

Cambridge AS & A Level · Psychology 9990 · Notes

Consumer decision-making A2

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Read first: [Research methods](#), [Sampling of participants](#)

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What you need to know

How shoppers choose, from careful weighing to quick shortcuts, and the mistakes that follow (Consumer psychology, Papers 3 and 4). You should be able to:

2.3.1 Consumer decision-making

1. **Models:** explain, with examples, **utility theory**, **satisficing** and **prospect theory**.
2. **Strategies:** explain, with examples, **compensatory**, **non-compensatory** and **partially compensatory** strategies, including the named strategies inside each group.
3. **Internet shopping:** how **website design** changes which strategy shoppers use, with a study such as **Jedetski et al. (2002)**.

2.3.2 Choice heuristics

4. **Heuristics:** explain, with examples, the **availability**, **representativeness**, **recognition**, **take-the-best** and **anchoring** heuristics.
5. **Point of purchase decisions:** **multiple unit pricing** and **suggestive selling**, with a study such as **Wansink et al. (1998)**.
6. **Decision-making styles:** how heuristics relate to a person's decision-making style, with a study such as **del Campo et al. (2016)**.

2.3.3 Mistakes in decision-making

7. **Thinking fast and thinking slow:** **System 1** and **System 2**, with examples, e.g. **Shleifer (2012)**.
8. **Choice blindness**, preferences and **defending a choice**, through the key study **Hall et al. (2010)** (tasting jam and smelling tea).
9. **Memory for advertising:** how **retroactive** and **proactive interference** affect it, with a study such as **Burke and Srull (1988)**.
10. **Evaluate it all** with the issues the syllabus names: application to everyday life, cultural differences, reductionism versus holism, determinism versus free will, idiographic versus nomothetic, individual and situational explanations, experiments, interviews, types of data, and reliability.

Questions from 2021–2023 also asked about **consideration and involvement**, Knutson et al. (2007) and Braun-LaTour et al. (2004), which are no longer on the syllabus; they are summarised briefly at the end of "Understand it". The Engel Kollat Blackwell model and post-purchase dissonance belong to The product (2.4.3).

Understand it

Models of consumer decision-making

Utility theory treats the consumer as **rational**. "Utility" is the benefit a product is expected to bring. The shopper sets what each option would give them against its cost and picks the one with the **highest expected utility**, so a bigger promised payoff makes a purchase likelier. *Evaluation*: it describes what a well-informed shopper **should** do, but real shoppers rarely have full information or time, and many buy on impulse or habit.

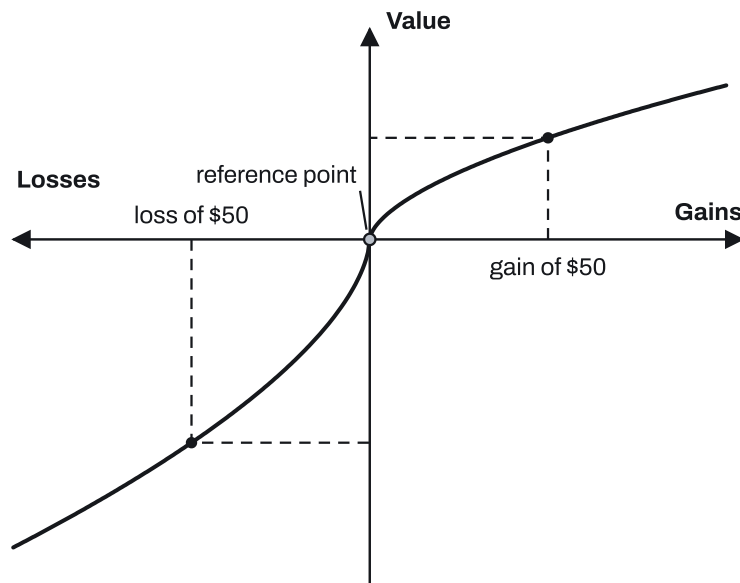
Satisficing (a blend of "satisfy" and "suffice") says shoppers do not hunt for the best. They decide what is **good enough** on the features that matter, look until one option reaches that level, then **stop searching** and buy it. *Example*: caught in a downpour, you buy the first umbrella that is big enough and folds up. It saves effort, so it suits cheap, low-risk items, and it is also a **non-compensatory** strategy (below).

Evaluation: it matches a lot of routine shopping, but it is **reductionist**: a purely **cognitive** explanation (the shopper's own sense of "good enough") that gives no role to a shop's atmosphere, an advertising campaign or an influencer. It also struggles with a car researched for weeks, a designer handbag bought because it is far more than adequate, and a chocolate bar grabbed at the till with nothing compared.

Prospect theory still has the shopper weighing costs against benefits, but adds that the **same outcome can feel better or worse** depending on how it is seen.

- **Reference point**: an outcome is judged as a **gain** or a **loss** compared with a starting point, such as the price you expected.
- **Loss aversion**: a loss feels **bigger** than a gain of the same size.
- **Framing**: the same choice described as a gain is preferred to it described as a loss; a yogurt labelled "90% fat-free" is likely to appeal more than the same yogurt labelled "10% fat".
- **Endowment effect**: people value something **more once they own it**, so after a "free 30-day home trial" of a sofa, giving it back feels like a loss.

It describes **four stages**: **editing** (simplifying the options with rules of thumb, such as a heuristic), **coding** (setting a reference point and coding outcomes as gains or losses), **valuing** (losses count for more) and **weighting** (weighing likelihood and risk, where framing acts).



Evaluating prospect theory: it is **useful** (it explains free trials, money-back guarantees and why "save 10" *beats* "avoid a 10 charge"); but it is **reductionist** (mood, habit and brand loyalty matter too), ignores **individual differences** (how big a loss feels varies), and its stages cannot be observed, which also seem too many for a packet of tissues bought out of habit.

Strategies of consumer decision-making

Products have several **attributes** (price, quality, size, colour), and shoppers combine them in different ways.

Compensatory strategies: a **strength** on one attribute can **make up for** a weakness on another; a slightly heavy bike can still win if it is very cheap. Richarme (2005) described two:

- **Equal weight:** every attribute counts the same; add up the scores and pick the highest total.
- **Weighted additive:** some attributes count **more**; multiply each score by its importance, then add.

Non-compensatory strategies: attributes are judged **one at a time**, and a good score on one **cannot** rescue a poor score on another; a phone with a superb camera is rejected outright if it is the wrong size.

- **Satisficing:** take the **first** product that meets the basic requirements and stop.
- **Elimination by aspects:** set a **cut-off** (a minimum) for the attribute that matters most and throw out every product that falls short; apply the next attribute's cut-off to whatever is left, and carry on until one product survives.
- **Lexicographic:** rank the attributes and buy whichever product scores **highest on the top one**; the second attribute only breaks a tie.

Partially compensatory strategies: a middle group, with some trading-off but not full adding up.

- **Majority of conforming dimensions:** pit **two** products against each other; whichever wins on **more** attributes stays in, then faces the next product, like a knockout competition.

- **Frequency of good and bad features:** set a cut-off for each attribute, count how many cut-offs each product clears, and buy the one with the **highest count**.

Three bicycle helmets, scored out of 10 and looked at in the order A, B, C, show that the strategies can pick different products:

Helmet	Safety	Comfort	Value for money
A	6	9	9
B	9	5	4
C	8	7	7

Strategy	How it works here	Choice
Equal weight	totals: A $6 + 9 + 9 = 24$, B 18, C 22	A
Weighted additive (safety counts 3 times)	A $18 + 9 + 9 = 36$, B $27 + 5 + 4 = 36$, C $24 + 7 + 7 = 38$	C
Lexicographic (safety most important)	B has the highest safety, 9	B
Elimination by aspects (value at least 5, then safety at least 7)	value removes B; safety then removes A	C
Satisficing (safety and comfort both at least 6)	A is looked at first and passes	A
Majority of conforming dimensions	A beats B on comfort and value; A beats C on comfort and value	A
Frequency of good and bad features (at least 7 on each counts as good)	A has 2 good features, B 1, C 3	C

Evaluating the strategies:

- **Application to everyday life:** the strategies have real practical value for sellers: a shop whose customers trade features off can add a comparison table, and one whose customers screen by limits can add filters. But the same person may weigh every feature of a car yet grab the first acceptable snack, so a seller cannot assume one strategy per customer, and **joint** decisions (a family holiday) are not described.
- **Cultural differences:** where choice or money is limited there may be only one or two products to compare, so the strategies have little to work with.
- **Reductionism and determinism:** a few tidy rules make shoppers predictable, which helps sellers plan, but leave out mood, impulse and other people, and a shopper is free to break any rule.
- **Idiographic versus nomothetic:** the strategies are **nomothetic** rules for all shoppers; a case study of one person's purchases would show the mix that individual really uses.

Website design and internet shopping: Jedetski et al. (2002)

The **design of a website** decides whether products can be compared easily, and that nudges shoppers towards a kind of strategy. **Jedetski et al. (2002)** is the study the syllabus names for this link: when a site makes products hard to compare, shoppers fall back on **non-compensatory** strategies such as satisficing, elimination by aspects or lexicographic. For example (our illustrations, not the study's), a site showing one product per page, or filters that hide anything below a cut-off, invites these strategies, while a side-by-side comparison table makes **compensatory** trade-offs easier. So a retailer can pick a design that suits how its customers decide. *Evaluating it: useful* to web designers, but strategies also depend on the product and the person.

Choice heuristics

A **heuristic** is a **mental shortcut** (a rule of thumb) for deciding quickly with little information. It is usually helpful but can bias choices.

Heuristic	What happens	Shopping example
Availability	We judge how likely something is by how easily examples come to mind	Two friends' suitcase handles snapped, so a shopper avoids that brand
Representativeness	We judge something by how similar it is to a typical example of a category	Own-brand biscuits in packaging like the best-known brand's are assumed to taste as good
Recognition	Of two options, we choose the one we recognise , because familiarity suggests it is better or safer	A shopper buys the sun cream brand they have seen advertised over one they have never heard of
Take-the-best	We check cues one at a time , most useful first, and choose as soon as one separates the options	A commuter checks battery life first; one pair of headphones lasts much longer, so they buy it
Anchoring	The first piece of information becomes a reference point, and later judgements stay too close to it	A coat marked "was 200, <i>now</i> 120" seems a bargain because \$200 was seen first

Availability is about what comes to **mind**, not what is in stock. **Recognition** needs the product to be **familiar** or **trusted**. **Anchoring** needs the **first** information to carry the most weight. **Take-the-best** is close to the **lexicographic** strategy.

Point of purchase decisions: multiple unit pricing and suggestive selling

Point of purchase decisions are made at the shelf or the till. These techniques use **anchoring** to change how **many** items people buy; shoppers adjust down from the anchor, but not far enough.

- **Multiple unit pricing:** "3 for 6" *instead of* "2 each". The number is a **quantity anchor**, so a bigger purchase feels normal at the same price per item.

- **Suggestive selling**: the seller suggests a quantity or an extra item ("Stock up: buy 10 for the freezer"; "Would you like garlic bread with that?").
- **Purchase quantity limits** ("limit 8 per customer"): an anchor that also suggests the item is **scarce**.

Wansink et al. (1998) tested these ideas in the USA, partly in real shops and partly in a laboratory:

- **Multiple unit pricing**: for one week, **86** shops (**43** with single-unit prices, **43** with multiple-unit prices at the same price per item) sold **13** kinds of product. Multiple-unit pricing raised sales by about **32%** overall.
- **Purchase quantity limits**: in **3** Iowa supermarkets, soup was sold at a small discount with no limit, a limit of **4** or a limit of **12** per customer. With no limit shoppers bought about **3.3** cans on average; with a limit of **12** they bought about **7**.
- **Suggestive selling** (laboratory, students): a suggested quantity, or a suggestion to buy for other people, raised how much people **intended** to buy.

Evaluating it: clear **everyday application** and **real shoppers** in many shops (high ecological validity); but only in the USA, the laboratory parts measured students' **intentions**, and shoppers with a budget or list may resist anchors (an **individual** factor). Sales data are **objective** but do not say **why**.

Heuristics and decision-making styles: del Campo et al. (2016)

People differ in **decision-making style**: some decide quickly on gut feeling, others gather information and think it through. The syllabus links heuristics to style through **del Campo et al. (2016)**, a study that set **recognition** against **take-the-best**. It is an **individual** explanation: which shortcut you reach for may depend on the kind of decision-maker you are, not just the situation. *Evaluating it*: the idea helps explain why two shoppers in the same shop decide differently (**individual** versus **situational** explanations).

Thinking fast and thinking slow: System 1 and System 2

	System 1: thinking fast	System 2: thinking slow
Speed and effort	quick, effortless	slow, effortful
Control	automatic, unconscious	deliberate, conscious
Basis	intuition, emotion, heuristics	calculation, reasoning
Shopping example	your usual toothpaste; a drink at the till	a university laptop; a mortgage

The syllabus names **Shleifer (2012)** for this account. Cheap, frequent buys are mostly System 1; expensive or risky ones bring in System 2, which may later **change** a quick System 1 choice ("Why did I buy that?"). Heuristics are System 1 tools, so they bring **biases** sellers can use.

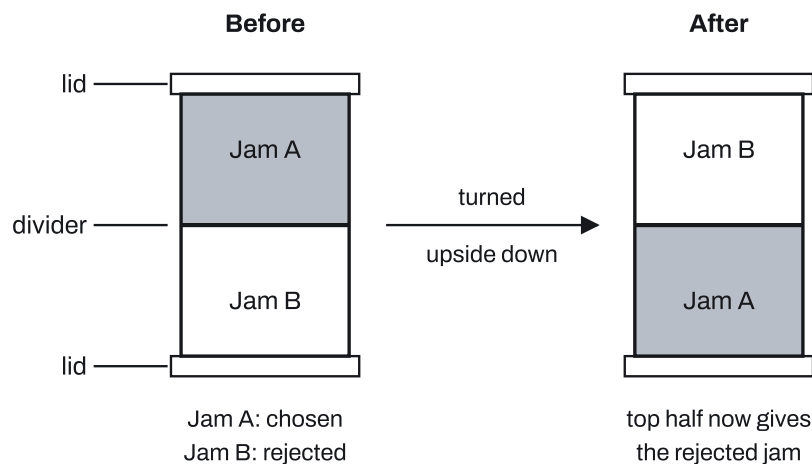
Evaluating it: **useful** (sweets by the till, quiet areas and trained staff for cars and kitchens), but **reductionist** (atmosphere, money and other people matter too), and knowing two systems exist does not show which one a shopper used for a given purchase. **Free will**: System 2 lets a shopper choose to slow down; **determinism**: System 1 runs automatically.

Choice blindness: the key study Hall et al. (2010)

Choice blindness happens when someone has just picked one option, is secretly handed the **other one**, and does not realise: they treat it as their choice and even give reasons for liking it. **Preferences** are less fixed than we think, and we readily **defend a choice** we did not make.

Method: a **field experiment** at a tasting stand in a **supermarket** in Sweden. **Participants:** **180** customers (**118** female, **62** male), aged **16–80**, living in or around **Lund**, Sweden; an **opportunity sample** of shoppers who happened to walk by the stand.

Procedure:



1. Posing as **independent consultants**, the researchers said they were running a **quality control** test of the shop's jam and tea range.
2. Each participant **tasted** a pair of **jams** or **smelled** a pair of **teas**, gave each a **liking** score, and said which they preferred.
3. They sampled their **preferred** product again and explained **why** they liked it. On manipulated trials the two-ended "magic" jar, split by a **divider**, had been secretly **turned upside down**, so they were sampling the product they had **rejected**.
4. Half were told they would get their chosen product as a **gift**, to see whether caring more made people notice.
5. At the end they were asked whether anything seemed odd, **debriefed**, and gave **written consent**; a regional ethics board had approved the study.

The four 10-point scales (a participant's **preference** is **not** one of them):

What was rated	Scale from 1 to 10
Similarity of each pair, rated in a pre-test with no switching (8 pairs of jams, 7 pairs of teas)	1 "very different" to 10 "very similar"
Liking of each product	1 "not at all good" to 10 "very good"

What was rated	Scale from 1 to 10
How difficult it was to tell the two products apart	1 "very difficult" to 10 "very easy"
Confidence in the choice just made	1 "very unsure" to 10 "very certain"

The deceptions and why each was needed: the **quality control** cover story (otherwise people would know it was a study and watch for tricks); posing as **independent consultants** (otherwise they would know they were dealing with researchers); the flippable "**magic**" jars, and a **card magic trick** used in the same way (without a hidden switch there is nothing to test).

Results:

- Only about **a third** of manipulated trials were **detected**: **33%** for jam and **32%** for tea.
- By kind: about **14%** of manipulations were noticed **concurrently** (while re-sampling) for both jam and tea, and **6–7% retrospectively** (only mentioned at the end).
- For jam, switches were spotted **more often** in the least alike pair (cinnamon-apple and grapefruit) than in the most alike pair.
- **Difficulty** and **confidence** ratings did not differ between undetected switches and ordinary trials: being wrong did not make anyone less sure.
- The **gift** lowered detection for tea (about **20%** with a gift, against **46%** without) but not for jam.

Conclusion: considerable choice blindness, even for taste and smell.

Evaluating it:

- **Field experiment:** a **natural** setting and a task that fits it, with an **IV** (switched or not), **DVs** (detection, ratings) and **controls** (same scales, products and switching method); but noise and other shoppers are hard to control, so it is less **reliable** than a laboratory study such as Burke and Srull's, although the standardised procedure could be repeated.
- **Sample:** 180 is fairly large, but about **two-thirds female** (perhaps typical of supermarket shoppers), all from **one** shop in **one** Swedish town; approaching passers-by lets researcher bias creep in, and splitting people across jam, tea, gift and no gift left some groups small.
- **Data:** **quantitative** ratings and detection rates allow comparison; **qualitative** reasons show how people defended choices but are **self-reports**, open to **social desirability**.
- **Ethics:** **deception** meant no informed consent beforehand, unavoidable here; balanced by **debriefing**, **written consent** afterwards and ethics-board approval.
- **Determinism and individual differences:** the blindness happens without awareness (a **situational** cause), yet a third noticed, so **individual** factors such as sharp taste matter.

Consumer memory for advertising: interference

We see many similar adverts, and similar memories get in each other's way: **interference**.

- **Retroactive interference:** **new** information disrupts memory for **old**. After this week's advert for a rival running shoe, you remember last month's slogan as the new brand's.
- **Proactive interference:** **old** information disrupts memory for **new**. Years of adverts for one fizzy drink make it hard to remember which brand a new drink advert was for.

Burke and Srull (1988) ran laboratory experiments with magazine adverts:

- **Experiment 1:** participants saw **12** magazine adverts and rated their chance of buying each brand. Details met later got in the way of brand details learned earlier (**retroactive interference**).
- **Experiment 2:** a similar task looking for **proactive interference**, with adverts for products of the same kind. Competitors' adverts hurt recall of a brand's earlier adverts and also learning from its next ones.
- **Experiment 3:** **22** full-colour magazine adverts. With rival brands also advertised, participants given prompts (**cued recall**) remembered clearly less about each brand.
- A viewer's **motivation** (interest in the product) also affected memory.

Evaluating it: **laboratory experiments** controlled what each participant saw and can be repeated exactly (**reliable**), and participants knew they were taking part (more ethical than deception). But a booklet of adverts is unlike daily life (low **ecological validity**), with possible **demand characteristics**. Advert order is **situational**; motivation is **individual**. Advertisers can avoid sitting next to rivals and make adverts distinctive.

Older syllabus content (2021–2023 questions only)

- **Consideration and involvement (Richarme, 2005):** **consideration** is choosing only from a **shortlist** of brands; **involvement** is how much thinking a purchase gets, set by how much it will change the buyer's **quality of life** rather than by price (mints low, a laptop high).
- **Knutson et al. (2007)**, pre-cognitive decisions (the brain shows the decision before awareness): **26** participants (**12** female, **14** male, aged 18–26), given **\$20**, did the **SHOP** task (Save Holdings Or Purchase) in an **fMRI** scanner. On each of **80** trials: product **4 s**, price **4 s**, choice **4 s**, fixation cross **2 s**. Liking went with **nucleus accumbens** activity, a fair price with **mesial prefrontal cortex** activity, buying with **insula** deactivation. *Controls:* one timed procedure for all; screening (psychotropic drugs, ibuprofen, substance abuse, psychiatric history); excluding **8** for head movement and **6** for buying fewer than four items. They aided reliability and validity but made it unlike real shopping.
- **Braun-LaTour et al. (2004)**, advertising and false memory: after a Disneyland advert showing a handshake with **Bugs Bunny** (not a Disney character), more students "remembered" that false handshake than a true one with Mickey Mouse; pictures planted more false memories than words.

Key facts and formulas

There is no formula list in the 9990 exam. "Learn it" means you must remember it.

Fact	Status
Utility theory: a rational consumer buys the option with the highest expected utility	Learn it

Fact	Status
Satisficing: stop at the first product that is good enough on the basic requirements	Learn it
Prospect theory: reference point, loss aversion, framing, endowment effect; stages editing, coding, valuing, weighting	Learn it
Compensatory (one strength makes up for a weakness): equal weight, weighted additive	Learn it
Non-compensatory (attributes judged separately): satisficing, elimination by aspects, lexicographic; hard-to-compare websites push shoppers to these (Jedetski et al., 2002)	Learn it
Partially compensatory: majority of conforming dimensions, frequency of good and bad features	Learn it
Heuristics: availability, representativeness, recognition, take-the-best, anchoring	Learn it
Wansink et al. (1998): 86 shops, 13 products, multiple-unit pricing about +32%; soup: no limit about 3.3 cans, limit of 12 about 7	Learn it
System 1: fast, automatic, emotional. System 2: slow, deliberate, effortful (Shleifer, 2012)	Learn it
Hall et al. (2010): Swedish supermarket field experiment, 180 customers (118 F, 62 M, 16–80), opportunity sample; about a third of switches detected (33% jam, 32% tea)	Learn it
Hall et al. scales: similarity, liking, difficulty, confidence, each 1 to 10	Learn it
Retroactive: new disrupts old. Proactive: old disrupts new (Burke and Srull, 1988)	Learn it
Percentage increase = $\frac{\text{increase}}{\text{original}} \times 100$	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 38 questions on this topic, from 2021 to 2026 (Papers 3 and 4; 26 different questions, as variants repeat them). One of them, [9990/32/F/M/26 Q8](#), is wholly about the Engel Kollat Blackwell model and post-purchase dissonance, which belong to The product (2.4.3), so it is not covered here. Of the other 37, 16 have parts of more than one type, so the counts add up to 57.

Question type	Questions
Recall details of a key study	8
Describe and evaluate essay	7
Outline or define a model, strategy or concept	7

Question type	Questions
Apply an issue or debate to a model or heuristic	6
Methodology applied to Hall et al.	6
"To what extent do you agree" essay	6
Identify the model, strategy or heuristic in a scenario	5
Explain a problem in finding which model or heuristic consumers use	5
Evaluate a theory or study	3
Plan a study and link it to psychological knowledge	3
Apply point of purchase techniques to a shop	1

1. Recall details of a key study (8 questions)

Mostly Hall et al. (one older question asks Knutson et al.'s procedure); usually 1 mark a fact plus 1 for its detail. Give a scale's variable **and** its end labels ("liking of each product (1), from 1 'not at all good' to 10 'very good' (1)"); a deception **and** what it hid; the sample's numbers, then how shoppers passing the stand were approached; a finding's figure **and** its comparison ("about 20% with a gift, against 46% without").

2. Describe and evaluate essay (7 questions)

Paper 3 Section B: (a) **describe** [6] (8 before 2024), (b) **evaluate** [10] with a **named issue**.

1. **(a)** Cover **everything named**; answering only one of two bullet points caps (a) at 3 or 4 marks. Strategies: all three groups, each sub-strategy with an example. A study: setting, sample, procedure, results with figures. No evaluation.
2. **(b)** The **named issue first**, then two or three more, each **applied** with detail from (a) and **analysed** (why it matters, or the other side), then a judgement. "It is holistic" alone stays low.
3. **Application to everyday life** only scores as evaluation when you judge it: how a seller could use the idea **and** where that breaks down; naming a product is just description.

3. Outline or define a model, strategy or concept (7 questions)

2–4 marks: the meaning (1), then a detail or shopping example (1); with no consumer link, usually 1 at most. Satisficing is stopping at the first good-enough product (not "the best", not "being satisfied"); for partially compensatory, explain one of its two strategies; prospect theory [4] needs reference point, loss aversion, framing and endowment with examples.

4. Apply an issue or debate to a model or heuristic (6 questions)

(a) Define the debate (1), then tie it to the named idea with an example (1); (b) a strength or problem (1) applied to it (1).

- **Determinism:** behaviour caused by internal or external factors outside our control; e.g. **anchoring**, as the first price seen sways us without our choosing it.
- **Strength of determinism: prediction** (a seller can predict that a product styled like a famous brand will be judged high quality, by representativeness), testable **causes**, **general laws**, and showing why heuristics exist (they save effort).
- **Free will:** behaviour chosen by the person; e.g. **System 2**, as a shopper can decide to spend a week comparing prices.
- **Reductionism:** one level of explanation; satisficing ignores the store, marketing, influencers, impulse and luxury buys.

5. Methodology applied to Hall et al. (6 questions)

Each point (1), then **applied to jam and tea at the stand** (1).

- **Open question:** begin "Describe" or "Explain", ask about one of the four variables, and rule out a one-word answer: "Explain why you found it easy or hard to tell the two jams apart." (difficulty). A question about which product they preferred does not count.
- **10-point scales:** strength: no middle point, so everyone must lean one way on liking, difficulty and confidence; a finer range than a 5-point scale. Weakness: someone truly undecided is forced into a false answer; a label may be misunderstood.
- **Without deception:** shoppers would know it was a study of choice and look for the switch (demand characteristics), so cause and effect is lost.
- **Field experiment, sample, ethics:** the points in the Hall et al. evaluation, each with the stand as the example.
- **Another sampling technique: volunteer** (a sign-up sheet for tasting slots at the customer service desk: willing, but keen tasters may guess the aim) or **random** (names drawn by computer from the loyalty-card list: no researcher bias, but many may not come). For "discuss an opportunity sample", see How to get the marks.

6. "To what extent do you agree" essay (6 questions)

Old Paper 4, 12 marks, **none for description:** argue both ways with research, then conclude.

- **Agree:** a shortcut existing does not show a given shopper used it; picking out one or two heuristics (or two systems) ignores the shop's atmosphere and more, so it is **reductionist**; Knutson et al.'s scans suggest the brain may settle on a purchase before conscious thought; a scanner is nothing like a shop.
- **Disagree:** the ideas explain a snap choice at the shelf that is rethought at home; sellers profit from them (Wansink et al.); fMRI gives objective data. Contrast heuristics with **alternatives** (rational models, pre-cognitive decisions).

7. Identify the model, strategy or heuristic in a scenario (5 questions)

Name it (1), then **link** it to the people in the question (1); two suggestions must differ.

- First information weighs most = **anchoring**; a familiar, trusted brand = **recognition**; searching features and comparing = **utility theory** or **take-the-best**; first one good enough = **satisficing**. "They bought the first one" or "he recognises it" alone only repeats the name.
- **Website where comparing is hard: non-compensatory** strategies (satisficing, elimination by aspects, lexicographic; partially compensatory and anchoring also credited). Give two, each with what the shopper would do on the site.

8. Explain a problem in finding which model or heuristic consumers use (5 questions)

The problem (1), with the purchase in the question (1). "Individual differences" alone scores 0.

- Shoppers may use **several** strategies or heuristics in one purchase.
- They may **not know** why they bought something, or give a **socially desirable** answer ("I compared prices", not "I took the first one").
- Sales data show **what** was bought, not **why**; only some customers write reviews.
- For free will: the choice cannot be separated from an **external** influence such as an advert.

9. Evaluate a theory or study (3 questions)

6 marks, levelled: two points (a strength and a weakness, or two weaknesses), each explained in **detail** with the study's or theory's own facts, from the evaluations above (Knutson et al.'s controls are under the older content). Prospect theory is a theory: it has no "sample" or "ecological validity" to criticise.

10. Plan a study and link it to psychological knowledge (3 questions)

Paper 4, 24 marks: (a) plan [10]; (b)(i) the knowledge [4]; (b)(ii) two features used [4]; (c) three 2-mark reasons or weaknesses, each applied to **your** plan. See the research-methods note for each method's features.

1. **Use the method named:** an **online** questionnaire is filled in on the participant's own device, with no researcher present; give question format, example questions, scoring, sample and sampling technique.
2. **(b)(i)** must match the plan: strategies (or Jedetski et al.) for a plan on strategies; Wansink et al. for multiple unit pricing. Choice heuristics (del Campo et al.) do not count for strategies.
3. **(b)(ii):** name the feature and where it is in the plan: "satisficing gave me the closed question 'Did you buy the first item that met your needs? Yes / No'".
4. **(c):** closed questions are quick to score; open ones give reasons; online questionnaires suffer drop-outs and exclude people without internet.

11. Apply point of purchase techniques to a shop (1 question)

(a) A technique (1) with the shop's product (1): a multiple-unit deal, a purchase limit, a suggested quantity; "offer a discount" alone earns 0. (b)(i) How it changes thinking: the number becomes an **anchor**, a limit suggests **scarcity**, with Wansink et al. as evidence. (b)(ii) A problem: a shopper on a fixed budget or list

ignores the anchor; extra of the promoted item may mean less of something else; shoppers who see no saving per item may feel tricked.

Worked examples

Example 1

An outdoor-gear website lets shoppers type in a maximum price and a minimum number of sleeping places, then hides every tent that fails either limit. The tents that pass are shown one per page.

- (a) Explain why this website design is likely to lead shoppers to use a non-compensatory strategy. [2]
- (b) The owner wants shoppers to weigh up all the features of the tents. Suggest **one** change to the website and explain how it would encourage a compensatory strategy. [2]
- (a) The filters remove any tent that misses a cut-off, so a very cheap tent that sleeps too few never appears (**B1**). Shoppers are pushed into **elimination by aspects**: price first, then sleeping places, with no chance for a strength to make up for a weakness (**B1**).
- (b) Add a **comparison table** showing several tents side by side with price, weight, waterproofing and sleeping places (**B1**). Seeing every attribute together lets a shopper decide that extra waterproofing is worth a higher price, a **compensatory** (weighted additive) decision (**B1**).

Example 2

These questions are about the key study by Hall et al. (2010).

- (a) Describe how the jars allowed the researchers to switch the products without the participants noticing. [2]
- (b) Suggest one way in which the researchers dealt with the ethical problems of deceiving participants. [2]
- (c) Explain one strength and one weakness of collecting the participants' reasons for their choice in this study. [4]
- (a) Each jar opened at **either end**, with a **divider** across the middle, so one jam sat at the top and the other at the bottom (**B1**). After the choice, the researcher secretly flipped the jar, so the "favourite" sampled again came from the end holding the rejected jam (**B1**).
- (b) Participants were **debriefed** about the switch at the end (**B1**) and then asked for **written consent** to use their data, so each shopper could still refuse once they knew the true aim (**B1**).
- (c) *Strength*: the reasons are **qualitative** data showing how people **defend** a choice (**B1**): someone praising the sweetness of the jam they had actually rejected shows invented reasons, which a liking score could not (**B1**).

Weakness: the reasons are **self-reports**, open to **social desirability (B1)**: wanting to help the "consultants", a shopper may give a confident reason for liking the jam while unsure, so the reasons may not reflect what they thought (**B1**).

Example 3

(a) Describe what psychologists have discovered about thinking fast and thinking slow (System 1 and System 2) and about how interference affects consumer memory for advertising. **[6]**

(b) Evaluate what psychologists have discovered about thinking fast and thinking slow and about interference in memory for advertising, including a discussion of reliability. **[10]**

(a) Psychologists, including Shleifer (2012), describe two ways of thinking. **System 1** is quick, automatic and driven by feeling: a shopper drops their usual tea into the basket without a thought. **System 2** is slow and deliberate: the same shopper spends a week comparing laptops. Cheap, frequent buys are mostly System 1 and use heuristics, which bring biases; costly ones bring in System 2, which can later change a System 1 choice.

In **retroactive** interference a new advert disrupts memory of an older one; in **proactive** interference older adverts make a new one harder to remember. In Burke and Srull (1988), Experiment 1 had participants look at 12 magazine adverts and rate their chance of buying each brand; Experiment 3 used 22 full-colour adverts and tested memory with prompts (cued recall). Adverts for rival brands made brand details harder to recall, and interest in the product also affected memory.

Why it reaches the top level: both named areas, each with definitions, consumer examples, and the study's procedure and findings.

(b) Reliability (the named issue). Burke and Srull's laboratory procedure was standardised (the same adverts, ratings and recall test for everyone), so another researcher could repeat it to check the results. The main finding also held within their own work: Experiments 1 and 3 used different sets of adverts (12, then 22 in full colour), and in both, other adverts seen alongside or after a brand's advert interfered with memory for it. The two-system account is harder to measure reliably: whether a purchase used System 1 or System 2 is judged from what shoppers say afterwards, and the same shopper may describe it differently on another day.

Ecological validity. A booklet of adverts followed by a test is unlike adverts scattered through a week, so real interference may differ.

Determinism versus free will and application. Interference and System 1 run without our control, allowing prediction (brands can avoid appearing beside rivals; shops put System 1 goods by the till), but System 2 shows a shopper can choose to slow down, and individual motivation changes how well any of this works.

Overall, the interference findings are reliable but artificial, while the two-system idea is useful but hard to measure consistently.

Why it reaches the top level: the named issue first and applied to both areas, further issues with evidence from (a), and a judgement.

Common mistakes

- **Not knowing "choice blindness"**: many answers showed the term had not been learned, and guesses rarely scored (June 2023 report).
- **Hall et al. scales**: writing "a 10-point scale was used", or naming a variable without its scale (March 2026 report); jam or tea **preference** is not one of the scales (mark scheme, March 2026). "It gives quantitative data" is not a strength unless tied to these scales (March 2026 report).
- **Open questions** that do not begin "Describe" or "Explain", or can be answered in one word (March 2026 report).
- **Deception**: writing about ethics in general instead (March 2025 report); "deceived about the aim" needs elaboration (June 2023 report); "it would not be valid" needs the reason, that shoppers who spotted the trick would act differently (March 2025 report).
- **Generic method points** with no example from Hall et al., and no conclusion on opportunity sampling (June 2023 and March 2025 reports).
- **Satisficing** as choosing the best product, or being "satisfied"; **prospect theory** replaced by the store environment, or criticised as if it were a study (November 2022 report).
- **Partially compensatory** confused with the other two groups (March 2021 report).
- **Availability** taken to mean whether a shop has the product in stock; Wansink et al.'s studies mixed up (June 2022 report).
- **Thinking fast and slow** with no link to buying (June 2021 and March 2023 reports).
- **Knutson et al.**: results when the procedure was asked, controls listed without their effectiveness (March 2021 report).
- **Plans**: an "online" questionnaire handed out in person on a tablet; choice heuristics when strategies were asked; no link from (b)(i) to the plan (March 2026 report).

How to get the marks

- **The 2-mark rule**: almost every short part gives 1 for the point and 1 for applying it to the shopper, product or study in the question. A correct point with no context stops at 1.
- **Numbers earn recall marks**: learn Hall et al.'s 180 (118 F, 62 M), 16–80, 33% and 32%, about 20% against 46%, and the four scale end labels; Wansink et al.'s 86 shops, 13 products, about 32%, and 3.3 against about 7 cans.
- **"Evaluate"** (10 marks) is marked point by point in levels: one detailed, analysed point beats several bare ones, and the named issue must be there.
- **"Discuss ... with a conclusion"** (5 marks): two strengths and two weaknesses, each tied to the study, then a conclusion that comes down on one side ("an opportunity sample was the better choice, because shoppers at a stand had to be approached on the spot for the cover story to work"). Repeating your points earns nothing.
- **"To what extent"** (12 marks): no marks for description alone; both sides with research, then a reasoned verdict.

Quick check

1. A shopper scores three backpacks out of 10. P: comfort 6, durability 9, value 8. Q: comfort 9, durability 6, value 6. R: comfort 8, durability 7, value 5. (a) Which does the equal weight strategy choose? (b) Which does the weighted additive strategy choose if comfort counts twice as much as each of the others?
2. Name the heuristic: (a) after a news story about two scooters of one brand catching fire, a shopper avoids that brand; (b) a shopper buys a cereal she has never heard of because its box looks just like the market leader's; (c) a shopper picks the one brand of batteries he has heard of from three on the shelf.
3. A shop usually sells 250 jars of pasta sauce a week at a single-unit price. If multiple-unit pricing raised sales by the same 32% that Wansink et al. found overall, how many jars would it sell?
4. Retroactive or proactive interference? (a) After seeing many adverts for a new energy drink, a viewer can no longer remember the slogan of an energy drink advert from last year. (b) A viewer who has seen one bank's adverts for years keeps misremembering a new bank's advert as being for the old bank.
5. In Hall et al., what percentage of manipulated jam trials went **undetected**, and what does this show?

Answers

1. (a) Equal weight: $P\ 6 + 9 + 8 = 23$, $Q\ 9 + 6 + 6 = 21$, $R\ 8 + 7 + 5 = 20$, so **P**. (b) Weighted: $P\ 12 + 9 + 8 = 29$, $Q\ 18 + 6 + 6 = 30$, $R\ 16 + 7 + 5 = 28$, so **Q**.
2. (a) **Availability** (the fires come easily to mind). (b) **Representativeness** (similar to a typical, trusted example). (c) **Recognition** (the familiar brand is trusted).
3. $250 \times 1.32 = 330$ jars ($0.32 \times 250 = 80$ more).
4. (a) **Retroactive** (new information disrupts the old). (b) **Proactive** (old information disrupts the new).
5. $100 - 33 = 67\%$ undetected: two thirds of the time people did not notice they had the jam they rejected, showing considerable choice blindness.

Past questions to try

- 9990/32/M/J/25 Q7: which models of decision-making two coat sellers are describing, and a problem in finding out.
- 9990/32/M/J/24 Q7: point of purchase techniques to sell more of one product.
- 9990/42/F/M/25 Q3: Hall et al.'s deceptions, why they were needed, and field experiments.
- 9990/32/O/N/22 Q3: satisficing, prospect theory and two weaknesses of prospect theory.