

Many first year courses are faced with large class sizes.  
Psychology at Glasgow – 600

The aim of first year is to :

- Provide an overview to the discipline
- Teach BPS core areas leading to an accredited degree
- Teach practical research skills
- Develop professional skills in essay/report writing

The course design of many first year courses assume all students are new to the discipline and equally engaged.

Growth in pre-tertiary psychology education

- Psychology A level is now the 4<sup>th</sup> most popular A level with over 55,000 students studying in 2011(BPS, 2013)
- 3,000+ studied Higher Psychology in Scotland 2012 (SQA, 2013)
- Increasing numbers of non-UK students completing UK degrees where there has been an opportunity to study aspects of the discipline beforehand

We surveyed our Level 1 psychology class (out of 550, 134 responded):

- 39% had prior studies
- 37% were non-native language speakers
- 62% intended to take psychology to honours

Does prior knowledge give an advantage?

1A exam grades were compared:

- Prior knowledge – B2
- No prior knowledge – B3 ( $p < 0.06$  ns)


Asked to reflect on first year experiences, students said:

“In higher psychology there was much more interaction with the lecturer.”


“It is very basic – seems to be intended for people who haven’t studied psychology before... It is mainly revision of what I did (in higher). This can be very demotivating.”

I study much less, e.g. in order to an A\* I had to remember so much more biology, names and years.


Prior knowledge and the first year experience

- How does the presence/absence of prior study affect the educational experience in first year
  - (How) should we recognise this prior knowledge in designing first year courses?
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Engaging students with different motivations

- Students at Glasgow study 3 subjects in first and second year with (normally) one becoming their main honours subject
  - This results in a class composed of students who intend to progress to honours and those who are just there to fill in an extra subject.
  - A common complaint about tutorials was that some students “didn’t get involved”
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Engaging students with different motivations

- How do these differences in motivation affect how students engage with their studies?
  - (How) should we address these differences in motivation?
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Activities & Materials

- We will give you sheets to record your private thoughts – you can keep these
  - Feedback sheets: at the end of each activity we will ask you to summarise your thoughts – we will collect these in before the start of the next activity
  - We will summarise these and post these on-line (see h/o)
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**Activity 1: How does prior subject knowledge affect the level 1 experience?**

- On the hand out we’ve prepared some prompt questions for you to think about
  - Begin by writing down your private thoughts on how you think this issue affects your course
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**Activity 2: How can we teach effectively when faced with different levels of student engagement?**

- Read the scenario of a ‘typical’ psychology tutorial with Seval, Katie, and Ben
  - Discuss in your groups what are the main challenges faced by educators with such a diverse group of students
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**Activity 3: How best to meet the needs of students with prior knowledge or different levels of engagement?**

- Read through one of the proposed solutions (Wilkinson vs. Jigsaw) and consider whether such a course would solve the issues faced by your course
- Compare solutions with your partner and assess their relative strengths
- Are there other solutions?



**Thank you for attending our workshop!**

**We will summarise our results on (see h/o):**  
<http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/talks/L1workshop2.html>

**Please fill in the workshop evaluation before you go**

