# Beyond a Guess

How psychologists turn everyday questions into scientific ones

**P.1.1** "Define psychology as a discipline and identify its goals as a science."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline the sentence that defines psychology, circle the first mention of each of its four goals, and number the example of each goal from 1 to 4. Your marks will show how the goals work together.

### A Phone, a Test, and a Question

1 At 10 p.m., Maya's phone lights up while she is studying for a history test. She checks one message, then spends twenty minutes scrolling. The next morning, she struggles to remember what she read. A friend might call her lazy, but a psychologist would ask a different kind of question. Psychology is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. Checking a phone is behavior others can observe; remembering and feeling distracted are mental processes. Psychologists use observations, surveys, and carefully planned studies to test ideas about these actions and experiences, rather than treating one person's guess as proof.

2 One goal of psychology is to describe what happens accurately. A researcher could record how often students check their phones while studying and ask them to report how focused they feel. Another goal is to explain why a pattern occurs. Perhaps alerts interrupt attention, or perhaps students already struggling with a difficult chapter reach for their phones more often. Both explanations sound possible, so the researcher must gather evidence to compare them. A single student's story cannot establish what is true for everyone. Clear definitions and repeated measurements help researchers spot patterns without confusing a hunch with a finding.

3 Psychologists also aim to predict behavior and mental processes. If a reliable pattern links frequent interruptions with lower quiz scores, researchers may predict which study sessions are most likely to end in poor recall. Prediction describes a likely outcome, not a certainty about any individual. A fourth goal is to influence outcomes responsibly. A school might randomly assign volunteers to study with alerts on or off, then compare their concentration. If the group without alerts concentrates better, that evidence may support silencing alerts as a strategy. These goals, describe, explain, predict, and influence, guide scientific questions rather than judgments about someone's character.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the passage define psychology? Identify one behavior and one mental process in Maya's story.

2. Which goal guides a researcher who counts phone checks? Which goal guides a researcher who compares possible reasons students check their phones?

3. If frequent interruptions reliably link to lower quiz scores, what could psychologists predict? What could they not know for certain?

4. Which goal guides the school's test of silencing alerts? What makes its approach scientific rather than a judgment about students?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a setting other than studying or phone use. In five sentences, define psychology as a science, then give one original example for each of its four goals: describe, explain, predict, and influence.

# Beyond a Guess



## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the sentence that defines psychology, circle the first mention of each of its four goals, and number the example of each goal from 1 to 4. Your marks will show how the goals work together. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How does the passage define psychology? Identify one behavior and one mental process in Maya's story. | **Psychology is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. Maya's phone checking is a behavior; remembering or feeling distracted is a mental process.** |
| 2 | Which goal guides a researcher who counts phone checks? Which goal guides a researcher who compares possible reasons students check their phones? | **Counting phone checks serves the goal of describing behavior. Comparing possible reasons serves the goal of explaining it.** |
| 3 | If frequent interruptions reliably link to lower quiz scores, what could psychologists predict? What could they not know for certain? | **They could predict which study sessions are more likely to end in poor recall. They could not know any individual's outcome for certain.** |
| 4 | Which goal guides the school's test of silencing alerts? What makes its approach scientific rather than a judgment about students? | **The goal is to influence outcomes. The school randomly assigns volunteers to conditions and compares their concentration instead of judging their character.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Psychology is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes, so I would study how people respond to a late bus. To describe their behavior, I would count how many riders leave the stop before the bus arrives. To explain it, I would compare whether posted wait times or crowd size better accounts for riders leaving. To predict it, I would use past counts to estimate when riders are most likely to leave. To influence it, I would test whether posting accurate arrival times reduces the number who leave.

Accept other accurate behaviors and mental processes named in the passage. For Part 3, look for a scientific definition and four distinct, plausible applications in a new setting.