



Social facilitation

You are learning how to...	In the context of...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe psychological studies Draw conclusions from research data Explain people's behaviour in psychological terms Find, read and understand psychological material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social facilitation The effects of an audience or co-actors on task performance

How does an audience affect people's behaviour?

An audience generally affects a person's ability to carry out a task, either by making their performance improve (**social facilitation**) or by making it deteriorate (**social inhibition**). Which of these things happens depends on the person and the task they are doing, as we shall see.

Psychological studies of social facilitation and inhibition

We can understand more about how audiences affect task performance by conducting **studies** into it. 'Study' is the term psychologists use for any scientific investigation into a particular aspect of thinking or behaviour. Studies are used as scientific **evidence** by psychologists. Each study has the following features, which you need to learn and give information about if required:

Feature	What is it?
Aim(s)	What the researcher wanted to find out. Quite often the researcher aims to find out the effect of one thing on another thing. In a study of social facilitation, the aim might involve finding out the effect of an audience on a person's ability to perform at a certain sort of task.
Method	How the researcher conducted their investigation. Studies can be done in many ways (which you will learn much more about). Typically, a study involves making measurements of people's thinking or behaviour under different conditions.
Results	The data the researcher obtained from their measurements. These could take many different forms, from answers to questions in an interview to physical measurements like heart rate or brain activity.
Conclusion(s)	The interpretation the researcher places on the data they have gathered. These generally relate to the aim, so if the study aimed to find out whether an audience makes people better or worse at juggling, the conclusion would start by saying whether or not it does and then go on to explain why or why not.

You need to be able to describe the following studies of social facilitation/inhibition, giving the types of details explained above:

- **Triplet (1897)**
- **Zajonc et al (1969)**
- **Michaels et al (1982)**

Triplet (1897)

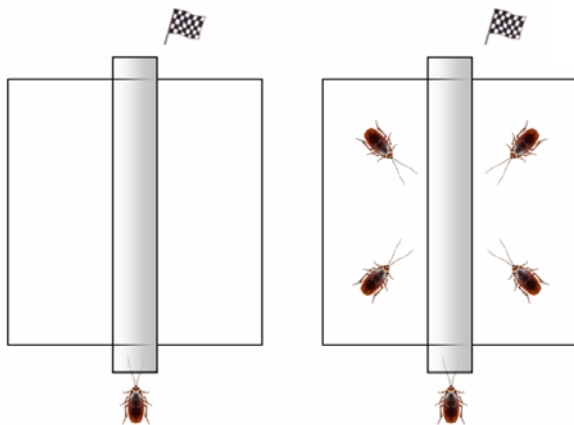
Triplet wanted to find out the effect of co-actors on performance of a simple task. A co-actor is another person doing the same thing as you, at the same time. Triplet used 40 children aged between 7 and 18 years. They were asked to wind 16 metres of thread onto a fishing reel as fast as they could. They did this either alone or in pairs. Triplet timed them using a stopwatch. The

majority of children completed the task faster with a co-actor than when alone (by 2 to 3 seconds on average). Triplett did, however, identify a small number of children whose performance got worse with a co-actor.

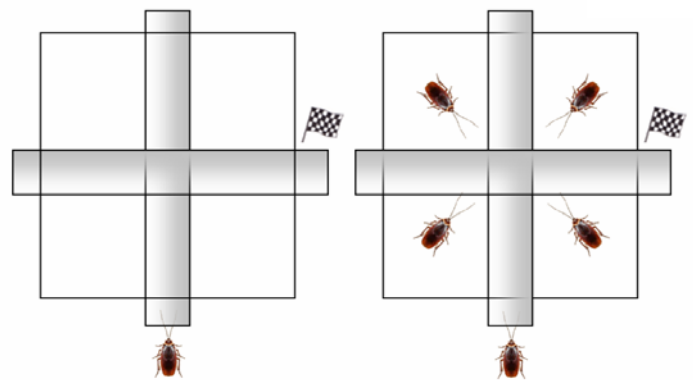
- **Suggest one or more reasons why most children did the task faster when they were with a co-actor.**

Zajonc et al (1969)

Zajonc and his colleagues investigated the effect of an audience on task performance, but using cockroaches instead of children. In their first experiment, cockroaches were timed to see how long it would take them to escape from a bright light by running down a straight path. They were either alone or accompanied by four other cockroaches that they could see and smell, held in clear plastic boxes. In a second experiment, the task was made more difficult by arranging the apparatus so that the cockroaches needed to make a right turn in order to escape from the light.



Simple task: the cockroach escapes by running in a straight line.



Complex task: the cockroach must make a right turn to escape.

Zajonc et al found that with an audience the roaches were faster when they only had to run in a straight line (41s alone; 33s with audience). However, when they had to turn a corner they were slower (110s alone; 130s with audience).

- **Based on Zajonc et al's results, describe the relationship between task difficulty, the presence/absence of an audience and task performance.**
- **Why might some people object that Zajonc et al's research doesn't tell us anything useful about human behaviour?**

Michaels et al (1982)

Michaels et al went to a pool hall and secretly watched the people who were playing pool there. They rated them as either above or below average players. After rating each player the researchers would come and stand close to their table as they played, making their presence obvious. They observed to see if the accuracy of the players' shots increased or decreased.

- **Do you think the audience made a difference to the players' accuracy? Why (not)?**
- **Do you think that above and below average players would be affected by the audience in the same way? Why (not)?**

Extension task (Grade A*)

Find out the results of Michaels et al's (1982) study using the World Wide Web. Write a short paragraph describing their results and explaining whether your predictions were correct.