AAMC’S COMPLETE LIST OF PSY/SOC/TOPICS FOR MCAT

These topics were compiled from the AAMC website. The order and grouping is almost identical to the AAMC’s lists. Concepts have been formatted and color coded by Kat Thomson.

- **BLUE =** Areas that emphasize general psychology and biopsychology
- **PINK =** Areas that emphasize the overlapping areas of sociology and psychology
- **YELLOW =** Areas that emphasize general sociology and epidemiology

### 6A. SENSING THE ENVIRONMENT

Sensory Processing  
Threshold  
Weber’s Law  
Signal detection theory  
Sensory adaptation  
Psychophysics  
Sensory pathways  
Types of sensory receptor  
Structure and function of the eye  
Visual pathways, parallel processing, feature detection  
Structure and function of the ear  
Auditory processing  
Sensory reception by hair cells  
Somatosensation  
Taste, taste buds, chemoreceptors  
Olfactory cells/chemoreceptors  
Pheromones  
Olfactory pathways in the brain  
Kinesthetic sense  
Vestibular sense  
Bottom-up/Top-down processing  
Perceptual organization (depth, form, motion, constancy)  
Gestalt principles
6B. MAKING SENSING OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Selective attention, Divided attention
Information-processing model
Piaget’s stages of cognitive development
Cognitive changes in late adulthood
Role of culture in cognitive development
Influence of heredity and environment on cognitive development
Biological factors that affect cognition
Types of problem solving
Barriers and approaches to effective problem solving
Heuristics and biases (e.g., overconfidence, belief perseverance)
Theories of intelligence
Influence of heredity and environment on intelligence, variations in intellectual ability
States of consciousness
Stages of sleep, sleep cycles, circadian rhythms, dreaming
Sleep-wake disorders
Hypnosis and meditation
Consciousness-altering drugs (types of, effects on nervous system)
Drug addiction and the reward pathway in the brain
Memory
Encoding Process of encoding information
Storage Types of memory storage (e.g., sensory, working, long-term)
Semantic networks and spreading activation
Recall, recognition, and relearning, retrieval cues
The role of emotion in retrieving memories (PSY, BIO)
Aging and memory
Memory dysfunctions (e.g., Alzheimer’s disease, Korsakoff’s syndrome)
Decay Interference
Memory construction and source monitoring
Changes in synaptic connections underlie memory and learning
Neural plasticity
Long-term potentiation
Theories of language development (e.g., learning, Nativist, Interactionist)
Influence of language on cognition
Brain areas that control language and speech
6C. RESPONDING TO THE WORLD

Three components of emotion (cognitive, physiological, behavioral)
Universal emotions (fear, anger, happiness, surprise, disgust, and sadness)
Adaptive role of emotion
Theories of emotion James–Lange theory Cannon–Bard theory Schachter–Singer theory
The role of biological processes in perceiving emotion
Brain regions involved in the generation and experience of emotions
The role of the limbic system in emotion
Emotion and the autonomic nervous system
Physiological markers of emotion (signatures of emotion)
The nature of stress
Appraisal Different types of stressors (e.g., cataclysmic events, personal)
Effects of stress on psychological functions
Stress outcomes/response to stressors
Emotional Behavioral Managing stress (e.g., exercise, relaxation, spirituality)
7A. INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCES ON BEHAVIOR

Neurons (e.g., the reflex arc)
Neurotransmitters and their influence on behavior
Structure and function of the peripheral and central nervous system
Forebrain, Midbrain, Hindbrain, Lateralization of cortical functions
Methods used in studying the brain
The spinal cord
Components of the endocrine system
Effects of the endocrine system on behavior
Genes, temperament, and heredity
Adaptive value of traits and behaviors
Interaction between heredity and environmental influences
Influence of genetic and environmental factors on the development of behaviors
Regulatory genes and behavior
Genetically based behavioral variation in natural populations
Prenatal development
Motor development
Developmental changes in adolescence
Theories of personality (psychoanalytic, humanistic, trait, social/cognitive, behaviorism)
Situational approach to explaining behavior
Biomedical versus biopsychosocial approaches to understanding behavior
Types of psych disorders, rates, and classification
Anxiety disorders Obsessive–compulsive disorder Trauma- and stressor-related disorders
Somatic symptom and related disorders
Depressive disorders, Bipolar and related disorders
Schizophrenia
Dissociative disorders, Personality disorders
Biological bases of: schizophrenia, depression, alzheimer’s, parkinson’s
Stem cell-based therapy
Factors that influence motivation (instinct, arousal, drives, needs)
Theories (Drive reduction, incentive, cognitive, need-based)
Biological and social motivators that regulate behavior (e.g., hunger, sex drive)
Motivation, behavior, and substance addiction
Components of attitudes (i.e., cognitive, affective, and behavioral)
How behavior influences attitudes (e.g., foot-in-the door phenomenon, role-playing effects)
Cognitive dissonance theory
7B. SOCIAL PROCESSES THAT INFLUENCE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

How the Presence of Others Affects Individual Behavior
Social facilitation
Deindividuation
Bystander effect
Social loafing
Social control
Peer pressure
Conformity
Obedience

Group Decision-making Processes
Group polarization
Groupthink

Normative and Deviant Behavior
Social norms
Sanctions
Folkways, mores, and taboos
Anomie
Deviance

Perspectives on deviance (e.g., differential association, labeling theory, strain theory)
Aspects of collective behavior (e.g., fads, mass hysteria, riots)

Socialization
Agents of socialization (e.g., the family, mass media, peers, workplace)
7C. ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE

Habituation and Dishabituation
Associative Learning
Classical conditioning
Neutral, conditioned, and unconditioned stimuli
Conditioned and unconditioned response
Processes: acquisition, extinction, spontaneous recovery, generalization, discrimination
Operant conditioning
Processes of shaping and extinction
Types of reinforcement: positive, negative, primary, conditional
Reinforcement schedules: fixed-ratio, variable-ratio, fixed-interval, variable-interval
Punishment
Escape and avoidance learning

The role of cognitive processes in associative learning
Biological processes that affect associative learning

Observational Learning
Modeling Biological processes that affect observational learning
Mirror neurons
Role of the brain in experiencing vicarious emotions
Applications of observational learning to explain individual behavior

Theories of Attitude and Behavior Change
Elaboration likelihood model
Social cognitive theory
Factors that affect attitude change (e.g., changing behavior, message and target, social factors)
8A. SELF-IDENTITY

Self-concept, self-identity, and social identity
self-esteem, self-efficacy, and locus of control
Different types of identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, class)
Formation of Identity
Theories of identity development (e.g., gender, moral, psychosexual, social)
Influence of social factors on identity formation
Influence of individuals (e.g., imitation, looking-glass self, role-taking)
Influence of groups (e.g., reference group)
Influence of culture and socialization on identity formation

8B. SOCIAL THINKING

Attributional processes (e.g., fundamental attribution error, role of culture in attributions)
How self-perceptions shape our perceptions of others
How perceptions of the environment shape our perceptions of others
Prejudice and Bias
Processes that contribute to prejudice
Power, prestige, and class
The role of emotion in prejudice
The role of cognition in prejudice
Stereotypes Stigma
Ethnocentrism
Ethnocentrism vs. cultural relativism
Processes Related to Stereotypes
Self-fulfilling prophecy
Stereotype threat
8C. SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Elements of Social Interaction
Types of status (e.g., achieved, ascribed)
Role, role conflict, role strain, role exit
Primary and secondary groups
In-group vs. out-group
Group size (e.g., dyads, triads)
Networks
Organizations
Formal organization
Bureaucracy and characteristics of an ideal bureaucracy
Perspectives on bureaucracy (e.g., iron law of oligarchy, McDonaldization)
Expressing and detecting emotion
The role of gender in the expression and detection of emotion
The role of culture in the expression and detection of emotion
Presentation of self
Impression management
Front stage versus back stage self (Dramaturgical approach)
Verbal and nonverbal communication
Animal signals and communication
Attraction, aggression, and attachment
Social support
Biological explanations of social behavior in animals
Foraging behavior
Mating behavior and mate choice
Applying game theory
Altruism
Inclusive fitness
Discrimination
Individual versus institutional discrimination
Relationship between prejudice and discrimination
How power, prestige, and class facilitate discrimination
9A. UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Sociological theories and perspectives
Microsociology vs. macrosociology
Functionalism
Conflict theory
Symbolic interactionism
Social constructionist perspective
Exchange-rational choice theory
Feminist theory
Social Institutions
Educational institution
Hidden curriculum
Teacher expectancy
Educational segregation and stratification
Institution of the family
Forms of kinship
Diversity in family forms
Marriage and divorce
Violence in the family (e.g., child abuse, elder abuse, spousal abuse)
Religion Religiosity
Types of religious organizations
Religion and social change (e.g., modernization, secularization, fundamentalism)
Government and economy
Power and authority
Comparative economic and political systems
Division of labor
Health and medicine
Medicalization
The sick role
Delivery of health care
Illness experience
Social epidemiology
Elements of culture (e.g., beliefs, language, rituals, symbols, values)
Material versus symbolic culture
Culture lag and culture shock
Assimilation and multiculturalism
Subcultures and countercultures
Mass media and popular culture
Evolution and human culture
Transmission and diffusion of culture
9B. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND PROCESSES

Demographic structure of society
Aging and the life course
Age cohorts
Social significance of aging
Sex versus gender
The social construction of gender
Gender segregation
Race and ethnicity
The social construction of race
Racialization Racial formation
Immigration status
Patterns of immigration and intersections with race and ethnicity
Sexual orientation
Demographic shifts and social change
Theories of demographic change (i.e., Malthusian theory and demographic transition)
Population growth and decline (e.g., population projections, population pyramids)
Fertility, migration, and mortality
Fertility and mortality rates (e.g., total, crude, age-specific)
Patterns in fertility and mortality
Push and pull factors in migration
Social movements
Relative deprivation
Organization of social movements
Movement strategies and tactics
Globalization
Factors contributing to globalization (e.g., technology, economic interdependence)
Perspectives on globalization
Social changes in globalization (e.g., civil unrest, terrorism)
Industrialization and urban growth
Suburbanization and urban decline
Gentrification and urban renewal
10A. SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Spatial Inequality
Residential segregation
Neighborhood safety and violence
Environmental justice (location and exposure to health risks)
Social class
Aspects of social stratification
Social class and socioeconomic status
Class consciousness and false consciousness
Cultural capital and social capital
Social reproduction
Power, privilege, and prestige
Intersectionality (e.g., race, gender, age)
Socioeconomic gradient in health
Global inequalities
Patterns of social mobility
Intergenerational and intragenerational mobility
Vertical and horizontal mobility
Meritocracy
Poverty
Relative and absolute poverty
Social exclusion
Health disparities (e.g., class, gender, and race inequalities in health)
Healthcare disparities (e.g., class, gender, and race inequalities in health care)