

AQA Psychology A-level

Topic 2: Memory

Example extended answers/essays

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Question: Megan is a university student studying psychology. During seminars she often plays the computer game Sims on her laptop, while at the same time listening to what her lecturer is saying. She explains to her lecturer that she can still concentrate on what he is saying while she plays the game. However, she notices that when her friend Jesse starts chatting to her during seminars (which she does a lot) , she loses track of what the lecturer is saying. Using your knowledge of the WMM, explain why Megan is able to concentrate on what her lecturer is saying in one situation but not the other. (4 marks).

In the first situation, Megan is using the visuo-spatial sketchpad slave system of her WMM to play Sims on the laptop and using the phonological loop to listen to her lecturer. Since she is using two different slave systems she is able to do both tasks at the same time. **AO2**

However, in the second situation, she is using the same slave system in her WMM to listen to both her friend and the lecturer. This slave system would be the phonological loop since it processes auditory information. Therefore since both tasks (listening to her friend and listening to the teacher) are competing for the same slave system she will lose concentration on what her teacher is saying and only be able to listen to her friend. **AO2**

Marks : 4 marks

Question : Explain one weakness of retrieval failure theory (3 marks)

One weakness of retrieval failure theory of context-dependent forgetting is that the contextual cues have to be very different for an effect to be seen. Like in Baddeley's study, you could not get a bigger difference than being underwater and on land. This is a limitation since in our everyday lives the contextual cues could be different rooms and not make much effect on forgetting. Therefore context-dependent forgetting cannot really be a valid explanation for forgetting in real life situations.

Marks : 3 marks

Teacher's comment : Excellent.

Question : Outline and evaluate the use of the cognitive interview to improve eyewitness testimony. Refer to research in your answer. (16 marks).

Cognitive interview is a method used to gain more accurate information from an eyewitness than a standard interview would. Fisher et al suggested the four techniques it consists of. The first is 'report everything'- this helps improve eyewitness testimony (EWT) since small details can help trigger other more important details. Secondly, there is 'reinstatement the context', this prevents any chance of context-dependent forgetting taking place. The last two are 'change the chronological order' or 'change the perspective' which should improve EWT since they prevent schema from interfering with their memories. In 1957, Fisher et al improved the CI by focusing on the social dynamics of the interactions and this is known as the enhanced cognitive interview (ECI).

Examples of the features of the ECI are asking open-ended questions, getting the witness to



Speak slowly and knowing when to establish or relinquish eye contact. These aspects of the social situation allow a rapport to be established between the eyewitness and police. AO1

The cognitive interview has the limitation of being time-consuming. The whole process of going through these four stages of CI and getting the eyewitness to relax takes a lot of time. Furthermore, Kebelle and Wagstaff (1996) have found that the police forces do not have enough time to carry out the complete specialised training. This means that a lot of the police will therefore not carry out the proper version of CI, explaining why they are not impressed by it. **AO3**

However, on the other hand to counter-balance that argument, it has been found that using two of the CI elements can be just as effective as using all. Milne and Bull (2002) found that the combination of the processes- 'report everything' and 'reinstate the context' produces the best outcome. This suggests that time does not have to be wasted going through all the steps but instead only those two should be used by the police, improving the credibility of the effectiveness of CI. **AO3**

The CI has individual differences with its effectiveness. CI has been proven to have more benefits when used for older people than with younger people. This is because 'report everything' prevents them from giving cautious recollections but instead provide more detail. This suggests the CI has practical benefits to society since it can help improve the EWT of older people in a way that standard interview would not. **AO3**

Having an effective CI also has the benefit to society whereby innocent people are less likely to go to jail due to an eyewitnesses' wrong testimony. Instead in crimes, the judge will be more likely to jail guilty people having had psychologist's research of the CI being applied by police to the interviewing process. Therefore the CI has good practical application to our society. AO3

Unfortunately, the CI is also challenged by Kohnken et al (1999) who found in a study that CI caused there to be 81% of correct information but also 61% of incorrect information. This shows that not only does CI improve the correct information of EWT, it also increases the amount of incorrect information. This implies it might be better for police to use a standard interview to reduce the amount of incorrect information presented in an EWT. **AO3**

Moreover, the CI presents a methodological problem. The 'change perspective' stage encourages fictional thinking and imagination since realistically you cannot imagine what someone else has seen. Therefore that stage presents a limitation to the CI technique. AO3

Lastly, another weakness of the CI is that in the supporting studies provided, slightly different variations of the CI technique are used. This prevents us from being able to validly compare the effectiveness of CI. Therefore we cannot be too sure about how effective the CI really is, making the results from the studies invalid. **AO3**

Marks: 15 marks.

Teacher's comments:



- Detailed and effective.
- What are the features of the ECI? (AO1)
- Can you add any methodological problems to evaluate the CI? (AO3)
- What is the benefit to society of having an effective CI? (AO3)

