

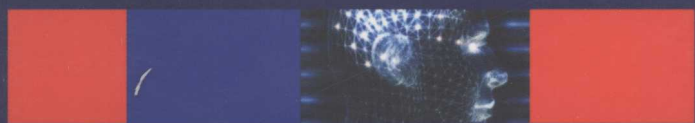


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# Oxford

DICTIONARY OF  
PSYCHOLOGY

## 牛津心理学词典



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ANDREW M. COLMAN

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# Preface

The Red Queen shook her head. 'You may call it "nonsense" if you like,' she said, 'but I've heard nonsense, compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary!'

Lewis Carroll: *Through the Looking-Glass*

The aim of this dictionary is to provide sensible and informative definitions of the most important and difficult words that a reader is likely to encounter in books and articles on psychology. Other dictionaries of psychology are available, but in general they provide only superficial coverage of the more technical terminology of neuroanatomy, neurophysiology, psychopharmacology, and statistics, and most of them make no systematic attempt to cover the specialized vocabulary of psychoanalysis. This dictionary provides systematic coverage of these areas, in addition to the basic terminology of psychology and psychiatry, and the definitions contain more explicit factual information and explanation than is available in other dictionaries. This second edition has 423 new entries and 17 new figures, and almost 400 of the definitions from the first edition have been revised.

The definitions are as simple as possible, but no simpler than that. Many of the concepts of psychology are inherently difficult and, if they are to be treated seriously, they ought not to be oversimplified or trivialized. In recognition of this, the definitions attempt to provide enough information to enable the serious reader to grasp the *fundamental meaning and significance of even the more difficult concepts*. Thus, for example, the entry under the headword **blood-brain barrier** avoids defining it in the usual, but misleading, way as a membrane and instead provides a detailed description of this remarkable but complex mechanism. In the same vein, the **peg-word mnemonic** is explained in enough detail to enable the reader to use it in practice; the **lateral geniculate nucleus** is not dismissed in a single sentence as a type of nerve cell, as in other dictionaries, but is described more accurately in terms of its structure and functions; and the **visual cortex** is not merely identified with vision and located at the back of the head but is given a full and detailed description. The entries under **information theory**, **prospect theory**, and **signal detection theory** provide enough information for the reader to grasp the fundamental ideas behind the theories and to understand how they actually work, and the same approach is adopted with other difficult terms. The aim is always to respect genuine difficulties and complexities but to provide the clearest possible definitions using the simplest possible language relative to the ideas being discussed.

Two unusual features of this dictionary deserve mention here. First, in many cases important terms and concepts are attributed to their originators or discoverers and, at the request of the publisher, when individuals are mentioned by name, their birth and death dates are usually supplied, although some dates, especially death dates, have been impossible to discover—people sometimes make significant contributions and then fade away into obscurity. Second, the entries are far more extensively cross-referenced than has been customary in earlier dictionaries. For example, the entry under **visual illusion** includes cross-references to every particular visual illusion described (and often illustrated) elsewhere in the dictionary, and the entry under **cranial nerve** is cross-referenced to all twelve of the human cranial nerves, each of which has its own, separate entry. The purpose of the cross-references is to enable a reader who has looked up a word to obtain additional information that is either directly or indirectly relevant to it, and in general to encourage the use of the dictionary as an aid to serious scholarship.

The selection of headwords for this dictionary was not an easy task. I had to discard many words that could have gone in, and hard choices had to be made. Dilemmas were resolved by asking the following two questions: Is the word used in psychological books and articles? Are readers likely to want to look it up? Speaking on BBC radio in September 1999, the England football coach, Kevin Keegan, commented memorably: 'Picking the team isn't difficult; what's difficult is deciding which players to leave out.' I faced the same problem picking headwords for this dictionary; the difficult part was deciding which words to leave out.

The headwords that were finally selected include the core terminology of psychology.

together with technical words that originate from other disciplines but are often used by psychologists. Psychology is a uniquely diverse discipline, ranging from biological aspects of behaviour to social psychology, and from basic research to various applied professional fields, such as clinical and counselling psychology, educational and school psychology, industrial/organizational and occupational psychology, and forensic and criminological psychology. Many of the technical terms of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, neuroanatomy, neuropsychology, pharmacology, computing, optometry, ethology, genetics, statistics, philosophy, linguistics, sociology, and anthropology have migrated into psychology and become partly naturalized there, and the most important ones are included in this dictionary.

Mental disorders are covered systematically and comprehensively, and definitions in this area are based on the widely accepted criteria of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) and the World Health Organization's *Diagnostic Criteria for Research* (ICD-10).

The basic vocabulary of psychoanalysis is included in this dictionary, although—in fact, partly because—other dictionaries of psychology omit most psychoanalytic terms and concepts altogether and treat the ones that are included only superficially. In this dictionary, terms introduced by Sigmund Freud are defined in sufficient detail to convey their meanings without trivialization, and key terms coined by subsequent psychoanalysts, including Jung, Adler, Erikson, Klein, Fairbairn, Winnicott, Kohut, Lacan, and Reich, are also included. Citations of Freud's writings are given by reference to *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey, using the usual convention in Freud scholarship of roman numerals for volume numbers and arabic numerals for page numbers, and citations of Jung's writings are referenced to *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, edited by Read, Fordham, and Adler, using arabic volume and paragraph numbers, as is conventional in Jungian literature.

Appendix I, at the back of the dictionary, contains a list of phobias and phobic stimuli that is, as far as I am aware, the most comprehensive yet compiled and one of the few to include etymologies. Appendix II contains an extensive list of over 800 abbreviations and symbols commonly used in psychology, cross-referenced to corresponding entries in the main body of the dictionary.

The definitions in the main body of the dictionary include occasional comments about careful usage: see, for example, **adrenalin rush** (based on a misconception), **anorexia** (not the same as **anorexia nervosa**), **basal ganglia** (best reserved for ganglia involved in voluntary movement), **innate** (not the same as **hereditary**), **monosynaptic reflex** (a physical impossibility), **narcotic** (not just an addictive drug), **paradox** (more than something merely surprising), **phi phenomenon** (not just any form of apparent movement), and so on. Occasional suggestions are made for renaming concepts that seem to be misnamed. For example, this dictionary suggests the term **Dircks's ghost** instead of the misnomer **Pepper's ghost**, **Luckiesh illusion** instead of **Sander parallelogram**, and **Merkel's law** instead of **Hick's law**, for reasons that are explained in the relevant entries, though it seems too late to change TAT back to its original name.

Scattered throughout the dictionary are suggestions for practical demonstrations of dramatic or interesting psychological phenomena that can be observed under home conditions. The following entries, among others, include easy demonstrations, some trivial and others illustrating profound ideas: **afterimage**, **Aristotle's illusion**, **Aubert effect**, **Bidwell's ghost**, **blind spot**, **chequer-shadow illusion**, **Cheshire Cat effect**, **conservation**, **Craik-O'Brien effect**, **Dollar Auction game**, **Emmert's law**, **filling-in illusion**, **flight of colours**, **floating-finger illusion**, **Gelb effect**, **hole-in-the-hand illusion**, **hollow-face illusion**, **Kohnstamm effect**, **lightness**, **Moses illusion**, **nine-dot problem**, **phi movement**, **Pulfrich effect**, **Purkinje figure**, **Purkinje shift**, **randomization**, **rubber hand phenomenon**, **size-weight illusion**, **Stroop effect**, **successive contrast**, **teacup illusion**, **tilt aftereffect**, **visual search**, **winner's curse**.

Friends, relatives, and colleagues have asked me where I found the headwords and the information used to define them. The answer is—everywhere. In some cases I managed to access the required information close to home in my own long-term memory store; more often, I looked in journal articles, textbooks, and reference works; in many cases I asked leading authorities in the relevant research areas for help; and occasionally I was driven to trawl the Internet. I wrote this dictionary in circumstances that were difficult for me at work, and I am lucky to have had a lot of support and advice. Acknowledgements to

people who helped me are provided elsewhere in these preliminary pages, though I take responsibility for errors that have no doubt remained. A list of the textbooks and reference works that I found most useful is provided at the back of the dictionary.

Andrew M. Colman

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# Advisory Editors

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The author and publisher wish to thank Market House Books Ltd for the use of the following illustrations from *A Dictionary of Biology*, 4th ed., and *A Dictionary of Science*, 4th ed. (both Oxford University Press).

### *A Dictionary of Biology*

- Autonomic nervous system: The parasympathetic and sympathetic systems
- Ear: Main structures of the mammalian ear
- Genetic code
- Lipid bilayer
- Meiosis: Stages in a cell containing two pairs of homologous chromosomes
- Mitosis: The stages of mitosis in a cell containing two pairs of homologous chromosomes
- Pyramid of numbers: A woodland food chain
- Retina: Basic structure (light enters from the bottom of the diagram)
- Skin: Structure of mammalian skin
- Synapse: Basic structure

### *A Dictionary of Science*

- DNA: Molecular structure
- Eye: Main structures of the vertebrate eye
- Harmonic: Fundamental and two overtones
- Motor neuron
- RNA: Molecular structure
- Sensory neuron



# General Acknowledgements

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# Layout of Entries

1. Every headword is printed in boldface type. Alphabetization is strictly letter by letter, ignoring spaces between words and punctuation marks. Except in Appendix II, numbers are listed as if they were spelt out in words: for example, **16PF** is positioned as if it were written 'sixteen PF', between **situationist critique** and **size constancy**.
2. The headword is followed by an abbreviation in italic type indicating the part of speech and occasionally (when there is likely to be confusion) whether it is singular or plural. The abbreviations are *abbrev.* (abbreviation), *adj.* (adjective), *adv.* (adverb), *conj.* (conjunction), *n.* (noun), *pl.* (plural), *sing.* (singular), and *v.* (verb).
3. If the headword has two or more sharply distinctive senses, then they are separated and labelled with boldface numerals (1, 2, and so on), but closely related meanings are defined together without numbering. When two or more senses are defined, the one that is most common in the literature of psychology is generally defined first.
4. Within a definition, an asterisk attached to a word or phrase indicates a cross-reference, directing readers to a separate entry that will help them to understand the definition or provide more information about the term or concept. Only cross-references that are thought to be especially helpful are asterisked, and terms are often used in the definitions without asterisks although they are included as headwords elsewhere in the dictionary. A degree of cross-referential integrity has been maintained: obscure or technical words that are used in the definitions are usually asterisked and included elsewhere as headwords with their own definitions, to ensure that the dictionary is reasonably self-contained.
5. In some cases, synonyms or alternative names for the concept and alternative or variant spellings are given after the definition, in italic type.
6. After the definition and its synonyms and alternative spellings, additional entries that should be consulted for further information are introduced with one of the following directions in italic type: *See*, *See under*, *See also*, or *Compare*.
7. Next, derivative or subsidiary forms are occasionally listed in boldface type, usually in alphabetical order. For example, under the headword **mesomorph** are listed the derivative forms **mesomorph** and **mesomorphy**, and under **meme** are listed **memeplex**, **meme pool**, **memetic**, **memetic engineering**, and **memetics**. As a general rule, the most common form of the word appears as the headword and the less common forms as derivatives or subsidiaries: thus, **diploid** appears as a headword although it is an adjective, and the noun **diploidy** is listed under it as a subsidiary form, because the adjectival form is far more common in psychological usage. If the term has a common abbreviation, it is shown in boldface type and marked abbrev.
8. A partial or full etymology is provided at the end of an entry, in square brackets, if it illuminates or clarifies the headword. The study of etymologies is often helpful, fixing the meaning of a word such as **migraine** and helping with spelling by, for example, insulating against the surprisingly common misspelling of a word such as **autotopagnosia**. Etymologies are omitted where the word is familiar or its derivation is obvious or implicit in the definition, or has not been determined with confidence.

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# Greek Alphabet

<i>Letter name</i>	<i>Greek letter</i>	<i>English equivalent</i>
alpha	A α	A a
beta	B β	B b
gamma	Γ γ	G g
delta	Δ δ	D d
epsilon	E ε	E e
zeta	Z ζ	Z z
eta	H η	E e
theta	Θ θ	TH th
iota	I ι	I i
kappa	K κ	K k
lambda	Λ λ	L l
mu	M μ	M m
nu	N ν	N n
xi	Ξ ξ	X x
omicron	O ο	O o
pi	Π π	P p
rho	Ρ ρ	R r
sigma	Σ σ	S s
tau	T τ	T t
upsilon	Υ υ	U u
phi	Φ φ	PH ph
chi	Χ χ	CH ch
psi	Ψ ψ	PS ps
omega	Ω ω	O o

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**abaissement du niveau mental** *n.* In \*analytical psychology, a reduced state of concentration and attention, accompanied by a loosening of inhibitions and relaxation of restraints, in which unexpected contents may emerge from the \*unconscious (2). It usually occurs spontaneously but can be deliberately encouraged in preparation for \*active imagination. Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) borrowed the term from his teacher, the French psychologist and neurologist Pierre Janet (1859–1947). [French: literally reduction of mental level]

**abasia** *n.* Inability to walk. *Compare* dysbasia. [From Greek *a-* without + *basis* a step, from *bainein* to step or go + *-ia* indicating a condition or quality]

**abbreviated reaction time** *n.* Another name for \*central reaction time.

**ABC** *abbrev.* 1. A model used in \*rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) for analysing a client's problems systematically into: A, the \*activating event; B, the mediating evaluative \*beliefs; and C, behavioural and emotional consequences. It is sometimes extended to ABCDE, with the addition of: D, disputing; and E, effect of practising rational thinking. 2. Shorthand for the sequence of effects in \*behaviour therapy: antecedent, behaviour, consequence.

**abderite** *n.* A simpleton. [Named after Abdera, a town in the ancient country of Thrace whose inhabitants were reputed to be stupid]

**abducens nerve** *n.* Either of the sixth pair of \*cranial nerves controlling the lateral \*rectus muscles of the eyes, turning the eye outwards for a sidelong direction of gaze. Paralysis of this nerve causes convergent squint of the af-

ected eye. Also called the *pathetic nerve*. [From Latin *abducere* to lead away, from *ab* away + *ducere* to lead or carry]

**aberration** *n.* 1. A deviation from what is normal, usual, or right. *See also* chromosomal aberration. 2. A temporary lapse of behaviour or mental function. 3. A defect of the \*crystalline lens of the eye, or of any other lens or mirror, also called *astigmatism* or *dioptric aberration*, in which rays of light do not all converge on to a single focal point. In *chromatic aberration*, different wavelengths of light are refracted through different angles and focused at different distances, leading to blurred images with coloured fringes—*see also* achromatic (2), refraction. In *spherical aberration* light passing through the lens near its edge is focused at a different point from light passing near the lens's centre, resulting in a distorted visual image, the defect arising from the surface of the lens being spherical. [From Latin *aberrare* to wander away, from *ab* away + *errare* to wander + *-ation* indicating a process or condition]

**ability** *n.* Developed skill, competence, or power to do something, especially (in psychology) existing capacity to perform some function, whether physical, mental, or a combination of the two, without further education or training, contrasted with \*capacity, which is latent ability. *See also* cognitive ability. *Compare* aptitude. [From Latin *habilitas* ability, from *habilis* able, from *habere* to have or to hold]

**ability test** *n.* A test that measures a person's current level of performance or that estimates future performance. The term sometimes denotes an \*achievement test, sometimes an \*aptitude test, and sometimes an \*intelligence test.

**abiogenesis** *n.* The generation of living from non-living matter. *Compare* biogenesis. [Coined in 1870 by the English biologist Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95), from Greek *a-* without + English *biogenesis*]

**abiosis** *n.* Absence of life. **abiotic** *adj.* Lifeless or inanimate. [From Greek *a-* without + *bios* life + *-osis* indicating a process or state]

**ablation** *n.* Surgical removal of a structure or part of the brain or other organ of the body.

**ablate** *vb.* [From Latin *ab* from + *latum* taken + *-ion* indicating an action, process, or state]

**ablation experiment** *n.* A basic research method of physiological psychology based on \*ablation, especially during the first three-quarters of the 20th century, in which an attempt is made to determine the functions of a specific region of the nervous system by examining the behavioural effects of its surgical removal. It was pioneered in 1824 by the French physiologist Marie Jean Pierre Flourens (1794–1867) and is also called a *lesion experiment*.

**ablaut** *n.* A change in the quality of a \*vowel serving to indicate a grammatical distinction, as in the forms *sing/sang/sung/song* or *foot/feet*. *Compare* umlaut (2). [Coined by the German philologist Jakob Ludwig Karl Grimm (1785–1863) from German *ab* off + *Laut* a sound]

**ableism** *n.* Discrimination against people who are not able-bodied, or an assumption that it is necessary to cater only for able-bodied people. The term was coined by US feminists in the 1980s and was later used by the Council of the London Borough of Haringey in a press release in 1986. Also spelt *ablistm*. *Compare* ageism, ethnocentrism, fattism, heterosexism, racism, sexism, speciesism. **ableist** or **ablist** *n.* 1. One who practises or advocates \*ableism. *adj.* 2. Of or relating to \*ableism. [From *able* + Greek *-ismos* indicating a state or condition, on the model of words such as *ageism*]

**Abney effect** *n.* 1. The slight change in the \*hue of \*monochromatic light when its \*lightness changes as a result of white light being added to it. 2. A perceptual phenomenon whereby a large surface that is suddenly illuminated appears to brighten first near its

centre and then near its edges, and if the illumination is suddenly extinguished it appears to darken first near its edges and then near its centre. [Named after the English chemist and physicist Sir William de Wiveleslie Abney (1843–1920)]

**Abney's law** *n.* The principle according to which the total luminance of light composed of several wavelengths is equal to the sum of the luminances of its \*monochromatic components. [Named after the English chemist and physicist Sir William de Wiveleslie Abney (1843–1920)]

**abnormal** *adj.* Departing from what is usual or what is the rule or \*norm (1, 2). [From Latin *ab* from + *norma* a rule + *-alis* of or relating to]

**abnormality** *n.* Anything that is \*abnormal. A psychological abnormality is a manifestation of \*cognition, \*emotion, or \*behaviour that deviates from an accepted norm or is a \*sign (1) or \*symptom of a \*mental disorder. *See also* abnormal psychology.

**abnormal psychology** *n.* A branch of psychology devoted to the study of the classification, aetiology, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of \*mental disorders and disabilities. Also called *psychopathology*. *Compare* clinical psychology.

**abortion** *n.* An operation to terminate a pregnancy prematurely (also called an *induced abortion*), or a premature expulsion of an embryo or foetus occurring naturally (also called a *spontaneous abortion*). **abort** *vb.* [From Latin *ab-* badly or wrongly + *oriri* to appear or arise + *-ion* indicating an action, process, or state]

**ABO system** *See* under blood group.

**aboulia** *n.* A variant spelling of \*abulia.

**Abraham Lincoln effect** *n.* The tendency for a \*block portrait to be difficult to recognize as a meaningful image when viewed close up but to become more recognizable when viewed from a distance or when blurred by half closing the eyes, for example, loss of information paradoxically increasing the recognizability of the image. *See* block portrait (and accompanying illustration). [Named by the US biomedical engineer Leon D(avid) Harmon (born

1922) after Abraham Lincoln (1809–65), the 16th US president, whose image he used to construct the first block portrait published in a technical report in 1971 and in an article in *Scientific American* magazine in 1973]

**abreaction** *n.* In \*psychoanalysis, a release or discharge of emotional energy following the recollection of a painful memory that has been repressed. It can occur spontaneously or during psychotherapy, especially under \*hypnosis, and may lead to \*catharsis. As a therapeutic procedure, it was discovered in 1880–82 by the Austrian physician Josef Breuer (1842–1925), and during the infancy of psychoanalysis it was believed to be therapeutic in itself. *See also* principle of constancy. [From German *abreagieren* to abreact or (metaphorically) let off steam, from Latin *ab* from + German *reagieren* to respond, coined in 1893 by Breuer and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) in an article 'On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication' (*Standard Edition*, II, pp. 3–17)]

**absence** *n.* The state or condition of being away from a place. In abnormal psychology and neurology, a brief period of loss of attention or consciousness, often followed by \*amnesia for the period of absence, characteristic of minor (formerly called *petit mal*) \*epilepsy. *Compare* tonic-clonic.

**absent-mindedness** *n.* Preoccupation to the point of being inattentive to one's own behaviour and surroundings, often characterized by \*action slips arising from \*open-loop control of actions that demand \*closed-loop control for accurate implementation. *See also* Cognitive Failures Questionnaire.

**absolute acuity** *n.* The maximum keenness or sharpness of a sense organ to detect weak stimuli, usually expressed in terms of the \*absolute threshold. *See also* acuity. *Compare* differential acuity.

**absolute error** *n.* In \*psychophysics, the difference between the judged value of a stimulus and its true value, ignoring the direction of the difference. *Compare* relative error. [Alluding to the mathematical sense of *absolute*, referring to a magnitude disregarding its positive or negative sign]

**absolute judgement method** *See* method of absolute judgement.

**absolute limen** *n.* Another name for the \*absolute threshold. [From Latin *limen* a threshold]

**absolute pitch** *n.* The ability to identify the \*pitch of a musical tone, or to produce a specified tone at its correct pitch, without reference to another tone. *See also* perfect pitch. *Compare* relative pitch.

**absolute reflex** *n.* The name given on occasions by the Russian physiologist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov (1849–1936) to what is usually called the \*unconditioned response.

**absolute refractory period** *n.* A \*refractory period (2), lasting up to 2 milliseconds after the onset of an \*action potential, during which no \*stimulus (5) can initiate another nerve impulse in the neuron. *Compare* relative refractory period.

**absolute scale** *n.* In statistics and measurement theory, a \*ratio scale in which the unit of measurement is fixed. In practice, values on an absolute scale are usually if not always obtained by counting. *See also* measurement level, scale (1). *Compare* interval scale, log-interval scale, nominal scale, ordinal scale, ratio scale.

**absolute thinking** *n.* Interpreting personal fears and desires in absolutes (for example, describing oneself as being absolutely devastated by a setback); regarded in some branches of \*counselling as a cognitive error that limits \*insight (3).

**absolute threshold** *n.* In \*psychophysics, the smallest intensity of a sensory stimulus that can be detected or can reliably evoke a sensation, a typical example being the average human absolute threshold for sound intensity at 1,000 hertz (about two octaves above Middle C), which is an intensity of about 6.5 dB SPL (*see under* decibel). The original concept of a sharply defined limit below which nothing can be perceived was discredited and largely abandoned after the development of \*signal detection theory, the absolute threshold being redefined as the magnitude that can be detected on a specified proportion of presentations (often 50 or 75 per cent, though



other percentages are sometimes used). Also called the *absolute limen* or *Reiz limen* (RL). See also acuity, audibility function, audiogram, bone conduction threshold, contrast sensitivity function, contrast threshold, dark adaptation, decibel, Heimdall sensitivity, light adaptation, Piper's law, psychophysics, Ricco's law, subliminal. Compare difference threshold.

**absorbance** See under reflectance.

**abstinence** *n.* 1. Avoidance of alcohol or some other drug of dependence, or more generally self-restraint from some indulgence. See also abstinence syndrome, withdrawal. 2. In psychodynamic counselling and therapy, the practice of the counsellor or therapist of holding back from uninhibited interaction and conversation with the client or patient. [From Latin *abstinere* to abstain]

**abstinence rule** *n.* In \*psychoanalysis, the organization of treatment to minimize the substitutive satisfaction of needs related to symptoms that the patient finds outside the analytic situation, in spite of the frustration and suffering that can result. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) introduced the rule in an article on 'Observations on Transference-Love' (1915): 'I shall state it as a fundamental principle that the patient's need and longing should be allowed to persist in her, in order that they may serve as forces impelling her to do work and to make changes, and that we must beware of appeasing these forces by means of surrogates' (Standard Edition, XII, pp. 159-71, at p. 165).

**abstinence syndrome** *n.* A pattern of signs and symptoms associated with \*withdrawal in a drug-dependent person who is suddenly deprived of a regular supply of the drug and is forced to practise \*abstinence (1).

**abstract attitude** *n.* A term introduced by the German psychiatrist Kurt Goldstein (1878-1965) to denote the ability to use conceptual categories in order to classify things according to their attributes and to think symbolically rather than concretely. This ability is impaired in many forms of brain damage and mental disorder. Also called *categorical attitude*.

**abstraction** *n.* 1. The act or process of formulating a general concept by identifying com-

mon \*features (1) from specific instances or examples, or a concept formed in this way. 2. A state of \*absent-mindedness or preoccupation. 3. In general, the act of withdrawing or removing something. [From Latin *abstractus* drawn off, from *ab* away from + *trahere*, *tractum* to draw + *-ion* indicating an action, process, or state]

**abstract measurement theory** *n.* Another name for \*axiomatic measurement theory.

**absurdity test** *n.* Any psychological test in which the respondent attempts to identify what is wrong or illogical about a verbal or a pictorial stimulus, such as a missing leg in a drawing of a spider or a missing numeral in a drawing of a clock face. It is often included as an item or subtest of an \*IQ test.

**abulia** *n.* A deficit of will or motivation, often leading to an inability to make decisions or plans. [From Greek *a-* without + *boule* will + *-ia* indicating a condition or quality]

**abuse (alcohol, child, elder, spouse, substance)** See under alcohol abuse, child abuse, elder abuse, spouse abuse, substance abuse.

**ABX paradigm** *n.* In \*psychophysics, a method of determining a \*difference threshold by presenting two stimuli (A and B) and a third (X) that is the same as one of the others, the observer's task being to decide whether it matches A or B.

**academic problem** *n.* A \*learning difficulty, usually in a schoolchild, that does not amount to a \*learning disability.

**academic skills disorders** *n.* An alternative name for \*learning disabilities.

**acalculia** *n.* Impairment of ability to do arithmetic. See also *agraphia*, *alexia*, specific disorder of arithmetic skills. Compare *dyscalculia*. [From Greek *a-* without + Latin *calculus* to count, from *calculus* diminutive of *calx* a stone + *-ia* indicating a condition or quality]

**acatamathesia** *n.* An obscure synonym for \*agnosia; an inability to comprehend sensory information. Also spelt *akatamathesia*. Compare *agnosia*. [From Greek *a-* without + *katamathanein* to observe or understand, from *kata* thoroughly + *mathanein* to learn + *-ia* indicating a condition or quality]