

The APA Introductory Psychology Initiative (IPI)
Course Design Suggestion to Use Psychology's Integrative Themes

Integrative or key themes are unifying concepts that are supported by many or even all subareas of psychology. These themes convey deeper insights from psychology that we hope will endure with students long after the class has ended. There are many ways you might incorporate the integrative themes into your course, and you should consider what will work best for your course and your students.

Choose an Approach to Teaching Integrative Themes: Because the integrative themes connect to all of the subareas of psychology represented in the pillar model, it is extremely likely that you are teaching content that already illustrates these themes. Some examples of concepts connected to each theme are listed in Table 1. Many instructors find they can incorporate the integrative themes by simply looking for them in their existing content. You might also elect to change or emphasize different content in your course in order to connect to and illustrate the integrative themes more effectively.

Integrative Theme	Sample Concepts or Ideas
Psychological science relies on empirical evidence and adapts as new data develop.	Experimental methods Statistics Memory models Subliminal perception Therapy interventions
Psychology explains general principles that govern behavior while recognizing individual differences.	Intelligence Resilience Personality testing Supertasters Synesthesia
Psychological, biological, social, and cultural factors influence behavior and mental processes.	Psychological disorders Aging Health and wellness Attachment Personality theories
Psychology values diversity, promotes equity, and fosters inclusion in pursuit of a more just society.	Racial and cultural identity Stereotypes Racism Biases Prejudice implicit and explicit Emotional regulation
Our perceptions and biases filter our experiences of the world through an imperfect personal lens.	Perceptual illusions Schemas Cognitive errors Self-serving bias In-group bias

Applying psychological principles can change our lives, organizations, and communities in positive ways.	Psychotherapy Study skills Coping Conflict resolution Behavioral change
Ethical principles guide psychology research and practice.	Beneficence and nonmaleficence Fidelity and responsibility Integrity Justice Respect for people's rights and dignity

Make the themes explicit: We recommend that you find a way to make the integrative themes explicit to students, such as by describing them and by specifically mentioning when course concepts relate to an integrative theme.

Provide practice thinking and communicating about integrative themes: For students to learn the integrative themes and their connection to course content, they need practice doing so. You can create opportunities for students to do this through informal class discussions, more elaborate classroom activities, and through assessments.

Assess Understanding of Integrative Themes: You should measure students' understanding of the integrative themes, ideally at the end of course but potentially throughout. We provide a collection of sample assessments to get you started but encourage you to think about what will work best for your course and students. We also encourage you to seek feedback from your students about their experiences with the integrative themes.

Sample assessments:

Researchers found that participants who were instructed to eat only radishes when next to a plate of tempting chocolate chip cookies quit sooner when later attempting a difficult puzzle. In attempts to replicate this work, researchers have questioned whether this effect is as powerful as originally reported. This example best illustrates which of the following themes in psychology?

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

Key: A

Rakel's 12-month old son is not walking yet but her neighbor's 8-month old daughter has begun taking her first steps. The pediatrician reminded Rakel that while most children are walking by 12 months, they may develop at different rates. The pediatrician's advice best represents which of the following themes in psychology?

- A. Psychological science relies on empirical evidence and adapts as new data develop.

- B. Psychology explains general principles that govern behavior while recognizing individual differences.
- C. Psychological, biological, social, and cultural factors influence behavior and mental processes.
- D. Psychology values diversity, promotes equity, and fosters inclusion in pursuit of a more just society.
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Key: B

When Pari failed her exam, she blamed it on her teacher's tricky questions and not the fact that she did not study. This example best illustrates which of the following themes in psychology?

- A. Psychological science relies on empirical evidence and adapts as new data develop.
- B. Psychology explains general principles that govern behavior while recognizing individual differences.
- C. Psychological, biological, social, and cultural factors influence behavior and mental processes.
- D. Psychology values diversity, promotes equity, and fosters inclusion in pursuit of a more just society.
- E. Our perceptions and biases filter our experiences of the world through an imperfect personal lens.
- F. Applying psychological principles can change our lives, organizations, and communities in positive ways.
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Key: E

Many variables affect what we consider appealing, including facial features, our upbringing, advertising, and what our friends think. This example best illustrates which of the following themes in psychology?

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- B. Psychology explains general principles that govern behavior while recognizing individual differences.
- C. Psychological, biological, social, and cultural factors influence behavior and mental processes.
- D. Psychology values diversity, promotes equity, and fosters inclusion in pursuit of a more just society.
- E. Our perceptions and biases filter our experiences of the world through an imperfect personal lens.
- F. Applying psychological principles can change our lives, organizations, and communities in positive ways.
- G. Ethical principles guide psychology research and practice.

Key: C

José was studying and remembered what his psychology teacher said about connecting new concepts to his personal experiences. He used what he learned and received A's on all of his midterm exams. This example best illustrates which of the following themes in psychology?

- A. Psychological science relies on empirical evidence and adapts as new data develop.
- B. Psychology explains general principles that govern behavior while recognizing individual differences.
- C. Psychological, biological, social, and cultural factors influence behavior and mental processes.
- D. Psychology values diversity, promotes equity, and fosters inclusion in pursuit of a more just society.
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Key: F

Angelica read about the Tuskegee syphilis study and was asked by her instructor to provide a similar current example. She responded to her instructor that her neighbor, who was a counselor, was collecting data from her

clients to publish without their consent. This example best illustrates which of the following themes in psychology?

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- B. Psychology explains general principles that govern behavior while recognizing individual differences.
- C. Psychological, biological, social, and cultural factors influence behavior and mental processes.
- D. Psychology values diversity, promotes equity, and fosters inclusion in pursuit of a more just society.
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Key: G

As the head of a large corporation, Helen wanted to ensure that hiring procedures were free from biases related to a candidate's age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and other personal characteristics unrelated to their job performance. She began to analyze personnel data identifying where gaps existed in the company, then created objectives to inform the search for job candidates. This example best illustrates which of the following themes in psychology?

- A. Psychological science relies on empirical evidence and adapts as new data develop.
- B. Psychology explains general principles that govern behavior while recognizing individual differences.
- C. Psychological, biological, social, and cultural factors influence behavior and mental processes.
- D. Psychology values diversity, promotes equity, and fosters inclusion in pursuit of a more just society.
- E. Our perceptions and biases filter our experiences of the world through an imperfect personal lens.
- F. Applying psychological principles can change our lives, organizations, and communities in positive ways.
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Key: D