

PSYCHOLOGY

Starting or rejuvenating a group

INTRODUCTION

Are you a people watcher? Do you read newspapers and wonder why people do the things they do? Do you sometimes wonder why you are the way you are? If so then psychology would undoubtedly interest you as this subject is all about understanding mind and behaviour.

GETTING STARTED

As with starting any group, you will need to establish if other members are interested in the topic. Generally, a note in your U3A's monthly newsletter is a good place to start. If you need a few more participants to make your group sustainable then cast your net wider and approach surrounding U3As. Don't give up!

FINDING A LEADER

This is often the most challenging part and not just for psychology groups! The first thing to say is that your leader need not be someone with prior experience of some aspect of psychology. We are all human beings and thus have our own knowledge and experience to draw on. It does help to have a nominated person to take overall responsibility for organising the group and managing the content of meetings but someone else could take responsibility for organising the venue, tea, coffee etc.

FIRST MEETING

The first meeting can be used to explore the potential for a group. Announcements of a psychology group starting lead to some members attending out of curiosity but does not always translate into loyal group members. Some groups, however, don't mind if members just attend occasionally. The main thing to bear in mind is not to commit to booking a venue until you are sure how many people you may need or want to accommodate. This is obviously the same for many U3A subject groups. Many groups are small, just around eight or ten members who meet in member's homes.

Having convened your group, some may drop-out after one or two meetings. Don't let this put you off. Word does spread and I haven't known of a psychology group closing yet!

PLANNING STYLE AND FORMAT

There are many ways to plan and run a group. Some groups:

- ❖ Buy a text book or 'pop' psychology book and follow through each topic systematically
- ❖ Follow an 'AS' or 'A2' level curriculum book
- ❖ Leave it to the group leader to pick topics

- ❖ Ask members to suggest topics that they are curious about
- ❖ Follow an on-line MOOC (Massive Open On-line Course)
- ❖ Have an AGM where the group plan the content for the following year

The list is not exhaustive. To some extent the way in which the group runs may rely on the experience and background of the leader.

Most groups run by meeting once a month but others run short courses a couple of times a year. One group in Manchester area ran two seven-week courses per year. This means that one particular topic can be covered in more detail.

TECHNOLOGY

The technology required is likely to depend on the size of the group and the choice of how you organise each session. Many U3As have a regular meeting room and some have wi-fi as well so that internet resources can be used.

A data projector, computer and sound amplification system are useful for presentation type sessions particularly if using PowerPoint. If you are meeting in a member's home then you may not need any particular technology but a TV, DVD and computer with wi-fi access is useful. Alternatively, each group member could take it in turns to prepare something and then talk about it with the group in which case technology may not be required apart from researching a topic.

RESOURCES

Books

- ❖ AS/A" Level Psychology AQA Revision Guide CGP Books ISBN 978-1-84762-422 ABOUT £18. Each topic is quite easy to turn into a two-hour session
- ❖ *Psychology. The Science of Mind and Behaviour* 2015 Richard Gross ISBN 978 1471 829734 about £38. Degree Level and an enormous tome but very interesting
- ❖ *Rough Guide to Psychology* (2011) Christian Jarrett ISBN: 978 1 84836 460 8 about £12
- ❖ *30-Second Psychology* (2011) Christian Jarrett ISBN 978 1 84831 261 6 About £15. Well-known theories in psychology are briefly explained. Each one has a '3-second psyche' and a '3-minute analysis'. Once again, each topic could stimulate discussion and investigation for a two-hour session.
- ❖ *50 Psychology Ideas you really need to know.* Adrian Furnham. ISBN 978 1 84724 852 7 about £12
- ❖ *50 Ideas you really need to know about the brain.* Moheb Costandi ISBN 978 1 78087-910-9 (There are lots of other titles in the range to support psychology groups)
- ❖ *Psychology. A Very Short Introduction.* Gillian Butler and Fred MacManus. About £5. As above there are lots of psychology topics in the range.
- ❖ *The Psychology Book* (2012) Nigel Benson and Catherine Collin. ISBN:1-978-40539-124-5 About £14. Available in ebook format. A magazine like format which follows logically the main ideas in psychology but also has some very thought-provoking topics such as 'Who likes competent women?'

This list is not exhaustive!

Magazines

- ❖ *Psychologies* published by Kelsey Media. Available from high street newsagents at £3.99 monthly. Each issue has a section entitled 'Dossier' which usually begins with an informative article, followed by examples and concludes with a self-assessment questionnaire. The latter is quite superficial but useful to trigger a discussion. www.psychologies.co.uk
- ❖ *The Psychologist* published by British Psychological Society. Hard copy £120 for 12 issues per year or electronic copy £12 per year. Details from www.thepsychologist.org.uk. Podcasts also available on the website.
- ❖ *Psychology Today* www.psychologytoday.com American publication but worthwhile for content. It's packed full of recent research.

Websites

- ❖ www.youtube.com Enormously useful for access to films of the classic experiments in psychology.
- ❖ <http://digest.bps.org.uk/> The British Psychological Society's 'Research Digest; Blogging on brain and behaviour. This has short up to date articles and very useful for generating ideas.
- ❖ www.psychologytoday.com Psychology Today Good material particularly their 'essential reads'.
- ❖ Search Google for 'Best Psychology Websites' and take your choice!

TV, DVD, Radio and Podcasts

- ❖ <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/keywords/psychology> There are lots of podcasts available; some just audio and others which take you inside the lecture theatre of a university.
- ❖ www.bbc.co.uk Go to the main home page and then enter 'psychology' in the search box. iPlayer may have some programmes but these are usually time limited whereas the BBC homepage has older programmes.
- ❖ *Neuropod*. www.nature.com/neurosci/neuropod Hosted by the journal Nature. Monthly podcast featuring psychology and neuroscience.
- ❖ This week in the History of Psychology. www.yorku.ca/christo/podcasts. Archive of podcasts from Professor Christopher Green recorded up to 2009 but still useful.
- ❖ All in the Mind, Radio 4. www.bbc.co.uk/radio4 Often available on iPlayer.
- ❖ The Great Courses www.thegreatcourses.co.uk. Various psychology courses on offer each with about 36 lectures of 30 minutes duration. A DVD course starts at around £80. The lecturers are from renowned American universities.

Massive Open On-line Courses. The content is free.

(See the document on 'MOOCs for Psychology')

- ❖ Edx offer a good variety of psychology courses e.g. 'The Psychology of Criminal Justice' and 'How the Mind Works'. The latter includes the topics thinking, reasoning and language.
https://www.edx.org/course?search_query=psychology
Recommended: Introduction to Psychology, Introduction to Social Psychology, Introduction to Developmental Psychology, The Psychology of Criminal Justice plus many many more.
- ❖ Coursera offer a sound basic psychology course called 'Introduction to Psychology'. Topics covered include the social mind, memory and mental illness. A little difficult to watch with the lecturer in a box at the bottom and a presentation at the top.
<https://www.coursera.org/courses?languages=en&query=psychology>
- ❖ Futurelearn is wholly owned by the Open University. At present the courses are somewhat limited for psychology although there are many health-related ones which inevitably include references to psychology. A course that might be of interest is 'Babies in Mind: Why the Parent's Mind Matters'.
<https://www.futurelearn.com/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=psychology>

TIPS FOR GOOD MEETINGS

Brief plans for the meeting provide structure and helps things to run smoothly. Your plan might include:

1. Introductions of group members
2. Set ground rules i.e. remind group members that whatever is discussed in the group is kept inside the four walls. This is important for psychology groups as members might share personal information.
3. An outline of what the meeting is going to be about
4. A list of the material you are going to present with some breaks planned so that everyone can contribute or comment if they wish to.
5. Include some questions for discussion such as:
 - a. Does this meet with your experience?
 - b. Can you think of a time when?
 - c. Have you seen anything about this in the media or elsewhere? This will encourage participation. If the group is large divide them into groups of three or four and then collect each group's comments once they are back altogether.
6. End by giving a summary or eliciting a conclusion.

For more detailed information about building, running and maintaining an interest group look at 'More Time to Learn'. It is an excellent publication. Go to <https://u3a.org.uk/advice/downloads> to download a copy.

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

Inevitably when your group becomes established there will be peaks and troughs. Try to vary the way in which the group runs. Few groups hit on a formula for success straight away so you may need to experiment until you find something that works for your members. Try to keep it fresh by trying new things from time to time.

AND FINALLY.....

Don't take it too seriously and have fun!

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