

Subfields of Psychology

Welcome to the infinite world of psychology! As you will soon learn, psychology is a field that is incredibly diverse, leaving you with *many* career options. Below is a description of the subfields of psychology, including degree and career options associated with each type.

Developmental

Focus on developmental, psychological, and social changes throughout the lifespan. This means from before birth to death. There are many theories about different developmental life stages. Examples you may have heard are Piaget, Erickson, and Kohlberg.

***Degree options:* PhD**

***Career options:* mostly research and teaching**

Social

Focus on the individual functioning in society. It is almost like the individual version of sociology. Famous social psych experiments include things like Milgram's experiment and the Stanford Prison Experiment. By the way, it's because of social psychology's unethical experiments that led to the strict standards in research involving human beings that we have today.

***Degree options:* PhD**

***Career options:* mostly research and teaching**

School

Focus on psychology in the schools, from kindergarten to high school (i.e., does not include colleges). Mostly involves helping kids with learning disabilities, histories of abuse, and other general psychological difficulties get proper services. School psychology is considered a different specialization than all others, because if you are educated as a school psychologist, you may only work in that area. In other words, if you want to cross over to other disciplines, you'll have to go back to school for more training.

***Degree options:* M.A./M.S., Ph.D.**

***Career options:* work K-12, maybe some research**

Counseling

Focus on adaptive functioning and strengths in their clients. It is like clinical psychology for "normal" people. Counseling psychologists look at clinical psychology as stigmatizing and too focused on problems. Counseling psychologists are like school psychologists for college, but can work in many other settings as well.

***Degree options:* Ph.D., Psy.D.**

***Career options:* individual/couples/group therapy, teaching, some research. (Often work in college counseling centers)**

Clinical

Focus on every diagnosis in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—like the Bible of psychology). They can have many different areas of specialization. This is what most people think of when someone says “psychologist.” Clinical psychologists can now be found in every setting, from private schools to hospitals, prisons, and private practice.

Degree options: Ph.D., Psy.D.

Career options: Anything, anywhere! Therapy, consulting, testing, teaching, research—you name it! They can even prescribe medication in some states (NM & LA)!

Neuropsychology

This is technically a subdiscipline of Clinical psychology. It specifically focuses on brain functioning and accidents to the brain—strokes, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s Disease, Alzheimer’s Disease, etc. It mostly involves testing but can also include cognitive rehabilitation (like teaching stroke victims how to talk again, etc.) This is the area of psychology that merges medicine and psychology and is the fastest growing subfield in psychology today! This requires specialized postdoctoral training in order to be considered a neuropsychologist.

Degree options: Ph.D., some Psy.D.

Career options: clinical (hospitals, medical centers, prisons), research, and teaching

Forensic Psychology

This is also a subdiscipline of Clinical psychology. It specifically focuses on legal aspects of psychology, including who’s competent to stand trial. Forensic psychology is one of the fastest growing subfields and they are some of the best paid psychologists. This requires specialized postdoctoral training in order to be considered a forensic psychologist.

Degree options: Ph.D., Psy.D.

Career options: Clinical, research. Can work in prisons, jails, police offices, consultation, for government, and/or courthouses

Psychoanalytic

Focus on the unconscious motivations of human behavior a la Freud. This is an incredibly elite subfield of clinical psychology, and requires an additional doctorate *after* you receive a doctorate in clinical psychology (or psychiatry). The focus is typically individual psychotherapy but can include couples and group therapy as well. Therapy traditionally occurs three to five times *per week* and lasts for years! The goal of therapy is to figure out who you are and work through all of the issues from your childhood that messed you up! Therapy is really expensive, ranging from \$100 to \$250 per hour! Note: this is the field of psychology that many people think is dying out but its theories are instrumental in helping us understand severe behaviors (aggression, murder, etc.) and personality disorders. Psychoanalysts consider themselves very different from other psychologists. Psychoanalysis has several different “schools,” but all deal with clinical concerns and the unconscious.

Degree options: Ph.D., Psy.D.

Career options: mostly private practice or teaching at psychoanalytic institutes

Humanistic

Focus on what makes people distinctly human. It is similar to counseling psychology but looks even more at the positivity in all human beings. The most famous humanistic psychologist was Carl Rogers, who revolutionized the field of psychology in the 60s. They are usually therapists in private practice, with the goal of helping people be “authentic.”

***Degree options:* Ph.D., Psy.D.**

***Career options:* private practice, some teaching and research**

Existential

Focus on the philosophy of existentialism, which sees humans as alone in the world. Existential therapy helps humans focus on how to deal with the anxiety of living alone in the world. It is often considered along with humanistic psychology, as both help humans be more “authentic” and alive.

***Degree options:* Ph.D., Psy.D.**

***Career options:* private practice, some teaching and research**

Industrial/Organizational

Focus on how to help humans be productive workers, including finding out what truly motivates them. Things like ergonomic working conditions came out of this subfield. These psychologists are considered the best paid, since they work for the corporate world.

***Degree options:* Ph.D.**

***Career options:* consulting with large corporations, research, some teaching**

Experimental

Focus on the mathematical and computer side of psychology. They work on things like making robots more human-like, teaching computers how to learn languages, etc.

***Degree options:* Ph.D.**

***Career options:* research and/or teaching**