



Factors affecting conformity

This activity will help you to...

- Understand and recall factors that make conformity to a majority more or less likely.
- Consider the psychological processes that govern whether people conform.

Variations on the Asch (1951) study

Since the original Asch (1951) research, a number of similar studies have been carried out to find out the circumstances under which people will or will not conform to a majority. Some of the studies are outlined below. For each study, suggest whether the rate of conformity would be higher or lower than the 32% found by Asch. You should also write a brief explanation of *why* you think the rate of conformity would change.

Variation	Effect?	Why do you think this?
The size of the majority was increased to sixteen confederates against one participant.		
The group of confederates contained one dissenter who agreed with the participant and disagreed with the majority.		
The task was made more difficult by using lines that were much closer in length to each other and the comparison line.		
Participants give their answers privately rather than calling them out in front of the group (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955)		
The participants were Maths and Science students, rather than Sociology students (Perrin & Spencer, 1981)		
The participants are young offenders and the confederates are all probation officers (Perrin & Spencer, 1981)		

Questions to think about and discuss...

- What do you think are the **most important** factors affecting conformity? Why?
- What do research findings like these tell us about the **reasons** why people will conform to a majority opinion, even if the majority is wrong?