Criteria of Personal Identity

1 The physical criterion

“(1) What is necessary [for personal identity over time] is not the continued existence of the whole body, but the continued existence of enough of the brain to be the brain of a living person. X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if (2) enough of Y’s brain continued to exist, and is now X’s brain, and (3) this physical continuity has not taken a ‘branching’ form. (4) Personal identity over time just consists in the holding of facts like (2) and (3).”¹

2 The psychological criterion

“(1) There is psychological continuity if and only if there are overlapping chains of strong connectedness. X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if (2) X is psychologically continuous with Y, (3) this continuity has the right kind of cause, and (4) it has not taken a ‘branching’ form. (5) Personal identity over time just consists in the holding of facts like (2) and (4).”²

“Psychological connectedness is the holding of particular direct psychological connections.”³ E.g. between an original experience and a subsequent memory or between forming a plan and recalling it when putting the plan into action.

“Psychological continuity is the holding of overlapping chains of strong connectedness.”⁴

² Parfit, Reasons and Persons, p. 207.
⁴ Parfit, Reasons and Persons, p. 206.