Psychology

Teacher Notes for Essay Skills Resources

Introduction

- These resources are designed to develop essay writing skills in A Level Psychology students by providing teaching and learning resources to be used online and offline independently and in the classroom.
- The resources are based on the idea of breaking down the components of a good Psychology essay and then consider how each of these elements can be achieved.
- The examples are all taken from Contemporary Debates (WJEC Unit 1, Eduqas AS/A Level Component 1) issues written by students either under exam questions or for homework. However the skills can be extended to work for essays at A2 Level and in other subjects

Teacher Notes for each resource

	Focus of Resource	Teacher notes
1	What makes a good essay	• Research has shown that although it can be difficult to get people to reliably apply a mark scheme, we are generally good at rank ordering pieces of work • Activity 1a) asks students to rank order essays from best to worst. The marks given under timed conditions were: – A: AO1=6, AO3=8, Total=14 – B: AO1=6, AO3=6, Total=12 – C: AO1=10, AO3=9, Total=19 – D AO1=5, AO3=5, Total=10 • Activity 1b) asks students to use the outcome of the rank ordering exercise to come up with a checklist for a good essay that could be used for self and peer assessment. A suggested response is also given
2	Structure of an essay	• Activity 2 asks students to drag and drop chunks of an essay into a broad essay outline to help them organise an answer appropriately to address a question

3	Transitional and Linking Words	• Linking words are important in introducing new points, signposting evaluation and helping with the flow of argument • Activity 3a) is designed to help students expand their vocabulary by asking them to sort words and phrases under the appropriate headings. An answer sheet is also provided for printing. • Activity 3b) encourages students to utilise some of these words in an example by improving a paragraph using them. There is a suggested response but a number of ways in which it could be improved using the words and phrases suggested.
4	Selecting evidence	• Activity 4 addresses the skill of using appropriate details from a research study and involves cutting down lengthy descriptions of studies to the key details that would be most useful in an essay context
5	Elaboration and Discussion	• Activity 5 looks at the skill of adding elaboration and discussion when using research evidence. There are two examples to work through. Each consists of two contrasting pieces of evidence with some prompt questions to get students thinking about the implications of the studies. There is then the opportunity to write an example paragraph using this evidence and a suggested response
6	Drawing Conclusions	• Activity 6a) looks at drawing mini conclusions at the end of paragraphs • Activity 6b) considers conclusions being drawn at the end of essays
7	Bringing it altogether	• Activity 8 provides students with some example paragraphs that they can colour code to highlight where the different skills are demonstrated • To help students remember the components of an individual paragraph each one has been assigned a colour. The colours were loosely based on DeBono's Thinking Hats (http://www.debonogroup.com/six_thinking_hats.php) to begin with but were adapted to be made more appropriate for Psychology essays. This also allows scope for lesson activities using coloured pens/bricks etc.

Example Answer A

Eye witness testimony is responsible for the highest number of wrongful convictions in the US. Groups such as the innocence project have worked hard to exonerate over 300 wrongly convicted individuals in America in the past decade. However there is some debate as to whether eyewitness accounts by children are reliable and whether they should be used in a court of law.

Leading questions are proven to have far more of an effect on children. In the McMartin sexual abuse trials in the 1980's in America, leading questions were repeatedly asked. These were suggestive and leading questions that would manipulate and influence the children's responses into fabricating evidence for the allegations. The impact the question had on the children could suggest that children are overly susceptible to distortion and that therefore their accounts are less reliable than those of adults.

However, that is not to say adults are not influenced by leading questions. Loftus and Palmer's study in the 1980's on the reliability of eyewitness testimony proved that even a group of intelligent university students were susceptible to the influence of leading questions. Therefore if adults are too influenced by leading questions then the only real difference in adults and child eyewitness accounts is the degree of influence.

When looking at the reliability a study was done with a group of children between the ages of 8-15. After watching a video of an event they were asked questions on it. The study found that children who were younger were more likely to agree with incorrect information when suggested by an older or authority figure, whereas children from 13-15 were far less compliant. Although this suggests that a child's willingness to comply with the researcher could impact the reliability of their eyewitness testimony, to some degree adults are just as willing to add or leave out details they have been challenged. A study by Emerson found that after conferring with another individual, 71% of adults added details that had not been included in their condition of the study. This would suggest that adults are just as influenced by co-witnesses or a willingness to comply as children only to a lesser extent.

In conclusion the eyewitness testimony of children is no less reliable than adults provided the account is handled carefully to ensure they cannot be influenced by leading questions. This understanding of what can influence eyewitnesses has allowed law systems globally to develop and improve the treatment of witnesses (use of cognitive interview). As Ceci and Bruck found that although as previously mentioned they are more likely to exaggerate, when dealt with correctly children are just as reliable as those of adults.

Example Answer B

Eye witness testimonies are essential in helping the police find out more about crimes, a huge 70% of crimes in the USA use eye witness testimonies. In America 65% of 500 people were wrongly convicted. This suggests that sometimes they are not very reliable. Children are being used as eyewitnesses frequently; however there is a debate as to whether we should use children because they can be 'less reliable'.

A case that provides evidence of unreliable testimonies is that of the McMartin Day Care centre in America whereby a mother of a 2 year old son, Judy Johnson accused Raymond Buckley, a member of staff, of sexually abusing her child. This sparked off other parents coming forward to tell the police about staff abusing their child. Interviews were had with the children and a letter was sent out to parents telling them to ask their children about sexual things. The interviews were not very sensitive or dealt with well. They were structured questions such as 'did you play any games?' and the children initially replied no. However as the interviews went on, children were replying yes so they could please the authority figure. The children were in nursery and were at the pre-conventional stage. They were also influenced by their parents, who distorted their memories. This suggests that children are less reliable and are heavily influenced by other people.

On the other hand, Ceci and Bruck suggested that children are capable of recalling more than what they let on. However they found out that children's memories can be distorted into thinking that something is real. This suggests that without leading questions children can be reliable but it needs to be dealt with more sensitively. However adults are more reliable because they are more in the post conventional stage of human rights.

There are some cognitive and social factors to be taken into account, one of them being compliance. This means that you want to please the interviewer/police to give the 'right' answer, rather than give your own answer. Children are more compliant than adults because they want to please a person of authority. Another factor is that of suggestibility meaning the questions the police ask may be leading to something e.g. Loftus and Palmer (1974) found out that using a different word in the question changed the participants answer. This study was based on adults so this could suggest that adults can be just as suggestible as children. However the McMartin case shows that children are more likely to change their answers.

Overall eye witness testimonies are more reliable when it comes to adults, they are able to record in more detail e.g. Yuille and Cutshall conducted an experiment of a real life robbery and adults had to describe what happened and were very accurate. Children can be used as eye witnesses but they are less reliable and need to be treated sensitively.

Example Answer C

The reliability of eyewitness testimony has been questioned recently due to the amount of false eyewitness testimonies being revealed. However it is not fair to state that the 'eyewitness reports of children are less reliable than those of adults' due to the fact that any type of eyewitness testimony has the possibility to lack reliability regardless of age. Age does not necessarily affect recall and therefore testimony.

Ceci and Bruck support this idea and state that children can recall events just as accurately as adults and therefore can give just as a reliable testimony as adults. The results that they found support this claim and show there is no difference in recall ability between adults and children. This therefore refutes the statement that the testimonies of adults are less reliable than those of children as there was no difference in ability to recall detail and therefore there was no difference in reliability. However Ceci and Bruck did state that children were more susceptible to manipulation, which could in turn affect their recalling of events and thus the reliability.

Additionally the McMartin day care case strongly suggests that the eyewitness testimony of children is unreliable as the children recalled things that did not ever actually happen and this led to false and severe accusations towards those who worked in the day care. This shows that a child's eyewitness testimony can indeed be unreliable. However the children in this case were supposedly asked leading questions which would have affected their recall.

Generally the eyewitness testimony of children has questionable reliability but that is not different to the questionable reliability that adults' testimonies face.

When trying to determine the reliability of children's eyewitness testimonies in comparison to the reliability of adults, it is important to assess the reliability of adult eyewitness testimony. Several studies show that adult eyewitness testimony is just as flawed as children's.

Loftus and Palmer's study on the effect of leading questions on memory recall revealed that adults can be just as easily affected / manipulated and provide false recall of events. This also suggests that eyewitness reports are not 'less reliable than those of adults' as both adults and children have been shown to have their recall affected. Additionally the 'Innocence Project' revealed statistics highlighting that 60% of false imprisonment was due to faulty adult eyewitness testimony, further supporting this. However this can be argued against as Loftus and Palmer's study was carried out in an artificial environment. Yuille and Cutshall conducted a study that revealed that after 4 months the recall of witnesses to a real life crime was still accurate and reliable, suggesting that they are not always flawed.

Overall adults eyewitness testimony has been shown to be unreliable, just as the testimonies given by children have been. Generally however the belief that the 'eyewitness reports of children are less reliable than those of adults' can be argued as both adults and children are susceptible to things such as leading questions and therefore it cannot be argued that the testimony given by a child is less reliable.

Example Answer D

The use of children's eyewitness testimonies has been a topic of controversy for decades.

Researchers have found that children can in fact remember a great deal of factual information. This shows that their testimonies are relevant and useful sources of evidence. However, studies have also shown that children are much more prone to suggestibility. This means that the interviewer must be very careful when wording questions in order to prevent a change in a child's memory. Closed questions should be avoided but if necessary should be followed with a question such as 'tell me more about that'. This ensures the child is answering from their own memory. Loftus and Palmer found that leading questions can alter people's memory of an event with their study into estimated crash speeds when asked with different verbs. Therefore due to children's suggestible nature, extra care should be taken to avoid such examples. It was found that older people can generally remember more information with suggestibility at much lower rates. This shows that eye witness testimony from older people is much more reliable than younger people since the information is much less likely to be altered.

Children are also subject to conformity and might change their answer to please the interviewer. This can cause reliability issues and steps should be taken to reduce this scenario by not giving praise or criticism. This ensures the child won't change their answer to what they think the interviewer wants.

In summary, children can provide a reliable eye witness testimony as long as precautions to protect their memory are put in place.

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What makes a good essay
– checklist

Instructions

Thinking about the rank ordering activity you have just completed, record below a list of features of a good essay. When you have finished compare your responses with the suggestions provided. You can then use this list to assess your own essays before you hand it in.

Suggested Checklist

In the right hand column is the activity in this resource pack you should be looking for if you need help with this particular skill

Overall Structure	
Logical order	**2**
Appropriate conclusion reached	**7/8**
Literacy	
Transitional and linking words	**3/4**
Appropriate terminology	
Avoiding repetition of language	**3/4**
Use of paragraphs	**2**
Content	
Concise descriptions of research	**5**
Appropriate research chosen to support points made	
Depth and range of material	
Elaboration	
Material related back to the question frequently	**6**
Presenting both sides of the argument	**6**
Application to quote/scenario (if applicable)	
References to quote made throughout	

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The overall structure of an essay

Instructions

A good essay should be like a TV Series such as CSI. There are some stories that run through an entire series, just the same as there should be an argument running through an essay. However within a TV series there are separate episodes, each with their own clear beginning, middle and end. These are your individual paragraphs.

If you plan in paragraphs this can be useful for revision and also when you come to write the essay as you can use the 'title' for the paragraph as a way of introducing the arguments to be presented.

Look at these different chunks of an essay and think about how they could be organised into the different paragraphs. Write them into the boxes, name each paragraph and then compare it to the suggested response.

Essay Map

'Neuroscience has many positive applications in contemporary society; however the ethical implications are debatable'. Discuss.		
Introduction		
Paragraph 1	Paragraph 2	Paragraph 3
Conclusion		

There are 850,000 people living in the UK with dementia, meaning that it could be considered to be unethical to not conduct this research as there is a real need for a cure to be found.
There could be ethical implications of using neuroscience as evidence in court for explanations of criminals' behaviour, such as using PET scans as justification for why they committed murder.
There are ethical guidelines in place by the charity Alzheimer UK to ensure that as little harm as possible comes to the participants.
Strict regulations and vast quantities of research needs to take place to ensure that people's safety is maintained and if the side effects are so great then the drugs need to stop being so readily available especially to students who brains are still developing.
There is an issue of changing capacity to consent because neurological diseases can rapidly deteriorate, this potentially means that it is impossible to gain full valid consent because a person's want for being involved in the research may change at some point and once they are involved in the research they may feel they cannot withdraw from the study.
Neuroscience is a rapidly growing area of research due to improvements to technology and a desire to know about the brain and how it influences our personality.
Capacity for consent is an issue because the participants that are involved in neurological research have an impaired capacity to give fully informed consent.
Ethical implications of neuroscience evidence being used in the legal system and the development of neural modifiers are worrying, meaning that until the correct procedures are in place to control these areas, these domains need to be effectively restricted.
Battleday (2015) who has reviewed the evidence into modafinil concluded that it could improve decision making and problem solving. As well as this, there were few side effects and no addictive qualities.

There is worry that juries are being swayed by this evidence because it is scientific making them believe that it is credible even though this evidence does not fully establish cause and effect as there is no way to know whether these changes occurred before, during or after the crime was committed.
There has been a rise in the number of cases using this evidence to potentially gain reduced sentences, such as in the Peter Jordan Chiesa case where he was convicted for the lesser offence of second degree murder for killing 2 of his neighbours, as he had evidence showing damage to his prefrontal cortex, temporal lobes and cerebellum.
The benefits of neuroscience research outweigh the ethical implications because the research increases the possibility of a cure for neurological disease, such as dementia and Alzheimer's being discovered.
Research into the long term side effects of drugs is limited. The drug Ritalin has been associated with mental health problems, meaning that people are disturbing the system of their brains in ways that has never been done before.
It would be economically beneficial for a cure to be found as it costs the government £26 billion a year to fund the treatment for Alzheimer's disease.
The authors of the bioethics report concluded that the gradual introduction of neuro-scientific evidence and concepts after they are validated, well understood and interpreted accurately could potentially be highly valuable.
There is concern that the increased research into neuroscience has promoted a rise in neural modification and cognitive enhancers.
However there is an issue about whether the information gained is acceptable in terms of ethical implications, meaning that due to the condition of the people involved in research and also because of how this new evidence is being used there is debate about whether there could be potentially harmful repercussions.

‘Neuroscience has many positive applications in contemporary society; however the ethical implications are debatable’. Discuss.

Introduction

Neuroscience is a rapidly growing area of research due to improvements to technology and a desire to know about the brain and how it influences our personality.

However there is an issue about whether the information gained is acceptable in terms of ethical implications, meaning that due to the condition of the people involved in research and also because of how this new evidence is being used there is a debate about whether there could be potentially harmful repercussions.

Ethical issues surrounding consent

Capacity for consent is an issue because the participants that are involved in neurological research have an impaired capacity to give fully informed consent.

There is an issue of changing capacity to consent because neurological diseases can rapidly deteriorate, this potentially means that it is impossible to gain full valid consent because a person’s want for being involved in the research may change at some point and once they are involved in the research they may feel they cannot withdraw from the study.

There are 850,000 people living in the UK with dementia, meaning that it could be considered to be unethical to not conduct this research as there is a real need for a cure to be found.

It would be economically beneficial for a cure to be found as it costs the government £26 billion a year to fund the treatment for Alzheimer’s disease.

There are ethical guidelines in place by the charity Alzheimer UK to ensure that as little harm as possible comes to the participants.

Ethics of using neuroscience in court

There could be ethical implications of using neuroscience as evidence in court for explanations of criminal behaviour, such as using PET scans as justification for why they committed murder.

There has been a rise in the number of cases using this evidence to potentially gain reduced sentences, such as in the Peter Jordan Chiesa case where he was convicted for the lesser offence of second degree murder for killing 2 of his neighbours, as he had evidence showing damage to his prefrontal cortex, temporal lobes and cerebellum.

There is worry that juries are being swayed by this evidence because it is scientific making them believe that it is credible even though this evidence does not fully establish cause and effect as there is no way to know whether these changes occurred before, during or after the crime was committed.

The authors of the bioethics report concluded that the gradual introduction of neuro-scientific evidence and concepts after they are validated, well understood and interpreted accurately could potentially be highly valuable.

Ethics of cognitive enhancers

There is concern that the increased research into neuroscience has promoted a rise in neural modification and cognitive enhancers.

Research into the long term side effects of these drugs is limited. The drug Ritalin has been associated with mental health problems meaning that people are disturbing the system of their brains in ways that has never been done before.

Battleday (2015) who has reviewed the evidence into modafinil concluded that it could improve decision making and problem solving. As well as this, there were few side effects and no addictive qualities.

Strict regulations and vast quantities of research needs to take place to ensure that people's safety is maintained and if the side effects are so great then the drugs need to stop being so readily available especially to students whose brains are still developing.

Conclusion

The benefits of neuroscience research outweigh the ethical implications because the research increases the possibility of a cure for neurological disease such as dementia and Alzheimer's being discovered.

Ethical implications of neuroscience evidence being used in the legal system and the development of neural modifiers are worrying, meaning that until the correct procedures are in place to control these areas, these domains need to be effectively restricted.

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Transitional and Linking Words

Add information		
again besides moreover another together with	and likewise as well furthermore additionally	along with also for example equally important further
Conclude or summarise		
in short finally in summary in conclusion	consequently due to all in all as a result	accordingly to sum up thus therefore
Contrast two things or show a difference		
but even though conversely however	yet even so counter to on the other hand	in the meantime on the contrary nevertheless as opposed to
Emphasise a point		
again indeed to repeat	truly in fact to emphasise	for this reason with this in mind
Show similarities		
in the same manner in the same way also	likewise like both	as similarly
Clarify		
that is in other words	put another way stated differently	to clarify for insurance

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Bringing it altogether
– colour coding

One way of remembering to use all of the elements we have discussed is to allocate them different colours and use these to check they have all been included.

Introduction to the focus of the paragraph	
Evidence	
Elaboration and Discussion - supporting one side of the argument	
Elaboration and Discussion - supporting the other side of the argument	
Conclusions	

Another area where there is concern is the use of neurological evidence in the legal system. Some consider that there could be ethical implications of using neuroscience as evidence in court for explanations of criminal behaviour, such as using PET scans as justification for why they committed murder. This is an issue because there has been a rise in the number of cases using this evidence to potentially gain reduced sentences, such as in the Peter Jordan Chiesa case where he was convicted for the lesser offence of second degree murder for killing 2 of his neighbours, as he had evidence showing damage to his prefrontal cortex, temporal lobes and cerebellum. This highlights the concern that lawyers are using this evidence even though they don't fully understand it, as an excuse for their clients' actions. There is also the worry that juries are being swayed by this evidence because it is scientific, making them believe that it is credible even though this evidence does not fully establish cause and effect as there is no way to know whether these changes occurred before, during or after the crime was committed, as well as the argument that that it does not take away the fact that the criminals did commit a crime which goes against the legal system. Despite this, there is an argument that in the future neuroscience evidence could be used. The authors of the bioethics report concluded that the gradual introduction of neuro-scientific evidence and concepts after they are validated, well understood and interpreted accurately could potentially be highly valuable. This highlights that if research and teaching is implemented in the use of neurological evidence in the legal system, then the ethical implications could be reduced. However overall, in this present day there is a number of ethical implications of the use of this evidence in the legal system and until the teaching and research is being fully applied, then neuroscience should not be used as evidence as explanations of crimes because the risks of it being used incorrectly and as an excuse is too high.

There is concern that the increased research into neuroscience has promoted a rise in neural modification and cognitive enhancers, which has led to a cause for concern for

the side effects and ethical issues of these enhancers. There is worry that because the research into the long term side effects of these drugs is limited. The drug Ritalin has been associated with mental health problems meaning that people are disturbing the system of their brains in ways that has never been done before. This means that there has not been treatments or therapies developed to deal with the potential problems and side effects that these drugs could cause, resulting in the argument that these neural modifiers and cognitive enhancers should not be readily available. However, there is the argument that there has been research into the side effects, such as Battleday (2015) who has reviewed the evidence into modafinil and concluded that it could improve decision making and problem solving as well as that there were few side effect and no addictive qualities. This provides people with the argument that so far in the short term there has been few side effects, so the long term side effects that have yet to surface must also be minimal. Overall, as well as the social implications of wealth that these drugs will cause in the academic world, there is also the potential for harmful effects to occur to people's health in the future, meaning that strict regulations and vast quantities of research needs to take place to ensure that people's safety is maintained and if the side effects are so great then the drugs need to stop being so readily available especially to students whose brains are still developing.