

Social Influence



Name _____

Class _____

Teacher _____

Key Definitions

Conformity	
Internalisation	
Compliance	
Informational Social Influence (ISI)	
Normative Social Influence (NSI)	
Obedience	
Situational Variables	
Situational Explanation of Obedience	
Agentic State	
Autonomous State	
Agentic Shift	
Legitimacy of Authority	

Dispositional Explanation of Obedience	
Authoritarian Personality	
Resistance to Social Influence	
Social Support	
Locus of Control (LOC)	
Minority Influence	
Consistency	
Commitment	
Flexibility	

Lesson Objectives – Social Influence:

- Describe key concepts of social influence, including conformity, obedience, and resistance.
- Explain and evaluate major theories and studies (e.g., Asch, Zimbardo, Milgram, Moscovici).
- Analyse factors that influence social behaviour such as situational and dispositional variables
- Apply psychological understanding of social influence to real-world examples

Lesson 1 – Types of Conformity

Conformity is a change in a person's behaviour or opinion as a result of real or imagined pressure from a person or group of people.

The different types of conformity were originally identified by **Herbert Kelman** in **1958**.

He proposed **three** types of conformity:

1. **Compliance** – A superficial change, public agreement but no private belief change.
2. **Identification** – Adopting behaviour to be associated with a group, often temporary.
3. **Internalisation** – A deep and lasting change in both public behaviour and private beliefs.

Exam Tip - The 2025 AQA Psychology specification now only requires knowledge of **compliance** and **internalisation**.

Internalisation: (Deep Conformity)

Definition:

Key Features:

-
-
-
-

Example:

Compliance: (Superficial Conformity)

Definition:
Key Features:
•
•
•
•
Example:

Task – Compare and contrast compliance and internalisation in the table below:

Feature	Internalisation	Compliance
Public Behaviour		
Private Beliefs		
Duration		
Influence Type		

Task: Read the five below scenarios and decide whether each represents **compliance** or **internalisation**

Scenario 1:

Liam starts wearing a specific brand of trainers because all his friends do. He personally doesn't like the style but wants to avoid standing out.

- Type: _____

Scenario 2:

After attending a climate change awareness event, Amira changes her views on environmental issues. She begins recycling at home and even encourages her family to reduce plastic use.

- Type: _____

Scenario 3:

During a group discussion in class, Tom says he agrees with everyone else's opinion, even though he privately disagrees. He doesn't want to create conflict.

- Type: _____

Scenario 4:

Nina grows up in a family that follows a specific religion. As she becomes older, she independently adopts and practices those beliefs herself, even when away from her family.

- Type: _____

Scenario 5:

In a team meeting, Sarah laughs at a joke her boss makes because everyone else does, even though she doesn't find it funny.

- Type: _____

Lesson 2 – Explanations of Conformity

Do Now - Recap below everything you can remember about conformity:

Conformity refers to a type of social influence where individuals change their behaviour, attitudes, or beliefs to match those of a group. Psychologists have proposed **two key explanations** for why people conform:

→ Informational Social Influence (ISI)

→ Normative Social Influence (NSI)

Task: Read the five below scenarios and decide whether each represents ISI or NSI

Scenario 1:

Josh wears designer clothes to school because all his friends do, and he doesn't want to be the odd one out.

- **Type:** _____

Scenario 2:

Zayn agrees with a movie review everyone in his group loves, even though he thought the film was boring.

- **Type:** _____

Scenario 3:

In a quiz, Mia gives the same answer as the rest of her team even though she thinks it's wrong - just in case they're right.

- **Type:** _____

Scenario 4:

During a science experiment, Ava copies another student's procedure because she's unsure what to do and assumes the other person is correct.

- **Type:** _____

Scenario 5:

Ella joins in with a political opinion her classmates all agree on, even though she isn't sure if she agrees. She thinks they must know more than she does.

- **Type:** _____

Essay structure and guidance

Psychology essays are marked using **AO1 (knowledge)**, **AO2 (application)**, and **AO3 (evaluation)**. PEEL is especially effective for meeting AO3 because:

- **Point** = clearly states the evaluative argument.
- **Evidence** = supports the point with a study or theory (shows knowledge).
- **Explain** = analyses how and why the evidence supports or challenges the theory (critical thinking).
- **Link** = connects back to the question, showing relevance and focus.

Top band marks (levels 4–5) require well-developed, coherent arguments. The PEEL format avoids vague or descriptive writing.

Let's put this technique into practice... the following is an example of how to structure a **PEEL** paragraph for ISI. Read through it and fill out evaluations for both ISI and NSI covering the PEEL framework:

Informational Social Influence (ISI) - Supporting Evidence

P: A strength of ISI is that it is supported by classic research from Sherif (1935).
E: In his autokinetic effect experiment, participants were asked to estimate how far a spot of light appeared to move in a dark room. When placed in groups, individuals' estimates converged, forming a group norm.
E: This suggests that when faced with an ambiguous task, people look to others for guidance, assuming they have more accurate information.
L: Therefore, this supports ISI as a valid explanation for conformity in uncertain or unfamiliar situations.

P:
E:
E:
L:

P:

E:

E:

L:

P:

E:

E:

L:

Lesson 3 – Asch’s (1951) Experiment on Conformity

Soloman Asch investigated the extent to which people will conform to the opinion of others, even in situations where the answer is obvious.

Task – Outline Asch’s baseline procedure and findings below:

Sample	
Procedure	
Findings	

Asch (1955) extended this baseline study to include **3 different variables** that may increase or decrease conformity levels. They are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Getting you thinking: Which of these variables do you think will have the greatest impact on conformity levels?

Task: Write out the alterations to the original procedure that were made to test each variable and the results that followed.

Group Size

Unanimity

Task Difficulty

G

Generalisability

R

Reliability

A

Application

V

Validity

E

Ethics

Lesson 4 – Obedience: Milgram’s Baseline Research

Milgram was deeply affected by the events of World War II and particularly the Holocaust, where millions of innocent people were systematically murdered under Adolf Hitler’s regime. Many of these atrocities were carried out by ordinary people who claimed they were simply “following orders.”

One key event that shaped Milgram’s thinking was the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, a high-ranking Nazi officer. Eichmann famously claimed he was “just obeying orders.” This raised the question Milgram sought to *answer through his research*:

“Could it be that ordinary people were simply obeying authority, even if it meant harming others?”

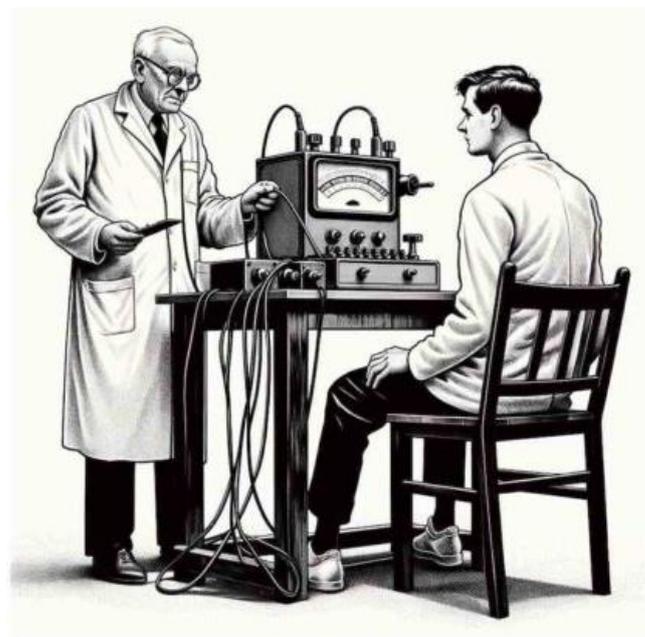
Task – Define the key term ‘obedience’ below:

Milgram wanted to understand whether people in any society — not just Nazi Germany — were capable of extreme obedience to authority. Which led to Milgram (1963) designing a baseline study to assess obedience levels. The findings of this baseline experiment have been used in comparisons between Milgram’s baseline study and later variations.

Task – Fill in the boxes below about Milgram's baseline research

Sample

Location



Procedure

The 3 individuals involved in the experiment were:

1.

2.

3.

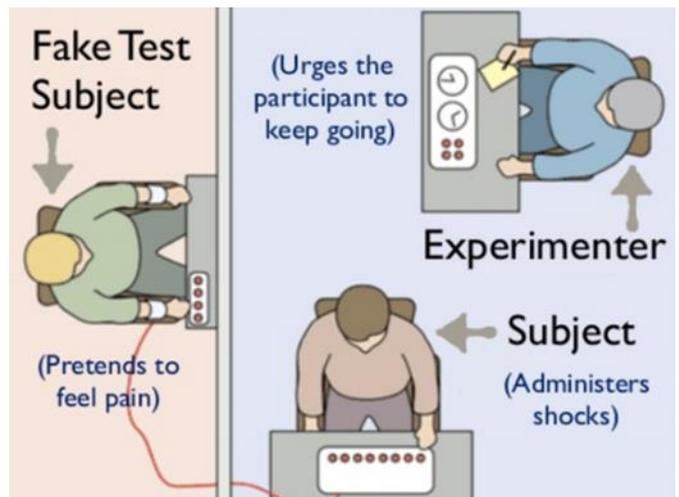
The 'experimenter' was instructed to use four standard 'prods' to order the teacher to continue they were:

1.

2.

3.

4.



Findings and conclusions

G

Generalisability

R

Reliability

A

Application

V

Validity

E

Ethics

Homework Task – Due in 1 week

Answer the following questions on lined paper ready to hand in next week:

- One variable that affects conformity is unanimity. Explain what is meant by unanimity. (2 Marks)
 - Outline normative social influence as an explanation of conformity (4 marks)
 - Describe the procedure and findings of one study investigating obedience (6 marks)
-

Lesson 5 – Obedience: Situational Variables

After Milgram conducted his baseline study on obedience, he carried out 18 variations in order to determine what **situational variables** might influence obedience.

Task – Define ‘situational variables’ below and include an example:

→ Situational Variables

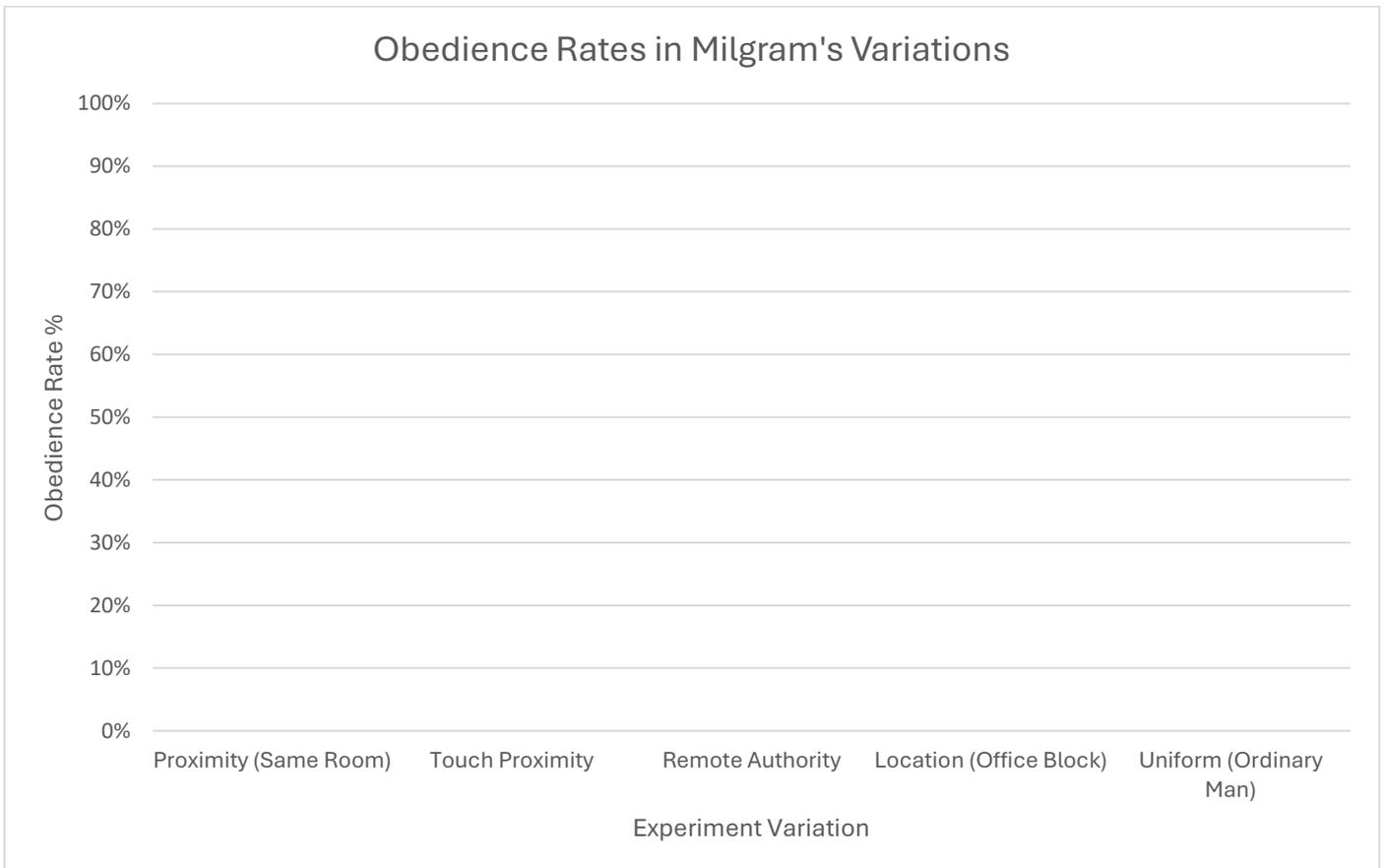
Now that you know what situational variables are – predict below which situational variables you think would have an influence on obedience levels and justify why.

Task – Fill out the table below to include the different procedures for the following situational variables, proximity, location and uniform.

Proximity

Location
Uniform

Task – Draw a bar chart below to reflect the results of each of these variations.



G

Generalisability

R

Reliability

A

Application

V

Validity

E

Ethics

Task – Plan an answer to the essay question below. You will be writing this essay next lesson using only your plan – no other notes:

‘Outline and evaluate how situational variables have been shown to affect obedience to authority.’

(16 marks)

Lesson 6 – Explanations of Obedience: Situational

When explaining obedience, the specification can be split into two categories: situational and dispositional explanations.

Situational explanations argue that a person’s behaviour is **primarily influenced by external factors** - the **environment** or **context** they are in.

These explanations focus on things like:

- Authority figures
- Group pressure
- Setting (e.g., location, uniforms, proximity)
- Social roles and expectations

Dispositional explanations suggest that behaviour is due to **internal characteristics** of the individual - such as their **personality** traits, **beliefs**, or **morality**.

These explanations focus on things like:

- Personality (e.g., authoritarian personality)
- Values
- Biological or genetic traits
- Mental state or upbringing

Stanley Milgram’s interest in Obedience was sparked by the atrocities committed in Nazi Germany during the holocaust – particularly the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Eichmann oversaw the Nazi death camps and his primary defence in his trial was that he was ‘only obeying orders’. This led to research into obedience and what factors influence our likelihood to obey.

Two **situational explanations** you are expected to know for obedience include ‘Agentic State’ and ‘Legitimacy of Authority’.

Task – Define ‘Agentic State’ below:

→ Agentic State _____

Lesson 7 – Explanations of Obedience: Dispositional

Task – Answer the following questions in the questionnaire.

Tick your reaction for each statement in the questionnaire using the following scale:

- 1 Disagree strongly
- 2 Disagree mostly
- 3 Disagree somewhat
- 4 Agree somewhat
- 5 Agree mostly
- 6 Agree strongly

1 2 3 4 5 6

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn.						
A person who has bad manners and habits can hardly expect to get along with decent people.						
If people would talk less and work more, everybody would be better off.						
Young people sometimes get rebellious ideas, but as they grow up they ought to get over them and settle down.						
No sane, normal, decent person could ever think of hurting a close friend or relative.						
Nobody ever learned anything really important except through suffering.						
What the youth needs most is strict discipline, rugged determination, and the will to work and fight for family and country.						
Sex crimes, such as rapes and attacks on children, deserve more than imprisonment, such as painful physical punishment or worse.						
A person who does not feel great love or gratitude or respect for their parents is the lowest type of person.						
When a person has a problem or worry, it is best for them not to think about it, but to keep busy with more cheerful things.						
People can be divided into two distinct classes: the weak and the strong.						
Most people don't realise how much of our lives are controlled by plots hatched in secret places.						
With human nature being what it is, there will always be war and conflict.						
Most of our social problems would disappear if we could get rid of immoral, crooked and weak-minded people.						
Nowadays when so many different kinds of people move around and mix together so much, a person has to protect themselves.						
A businessman and a manufacturer are much more important to society than an artist and a professor.						

Adapted from Adorno et al (1950). *The Authoritarian Personality*. NY: Harper and Brothers.

Not all psychologists accept that obedience can be fully explained by situational factors. They believe that obedience can also be explained by the personality or *disposition* of an individual. Like Milgram, Theodor Adorno wanted to understand antisemitism and his research led him and his colleagues to believe that high levels of obedience can be caused by the personality of the individual rather than the situation.

Adorno et al. (1950) suggested that the authoritarian personality develops during **early childhood**, as a result of specific **parenting styles** — particularly those that are:

- **Strict**
- **Emotionally distant**
- **Overly harsh or punitive**
- **Conditionally loving** (love depends on the child's behaviour)

Children raised in such environments are taught to obey authority **without question** and are punished for even small acts of disobedience. This creates **hostility and resentment**, but the child is unable to express these feelings directly toward their parents due to **fear of punishment**.

Synoptic Link – Approaches

A synoptic link is when you connect different topics, theories, or issues across the specification to **show a deeper understanding** of psychology.

Adorno's theory is rooted in **Freud's psychodynamic approach**, which involves **unconscious processes** shaping personality.

Defence Mechanism: Displacement - According to Freud, when children are unable to express anger towards a powerful figure (like a strict parent), they use a defence mechanism called **displacement** — redirecting their aggressive feelings onto safer, weaker targets.

Task – List some characteristics of authoritarian personality below:

-
-
-
-
-
-

Adorno conducted research to investigate the relationship between personality traits and obedient/prejudiced behaviour. Using the boxed below outline his research.

Sample/Design

Procedure
Findings
Strengths/Limitations

How does this explain obedience?

- People with authoritarian personalities have a **psychological need for order and control**.
- They see authority as **legitimate and necessary** and are **more likely to obey without question**.
- They also tend to **blame individuals lower in the hierarchy** (scapegoating), especially in times of social instability — which helps explain historical obedience to oppressive regimes (e.g., Nazi Germany).

Lesson 8 – Resistance to social influence

Resistance to social influence refers to an individual's ability to withstand pressure to conform or obey authority. This ability to withstand social pressure can be influenced by situational and dispositional factors.

One **situational factor** is **social support**; this can be broken down into resisting conformity and resisting obedience. Social support is when the presence of people who resist pressures to conform or obey encourages others to do the same and resist. When others successfully resist social influence, it models to others that resistance is possible.

Task – Fill in the boxes below detailing how social support can have an impact of resisting **conformity** and **obedience**.

Resisting Conformity

Resisting Obedience

Task – Colour code the statements that meet the criteria of either internal/external LOC.

No, I'm not a killjoy, I just don't want another drink, I've had plenty already.	I never vote, I don't see the point. A single vote can't make a difference.
I had no choice – I had to marry him or my parents would have disowned me.	No, I didn't audition for a part – I'd never be any good at acting no matter who directed the play.
I never found maths easy so I made sure I got extra help and worked at it.	I don't care what my teacher says, I'm not doing the cross country run at the weekend.
I'm going to get to the top.	I did it my way.
My parents brought me up not to question what I'm told to do and I respect that.	I failed my driving test because I can't park well.
I've never had a problem passing exams: I'm fortunate that I'm bright but I always work hard too.	I'm going to join a religious sect and live entirely by their rules.
I'm just an unlucky person – I never win in raffles.	I'm a confident person and I'll manage it somehow.
We lost the domino game – we were just so unlucky with the tiles we got.	I always take my lucky mascot into exams.

There is research evidence to support both social support and LOC as explanations of resistance to social influence. Fill in the tables with a summary of the supporting research.

Social Support	Locus of Control

Lesson 9 – Minority Influence

Minority influence refers to a form of social influence in which a minority of people (or a single person) persuades others to adopt their beliefs, attitudes or behaviours. Minority influence is most likely to lead to internalisation – both public and private beliefs are changed by the process.

Serge Moscovici (1969) first studied this process in his ‘blue slide/green slide’ study. The aim of this study was to investigate whether a consistent minority could influence a majority’s perception in a colour judgment task and to explore the processes involved in minority influence.

Task – Fill in the details of the study below:

Sample
Procedure
Conditions: 1. 2. 3.
Findings

This study highlighted some key processes involved in minority influence; they are:

- Consistency
- Commitment
- Flexibility

What strengths/weaknesses can you highlight in this experiment?

Task - List 2 strengths and 2 weaknesses below:

Task - Define these processes below:

→ Consistency - _____

→ Commitment - _____

→ Flexibility - _____

AO3 – Some researchers believe that these 3 processes are not equal in their influence. Nemeth (1986) conducted research that expanded on Moscovici’s work by suggesting:

- Consistency alone is not sufficient for minority influence.
- Flexibility shows rationality and willingness to cooperate, making the minority's position more persuasive.
- Influence is most successful when the minority is seen as both committed and reasonable.

Procedure

Conditions:

1.

2.

Findings

Synoptic Link – Research Methods

Another limitation of research into minority influence is the artificial nature of the tasks. Often the research studies are nothing a like to how individuals attempt to change opinions/behaviours of others in the real world. This limitation is directly linked to a concept we learn in research methods known as **mundane realism**.

Mundane realism refers to how much a research study resembles real-life situations that people might encounter. If a study lacks mundane realism, it means the tasks or settings are too artificial or unrealistic, making it harder to generalise the findings to everyday life.

Task - Write below how we can apply this to minority influence research – remember to use your PEEL AO3 format.

Once a minority presents a consistent, committed, and reasoned argument, members of the majority are prompted to think more deeply about the message. This is often because the minority view challenges existing norms, creating a state of cognitive conflict. This area of minority influence is known as deeper processing. Martin et al (2003) provided experimental support for the role of deeper processing.

Task - Summarise this below:
