GRADE A*
MODEL
ESSAYS

Memory

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A LEVEL
PSYCHOLOGY
TUTOR

Thank you for downloading this resource, I hope you find it useful!

The 16-mark essay is the longest question you can face in AQA A-level Psychology. While many students find it daunting, these essays can be relatively straightforward.

Essay advice

Essays in AQA A-level Psychology do not require an introduction or conclusion. It is advisable not to include these sections as they consume valuable time that could be used to address the mark scheme. For straightforward "outline and evaluate" or "discuss" essays, the mark scheme allocates 6 marks for A01 (knowledge and understanding) and 10 marks for A03 (evaluation and analysis). It is worth noting that you can approach "discuss" essays in the same way as "outline and evaluate" essays. Additionally, 8-mark essays have half the marks of 16-mark essays, but the structure remains unchanged. Lastly, when an essay prompts you to discuss "research," it refers to both theories and studies.

This booklet provides examples of how to approach essays for each subtopic on the specification, helping you understand what a top-mark essay would look like. Please note that application essays are not covered in this booklet and require a slightly different set of skills.

Suggested way of using the Essay Planning Booklet

- Read through the essay on a sub-topic you are currently revising to gain an understanding of what a top-mark band essay looks like.

- After reading the essay, close the booklet and attempt to plan the essay from attachment in your Essay Planning booklet. This exercise will help you reinforce your understanding of the topic and improve your ability to structure and organise your own essays.

By keeping organised and approaching the A-level Psychology course systematically, you can ensure that you don't overlook any content, and it will greatly enhance your preparation for the crucial exams.

Good luck!

Marie

Other resources for A-level Psychology which you may find useful are:
- PowerPoint Lessons
- Cornell Notes booklets
- Topic Summaries
- Essay Planning booklets
- A* Evaluation booklets
- Revision Activities booklets

Essay titles

1. Discuss research into the features of the different memory stores. (16 marks)

2. Outline and evaluate the multi-store model of memory. (16 marks)

3. Discuss the working memory model including reference to coding and capacity. (16 marks)

4. Outline and evaluate types of long-term memory. (16 marks)

5. Outline and evaluate interference as an explanation for forgetting. (16 marks)

6. Outline and evaluate retrieval failure as an explanation for forgetting. (16 marks)

7. Discuss leading questions as a factor affecting the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. (16 marks)

8. Discuss post event discussion as a factor affecting the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. (16 marks)

9. Outline and evaluate the effect of anxiety on the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. (16 marks)

10. Outline and evaluate the cognitive interview to improve EWT. (16 marks)

Outline and evaluate the multi-store model of memory. (16 marks)

Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968) proposed the first ever model of memory, the multi-store model of memory (MSM). The model suggests there are three separate and distinct memory stores each with differences in coding, capacity, and duration. The model is a linear and sequential model, with information passing through the stores in turn. Sensory memory is modality-specific meaning it encodes information in the way it is received, has a very large capacity, and a duration of less than half a second. Short-term memory (STM) encodes acoustically, has a capacity of 7 ± 2 items, and a duration of 18-30 seconds. Long-term memory (LTM) encodes semantically, has a potentially unlimited capacity, and a potentially infinite duration. Attention is required for information to pass from the sensory store to the STM, and rehearsing information allows for transfer from STM to LTM. Retrieval involves recalling information from LTM. Information can be lost from STM through decay (lack of rehearsal) or displacement (new information replacing old).

A strength of the multi-store model (MSM) is the supportive research derived from the case study of HM. HM experienced severe damage to his LTM, as evidenced by his inability to recall information such as repeatedly reading the same magazine without remembering it. However, his STM remained intact, for example he performed well on tests of immediate digit span. This supports the existence of separate and independent memory stores for STM and LTM, increasing the validity of the model. However, the case study also highlights a limitation of the model as it claimed that LTM was one unitary store. HM found that he could make new procedural LTM but not new episodic and semantic memories. Therefore, the one case study both supports and challenges different components of the model.

A limitation of the multi-store model (MSM) is the over emphasis on the role of maintenance rehearsal; other researchers have suggested that deeper processing is more important. Craik and Lockhart (1972) conducted a study in which participants were asked questions about a list of words that involved either shallow or deep processing e.g. shallow processing tasks asked if the word was printed in capitals, while deep processing asked if the word fitted within a sentence. They found that participants remembered more words when they engaged in deeper processing. This alternative explanation for the formation of LTM was developed into the Levels of Processing theory. This challenges the core concept of maintenance rehearsal in the MSM, suggesting deep processing is more important than the maintenance rehearsal.

A limitation of the multi-store model (MSM) is that it is an oversimplified explanation of memory. More recent research by Baddeley & Hitch has shown that the STM store is made of multiple components. They proposed the Working Memory Model which suggests that STM is made up of several components including the central executive, phonological loop, visuo-spatial sketchpad and episodic buffer. So, whilst the model has been very influential in sparking a significant body of research, the model itself is now outdated. In current psychological practice the WMM has replaced the concept of the STM store.

Outline and evaluate the cognitive interview as a way to improve EWT. (16 marks)

The cognitive interview, developed by Fisher and Geiselman (1992), aims to improve eyewitness testimony through four specific techniques. Firstly, report everything means that witnesses are encouraged to include all details, even seemingly irrelevant ones, to trigger further memories based on retrieval cues including both state and content dependent cues. Secondly, reinstate the context suggests witnesses mentally return to the crime scene to recall the environment and emotional state, benefiting from the encoding specificity principle whereby the same cues at encoding are present when recalling information. Thirdly, reverse the order allows for eyewitnesses to recall events in a different order to prevent schema distortion by schemas (scripts). Finally, change perspective asks witnesses to recall the event from others' perspectives to prevent schema-based expectations from distorting recall. The enhanced cognitive interview, developed by Fisher et al. (1987), emphasizes the social dynamics of the interaction. Interviewers use appropriate eye contact, speak slowly, and reduce anxieties and distractions.

A strength of the cognitive interview (CI) is that there is empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness. Köhnken et al. (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of 55 studies and found that the CI produced a 41% increase in the amount of correct information obtained, thereby increasing the validity of the technique. Only four studies reported no difference between the CI and the standard interview. However, they also found a significant increase in the amount of incorrect information, or false positives, particularly when using the enhanced cognitive interview. This suggests that while the CI can elicit more information, it does not necessarily guarantee accuracy, which poses a challenge for its use in the criminal justice system.

A limitation of the cognitive interview is that evidence suggests that some elements of it are more valuable than others. Milne and Bull (2002) found that whilst each element was independently better than a standard police interview using a combination of 'report everything' and 'context reinstatement' produced better recall than any conditions. This supports police officers' views that some elements are more useful than others.
These findings could be used to improve the cognitive interview within the police force who have limited time and resources, by only implementing these two elements.
This also improves the credibility of the CI within the police force as it, by not using elements police do not find useful.

A limitation of the cognitive interview is its time-consuming nature, requiring more time compared to the standard police interview. Kebbell and Wagstaff (1999) found that many police officers did not use the cognitive interview technique in less serious crimes due to time constraints. The technique involves establishing a rapport, exploring multiple perspectives, and requiring additional training, which adds to the time needed.
With limited police resources and budget cuts, it is unlikely that the full version of the cognitive interview would be implemented. Although grounded in good academic theory, its practical use may be limited, reducing its overall utility. However, the CI has led to the development of new interviewing techniques such as the self-administered interview (SAI) which allows witnesses to complete a report themselves which is still utilising the theory of the CI.

Outline and evaluate the multi-store model of memory. (16)

AO1
- Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968) proposed the multi-store model (MSM), suggesting memory consists of three separate and distinct stores.
- The model is linear and sequential, with information passing from the sensory register to short-term memory (STM) and then to long-term memory (LTM).
- The sensory register is modality-specific, has a very large capacity and a duration of less than one second.
- STM encodes acoustically, has a capacity of 7±2 items and a duration of approximately 18–30 seconds.
- LTM encodes semantically, has a potentially unlimited capacity and potentially lifelong duration.
- Attention transfers information from the sensory register to STM, maintenance rehearsal transfers information from STM to LTM, and forgetting in STM occurs through decay or displacement.

AO3

Strength: case study evidence supports separate memory stores.
- HM showed severely impaired LTM but intact STM, as demonstrated by preserved digit span.
- This double dissociation supports the idea of structurally separate STM and LTM stores.
- However, HM could form new procedural memories but not episodic or semantic memories.
This challenges the claim that LTM is a single, unitary store.

Limitation: overemphasis on maintenance rehearsal.
- Craik and Lockhart (1972) found deeper processing led to better recall than shallow processing.
- This suggests elaborative rehearsal is more important than simple repetition.
- The Levels of Processing theory provides an alternative explanation for LTM formation.
- Therefore, the MSM may oversimplify how information is transferred to LTM.

Limitation: the model is oversimplified and outdated.
- Baddeley and Hitch proposed the Working Memory Model, showing STM has multiple components.
- The central executive, phonological loop, visuo-spatial sketchpad and episodic buffer replace the single STM store.
- This suggests STM is more complex than originally proposed.
- Therefore, although influential, the MSM lacks explanatory depth compared to later models.

Outline and evaluate the cognitive interview as a way to improve EWT. (16)

AO1
- The cognitive interview (CI) was developed by Fisher and Geiselman (1992) to improve the accuracy and quantity of eyewitness testimony and is based on cognitive principles of memory retrieval.
- Report everything encourages witnesses to recall all details, even those they consider trivial, because minor details may act as retrieval cues.
- Reinstate the context requires witnesses to mentally recreate the physical and emotional context of the event, drawing on Tulving's encoding specificity principle.
- Reverse the order asks witnesses to recall the event in a different sequence to reduce the influence of schemas and scripts on memory reconstruction.
- Change perspective requires witnesses to recall the event from another person's viewpoint to minimise schema-driven distortions.
- The enhanced cognitive interview (ECI) was later developed by Fisher et al. (1987) and focuses on social factors such as building rapport, maintaining eye contact and reducing anxiety to improve recall.

AO3
Strength: strong empirical support for effectiveness.
- Köhnken et al. (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of 55 studies and found that the CI increased the amount of correct information recalled by 41% compared to standard police interviews.
- Only 4 studies reported no significant difference.
- This demonstrates strong reliability and supports the validity of the CI as an evidence-based technique.
- However, the CI also increased incorrect recall (false positives), suggesting quantity may increase at the expense of accuracy.

Limitation: some components are more effective than others.
- Milne and Bull (2002) found that report everything and context reinstatement produced better recall than reverse order or change perspective.
- This suggests the full CI may not be necessary and that some elements contribute little additional value.
- Police officers have also reported that certain components are difficult to apply in practice.
- Therefore, the CI may be more effective when streamlined rather than used in its full original form.

Limitation: practical constraints reduce real-world application.
- Kebbell and Wagstaff (1999) found many police officers avoid using the full CI in less serious cases due to time pressures and lack of resources.
- The CI requires specialist training and longer interview times, increasing costs.
- This reduces its practicality despite strong theoretical foundations.
- However, it has inspired adaptations such as the self-administered interview (SAI), which maintains CI principles while improving efficiency.

Marie is the current Head of Psychology at a Top 10 School in the UK and also a private tutor. She is a qualified teacher with an MSc Psychology, MBA and LLB (Hons) Law degree. She has authored for the Psychology Review magazine and has presented at A Level student conferences. She loves helping students achieve their potential by creating high quality resources - that work!

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