The Language of Analysis

SAFE Psychology for A-Level Students

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Structural Analytical Framework for Excellence provides a ***SAFE Method*** for students, offering a theoretical framework to implant all topics learnt for A-level in psychology. The elements within this framework emanate from core arguments of approaches in psychology, leading to core arguments in psychopathology and treatments. Context for evaluation derives from issues and debates. Students learning this template and its applications can use it as a satnav: directing them how to juggle content material to guarantee a powerful, sophisticated, and effective analysis.

Starting point:

Description = *what the concept is, information ascribed to the concept.*

Choose any concept and write a description of this concept:

Practice 1:

Practice 2:

Explanation = *How and Why one concept can explain/influence another concept: the linking of a minimum of two concepts.*

Write explanatory sentences for the concepts you described above:

Practice 1:

Practice 2:

The basic cognitive model

X can explain Y; X can influence Y; X can shape Y; X can be a reason for Y; Y is influenced by X; or Y can be the result of X.

Write explanatory sentences for any concepts you choose:

Practice 1:

Practice 2:

Basic scientific model

X can explain Y

Lack of a 100% explanatory power – therefore we need further analysis and related evaluation.

Y = result, the explained/dependent concept = *factor/variable/issue that we need to explain and understand, the outcome; or the dependent concept/variable in experiment.*

X = reason, explaining/independent concept = *factor/variable/issue that is 'doing' the explanation; or the explanatory or independent concept/variable in experiments.*

The options of understanding the relationship, without taking into account causality:

- *X can explain how and why Y (and how and why NOT Y)*
- *X comes before Y*

- *X needs to happen before Y*
- *Y happens after/following X*
- *Changes in X explain/affect/shape/influence changes in Y*
- *Y happened after X happened, Y is influenced by X*
- *Changes in Y are the result of changes in X*
- *If we wish to change Y – we need to change/influence X*

  - For example: treatments in psychology.
  - Explain the issue of causality, the difference between IV-DV in experimental psychology, and the implications for understanding the basic scientific and analytical model of: X can explain Y.
  - Correlations – how it fits within the basic scientific model.

The difference between description and explanation, as applied to psychology

Choose a concept from psychology, write a description and an explanation, identify X and Y:

Practice 1:

Concept =

Description =

Explanation =

Identify X (the explaining/independent concept)

and Y (the explained/dependent concept):

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Choose a concept from psychology, write a description and an explanation, identify X and Y:

Practice 2:

Concept =

Description =

Explanation =

Identify X (the explaining/independent concept)

and Y (the explained/dependent concept):

A note: *your result/explained concept (Y) is the one you zoom into, then you 'import' X, a reason, an explaining concept, to explain Y.*

Psychology is the study (X) of the human being (Y)

The Human being: human behaviours, mental processes (cognitions, memory), and emotions (also: physiological and social dimensions).

Human abnormality, therefore, abnormal behaviours, abnormal mental processes, and abnormal emotions (also: abnormal physiological and social indicators)

- The 'big' question: where, how, and what is the line that we draw between 'normal' and 'abnormal'.

X can explain Y

Y = the human being

Y1 = Behaviours

Practice – write examples of behaviours, at different levels of abstraction:

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Y2 = Mental processes

Practice – write examples of mental processes, at different levels of abstraction:

Y3 = Emotions

Practice – write examples of emotions, at different levels of abstraction:

Y4, Y5 = Physiological and Social indicators

Practice – write examples of physiological and social indicators:

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Issues to consider:

- **Discrepancies,** incompatibility between key dimensions as above. Theories are important in tackling these issues, thus, we need to evaluate the discrepancies and see how the theory addresses them.

Practice – examples of discrepancies:

- **Dissonance = lack of harmony = conflict between behaviour and an emotion, or within behaviours, emotions and cognitions.**

- **Unit of analysis:** in psychology, the individual is the unit of analysis. Therefore, we need to assess the importance of individual differences; and compare this to other units of analysis.

Practice – examples of individual differences, and compared with other units of analysis (group, organisation, state):

- **Comparative research and theory** – the problem of terminology in different cultures.

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- **Interdisciplinary orientation,** including social psychology, political psychology, and so forth. That is, when the result/explained/dependent concept Y is from psychology, and the reason/explaining/independent concept X is from another discipline (like in social influence). The other way around is, when the result/explained/dependent concept is from political science (like political ideology), for example, and the reason/explaining/independent concept is from psychology (like anxiety). Our focus, as psychologists, is on the first option – it all begins with zooming into the result/explained/dependent concept, the one we identify as requiring understanding and explanation.

Practice – examples of interdisciplinary explanations in psychology; and explain social psychology:

And the X? these are the approaches, theories, models in psychology

The same analytical layout is used in other disciplines:

Practice – examples in other disciplines:

Recap of the analytical process, employing the building blocks we have practised:

The theory X can explain the human being (Y): the theory can explain behaviours, mental processes, and emotions.

Psychology is the study of the human being:

- **'The study of',** refers to explaining the human being: exploring, analysing, examining, in order to understand the human being. How and why an individual behaves, feels, and thinks in a certain way.

Y in psychology is almost always any concept that has to do with the 3 key indicators/dimensions of the human being, and it is often the one that is changing in the basic model.

The theories, the Xs, are 'fixed', the Ys, change depending on our question and topic of study.

Therefore, the framework of analysis is consistently using the theories (same key Xs), applied to changing Ys.

The X is embedded in the theory. Each theory, such as behavioural theory, is composed of many theories and models, all sharing something in common.

A note: *The label of the theory is a clue to the concept being used.*

Explanations in psychology:

- X is a reason for Y
- Y is explained by X
- X can influence Y
- Y can be shaped by X

A note: *Explain the difficulty in relating cause to effect, even under experimental conditions; including extraneous and confounding variables.*

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Practice – core sentences in different ways:

Checking up on our identification of X and Y, especially in application scenarios:

Practice – identification and double checking on identification of X and Y, especially in application questions regarding scenarios:

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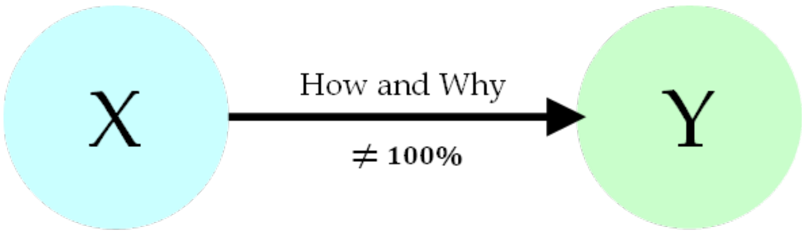
Basic Template in SAFE Psychology

Y = any concept that involves any behaviours, and/or mental processes, and/or emotions at the individual level that we aim to explain, study, examine, understand.

X = theories in psychology



X can explain Y (non-100% relationships)

Aim/Research Question (Introduction)

- **To explain Y** *(result, the explained/dependent concept/factor/variable; identifying Y), or to examine the relationship between X (reason, the explaining/independent concept/factor/variable) and Y; types of relationships between X and Y*
- *Setting up the scene, context*
- **What is Y** *(=description/conceptual and operational definition)*
- **What is X** *(=description/conceptual and operational definition)*

The Analysis (Body)

- **Analysis:** *How and Why X can explain Y (types of relationships)*

- **Evaluation:** *of the relationship between X and Y (lack of a 100% explanatory power)*

Conclusion

- **Generalisation:** regarding the relationship between X and Y (types of relationships)

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The Theoretical Framework in Psychology

Core arguments for:

- *General theory.*
- *Abnormality.*
- *Treatments.*
- *Debates and issues = key contextual points of direct evaluation related to core theoretical explanations.*

Biological theories:

Study and explain the human being by employing biological/physiological concepts, rather than psychological concepts.

X1 = Evolutionary, genetics.

X2 = Brain (structure, chemicals).

- A glance at the endocrine system, controlled by the brain; pituitary master-gland.

Psychological theories:

Study and explain the human being by employing psychological concepts, rather than biological concepts.

X3 = Behaviouralism, and social learning.

X4 = Cognitive theory.

X5 = Psychodynamic theory (Freud).

X6 = Humanist theory.

X7 = Social approach.

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Definition of abnormality

- This topic relates to the first step in the study of psychopathology = definition of the explained concept, namely: mental disorders, at a general abstract level, or at a specific level, like a specific mental disorder, in specific settings/attributes, like depression of women in major cities in the UK.

- We are facing this demanding task before we embark on the explanation of *How and Why* any concept can explain depression, for example.

- It is challenging to 'decide' on the point of transition from 'normal' to 'abnormal.
- DSM-5TR Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published in 2022 (first edition was published in 1952) provides the diagnostic criteria; symptoms that are persistent, pervasive, and distressing.
- The problems: subjectivity, self-report, observation, and bias.

The common guidelines for abnormality:

1) Deviation from social norms

All societies have social norms: behaviours and beliefs that deviate from these norms can be regarded abnormal.

- Practical and useful.
- Subjective: can be open to interpretation.
- Cultural differences and subcultures.
- Change over time between and within cultures.
- Eccentricity.
- The role of context.
- Ethnocentric bias.

2) Deviation from statistical norms

Abnormality can be seen as a statistically rare behaviour (statistical infrequency), on both sides of a normal distribution; away from the average.

- Objective criterion.
- Useful, as a diagnostic tool, provides cutting-off point.
- Difficult to define.
- Cultural differences and subcultures.
- Individual and situational differences.
- IQ above 140 (average is 100) is infrequent yet not abnormal, compared with anxiety disorders that are frequent.

3) Failure to function adequately

Abnormality can be defined depending on the level of functioning of the individual;
Features (Rosenhan and Seligman, 1989):

- Dysfunctional and maladaptive behaviour (prevents achieving goals).
- Observer discomfort.
- Unpredictable behaviour.
- Irrational behaviour.
- Personal distress (anxiety, depression, excessive fear).

• Objective and quantifiable (GAF Scale, the global assessment of functioning: a score from 0 to 100).
• Successful functioning means 'normal' and psychologically healthy, and vice versa?

4) Deviation from ideal mental health

A humanist orientation that alters the perspective from asking when we can think of abnormality onto when it is 'normal'; a more positive perspective.

Jahoda's (1958) indicators:

1. Positive attitude towards oneself, self-esteem: super important factor.
2. Self-actualisation.
3. Resistance to stress.
4. Personal autonomy (internal locus of control versus external and helplessness).
5. Accurate perception of reality: super important and at the heart of all theories one way or another regarding mental health.
6. Adaptation (flexibility compared with rigid attributes/authoritarian), mastery of the environment (successful work, life, balanced).

• Holistic orientation.
• Subjective.
• Change over time.
• Cultural differences and subcultures.
• Difficult to define.
• Difficult to achieve (Maslow, 1943, argued that around 1% of people achieve self-actualisation).

Overlapping parameters, and overlapping symptoms, including the challenge of comorbidity = the presence of more than one medical or psychiatric conditions for the same individual.

Theories in psychology

1) Evolutionary theory

Core theoretical argument

X = **Genetics**

Genetics can explain human behaviours, emotions, and cognitions.

Human behaviours, emotions, and cognitions are the result (Y) of genetic predispositions (X) that run in the family history (for survival).

- 23 pairs of chromosomes = 46, DNA genetic makeup

Examples:

Genotype: actual genes estimated between 50-100,000, cannot be changed.

Phenotype: how the genes manifest themselves in response to environmental factors, like height (strongly influenced by genotype) but can be influenced by malnutrition.

Core abnormality argument

Abnormality (abnormal behaviours, abnormal emotions, abnormal mental processes) can be explained by genetic predispositions and mental disorders that run in the family history. Mental disorders are inherited.

Examples:

Schizophrenia – 48% concordance rate identical twins, 17% nonidentical.

Depression – 40-50% concordance rate identical twins, 20% nonidentical.

Core treatment argument

N/A – the difficulty of 'tampering' with genetics, 'fixing' genetic abnormalities?

- Preventive medical procedures based on identified genes.
- Genetic profiles (and gene mapping), and genetic engineering.

Examples:

N/A? when, how and why?

Debates and issues

Nature versus nurture:
Nature, but: genotype versus phenotype

Determinist versus free will:
Genetic/biological determinism

Reductionist versus holism:
Biological reductionism

Individual differences (unit of analysis = the individual):

Situational differences:

Cultural differences and cultural bias:

Gender differences and gender bias:

Scientific approach?
Highly scientific; Nomothetic

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2) Neuropsychology theory

X = **Brain**

X1 = **brain structure**

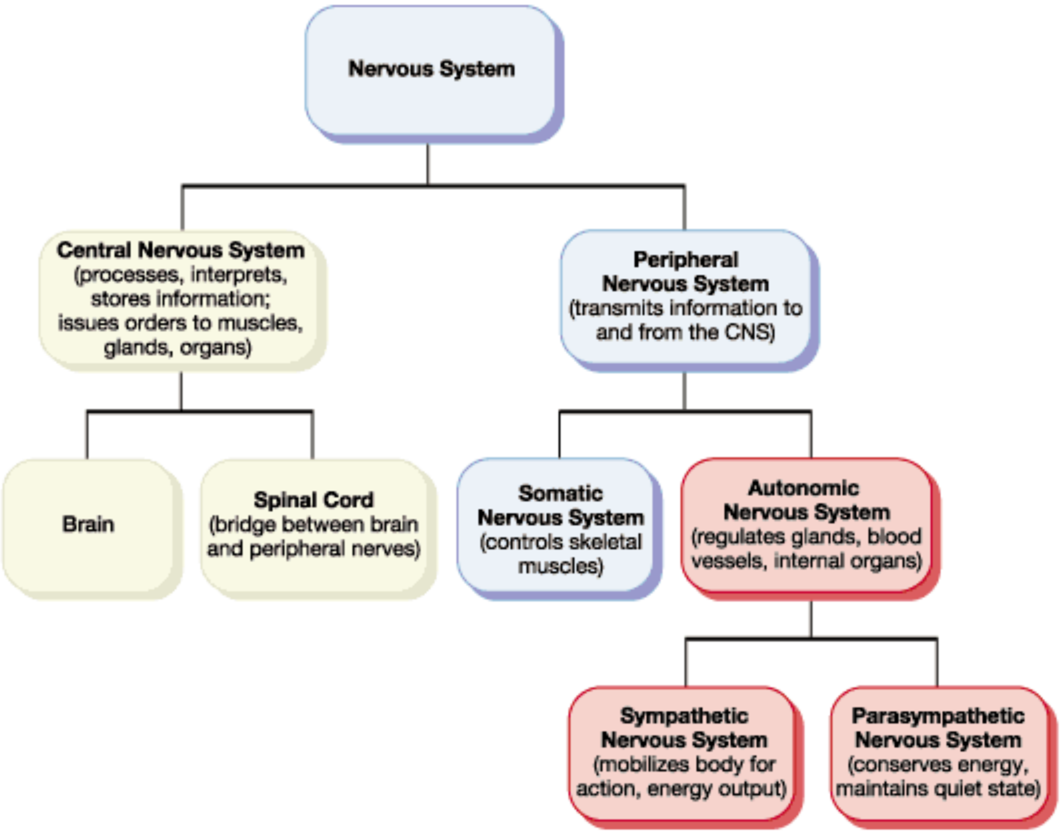
- Brain mapping, linking parts of the brain to specific functions.
- Brain scans, invasive versus non-invasive, showing structure and/or activity.

X2 = **brain chemicals**, neurotransmitters

- The role of **hormones** = pituitary gland

Core theoretical argument

- Different parts of the brain are responsible for different functions (behavioural, cognitive, and emotional functions).
- Different neurotransmitters can explain/are responsible for different behavioural, cognitive, and emotional functions.
- And, different hormones can explain various behavioural, cognitive and emotional functions.



Examples X1:

Examples X2:

Core abnormality argument

- Abnormality is the result of damage/dysfunction within the specific part of the brain responsible for the function.
- Abnormality is the result of abnormal neurotransmitters, chemical imbalance/ dysfunction.

Examples X1:

Examples X2:

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Core treatment argument

- Brain surgery (rare, no longer performing lobotomy); the problem of no-regeneration for neurons: brain damage is irreversible and irreparable.
- Pills – balancing brain chemicals.
- ECT.
- Invasive versus non-invasive methods and considerations.

Examples X1:

Examples X2:

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Debates and issues

Nature versus nurture:

Nature, mostly

Determinist versus free will:

Biological determinism

Reductionist versus holism:

Biological reductionism

Individual differences (unit of analysis = the individual):

Situational differences:

Cultural differences and cultural bias:

Gender differences and gender bias:

Scientific approach?

Highly scientific, development of scanning techniques; Nomothetic

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3) Behavioural theory

Y = **behaviours only** - not including emotions and mental processes.

X = **learning from the environment** through **classical conditioning** (by association) and **operant conditioning** (through reward/punishment, reinforcement). Learning through direct experience.

Social learning: X = the observation and imitation of **role models**. There is a limited account for mental processes in the explanation: attention and retention (for the learning aspect), motor reproduction and motivation (for the performance/behaviour aspect). Learning through indirect experience.

Core theoretical argument

- Behaviouralism argues that all behaviour (limitation on Y) is learnt from the environment (direct experience) through classical (through association) and operant conditioning (through consequences of reward/punishment).
- Social learning: X is learning from the environment through observation and imitation of role models (those we identify with). There is mediation by cognitive processes like attention, retention (encoding), motivation, decision-making, etc.

Examples:

Core abnormality argument

- Abnormal behaviour is learnt from the environment as maladaptive or dysfunctional behaviour.
- Abnormal behaviour is learnt from observing and imitating role models displaying abnormal behaviour themselves.
- Mental disorders are acquired from the environment.

Examples:

Core treatment argument

- Changing into a new learning through conditioning = systematic desensitisation, flooding, token economy.
- Changing role models…

Examples:

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Debates and issues

Nature versus nurture:
Nurture
SLT: Nurture

Determinist versus free will:
Environmental determinism
SLT: Soft determinism

Reductionist versus holism:
Environmental reductionism
SLT: less reductionist

Individual differences (unit of analysis = the individual):

Situational differences:

Cultural differences and cultural bias:

Gender differences and gender bias:

Scientific approach?
Scientific; Nomothetic
SLT: mostly scientific; Nomothetic

4) Cognitive theory

X = **cognitions**, mental processes

Y = **behaviours and emotions**

Core theoretical argument

The way the individual thinks (cognitions) can explain the individual's behaviours and emotions.

- The role of **schemas** = a schema contains all the information about an object, action, concept, other people. It is like a cognitive roadmap, a package of knowledge.

Examples:

Core abnormality argument

Abnormality is the result of abnormal distorted and irrational cognitions, such as negative thoughts, irrational beliefs, black-and-white thinking, and overgeneralisations.

Examples:

Core treatment argument

Transforming abnormal cognitions into more ‘normal’ ones: Elli’s ABC model, Beck’s negative triad.

Examples:

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Debates and issues

Nature versus nurture:
Nature and nurture

Determinist versus free will:
Soft determinism

Reductionist versus holism:
Less reductionist

Individual differences (unit of analysis = the individual):

Situational differences:

Cultural differences and cultural bias:

Gender differences and gender bias:

Scientific approach?
Mostly scientific; Nomothetic and Idiographic

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5) Psychodynamic theory

X = **psychodynamic emotional conflicts**

- Conflicts between emotions (unresolved).
- Origins in childhood experiences (psychosexual stages).
- Unconscious.

Core theoretical argument

The structure of personality is founded on the id, ego, superego.

Human beings are shaped and governed by a dynamic interplay of emotional conflicts between the id (instincts, nature) and superego (morality, nurture). Ego is the conscious self, the referee, its role is to constantly negotiate conflicting demands between ego and superego.

- **Id:** innate, **pleasure principle**, responsible for drives like sex and aggression.
- **Ego:** developed around the age of 2-4 years old, and acts based on the **reality principle**, balancing the id and the superego.
- **Superego:** acquired, develops around 4-5 years old. Acts based on the **morality principle**: fighting against shame and guilt resulting from the demands of the id (hence, self-criticism).

Examples:

Core abnormality argument

Abnormality is the result of a weak ego failing to balance the conflicting demands between id and superego, thus, overuse of defence mechanisms.

Abnormality where 'id' takes over versus abnormality where 'superego' takes over.

Examples:

Core treatment argument

Psychoanalysis is the bringing up of content from the unconscious mind into consciousness thereby it 'resolves' the need for excessive use of defence mechanisms, strengthening and consolidating the ego/self and alleviating symptoms.

Methods: free associations, interpretation of dreams, slips of the tongue, hypnosis.

Examples:

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Debates and issues

Nature versus nurture:
Nature and nurture

Determinist versus free will:
Determinist

Reductionist versus holism:
Less reductionist but not in a humanist sense

Individual differences (unit of analysis = the individual):

Situational differences:

Cultural differences and cultural bias:

Gender differences and gender bias:

Scientific approach?
Not scientific; Idiographic mostly, and nomothetic

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6) Humanist theory

Considers the individual as a unique human being, and focuses on a positive search for meaning, self-actualisation, and self-esteem; takes into account various explaining concepts Xs.

Core theoretical argument

Holistic approach: a positive focus on the individual as a 'whole' – human beings have free will.

Subjective thoughts and feelings (**self-concept**) shape human life, especially behaviours.

Maslow – **hierarchy of needs**; **Rogers** – **self actualisation**

Various factors provide the context for each individual's life at any given moment.

Examples:

Core abnormality argument

Abnormality is the result of incongruence between self-concept and ideal self. Pathways for self-actualisation are free or blocked? (Rogers)

Examples:

Core treatment argument

Holistic, awareness of the individual's behaviours, emotions, and cognitions, talk therapy, free will and responsibility.

Combination of factors, finding meaning and purpose, self-actualisation, logotherapy.

Removing incongruency – Rogers.

- The issue of cultural differences.

Examples:

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Debates and issues

Nature versus nurture:
Nature and nurture

Determinist versus free will:
Free will

Reductionist versus holism:
Holistic

Individual differences (unit of analysis = the individual):

Situational differences:

Cultural differences and cultural bias:

Gender differences and gender bias:

Scientific approach?
Not scientific; Idiographic

Juggling concepts at all levels of the matrix: nuances and implications:

Apply different Xs to different dimensions of Ys, and implications in evaluation:

- Vertical and horizontal juggling

- Expanding the matrix and the formulation of models

Practice and examples:

- **The diathesis model** in studying stress: genetic vulnerability and a trigger (like trauma, life experiences/events).
- **The interactionist approach:** nature and nurture are not mutually exclusive influences, and it is not a zero-sum-game impact. The relative contribution and interplay between innate and environmental factors are more important: like parenting (sensitivity hypothesis and temperament).

- **Mediating variables**
- **Extraneous variables**