



Factors that influence obedience

This activity will help you to...

- Identify & describe factors that influence obedience to authority
- Draw conclusions from research findings
- Develop commentary skills for exam answers

What do obedience studies tell us?

Stanley Milgram's research on obedience helps us to identify the important features of a situation that make people more likely to obey orders, even if they disagree with what they are told to do. Some of the important factors are:

- Social isolation
- The legitimacy of the authority
- Buffers
- Gradual commitment

Using evidence to generate commentary

The basis of the AO2 exam skill (commentary, analysis, criticism, evaluation) is writing **about** the psychology rather than simply describing it. One way of doing this is to use the results of psychological research to support ideas or statements about human behaviour. This is the most basic of the AO2 skills, and one you need to work hard on developing. Here is an example of what a student might do to generate some commentary when writing about the reasons for obedience:

The student starts by making their AO1 point clearly and concisely.

One factor that makes people more likely to obey is social isolation. This is illustrated by the experiment where Milgram put the PP together with two confederates who refused to obey. The effect of this was that obedience dropped to only 10% of PPs giving a 450v shock. This shows the importance of social isolation/support, because in the experiments where the PP was alone obedience was usually much higher.

Then they introduce some evidence to support their point.

The comment is supported by some more evidence.

Then they make a comment about what the evidence shows.

What You Need To Do...

Produce some more commentary on the factors that influence people to obey. The further you get, the less support you are given, so if you finish, you will be producing commentary that is entirely your own.

Write a paragraph of commentary by filling in the missing parts.

*Another factor that influences obedience is the legitimacy of the authority. This is shown by Milgram's experiment where [outline the study]. Milgram found that [outline the finding]. This shows that [comment on what the finding means] because [explain your reasoning]. **Hint:** use the 'run-down office' experiment for this one.*

Using your first paragraph as a model, write a second based on the following:

- *A further factor is the existence of buffers between the PP and the victim.*
- *These are...[continue with an explanation].*
- *Their importance is shown by... [continue with research evidence and comment]*

Now write a third paragraph based on the previous two, starting with:

- *A final factor is gradual commitment... [Continue]*

When you have written your commentaries, we will be swapping around to share ideas and suggest improvements.