History and Approaches

I. WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGY?

A. BASIC DEFINITION

1. *Psychology* is the **scientific** study of behavior and mental processes.
2. *Behavior* refers to any action or reaction of a living organism that can be directly observed.
3. *Mental processes* include internal processes such as thinking, feeling, and desiring that can be only indirectly observed.

B. GOALS

1. To describe particular behaviors by naming, classifying, and measuring them.
2. To explain why a behavior or mental process occurred.
3. To predict the conditions under which a future behavior or mental process is likely to occur.
4. To apply psychological knowledge to promote desired goals and prevent unwanted behaviors.

II. EARLY APPROACHES

A. WILHELM WUNDT

1. Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) was a German scientist who established the first psychology research laboratory. Wundt wrote a landmark text and was the first person to call himself a "psychologist."

2. Wundt and his students conducted studies on the "elements" of consciousness, including sensation, perception, and emotion.

3. Wundt pioneered a research method called introspection in which his subjects reported detailed descriptions of their own conscious mental experiences.

B. STRUCTURALISM

1. Inspired by Wundt's ideas, Edward Titchener (1867–1927) established a psychological laboratory at Cornell University.

2. Titchener trained his students to use introspection to identify the most basic components, or structures, of conscious experiences.

3. Known as structuralism, Titchener's approach proved to be an unreliable method of investigation because different subjects often reported very different introspective findings about the same stimulus. In addition, introspection could not be used to study children, animals, or complex topics such as mental disorders.

C. FUNCTIONALISM

1. Led by Harvard professor William James (1842–1910), functionalists emphasized studying the purpose, or function, of behavior and mental experiences.

2. Functionalists rejected the introspective method of gathering information. For example, instead of asking subjects to describe the emotion of fear, functionalists studied how fear enables people and animals to adapt to their environments.

3. Functionalists broadened the scope of psychological research to include the direct observation of human and nonhuman animals.

D. PSYCHOANALYSIS

1. Both the structuralists and the functionalists focused on the study of conscious experiences. In contrast, the Austrian physician Sigmund Freud emphasized the role of unconscious conflicts in determining behavior and personality.

2. Known as psychoanalysis, Freud's school of psychological thought focused attention on conflicts between accepted norms of behavior and unconscious sexual and aggressive impulses.
3. Freud believed that dreams, "slips of the tongue" (called "Freudian slips"), and memory blocks all provide glimpses into the unconscious mind.
4. The modern psychodynamic approach incorporates many of Freud's landmark theories.

E. GESTALT

1. While the structuralists divided the object under study into a set of elements that could be analyzed separately, Gestalt psychologists focused on how we construct "perceptual wholes."
2. Gestalt theories and methodologies are used to explain perceptual organization. Chapter 6 will provide a detailed discussion of Gestalt theories.

III. MODERN PERSPECTIVES

A. THE BEHAVIORAL PERSPECTIVE

1. Behaviorists believe that both conscious and unconscious mental processes are unobservable. Instead, behaviorism focuses scientific investigations on observable behaviors that can be objectively measured. Behaviorists believe that human behavior is learned and can be controlled through the presence or absence of rewards and punishments.
2. Behaviorism emerged from the pioneering work of the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936). Pavlov conducted a series of famous experiments, which demonstrated that much behavior among animals is learned rather than instinctive. Pavlov's work will be studied in more depth in Chapter 8.
3. American psychologist John B. Watson (1878–1958) applied Pavlov's line of reasoning to human behavior. Watson believed that human beings could be socialized in any direction through learning. In 1924, he boldly declared,

"Give me a dozen healthy infants, well formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in, and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and, yes, even beggar and thief. . . ."

4. Watson's ideas had a great influence on the thinking of B. F. Skinner (1904–1990). Skinner's experiments and writings made him the leading advocate of behaviorism. Chapter 8 will provide a detailed discussion of Skinner's landmark work.

Test Tip *The behavioral perspective has generated significantly more multiple-choice questions than any of the other perspectives discussed in this chapter. Make sure that you know that Watson, Skinner, and other pioneering behaviorists stressed the importance of studying observable behavior. In addition, remember that behaviorist therapists use reinforcement to modify a client's behavior.*

B. THE HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

1. The American psychologist Carl Rogers (1902–1987) played a key role in the rise of humanistic psychology. Rogers believed that every person has the ability to self-actualize or reach their full potential. He emphasized the importance of free will and choice in human behavior. Chapter 12 will provide a detailed discussion of Rogers' work on personality.

2. Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) was another key leader in the development of humanistic psychology. Chapter 10 will examine Maslow's influential theory of motivation.

C. THE PSYCHODYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE

1. Freud's key theories about the unconscious continue to influence contemporary psychologists who follow the psychodynamic perspective. While continuing to emphasize the importance of unconscious influences, the psychodynamic perspective places less emphasis on sexual instincts.

2. The psychodynamic approach to therapy emphasizes repressed memories, free association, dream interpretation,

and analysis of transference. Psychodynamic ideas will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 12 and 15.

D. THE BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

1. Psychologists who employ the biological perspective study the physical bases of human and animal behavior.
2. Chapter 5 will provide a detailed discussion of the nervous system and the endocrine system.

E. THE COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

1. The cognitive perspective focuses on the way humans gather, store, and process sensory information.
2. Influenced by the computer revolution, cognitive psychologists use an information-processing model to conceptualize human memory, thinking, and problem solving. Chapter 9 will provide an in-depth discussion of the cognitive perspective.

F. THE SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

1. The sociocultural perspective focuses on how culture and social situations affect the way people think, feel, and behave.
2. See Chapter 16 for an in-depth discussion of the key research studies and findings based on the sociocultural perspective.

G. THE EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

1. The evolutionary perspective uses the principles of evolution to explain psychological processes and phenomena.
2. Evolutionary psychologists believe that natural selection plays a key role in determining human behavior. For example, evolutionary psychologists point to natural selection to explain the male preference for attractive, youthful spouses and the female preference for mates who possess high social status and financial resources. Chapter 5 will include a detailed discussion of the insights of the evolutionary perspective.

IV. A BROAD DISCIPLINE

A. DIVERSE SPECIALTY AREAS

1. Psychology embraces a wide range of specialty areas.
2. Clinical psychology and counseling attract the largest number of doctoral students.

B. SAMPLE CAREERS

1. Clinical psychology specializes in the evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of mental and behavioral disorders.
2. Forensic psychology applies the principles of psychology to the legal profession, including jury selection and psychological profiling.
3. Educational psychology uses knowledge of how people learn to help develop instructional methods and materials.
4. Industrial-organizational psychology applies the principles of psychology to the workplace, including employee motivation, job satisfaction, and personnel selection.

Test Tip

Psychology includes a large number of subfields and career specialties. Note that AP Psychology test writers have written several multiple-choice questions devoted to industrial-organizational psychology. Psychologists who specialize in this area study such workplace conditions as employee evaluation, job satisfaction, and leadership styles.