

What to do with a Psychology degree?

To employers, a psychology degree is attractive, because of its combination of science and humanities. Carl Gilleard, of the Association of Graduate Recruiters, says "Many employers regard psychology graduates as having a head start. They know about people's behaviour, how they form relationships and about group dynamics. That kind of knowledge is key to so many jobs these days."

What skills have I got ?

A common characteristic of students is their difficulty in articulating what skills they have developed through studying psychology. It is easy to assume that all graduates possess the same skills. Few disciplines though, can offer such a comprehensive list. For example, those statistics you have sweated blood over but managed to master, prove you can handle and interpret statistical data which is a useful skill in many careers.

Listed below are some of the skills a typical psychology graduate will have acquired during their degree course.

Literacy

The ability to write both succinct reports and more lengthy analyses. Psychology graduates are accustomed to writing essays which allow them to explore issues in detail, but they also become familiar with the techniques of concise writing within a pre-set format as they write up their practical reports. The ability to produce a concise report is often cited by managers as a skill they would like their management trainees to have.

Numeracy

The ability to handle and interpret statistical information. Psychology graduates are good at manipulating and summarising data, and at drawing implications from data summaries and probability statements.

Computer literacy

The ability to use a computer package, whether for word processing, statistics, or data management, and the ability to learn new ones.

Interpersonal awareness

Knowledge of the mechanisms of social communication and the potential sources of personal conflict. This makes a difference in understanding and dealing with interpersonal problems when they arise in the workplace.

Environmental awareness

Knowing how environments and organisations can directly influence people's understanding and behaviour.

Problem-solving skills

The ability to identify different strategies and approaches to solving problems. This may be on a macro-level, in applying totally different perspectives or levels of analysis to the problem, or at a more basic level, in terms of choosing appropriate methods to deal with it. Psychology graduates are brilliant at solving problems as they are trained in relevant methods from the moment they step into a laboratory.

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Information-gathering skills

In seeking information on a particular topic or general area, knowing where to look, what to use and how to use it.

Critical evaluation

The ability to appraise information and situations realistically, and to anticipate problems or difficulties.

Research skills

Knowing how to go about gathering systematic information. Psychology students are trained in a number of methods. At the least, observational, experimental and case-study techniques.

Measurement skills

Knowing how to design questionnaires and develop other measurement tools.

Perspectives

The ability to look at issues from several different points of view.

Higher-order analysis

The ability to extract general principles from immediate or concrete situations. Psychology graduates tend to be better than most people at spotting recurrent patterns or similarities between situations, and at looking at issues in terms of their underlying principles rather than becoming bogged down with the details of the immediate situation.

Pragmatism

The ability to make the best of a non-ideal situation. Psychology students know that the perfect experiment is going to be elusive and they will have to get on with doing it as well as possible. As graduates, this tends to give them a strongly practical element.