

# Location of Research\*

Researchers can carry out their data collection in one of three environments. A

**laboratory** is a controlled environment specifically designed for the purpose of the research. Reliability will be high, but ecological validity is much lower.

An alternative is to conduct research in the **field**. This means measuring behaviour in a natural setting in which ecological validity is high, but control of variables is much more difficult, potentially reducing reliability. More recently, researchers have the option to collect data using **online** methods to distribute surveys or carry out experiments.



## Laboratory Research



Laboratory research takes place in highly **controlled conditions**, where the environment, equipment, and procedures are carefully managed to reduce the influence of extraneous variables.

Researchers use **standardised instructions** and procedures so that every participant experiences the study in the same way, making replication easier and results more reliable. **Variables are closely controlled and measured**, often through precise equipment or clear behavioural observations, allowing researchers to establish **cause-and-effect** relationships and collect accurate, objective data

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- ⚡ Researchers can control extraneous variables more effectively, making it easier to identify cause and effect.
  - Laboratories allow access to specialist equipment (e.g. brain scanners) that might not be available in natural settings.
  - High reliability.

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- The artificial setting may cause participants to behave unnaturally, reducing ecological validity.
  - Some types of behaviour or topics cannot be studied in a lab, as the setting may be unsuitable or unethical.



# Field Research

Field research can be conducted in various natural settings, allowing for the collection of data from participants in their everyday environments. Examples include schools, hospitals, shopping centres, or parks. This type of research could be carried out through a range of methodologies, such as observations or experiments. The defining characteristic is that participants are situated in **real-life contexts** where variables are less controlled.



⚡ Field research has greater ecological validity as behaviour is studied in a natural environment.

- There is less risk of demand characteristics because participants are often unaware of observation.
- Researchers can study behaviour in a wider range of real-life settings.

⚡ It is harder to manage confounding variables, which may compromise the validity of the results.

- Reliability decreases because it is significantly more difficult to standardise and control all aspects of the study, making replication a challenge.

## Online research



Online research in psychology involves collecting data from participants through websites, apps, or social media platforms. This method often uses questionnaires, surveys, or rating tasks, where participants give their opinions or respond to stimulus materials such as images, videos, or scenarios. There are also websites that allow volunteers the opportunity to undertake experimental tasks and activities online.

### EXAMPLE

Sites such as Prolific and Mechanical Turk are now widely used for psychology experiments. Researchers can post studies, and participants complete memory tests, moral dilemmas, or judgement tasks online. This allows for fast, large-scale data collection but raises concerns about attention, honesty, and sample diversity.



- Online research allows psychologists to reach a larger and more diverse sample, often making findings more representative.
- Participants may also give more honest responses when completing online questionnaires privately, improving the validity of the data



- There can be ethical issues, as participants may give consent online without fully understanding the study.
- Online research also provides less researcher support, so if participants become upset or anxious, it's harder to offer immediate help or debriefing.

Choose the most appropriate location for the following research scenarios with a brief justification for your choice:

1. A psychologist wants to investigate how background noise affects short-term memory. Participants will try to recall lists of words while exposed to different sound levels.

location choice \_\_\_\_\_ Justification \_\_\_\_\_

2. Researchers want to explore whether teenagers who use social media more frequently report higher levels of anxiety and lower self-esteem.

location choice \_\_\_\_\_ Justification \_\_\_\_\_

3. A psychologist wants to study whether people are more likely to help someone who drops their belongings when they are alone or when others are present.

location choice \_\_\_\_\_ Justification \_\_\_\_\_

4. A sports psychologist wants to test whether drinking an energy drink improves reaction times in athletes before competition.

location choice \_\_\_\_\_ Justification \_\_\_\_\_

5. A psychologist wants to investigate whether males and females differ in their ability to remember faces. The study involves showing a series of photos and testing recall accuracy.

location choice \_\_\_\_\_ Justification \_\_\_\_\_

# Exam Skills

A psychologist wants to investigate whether stress affects problem-solving ability. Participants are brought into a university lab and given a difficult puzzle to solve. Half of the participants complete the puzzle while loud construction noise is played through headphones, while the other half work in silence. The researcher measures how long each group takes to solve the puzzle.

EXAMPLE

(a) Explain one strength and one weakness of locating this research in a laboratory. [2+2]

One strength of locating this research in a lab is the ability to control variables. By controlling extraneous variables like light and temperature, researchers can see if the noisy, stressful conditions cause any change in problem-solving ability, increasing internal validity.

A weakness of conducting this in a lab is that conditions are artificial and behaviour may not be natural. Problem solving in real life often takes place in less controlled conditions, so ecological validity is reduced.

**WHAT**

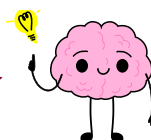
is the issue/solution?

**WHY**

is it an issue/solution?

**LINK**

to the research context



A researcher wants to see whether people are more likely to obey instructions from someone wearing a uniform. In a busy shopping area, a confederate either wears a police-style jacket or casual clothes and asks pedestrians not to walk on a patch of newly painted pavement. The researcher records how many people obey the instruction in each condition

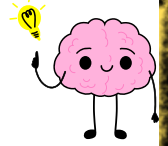
(b) Explain one strength and one weakness of locating this research in the field. [2+2]



# Exam Skills



A psychology student is investigating whether students who get more sleep perform better on memory tests. They create an online study where participants first report how many hours they usually sleep per night and then complete a short memory task presented on a website. Their scores are automatically recorded.



(c) Explain one strength and one weakness of locating this research online. [2+2]

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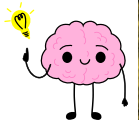
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A researcher wants to investigate whether people remember faces better when they are smiling or showing a neutral expression. Participants are shown 20 photographs of different faces on a computer screen in a quiet laboratory. Half the faces are smiling and half are neutral. After a short break, participants are shown a larger set of faces and asked to identify which ones they saw earlier.



(d) Explain one strength and one weakness of locating this research in a laboratory. [2+2]

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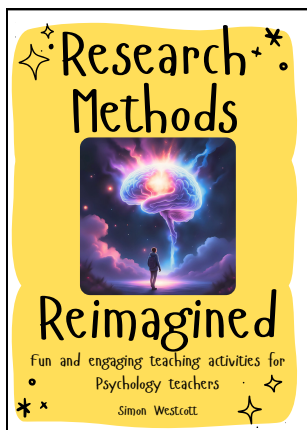
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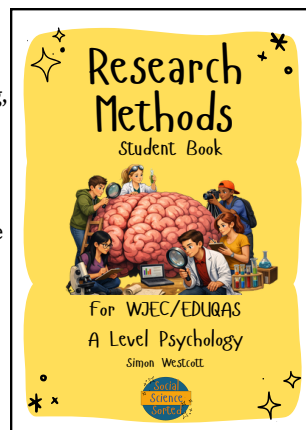


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## Psychology

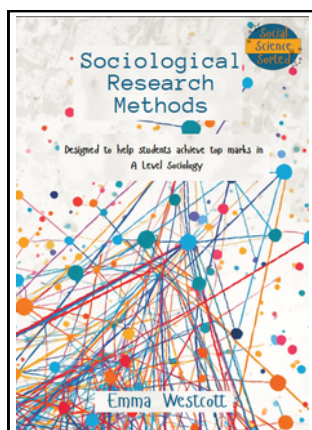


Transform the teaching of A-level Psychology research methods with this practical collection of engaging, classroom-tested activities. Covering research design, data analysis, statistics, validity, reliability, sampling, and ethics, the book provides adaptable ideas to boost understanding, confidence, curiosity, and critical thinking, making research methods more accessible and enjoyable for students.



Written for WJEC Units 2 & 4 and Eduqas Component 2 Psychology, this student guide offers clear explanations, knowledge checks, comprehension tasks, model answers, exam-style questions, a glossary, and exam skills support. Suitable for classroom or independent study, it helps students build confidence, strengthen understanding, and improve exam performance.

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