory.
 2. **Psychological disorders and therapies:** has application in rehabilitation psychology and community psychology (social psychology is also helpful in this chapter).

3. **Social psychology:** has application in community psychology, psychology of disadvantaged, psychology of social integration (greatest application here), environmental psychology, psychology of economic development, terrorism psychology, psychology of gender etc. Social psychology is *by far* the most important chapter when it comes to applying concepts of psychology in paper2. This is because many chapters in applied psychology aim at changing the social/ group behaviors of people (eg, how to get people to have a positive attitude towards small family, or to conserve water), which falls within the domain of social psychology. So cover this chapter from both Baron and Ciccarelli, although avoid repetition while doing so.

- Next is the writing practice. Although writing practice is essential in paper1 too, it's more so for paper2. That's because the writing skills in applied psychology call for innovation, creativity and thinking-on-your-feet ability, which comes but with practice. Unlike in paper 1, here, by and large, there is no right or wrong answer to a question; it all depends on what all psychological techniques you have incorporated in the answer. When posed with a question, you might often feel you don't know the answer to the question, but you do—just try to think from different psychological angles; try to draw on the knowledge from Ciccarelli or Baron; and think of points mentioned in smarak swain. Almost as a rule, you have to attempt each and every question and reach up to its word limit. You might feel you are writing garbage, but you are not (now you know how this paper is blessing in disguise)—just make sure you are somehow including psychological jargon in your answer and tackling the question from different psychological angles to make the answer more well-rounded. You will definitely fetch marks (given basic psychology and smarak swain have been mastered well).
- I have made notes for the most important areas in applied psychology which I attach here. These notes have been made from different sources—Wikipedia, my own knowledge from basic psychology and smarak swain, and notes handed over by Mukul Pathak sir who is a renowned psychology faculty in Delhi (searching his voluminous and haphazardly-arranged notes was like searching for a needle in haystack). Notice in the notes how I have used different psychological techniques for different topics—you have to develop the knack of doing the same. Also notice that some psychological techniques used cut across different chapters. These are the general techniques which can be used for a variety of questions. Also, these notes are to *complement* smarak swain, so many new things might be found, although I *have* included points from smarak swain at times for the sake of orderly organization.

However, these notes are very personal to me, written for my personal usage. There might be things which you might not understand, since they were supposed to make sense to me and not anybody else. For example, at times I would just write a technical term, leaving it unexplained. That's because I already know what that means. At such times, feel free to look up the internet, particularly articles on Wikipedia, which I myself have used profusely. I just hope you find the notes useful.

It's paradoxical that this paper, which at one point seemed like my Achilles heel, would eventually go on to become my weapon. Personally speaking, while writing the mains exam or the test in the test series, I felt at much ease in paper2 as

compared to paper1. My brain felt less encumbered with information, and I liberally used points that came to my mind then and there, almost as if I had to just fill the pages, as it were! But honestly, it earned me good marks, and I always felt confident in this paper. I think that was because of my perseverant and honest hard work. Hard work just pays off I guess in ways that we don't quite comprehend.

Research methods in psychology and psychometry: Comparatively much smaller portion, it covers the following chapters:

- Methods of psychology (chapter 2 of paper1)
- Research methods (chapter 3 of paper1)
- Psychological measurement of individual differences (chapter 1 of paper 2)

The first two of these can be studied together (both deal with research methods in psychology), while third one is to be done separately (it covers psychometry).

This part of the syllabus covers two broad areas, viz. research methods in psychology, and psychometry. By **research methods** is meant what kind of methods do psychologists deploy to study behavior and then reach a meaningful and scientific conclusion—these methods are required to be known by you. A psychological research is a long drawn out process, consisting of many stages. One of the stages is to apply *statistical techniques* on the data collected in the study on behavior, from which emerges the hidden information in the data. Some statistical techniques are specifically mentioned in the syllabus (e.g., t-test, ANOVA etc.)—we are expected to know them too. **Psychometry** (dealt by the chapter1 of paper 2, ie *psychological measurement of individual differences*), on the other hand, deals with measurement in psychology. Various psychological traits like intelligence, attitude, aptitude etc. are measured using what is called a “psychological test”. Here you are required to know what are the characteristics, types, use and misuse, limitation etc. of psychological tests.

This entire part of the syllabus is notorious for giving tough time to students—not because of the lack of books this time (in fact, there is a copious amount of them), but because of its perplexing nature. Of particular notoriety is the part on statistical techniques. However, overall, it's not as difficult as students generally think. Typically some four-to-five questions might be asked in all (both papers), and it certainly cannot be overlooked.

As for the book source, *Tests, Measurements and Research Methods in Behavioural Sciences* by A.K. Singh (you can find it online), is by far the most important source. Technically, it covers practically the entire portion well, except for the portion on statistical techniques, which, although covered, is mentioned very briefly and with no background of statistics, making it hard for us to understand the already intricate concepts. So for the statistics part (which is a very minor portion, and the one that you could well skip if worse comes to worse), I suggest *Statistics for Psychology* by Aron, Coups, and Aron (I will attach the soft copy), which is a splendid book. There are other books too on the statistics portion (I will attach the soft copies), but it is advised to stay away from them. Even Aron and Coups is to be used very minutely and carefully, since we are looking for some handful topics spread out in the entire book!

A few words of wisdom now on how to cover A.K. Singh. To give you a bird's eye-view, a good command on the subject matter will require you to cover some one-third of the book spread over different chapters, although only three or four chapters will suffice if you are hard pressed for time. The book can be divided into two parts—the first half covers psychometry, and the second covers research methods. Coming to psychometry first, the most important chapter here is *Test Construction* (2nd chapter of the book), which covers the basics of psychological tests (properties, uses, limitations, ethical issues in testing). This is a very easy but important chapter, and should be on your tips. It covers many aspects of testing which are directly mentioned in the syllabus and which are directly asked too in the exam. The following chapters in the book deal with specific aspects of testing like item analysis, validity, reliability, norms etc. of a psychological test (*item response theory* given in “item analysis” chapter should be read well, as should be the reliability and validity concepts in the following chapters). You just need to read the basics of all these things from these chapters, and not the entire chapter (see the past question papers; you will get an idea what to read).

Now coming to the psychological research part, which is the second half of the book. Here the *Social Scientific Research* chapter (15th chapter of the book) is very important, and walks you through the types of psychological research and their basics. This chapter should be done well. Just like in psychometry, the following chapters deal with the specific aspects of psychological research. Only two are important in my opinion—20th chapter (*variables*) and 21st chapter (*research design*). Research design (covered in 21st chapter) forms a very important part of the syllabus, and the basics of different kinds of research designs (e.g., between-group design, within-group design, factorial design etc.), should be well known to you. This chapter, however, delves somewhat deeply into each research design, which is not required. Just make sure you understand the basics of each research design, and the distinction of one from the other. Intrinsic to the process of research design is a statistical test (t-test, ANOVA, etc.) to be done on the data collected as guided by the research design at hand. Basics of these statistical tests should also be known, as the syllabus specifically demands. Understanding this chapter (particularly the statistical tests) can be a tricky affair—that's where Aron and Coups comes in (more on that later). 16th chapter (*single subject experimental design*) could also be skimmed through, since single-subject experimental design is also a kind of research design. “Chapter W1” of Aron and Coups (*Overview of the logic and language of psychological Research*), towards the far end of the book, is also a good read to understand the basics of research design.

To sum up, chapters in AK Singh that are to be fully read are: chapter 2 and 15. Chapters to be read partly (just make sure you understand the basics here; you can skip the details. See the past question papers to get an idea) are: chapter 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 (see the basics of how to measure aptitude, value, interest etc.; they are mentioned in paper1), 12 (here, see the basics of data collection techniques like survey, observation, interview etc.), 16, 20 and 21.

Few things now about Aron and Coups (soft copy attached). The subject matter of the book is: how statistical techniques are used in the process of psychological research. Our aim here is to understand the rudiments of some statistical techniques mentioned in the syllabus (t-test, two way ANOVA, correlation and regression, factor analysis), and some other things not explicitly mentioned in the syllabus, but nonetheless asked (e.g., effect size, statistical power etc.). The concepts are presented in a very easy-to-understand manner, sometimes the same things being said repetitively from oblique angles,

supplemented with copious examples. The only problem is what we are looking for is spread out, literally, in the entire book! This could eat into lot of your time; so use the book at your discretion. But I do recommend reading the 4th chapter of this book that introduces you the all-important concept of hypothesis testing, which is central to psychological research. You will feel at once what on earth is this psychological research all about! The chapter isn't as big as it seems—just understand what hypothesis testing is and how it is done. I leave on you how to cover the statistical techniques mentioned in the following chapters. I myself could cover only some of them from this book as it was taking lot of time and not yielding commensurate benefits. But for someone who has good amount of time, the book can be put to good use.

Two topics—*focus groups* and *grounded theory*—will not be found in either of the two books. For these, I will attach a few pages extracted from a standard textbook, or possibly the book itself, in case you want a little background on qualitative research (both focus groups and grounded theory are qualitative research methods, as distinct from quantitative research methods). There is a third topic by the name *brainstorming*, on which, I am afraid, I do not have any source to suggest—I myself never did it. Try googling it.

With this I conclude my rather elaborate psychology strategy. Part of the reason why I have written it so long is that I myself felt a conspicuous lack of guidance in psychology during my preparation days, and I had to carve my own path out. I have learnt many things during the course of three years, some the hard way! For example, I went to great lengths to find a good book for paper2, which never existed in the first place; I read entire Morgan and King only to realize I shouldn't have; towards the end, I amassed a good deal of books, but all came gradually spread over great length of time. I am pretty sure things would have been starkly different had I had them right from the start. To top that all, filtering the relevant from the irrelevant felt like an arduous exercise (particularly in psychological research and psychometry). I just hope my strategy helps you circumvent these, and possibly other, pitfalls, and save you both labour and time. That said, I firmly believe it takes all sorts to make a world. So if my strategy, or a part of it thereof, doesn't go down your throat well, DO NOT be afraid to do your own thing! After all, not all successful students in psychology had the same path as mine. That's true not just for psychology, but the entire preparation. But at the same time no man is an island—you do need help. So keep your eyes and ears always open, and, to quote *Rig Veda*, let the good ideas come from all sides! With this, I extend my heartfelt wishes in your endeavours!