

Approaches Sort

The decisions made by psychologists are guided mainly by their overall *approach* to psychology—that is, by the assumptions, questions, and methods they believe will be most helpful in their work. There are many psychology approaches that have evolved over the years. We will look more closely at five of these approaches. Some psychologists adopt just one of these approaches, but most psychologists blend assumptions and methods from two or more approaches in an effort to more fully understand behavior and mental processes.

Your task is to rank each approach of psychology from the most important to the least method of understanding ones personality and justify your answer. Before deciding, you need to read the descriptions of each development below.

A. Psychodynamic Approach:

Rooted in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, this approach asserts that all behavior and mental processes reflect constant, and mostly unconscious, psychological struggles raging within each person. Usually these struggles involve conflict between the impulse to satisfy instincts (such as food, sex, or aggression) and the need to abide by the restrictions imposed by society. This was the first major theory of personality and treatment, and, with modifications, it is still in use. The theory places a heavy emphasis on inner, unconscious processes as the primary determinants of personality and behavior.

B. Humanistic Approach:

The humanistic approach sees behavior as determined primarily by each person's capacity to choose how to think and act. They see these choices as dictated not by instincts, biological processes, or rewards and punishments, but by each individual's unique perceptions of the world. So if, to you, the world is a friendly place, you are likely to be optimistic and secure. Humanistic psychologists try to understand how each individual's immediate and unique experiences guide that person's thoughts and actions. Humanistic psychologists also believe that people are essentially good, that they are in control of themselves, and that their main innate tendency is to grow toward their highest potential. One key example of this approach is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory.

C. Behavioral Approach:

Founded by John Watson, behaviorism characterizes behavior as primarily the result of learning. Behaviorists seek to understand all behavior—whether it is aggression or drug abuse, shyness or sociability, confidence or anxiety—by looking at the individual's learning history, especially the patterns of reward and punishment the person has experienced. They believe that people can change problematic behaviors by unlearning old habits and developing new ones. Behaviorism, in regards to personality, focuses on the meaning behind how we have been conditioned to learn behaviors based on stimuli and rewards and punishments.

D. Cognitive Approach:

The cognitive approach focuses on how people take in, mentally represent, and store information; how they perceive and process that information; and how cognitive processes are related to the behavior we see. In other words, the cognitive approach leads psychologists to study how our mental memories and experiences connect with our outward behaviors. Psychologists using this approach explore how people process information in various situations ranging from decision making and interpersonal attractions to intelligence testing and group problem solving. This approach seeks to connect how our cognition (process of learning something) connects with our behaviors such as remembering a fact, naming an object, or writing a word.

Rank each of these approaches to psychology from most important to least important method to understanding personality. Then, explain why you placed the MOST important and LEAST important in those places. Make sure you give **specific** examples to support your argument.

Most important
approach to
psychology



Least important
→ approach to
psychology

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