

# TOPIC ESSAYS BOOKLET

AQA  
A Level  
2025 spec

Memory

Sample Copy - Not all pages are included

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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 memory 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 AQA A-level Psychology which you may find useful are:

- PowerPoint Lessons
- A\* Evaluation booklets
- Cornell Notes booklets
- Topic Summaries
- Revision Activities booklets
- Essay Planning booklet
- Topic Essays

## 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 include reference to coding and capacity. (16 marks)
4. Outline and evaluate interference as an explanation for forgetting. (16 marks)
5. Outline and evaluate retrieval failure as an explanation for forgetting. (16 marks)
6. Discuss leading questions as a factor affecting the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. (16 marks)
7. Discuss post event discussion as a factor affecting the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. (16 marks)
8. Outline and evaluate the effect of anxiety on the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. (16 marks)
9. 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  $7 \pm 2$  items, and a duration of 18-30 seconds. Long-term memory (LTM) encodes acoustically, 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.

## **Discuss the working memory model include reference to coding and capacity. (16 marks)**

The working memory model (WMM), proposed by Baddeley and Hitch (1974), explains short-term memory as an active processor of information, different from the passive store in the multi-store model (MSM). The WMM suggests that short-term memory is not a unitary store. The central executive (CE) acts as a supervisor, directing attention and allocating tasks to the slave systems. It has limited storage capacity and is modality free. The phonological loop (PL) processes auditory information and consists of the phonological store (holding 2 seconds of auditory information) and the articulatory control process (inner voice for maintenance rehearsal). The visuo-spatial sketchpad (VSS) processes visual information, comprising the visual cache (for storing visual information) and the inner scribe (for managing spatial relationships), with a capacity of 3-4 items. The episodic buffer, added in 2000, allows for integration of information from the VSS and PL, functioning as a temporary store for 3-4 items.

A strength of the working memory model (WMM) is its support from clinical evidence through case studies of patients suffering from brain damage. KF experienced brain damage following a motorcycle accident and subsequently faced difficulties with his STM. He was unable to recall verbal (acoustic) information but retained the ability to process visual stimuli, including faces. This suggests that his phonological loop was damaged while his visuospatial sketchpad remained intact. This supports the idea that there are distinct stores for visual and acoustic processing within STM, thereby enhancing the validity of the model. However, evidence from this case study may be unique, as KF had brain damage following trauma. Additionally, it is unknown how KF would have performed on specific tasks prior to his brain injury. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalising the findings.

Another strength of the working memory model (WMM) is the presence of empirical evidence from dual task performance studies. Baddeley and Hitch (1976) demonstrated that participants experienced more difficulty when performing two tasks that relied on their phonological loop. However, when one task required the use of their phonological loop (remembering numbers) and the other involved their central executive (making decisions), their performance was not significantly impaired. This suggests that when tasks require the use of two different slave systems, no competition is observed. However, they found that when two tasks use the same slave system it becomes overloaded. This provides evidence for the existence of multiple components within our STM, which enhances the validity of the model. However, it is important to note that evidence from laboratory studies like this one may lack mundane realism due to the artificiality of the tasks. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalising the results to real-world scenarios.

A limitation of the working memory model (WMM) is the criticism that the central executive (CE) component is too vague. Baddeley has acknowledged that it is the "least understood" component of the WMM. This is mainly as the CE delegates tasks and has very limited storage it is hard to isolate and therefore test in lab settings. Some psychologists have even suggested that the CE may consist of separate stores, further complicating its conceptualisation. The lack of clarity surrounding the CE raises questions

about the validity of this part of the model, as it remains inadequately explained and developed. However, there is brain scan evidence from **Braver (1997)** that supports the existence of the CE. In a task involving the CE, activity was observed in the prefrontal cortex, with increased activation corresponding to higher task difficulty. Nonetheless, further research is required in this area to deepen our understanding.

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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