

# Shining a torch into the mental nooks and crannies

The saying goes that almost all of us psychologists took up the subject because of the desire 'to know about ourselves' and that after only a few weeks into the first term, this nonsense goes right out of our heads. Instead we are excruciatingly embarrassed to ever have had such a silly idea about the rigorous, empirical study of mind, brain and behaviour. Only the uncool non-scientific versions of psychology, the psychobabble type, would pretend to be able to reveal our innermost being. Christian Jarrett has turned the tables. He has succeeded in shaking off the cobwebs over a well-kept secret, namely, that cool scientific psychology can do this much better. So, we don't need to be embarrassed any more, but can embrace the refreshing idea that rigorous, respectable academic psychology can shine a torch into the 'crooks and nannies' of our mental life.

Jarrett has a brilliant track record as science journalist in the blogosphere. He unerringly picks those nuggets of information from the thousands of currently published papers that contain streaks of gold. Like his many other followers, I have long been impressed at how he manages to dig out the really interesting bits. It has to be admitted that among the thousands of publications in psychology, there are always only a very few that deserve to attract attention. Yet, all these bits make up a steady stream of information. Moreover, this stream flows in a landscape that has shape and form, and this is where the *Rough Guide* leads you to explore. The landscape of the mind offers surprising vistas, and there are signposts to future explorations. Like any proper guide it gives warnings as well as recommendations.

Some of Jarrett's most intriguing sections are about the new advances in linking mind and brain. He does not shrink from discussing notorious critiques of neuroimaging, or from debates about such controversial topics as 'nudge', gender differences, intelligence testing, false memories and false confessions.

Because this book is disarmingly appealing to the deep desire to know ourselves it follows a nice and logical path from what psychology offers about your own mind, and this includes emotions, to what it can tell about personal relationships, to the social psychological phenomena that are among the most important insights gained by psychologists. For example, stereotype threat, altruism, persuasion and compliance are all soundly discussed in the context of the groundbreaking experiments that established them as topics of further study. But what is so appealing in this book is that you are given everyday context; for instance, what happens when we are shopping, working with others, doing sports, learning in the classroom. As obligatory in any 'know yourself' book there are also excellent short sections on mental disorders and their treatments.

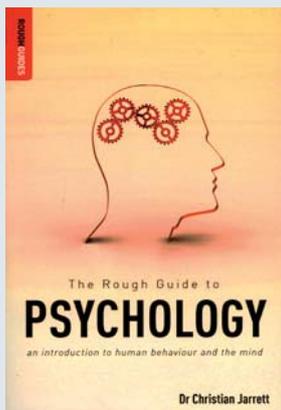
This book presents psychology today 'in a nutshell', and it is almost frighteningly up to date. But then this is what you should expect of a *Rough Guide* that is properly researched. This guide tells readers about the outstanding discoveries made by explorers of psychology in an extremely engaging way. It invites travellers to consider these discoveries not only with due wonder but also healthy scepticism. The invitation to follow up with recommended readings is well judged. You should be able to find the primary references using Google Scholar and PubMed; but besides these there are other sources of information on the web, notably in blogs, and these you have to explore by yourself.

If I had to help a young person choose the subject they should study I would not make any direct suggestions, but if I was convinced they should take up psychology, I would simply recommend this book. The rest would follow.

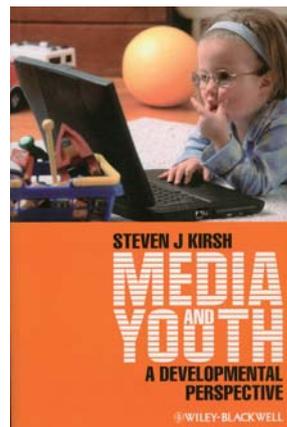
| Penguin; 2011; Pb £11.99

Reviewed by Uta Frith who is Emeritus Professor at the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, University College London

For your chance to win a copy of *The Rough Guide to Psychology*, simply follow @psychmag on Twitter.



The Rough Guide to Psychology  
Christian Jarrett



## Comprehensive survey

Media and Youth: A Developmental Perspective  
Steven J. Kirsh

The impact of media on youth has long been a contentious issue. As Steven J. Kirsh makes clear, there have been scares for as long as there have been worried parents. Along with violent video games, we could cite skinny models encouraging anorexia, predators lurking in internet chatrooms, and children's academic potential wilting under the glare of all those screens.

Kirsh's objective is neither to create nor dispel such fears. Rather, he provides a clear-headed and admirably comprehensive survey of the available evidence, discussing how youth consume media and how it affects them both positively and negatively as they grow up.

A diverse range of topics are addressed from a developmental perspective, giving readers a good grounding in theory and findings alike. With his lucid writing style, clearly structured chapters and a slew of rather endearing personal anecdotes, Kirsh makes a labyrinthine subject remarkably navigable. He reveals that the areas most influenced by media are not necessarily what we might think.

*Media and Youth: A Developmental Perspective* has much to offer both inside and outside an academic context.

| Wiley-Blackwell; 2010; Pb £25.99

Reviewed by Abi Millar who is a Science Journalism postgraduate at City University



### New autism theory

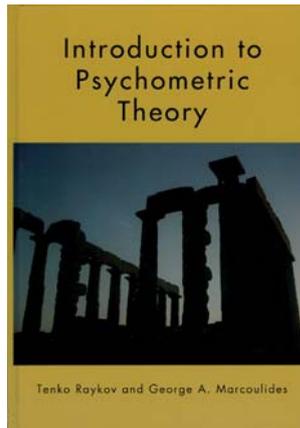
**The Passionate Mind: How People with Autism Learn**  
Wendy Lawson

Wendy Lawson writes passionately about how her cognitive theory of autism – selective attention and associated cognition in autism (SAACA) – fills the gaps left by other theorists.

Lawson argues that 'neurotypical' individuals access and process information in a polytropic way; attention can shift between multiple topics or channels. Conversely, autism spectrum (AS) individuals are monotropic in their approach; attention occupies a single topic or direction. This 'attention tunnel' is determined by the individual's interest, and is proposed to connect to the sensory motor loop to create a specific cognitive style. Lawson believes that a better understanding of this allows for personalised interventions to be successful.

Unfortunately, little evidence exists to support her theory. Lawson cites anecdotal evidence or re-interprets the existing literature, but recognises the weaknesses of this approach, calling for researchers to test her theory. I would second this, as what SAACA cleverly does is provide a simple yet comprehensive theory of cognitive style in autism – one that is interesting and warrants further attention.

| Jessica Kingsley; 2011; Pb £15.99  
**Reviewed by Léonie McDonald** who is a clinical psychologist with Suffolk Community Healthcare



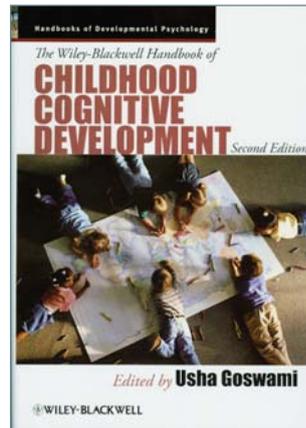
### Passes the test

**Introduction to Psychometric Theory**  
Tenko Raykov & George A. Marcoulides

This book is a wide-ranging introductory text to psychometric theory, covering latent variable models such as exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, generalisability theory, and item response theory. The mixture of written accounts, equations, software commands (including code for several packages such as MPlus, SPSS, and R), and software outputs is highly commendable. This mixed approach does a good job of 'mentoring' you from study design all the way to analysing and interpreting your data.

The book easily passes the 'Did I wish I had used this book during my PhD?' test, and some of the more advanced chapters (e.g. regarding item response theory) have dropped several pennies for me. The writing itself can be a little difficult, quite dense and featuring several over-long and (to me, at least) baffling sentences. The book does assume basic statistical knowledge, and potential readers should be aware that, with only 318 pages, it's a whistle-stop tour. Having recourse to fuller treatments of the material is likely to be beneficial for those less gifted souls such as myself.

| Routledge; 2010; Hb £44.95  
**Reviewed by Chris Beetley** who is with the Institute of Mental Health, Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust



### A wealth of material

**Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Childhood Cognitive Development (2nd edn)**  
Usha Goswami (Ed.)

This is an authoritative, comprehensive and cutting-edge account of psychological theory and research on children's cognitive development from infants to early adolescence. Written by a cast of world leading academics, this handbook provides a single volume resource that covers all the major topics. The material is organised into sections each with a useful introduction, which provides an important thread of contextual coherence across the book.

This second edition reflects the significant developments within the field arising from the latest cognitive neuropsychological research. New data about the connections between neural mechanisms and children's learning is considered in relation to topics as diverse as memory, spatial development and theory of mind, leading to new insights and explanatory frameworks for cognitive development. A theme that runs through many of these

accounts is the incredible learning power and plasticity of the infant brain and its superbly adapted capacity for learning through experience.

Subsequent chapters consider the development of core cognitive functions, such as imitation, categorisation, concept development and causal reasoning, and broader aspects of development, such as reading, mathematical understanding, scientific thinking, moral reasoning, as well as executive functioning and language development. A final section critically reviews established theories (i.e. Piaget and Vygotsky) while also introducing newer theoretical frameworks, such as information processing and neuroconstructivism.

This handbook brings together such a wealth of material to constitute possibly the single best reference book in its subject area and, as such, should serve as a key text for advanced students, researchers and practitioners.

| Wiley-Blackwell; 2010; £120.00  
**Reviewed by Paul Riddick** who is Senior Educational Psychologist, Leicester City

just in

Sample titles just in:

**Zen and the Art of Consciousness** Susan Blackmore  
**Dream Life: An Experimental Memoir** J. Allan Hobson  
**Positive Psychology at Work** Sarah Lewis  
**Applied Psychology** Graham Davey  
**Culture and Cognition: Evolutionary Perspectives** Bradley Franks

For a full list of books available for review and information on reviewing for *The Psychologist*, see [www.bps.org.uk/books](http://www.bps.org.uk/books)

Send books for potential review to *The Psychologist*, 48 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7DR