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Resource manual for new high school psychology teachers

APA TEACHERS OF PSYCHOLOGY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

New high school psychology teachers may have a number of questions about how to proceed with instruction in their first psychology teaching assignment. What topics do I need to cover in a psychology course? How can I learn more about psychology? How do teachers find substantive and effective activities? How can teachers find quality support resources?

Questions like these are just a few that are repeatedly posted on social media sites when new teachers are looking for help. The purpose of this document is to present new high school psychology teachers with some resources and helpful suggestions from teachers with many years of teaching experience. APA is the leading professional and scientific organization representing psychology in the United States, and APA's Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (TOPSS) is the voice of high school psychology teachers within the association. This resource shares advice to new teachers from both APA and TOPSS.

The original authors of this resource, and those who have revised it, believe this resource will be useful to teachers new to the teaching of psychology. It can facilitate their being able to approach their new assignment with more confidence and poise, equipped with strategies for effective instruction.

Note: *This document mentions several resources that are external to APA. APA does not endorse any external resource or organization mentioned, but the information is provided here as useful information for teachers to view and consider.*

CONNECTING WITH COLLEAGUES

Being part of a larger, collaborative psychology teaching community can help teachers stay informed and feel supported, which can lead to better teaching practices and a more enriching learning experience for students. Many of the communities we describe offer continuous opportunities for professional growth and development. Through collaboration, workshops, and peer learning, teachers can stay updated on new educational strategies, tools, and pedagogical methods, ensuring they provide relevant and high-quality education. A connected community also fosters an environment of creativity and innovation. Teachers can exchange ideas, experiment with new teaching techniques, and share feedback, which leads to more engaging and effective lessons. Finally, belonging to a community can foster emotional well-being. Teaching is emotionally demanding, and having a network of peers who understand the challenges can provide support, encouragement, and a sense of solidarity.

APA, TOPSS, and the Society for the Teaching of Psychology

All new high school psychology teachers are encouraged to join APA as a [high school teacher affiliate](#). APA high school teacher affiliates automatically become members of TOPSS, which is the voice of high school psychology teachers within APA. The [TOPSS website](#) contains links to many free teaching activities and resources described in more detail throughout this guide. Learn more about TOPSS in this [brief video](#).

The [APA website](#) and affiliated pages are also valuable resources for teachers. From links to [over 60 psychology topics](#) and [current news stories](#) to an [APA dictionary of psychology](#) and [guidance for teachers and students on APA style](#), teachers can find a wealth of useful and up-to-date information online through APA.

Teachers who are interested in receiving periodic news and updates on TOPSS activities, opportunities, and resources are encouraged to [subscribe to the TOPSS listserv](#). Teachers can also subscribe to the free [Psychology Teacher Network \(PTN\)](#), a quarterly publication from APA's Center for Education in Psychology that includes articles, teaching activities, book reviews, and announcements about professional development opportunities. Finally, the [TOPSS Facebook page](#) is another way for teachers to stay informed about updates and opportunities.

APA also has over 50 divisions, or special interest groups, that are organized by members. High school teachers might find it useful to join Division 2, the [Society for the Teaching of Psychology](#) (STP). STP represents the interests of psychology teachers in all types of academic institutions—from secondary schools through graduate schools—and promotes teaching excellence.

Regional networks for the teaching of psychology

Many states and regions also have [regional teaching networks](#) specifically designed for high school psychology teachers and/or [regional psychological associations](#) for educators at both the secondary school and higher education levels. If a regional network for high school teachers does not exist in your state, TOPSS [offers funding \(through the American Psychological Foundation\)](#) and guidance for you to start your own.

Other professional communities to potentially explore

Several organizations and committees support the teaching of psychology as described on the [APA Center for Education in Psychology's webpage](#). Some examples include:

- The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) [Psychology Community](#)
- [College Board](#) offers communities, discussion boards, resource libraries, workshops, summer institutes, and other opportunities that may be of interest to those teaching Advanced Placement (AP) Psychology. Those teaching AP Psychology have also established a [Facebook page for AP Psychology instructors](#).
- Those teaching International Baccalaureate (IB) Psy-

chology also have access to a [Facebook community and IB resources](#).

- The [High School Teachers of Psychology Facebook page](#) describes itself as a space in which high school psychology teachers can collaborate, share materials, advice, and ideas to expand the minds of students in a non-AP psych course.

DESIGNING A HIGH SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY COURSE

Choosing the core topics to cover

The APA's [National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula \(PDF, 1MB\)](#) provide a strong infrastructure for organizing a course. The National Standards are designed to help teachers develop an accurate, comprehensive, and developmentally appropriate introductory psychology course for students in grades 9–12.

APA first commissioned a task force to develop curriculum standards in 1994. Task force members included experienced psychology educators at the secondary and university levels. These standards were approved by APA's Council of Representatives in 1999, and they are rigorously reviewed and revised on a regular schedule not to exceed 10 years. The first revision of these psychology standards was published in 2005, and a second revision was published in 2011. This third and most current version of the standards reflects the evolving body of psychological knowledge.

The National Standards are organized into four levels:

- Five thematic **pillars** represent overarching areas that encompass broad areas of psychological methodology, knowledge, and study. At the foundation of these pillars, cutting across all content, is **scientific inquiry and research methods**.
- Within each pillar are **standard areas**, or unit topics that represent closely related theories and findings regarding more specific areas of knowledge and study.
- **Content standards** are specific topics teachers can use as starting points to build lessons.
- Within each content standards are specific student **learning targets** or objectives.

Those teaching on-level psychology courses or who are not able to cover all units of the course due to time constraints should note that the standards recommend 10 units of study that should be considered a priority for

instruction. These recommended priority units are: scientific inquiry and research methods; biological bases of behavior; cognition; memory; life span development; learning; social; multiculturalism and gender; disorders; and health. The standards recommend that instruction on scientific inquiry and research methods should be included in all units of study.

Because high school psychology is a survey course covering a broad range of topics in psychology, it can sometimes seem that each topic in a unit or book chapter is distinct. However, there are common themes in psychology that cut across content areas. To demonstrate these overarching ideas and concepts that connect psychological content together, the National Standards include seven [Integrative Themes \(PDF, 43KB\)](#) that teachers are encouraged to emphasize throughout the course. These themes align with the APA's student learning outcomes for the Introductory Psychology course taught at the college level. Thus, highlighting them in the high school psychology course is a way to help students prepare for college coursework.

Integrative themes from the National Standards

 Psychology's Integrative Themes		Psychological science relies on empirical evidence and adapts as new data develop.
Psychology explains general principles that govern behavior while recognizing individual differences.	Psychological, biological, social, and cultural factors influence behavior and mental processes.	Psychology values diversity, promotes equity, and fosters inclusion in pursuit of a more just society.
Our perceptions and biases filter our experience of the world through an imperfect personal lens.	Applying psychological principles can change our lives, organizations, and communities in positive ways.	Ethical principles guide psychology research and practice.

Human diversity

Psychology aims to understand human behavior in all its complexity. An essential component of self-identity and self-image is one's cultural identity, which includes many components such as our age, racialized identity, ethnicity, nation of origin, migration status, ability, gender identity,

sexual orientation, social class, and religion/spirituality. For that reason, best practices in the teaching of psychology include instruction in cultural diversity.

TOPSS provides resources designed to [broaden diversity and representation in the high school curriculum](#), which include research study summaries, psychologist profiles, and other resources that highlight human diversity.

However, the TOPSS Committee and APA are also aware of the fact that across the U.S., there has been legislation limiting the topics that can be taught in individual states and that parents, school boards, and other stakeholders may review and/or censure content that can be taught in high school.

APA and TOPSS provide teachers with the resources needed to teach a high school psychology course that reflects the current psychological science and adequately prepares students for college coursework. This information may be useful for teacher background even if it is not used in the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to consult with school administrators to better understand any local, state, or regional restrictions on content.

[APA's Inclusive Language Guide](#) can be a helpful resource for teachers and students who are interested in learning culturally sensitive terms and phrases that center the voices and perspectives of those who have been historically marginalized or stereotyped.

Ethical challenges in teaching psychology

Teachers of high school psychology sometimes face ethical challenges that are unique to this discipline. For example, students sometimes self-disclose mental health challenges or mistakenly assume the course will provide them with mental health treatment. While having an experienced mentor teacher to consult in such situations is ideal, it can also be helpful to review the [APA Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct](#) for guidance. The article "[Do's and Don'ts in Teaching Psychology](#)" also is a helpful resource for avoiding ethical missteps.

Finding activities to deepen student learning

As in all high-quality teaching, the use of backward course design to develop a high school psychology course involves choosing instructional methods and including learning activities that will efficiently and effectively help students achieve desired learning outcomes.

There are countless sources of activities for psychology courses that teachers can find in textbooks, online, and

through professional development programming. The biggest challenge that most teachers face is considering: “When should I include an activity, and what should be my criteria for choosing which activity to use?” These questions can be particularly challenging for new teachers trying to discern which activities are informed by psychological science and which reflect ideas (and sometimes myths) that have been promoted through pop psychology. We highly recommend teachers thoughtfully consider the questions in the [Resource Vetting Rubric for High School Psychology Teachers \(PDF, 80KB\)](#) when selecting activities.

One heuristic that can be applied in choosing an activity is to try to determine how useful the activity is for enhancing learning, particularly of hard-to-grasp concepts or the most important concepts in a unit. A question teachers may ask is: “Will spending 45 minutes (or an hour) on this activity be the best use of time to get this concept across?” The authors of this resource have used activities that took an entire class block to set up, run, and clean up, while only reinforcing a simple concept that could have been mastered in 10–15 minutes of reading, lecture, and/or class discussion. (Jennifer Gonzalez, host of the podcast *Cult of Pedagogy* captures this challenge in her episode, *Is Your Lesson a Grecian Urn?*).

However, the authors of this resource have also devoted several full blocks to hands-on activities that effectively convey complicated information to students in ways that promoted a deep and detailed understanding seldom achieved through reaching, lecturing, and/or discussion.

Activity resources

- [Resources](#) that are searchable by the content pillars of the National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula have been collected from published APA teaching resources, online activities from the TOPSS unit lesson plans, and the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP; APA Div. 2) e-book *Promoting Psychological Science: A Compendium of Laboratory Exercises for Teachers of High School Psychology*. This page also includes a link to [resources designed to broaden diversity and representation in the high school curriculum](#), which includes research study summaries, psychologist profiles, and other resources that highlight human diversity.
- APA’s [Project Assessment \(PASS\)](#) is a collaboratively developed digital library of free learning assessments (e.g., assignments, quizzes, evaluations) designed to help psychology educators demonstrate evidence of

teaching and learning effectiveness. Users can search for, download, reproduce, and use the assessments in their classes at no cost.

- A collection of teaching resources including activities, videos, and assessments developed by a working group at the 2017 APA Summit on High School Psychology Education can be accessed through Canvas Commons. Instructions on how to access and use this resource set can be found at [this webpage](#).
- Teachers might also enjoy sharing engaging and accessible psychological science with students via APA’s podcast *Speaking of Psychology*. *Speaking of Psychology* features some of the field’s leading researchers discussing engaging topics that are highly relevant to our daily lives. A new episode is released every Wednesday. All episodes are available on the [podcast website](#) (with transcripts) and on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your favorite podcasts.
- The [Nicholas and Dorothy Cummings Center for the History of Psychology \(CCHP\)](#), located on the campus of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, provides access to historical records and artifacts related to psychology and the study of human behavior. Some exhibits are accessible online.

Research resources

The National Standards emphasize the importance of infusing research throughout the high school psychology course as a way of emphasizing the essential role that science plays in the study of human behavior. The resources below help teachers achieve this goal.

- The [APA Online Psychology Laboratory](#) is a free resource teachers can use to assign students to participate in experiments on psychological topics such as cognition, individual differences, learning, sensation and perception, and social psychology. Students can also access data sets to practice exploring and analyzing data.
- [This article highlights many free resources available from APA](#) that can provide teachers with access to research articles.
- Teachers can also subscribe to [APA Editor’s Choice](#) and receive free access to full length psychological research studies.

Pacing

For your convenience, the TOPSS Committee has compiled

some [sample pacing calendars](#) from high school psychology teachers for new teachers to review and adapt if helpful. APA does not endorse these calendars, but they are being provided here as examples for teachers to view and consider. The committee strives to continuously update the samples shared on this page.

LEARNING ABOUT THE DISCIPLINE OF PSYCHOLOGY

High school teachers can learn about the discipline of psychology through education, professional development opportunities, resources, and formal and informal teacher networks.

Education

For example, some teachers opt to take graduate coursework or pursue a master's degree in psychology. Information on some graduate programs in psychology can be found in this [resource](#). APA and many other non-profit institutions offer psychology courses such as [psychological research](#) and [statistics](#) through MOOCs or global massive open online course providers like [Coursea](#).

Professional development opportunities

- [Become a TOPSS member](#) and/or subscribe to the TOPSS listserv and [Psychology Teacher Network newsletter](#) to receive announcements about these events and opportunities.
 - TOPSS regularly hosts free and/or low cost webinars and summer workshops for high school teachers. TOPSS and the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) also regularly offer funding opportunities for teachers interested in pursuing professional development. Become a TOPSS member and/or subscribe to the TOPSS listserv and Psychology Teacher Network newsletter to receive announcements about these events and opportunities.
 - APA's [annual Convention](#) is the world's largest gathering of psychologists, psychology educators, and psychology students that takes place annually. The convention offers a variety of opportunities for teachers to discover the breadth and richness of the discipline and teacher registration is deeply discounted. This [earlier article highlights why APA is the "greatest professional development opportunity available"](#) for high school psychology teachers.
 - Other annual meetings include:
 - » [STP Conference on Teaching](#)
 - » [National Council for the Social Studies Annual Conference](#)
 - » [Regional Psychological Associations](#)
 - » [National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology \(NITOP\)](#)
 - » [Intro Psych Coast-to-Coast](#)
- APA's [Learn 2 Learn](#) webinar series showcases the application of advances in the science of learning through the illustration and application of novel and inclusive educational approaches, strategies, and techniques that promote educational excellence among teachers, students, and learners of all types.

Other resources

- APA's [Monitor on Psychology](#) is a monthly magazine that provides timely and informative articles about current issues in the field of psychology. TOPSS members receive hard copies as part of their membership benefits.
- APA has over [50 divisions](#), or special interest groups, that are organized by members. Browsing the main landing site can give teachers a sense of the breadth and reach of psychological science. Each division also had its own website, where teachers can learn more about particular fields. Many of the websites also have sections for students interested in learning more.
- The [APA Ethics Code](#) provides general principles and ethical standards that guide psychologists in ethical courses of action.
- In 2017, the APA Summit on High School Psychology Education was held at Weber State University in Utah. The summit produced [a number of deliverables on topics covering science, assessment, skills, credentialing, professional development, diversity, and technology](#). The TOPSS Committee is working to review and revise a number of these original resources, which were developed to support teachers and create the best possible future for high school psychology education. Teachers are invited to review the summit deliverables, available through the website above, but should note that content is being reviewed and revised and that several resources may be archived in coming months or years.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS' INTEREST IN PSYCHOLOGY

Preparing to teach a new course can be difficult, particularly for teachers with a limited educational background in psychology. As you get your bearing, you may have limited time to provide students with cocurricular activities or resources aimed at supporting their interest in the discipline. At the same time, APA recognizes the fundamental role that teachers play in engaging the future of our discipline. To support teachers in cultivating an excitement for psychology in their students, we share just a few resources for your consideration:

- This webpage on the [value of the high school psychology course](#) includes a brief but engaging video aimed at encouraging students to consider taking a course in high school psychology. This page also has links to articles and videos about different career paths in psychology.
- TOPSS offers an annual [TOPSS Competition for High School Psychology Students](#), traditionally held as an essay or video contest that offers cash awards to winning students.
- An APA webpage highlights [science fairs, clubs, and high school student research in psychology](#).
- [Psi Alpha](#) is a national honor society for students who plan to major or minor in psychology (or who just have a deep interest in the subject).
- The [Psychology Student Network](#) is a free biannual newsletter for all students interested in psychology (APA membership not required).
- TOPSS has also [provided classroom posters for teachers](#), including new posters that highlight the integrated themes for the course as mentioned above.

MAINTAINING YOUR EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING: STRESS AND COPING

Psychology is a fascinating subject, and it is a terrific class to teach because it is so interesting and students get excited about the content they study. However, there is a lot to learn when teachers are first starting out, particularly for those with limited background education in psychology. Moreover, we understand that teachers are already under considerable stress due to a variety of challenges and pressures. Our best advice is to join a psychology teaching community, use the resources available to high school psychology teachers, and engage in regular self-care.

APA offers many science-based [stress management resources](#) that you may find helpful for your own well-being and the well-being of your students. Additionally, TOPSS lesson plans on [positive psychology \(PDF, 861KB\)](#) and [stress and health \(PDF, 453KB\)](#) offer helpful tips for students and teachers alike, and APA lessons on [building student resilience](#) promote additional ways to boost student and teacher resilience.

Finally, APA's [Center for Psychology in Schools and Education](#) (CPSE) provides a broad array of science-backed resources for managing many of the challenges that arise in today's classrooms. As just a few examples, CPSE provides resources on:

- Using the [top 20 principles](#) on the science of learning to enhance pre-K to 12 teaching
- [Managing challenging classroom behaviors](#)
- Improving student [motivation](#)
- [Promoting mental health and academic success](#)
- [Mental health primers for teachers](#)
- [Violence and aggression against educators and school personnel](#)

CONCLUSION

The high school teachers who authored and revised this document have found teaching high school psychology to be an extremely fulfilling and exciting profession, and hope users of this resource will have the same experience. As has been mentioned in this document, all new teachers are encouraged to join [TOPSS](#) and become part of the TOPSS community. If new teachers have any questions, they should feel free to reach out to the current TOPSS Committee or to the APA Center for Education in Psychology at TOPSS@apa.org. The authors hope new teachers have a good school year.

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