

Milgram (obedience)

AS

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What you need to know

Milgram (1963) watched what ordinary men did when a man in a grey coat kept telling them to give stronger and stronger electric shocks to a stranger. The shocks were fake, but the men did not know that. As with every AS core study, you should be able to:

1. **Explain the psychology being investigated: obedience and social pressure**, including what happens when doing as you're told means acting against what you believe is right, and the **dispositional** and **situational** hypotheses.
2. **Give the background**: why Milgram asked how far people will go when an authority figure tells them to hurt someone.
3. **State the aims** of the study.
4. **Describe the procedure and its methodology**: the research method (a controlled laboratory study measuring obedience, with **no independent variable**, so not an experiment), the sample and how it was recruited, the people involved (experimenter, learner, teacher), the cover story, the shock generator, the learning task, the shock instructions, the learner's scripted feedback, the experimenter's prods, the observations, and the interview and dehoax at the end.
5. **Discuss the ethical issues**: deception, protection from psychological harm, the right to withdraw, informed consent, and the debrief.
6. **Give the results**: the main quantitative findings (how far the men went) and the qualitative ones (what they said and the signs of tension they showed), and how these can be shown and interpreted.
7. **State the conclusions** that Milgram drew, or that could be drawn.
8. **Evaluate every part of the study**: method, sample, data, controls, validity, reliability, generalisability and ethics.
9. **Relate it to the AS issues and debates**: application to everyday life, individual and situational explanations, nature versus nurture and the use of children in research. No animals were used.
10. **Explain why it belongs to the social approach**, using the approach's two assumptions, and compare it with the other social core studies, Perry et al. and Piliavin et al.

Understand it

The psychology: obedience and social pressure

Obedience means doing what you are told by someone you see as having **authority** over you, such as a police officer, a boss or a scientist. It is different from **conformity**, which is going along with a group of equals. Nobody in Milgram's study was copying anyone: they were taking orders.

Social pressure is the push to act in a certain way that comes from other people, here from an experimenter who calmly insisted that the study carry on.

Milgram was interested in the moment when an order and a person's **conscience** pull in opposite directions: what wins when someone in charge tells you to do something you believe is wrong?

Three ideas help explain what he saw:

- **Agentic state**: a person stops seeing their actions as their own choices and sees themselves as carrying out someone else's wishes, so they pass the responsibility for the outcome to the person giving the orders.
- **Autonomous state**: the opposite: a person acts on their own judgement and values and accepts responsibility for what they do.
- **Moral strain**: the distress felt when you carry on obeying while believing that what you are doing is wrong.

Background

After the Second World War, people wanted to understand how so many ordinary people had taken part in the killings of the Holocaust. One idea was **dispositional**: that Germans had a particular kind of character that made them unusually willing to obey (the "Germans are different" hypothesis). The other was **situational**: that almost anyone might obey destructive orders in the right setting. Milgram set out to test the second idea with Americans: if ordinary American men would hurt a stranger on command, then obedience was not a peculiarly German trait.

The aims

- **Main aim**: to measure how many steps up the shock scale ordinary men would climb when an authority figure kept telling them to punish an innocent stranger.
- **Testing the dispositional hypothesis**: to see whether destructive obedience could be produced in Americans in a laboratory, which would cast doubt on the claim that "Germans are different".
- **Measuring the stress**: to observe the strain shown by people who are caught between an order and their conscience.

The method: not an experiment

The study took place in a university **laboratory** and was **highly controlled**, but it was **not an experiment**: every participant went through exactly the same procedure, so there was **no independent variable** and no comparison between conditions. Obedience was **measured** as the highest shock each man was willing to give. Data came from **controlled observation** (watching and recording the men during the session) and an **interview** afterwards. Examiners penalise calling it a "laboratory experiment".

Later, Milgram ran the same procedure in an old office block and compared the results with this study. **That comparison** was an experiment: the **IV** was the location (university laboratory versus office block) and the **DV** was the level of obedience (the highest voltage given).

The sample

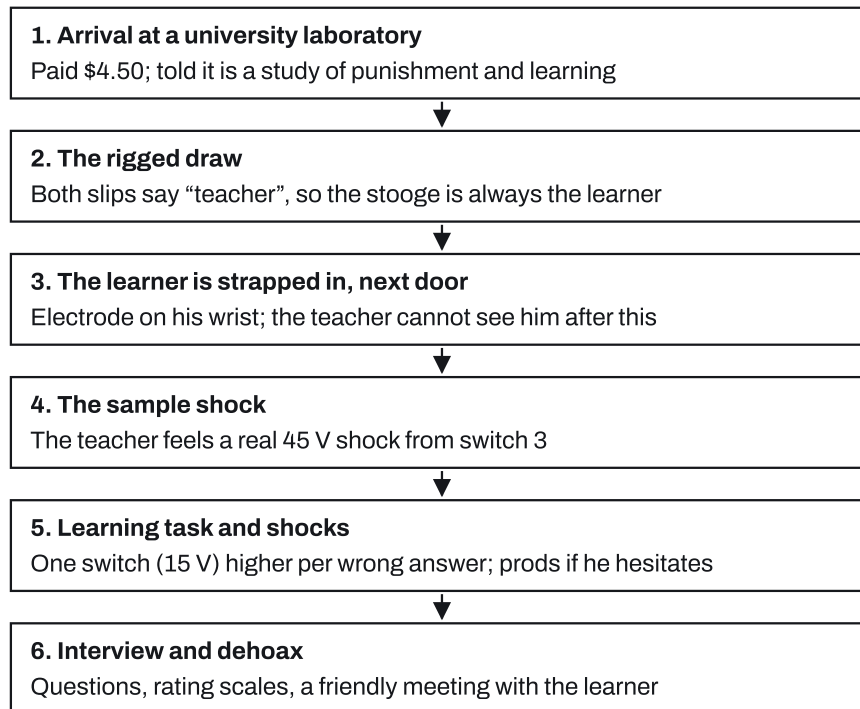
Feature	Detail
Size	40 participants
Sex	All male
Age	20 to 50 years
Where from	New Haven and the area around it, in the USA
Sampling technique	Volunteer (self-selecting): men answered a newspaper advertisement or a direct mail request asking for people to take part in a study of memory and learning
Occupations	A wide range, for example postal clerks, high school teachers, salesmen, engineers and labourers
Education	A wide range of educational levels
Payment	\$4.50 (including 50 cents for travel); they were told the money was for attending and did not depend on how the session went

The three roles

Person	Who they were
Teacher	The real participant
Learner (the victim)	A stooge : a mild-mannered, likeable 47-year-old accountant of Irish-American background
Experimenter	A man in his early thirties who taught biology at a high school; stern in appearance, impassive in manner, wearing a grey technician's coat

Don't mix these up: the reports say answers often gave the sample's features, or the experimenter's, when the question asked about the learner.

The procedure



1. The cover story. Each participant arrived at the laboratory with the learner, who seemed to be a fellow volunteer. The experimenter explained that:

- very little is known scientifically about how **punishment** affects **learning**, because almost no studies have been done on people;
- nobody knows **how much** punishment works best, or whether it matters **who** gives it;
- to look into this, men with **different jobs** had been recruited, and each would be given a role: **teacher** or **learner**;
- so, the experimenter said, the study would look at how the person doing the teaching and the person doing the learning influence one another, and whether being punished helps someone learn.

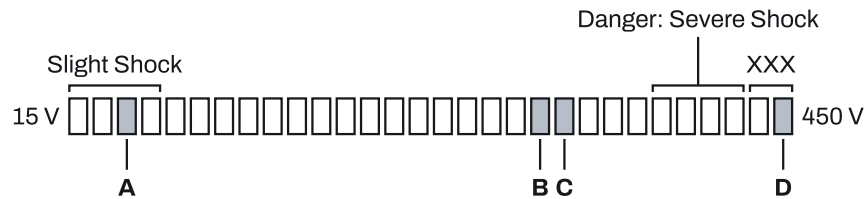
2. The rigged draw. The two men drew slips of paper from a hat to decide who would be teacher and who learner. **Both slips said "teacher"**, so the real participant always became the teacher.

3. Strapping in the learner. Both men went into the **room next door**. The learner was strapped into an "electric chair" apparatus; the reason given for the straps was that they **limited how much he could move** once the shocks began. An **electrode** was fixed to his **wrist**, with **electrode paste**, which, the teacher was told, would prevent blisters and burns, and the teacher was told it was wired to the shock generator. The experimenter added that the shocks could be **painful** but would cause **no permanent damage**. From then on, the teacher **could not see** the learner.

4. The sample shock. Back in the main room, the teacher sat at the shock generator and was given a **real 45-volt shock** on his wrist, by pressing the **third switch** (the current came from a battery wired into the generator). This happened to **every** participant before the task began, so the machine seemed genuine.

5. The shock generator.

Each switch is 15 V higher than the one before



- A** 45 V: the sample shock every teacher felt first
- B** 300 V: the learner pounds the wall; all 40 got this far
- C** 315 V: he pounds once more, then silence
- D** 450 V: pressed by 26 of the 40 (65%)

- **30 lever switches** set in a **horizontal line**, each switch with its own voltage label.
- They run from **15 V** to **450 V**, each one **15 V** higher than the last.
- Groups of **four** switches carry word labels, from **Slight Shock** at the low end to **Danger: Severe Shock** near the top; the last **two** switches are marked just **XXX**.
- Pressing a switch made a **red light** come on, an **electric buzzing** sound, a **blue light** labelled "**voltage energizer**" light up, a **dial** swing to the right, and **relay clicks**.

6. The learning task (a **paired-associate** task). First the learner heard a list of **word pairs**, read by the teacher. In the test that followed, the teacher gave a **single word** together with **four** candidates, and the learner signalled which candidate had been its partner using one of **four switches**; his choice appeared as one of **four quadrants** lighting up on an **answer box** that showed the teacher his answer.

7. The shock instructions. The teacher was told to:

- give a shock every time the learner answered **wrongly**;
- start at **15 V** and move **one switch (15 V) higher** after each wrong answer;
- **say the voltage aloud** before pressing the switch;
- treat **no answer** as a wrong answer;
- go back to the start of the list when it was finished, and carry on until every pair had been learned.

A short practice, the **preliminary run**, came first; then a second list was used for the real task.

8. The learner's feedback (fixed in advance, so the same for every participant):

- He gave mostly wrong answers: roughly **three wrong for every one right**.
- Up to **300 V** he made **no sound** at all.
- At **300 V** he **pounded on the wall**, and gave **no more answers** after that.
- At **315 V** he pounded once more.
- From then on the learner was completely **silent**: the answer box stayed dark and the wall stayed quiet.

The learner did **not** shout, scream or complain aloud in this study; the syllabus notes that the version with voice feedback is a different one of Milgram's studies.

9. The prods. If the teacher hesitated or said he did not want to go on, the experimenter used a **standard sequence of four prods**, always in a **firm but polite** tone:

- the first was **"Please continue"** (or "Please go on");
- if one prod failed, he moved to the **next** one in the sequence;
- the sequence **started again** from the first prod whenever the teacher hesitated afresh;
- if the teacher still refused after the **fourth** prod, the session **ended**.

There were also **special prods**: if asked whether the learner could be hurt, the experimenter said the shocks might be painful but would cause **no permanent damage**; and a further prod told the teacher that, whether the learner liked it or not, he must go on until **all the word pairs were learned**.

10. Recording. The experimenter recorded the **highest switch** each man pressed. Sessions were also **observed** and recorded, including **what participants said** and how they **behaved**.

11. The interview and dehoax. At the end, each participant was **interviewed** and **debriefed**:

- open-ended questions about how they felt, plus **projective measures** and **attitude scales**;
- a judgement of the shocks' **pain**: each man put a number on it using a **14-point** scale, where 14 meant extremely painful;
- a **friendly reunion** with the learner, so the teacher could see he was **unharm**ed and be reassured;
- the chance to ask questions, all done in a friendly way.

Measuring obedience

The **DV** was **obedience**, measured as the **maximum voltage** a participant gave before refusing to go on. Someone who pressed the **450 V** switch was counted as **fully obedient**; anyone who broke off earlier was **defiant**. The higher the last switch, the more obedient the person.

The results

Quantitative:

Finding	Number	Percentage
Reached the 300 V switch	40 of 40	100%
Pressed the 450 V switch	26 of 40	65%
Stopped before 450 V	14 of 40	35%

- **300 V** was the **highest voltage at which every participant obeyed**, and it was also the most common point (the **mode**) at which defiant participants stopped.
- Before running it, Milgram described the procedure in detail to **fourteen Yale psychology students**. Their job was to forecast: picturing **100** imaginary men like these, they drew up how the men would be spread along the switches, and gave the **percentage** they expected to reach **450 V**.

Qualitative:

- **Signs of tension:** sweating, trembling, stuttering, biting their lips, groaning, digging their fingernails into their flesh, and **nervous laughter** and smiling. Some had **seizures** (violent convulsions).
- **Comments:** many spoke up, to the experimenter or about the learner, saying things like "I think he's trying to communicate", "Oh, I can't go on with this", "The guy is suffering in there" and "It'll hurt his heart". Others commented that it wasn't fair to shock him, or that they couldn't do this to a man.
- Afterwards, in the interview, men described their own feelings during the session, and some said whether they were glad or sorry they had come.

The conclusions

- **We underestimate obedience: with someone in authority giving the orders, ordinary people keep going far longer than anyone predicts.**
- **An instruction from a person in charge is enough to make most ordinary people hurt someone blameless.**
- **Once someone else has accepted the blame, people find it much easier to cause harm** (the agentic state).
- **Carrying out harmful orders takes a heavy emotional toll:** the men showed moral strain, not calm indifference.
- **Destructive obedience is not a national trait:** ordinary Americans obeyed, which does not support the "Germans are different" hypothesis (max 1 mark on its own).

A **result** is something measured ("26 of the 40 men pressed the 450 V switch"). A **conclusion** is the general claim the results support ("people will hurt a stranger if an authority figure tells them to"). Questions treat them as different things.

Ethical issues

Guideline	What it means	In this study
Deception	Misleading participants, by lying to them or hiding what the study is really about	Told it was about memory and punishment; believed the shocks were real; the draw was fixed; the learner was a stooge whose pounding and silence were scripted (broken)
Protection from psychological harm	Nobody should leave a study more upset, stressed or ashamed than when they arrived	Sweating, trembling, seizures; some may later have felt guilty about what they were willing to do (broken)
Right to withdraw	Anyone taking part can stop and walk away at any point, and nothing bad happens to them for doing so	The prods pressed them to carry on when they asked to stop (arguably broken); but nobody was physically kept there, and 14 did leave before 450 V

Guideline	What it means	In this study
Informed consent	Saying yes to a study only once you understand what it will ask of you	They agreed to a "memory and learning" study, not this one (broken)
Debriefing	Explaining the truth afterwards and making sure participants are all right	The interview and dehoax, including the friendly reunion with the learner (kept)

Types of data

- **Quantitative:** the voltage each man reached; the number and percentage who went to 450 V. Easy to compare and summarise; objective.
- **Qualitative:** what the men said during the session and in the interview, and the signs of tension observers noted. Shows **why** they obeyed or refused and how they felt.

Why it is from the social approach

The social approach has two assumptions (syllabus), given here in plain words:

- **Groups and settings:** put the same person in a different **social setting**, or among a different **group**, and their actions, thinking and feelings (**behaviour**, **cognitions** and **emotions**) can change.
- **Other people:** having others around, or just believing or imagining that they are, is enough to change how a person acts, thinks and feels.

Milgram fits both. The experimenter's presence and his prods (another person, in a setting that made him look like an authority) kept men pressing switches that they plainly did not want to press: their **behaviour** was shaped by another person. Their **emotions** (stress, tension) came from the clash between that person's orders and their own conscience.

Issues and debates

- **Application to everyday life:** authority can be used **ethically** to get people to follow safety rules: for example, a doctor in a white coat presenting a vaccination campaign, or a teacher using a firm, standard instruction to settle a class. It also helps explain **past** events, such as people obeying orders during the Holocaust, and supports training people to **question** harmful orders (such as whistleblowing policies at work).
- **Individual and situational explanations:** **situational:** the authority figure, his coat, the prods and the university setting pushed people to obey. **Individual:** men in the same situation stopped at different voltages, and 14 refused before the end, so something about the person mattered too.
- **Nature versus nurture:** mainly **nurture:** obedience to authority is learned through upbringing, school and work. The study did not look for inborn factors.

- **The use of children:** a child would be more vulnerable to the distress the men showed; consent would have to come from parents; and a child might not grasp the memory-test story, treating the flashing, buzzing machine as a toy, so the voltage reached would no longer tell us about obedience.

Comparing with the other social studies

Point	Milgram	Piliavin et al. (subway Samaritans)	Perry et al. (personal space)
Method	Controlled laboratory study (no IV)	Field experiment	Experiments
Setting	University laboratory	Subway train in New York	Tasks on a computer screen, with animated figures
Stooge	A human stooge the participant met and then only heard	Human stooges (victim and model) the passengers did not know were acting	An animated (on-screen) stooge
Data	Quantitative (voltage) and qualitative (comments, tension)	Quantitative (helping) and qualitative (passengers' comments)	Quantitative (interpersonal distance) and questionnaires

Key facts and formulas

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

Fact	Status
Milgram sample: 40 men, aged 20–50, from New Haven, volunteers (newspaper advertisement or direct mail), wide range of occupations and education, paid \$4.50	Learn it
Milgram learner: a stooge, 47-year-old accountant, Irish-American, mild-mannered and likeable	Learn it
Milgram experimenter: early thirties, high school biology teacher, stern, impassive, grey technician's coat	Learn it
Milgram shock generator: 30 switches in a horizontal line, 15 V to 450 V in 15 V steps, labels from Slight Shock to Danger: Severe Shock, last two XXX	Learn it
Milgram sample shock: 45 V, from the third switch, given to every teacher	Learn it
Milgram learner feedback: about three wrong answers to one right; silent until 300 V; pounds the wall at 300 V and 315 V; then silent	Learn it
Milgram results: 100% (40 of 40) reached 300 V; 65% (26 of 40) went to 450 V; 35% (14 of 40) stopped earlier	Learn it

Fact	Status
Switch voltage = $15 \times \text{switch number}$, so the 30th switch is $15 \times 30 = 450 \text{ V}$	Learn it
Percentage = $\frac{\text{part}}{\text{whole}} \times 100$, for example $\frac{26}{40} \times 100 = 65\%$	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 45 questions on this study, from 2021 to 2026 (Papers 1 and 2). 19 of them have parts of more than one type, so the counts add up to 65.

Question type	Questions
Describe a part of the procedure	14
Describe the sample or the sampling	8
Applications to everyday life	8
Results and conclusions	7
Validity, reliability or one strength explained	6
The psychology, aims and reasons for obedience	5
Evaluate in 10 marks: two strengths and two weaknesses	4
Types of data and how obedience was measured	4
Ethics: define a guideline and apply it	3
Issues and debates	3
Compare Milgram with another study	3

1. Describe a part of the procedure (14 questions)

These are marked one point per mark from a fixed list, so learn the steps in order and with their numbers.

1. **Find the exact part asked for** and its start and end points ("from the draw until the learning task", "after the preliminary run until 300 V"). The reports say answers often drifted into a neighbouring part, gave the results, or described a different Milgram study.
2. **Write one separate fact per mark.** Numbers make points definite: 30 switches, 15 V steps, 45 V, 300 V, 315 V, four prods.

Variations you will meet:

- **The shock generator** (4–5 marks): 30 switches in a line; each labelled with a voltage; 15 V to 450 V; 15 V steps; word labels for groups of four; two of them, Slight Shock and Danger: Severe Shock (one mark for two); last two XXX; red light; buzzing; blue "voltage energizer" light; wired to the learner's electrode. If the

question rules some features out, don't repeat them.

- **What happened when a switch was pressed** (2 marks): buzzing; blue energizer light; dial swings right; relay clicks. Not the 15 V steps (that's how it was laid out, not a change).
- **From the draw to the start of the task** (4 marks): both slips said teacher; both men went to the next room; learner strapped into the chair to stop excess movement; electrode on the wrist; paste to avoid blisters and burns; wired to the generator; painful but no permanent damage; 45 V sample shock; third switch.
- **The sample shock** (3 marks): always given before the task; 45 V; third switch; on the teacher's wrist; from a battery in the generator. Not the shock instructions.
- **The learning task** (5 marks): the **learner's** side: word pairs read out; then one word with four options; learner presses one of four switches; lights one of four quadrants in the answer box. Shock instructions earn at most one mark here.
- **The shock instructions** (3 marks): shock every wrong answer; press the switch; one level (15 V) higher each time; say the voltage first. Not the prods (those came later, when the teacher hesitated).
- **After the preliminary run until 300 V** (4 marks): second list; one word plus four options; repeat the list from the start; shock each error; no answer counts as wrong; start at 15 V; up 15 V each time; prods if he refused.
- **The learner's feedback** (4 marks): predetermined; about three wrong to one right; silent until 300 V; pounds the wall at 300 V; no answers after that; pounds again at 315 V; then nothing.
- **The experimenter's feedback** (4 marks): four prods; scripted; "Please continue" first; next prod if one fails; firm but polite; restarted with fresh reluctance; special prods about injury and that, whether the learner liked it or not, all the word pairs must be learned; session ends after the last prod fails.
- **The interview and dehoax** (4 marks): debrief; open-ended questions; projective measures; attitude scales; pain rating on a 14-point scale; reunion with the learner; reassured no harm was done; friendly; could ask questions.
- **Features of the experimenter** (3 marks) or **the learner** (2 marks): see "The three roles". Give the right person's features.
- **What participants were told before the draw** (3 marks): little is known about punishment and learning; almost no studies on humans; how much punishment is best; whether it matters who gives it; people from different jobs; some teachers, some learners; the effect of people on each other and of punishment on learning.
- **What the Yale students were asked** (2 marks): a forecast for 100 imaginary participants; a sketch of where along the switches they would stop; a percentage for how many would reach 450 V. Not what they predicted.

2. Describe the sample or the sampling (8 questions)

- **Sample features** (one mark each, from a definitive list): 40; male; aged 20–50; New Haven; volunteers by newspaper advert or direct mail; wide range of occupations; wide range of education; paid. "Adults" scores nothing.

- **Name two occupations** (1 mark for two): any two of students, postal clerks, high school teachers, salesmen, engineers, labourers.
- **The sampling technique** (1 mark): **volunteer** (self-selecting). Then **how** (2 marks): a **newspaper advertisement** or **direct mail** (1), plus a detail: in New Haven; asking for men aged 20–50; a range of jobs; paid; described as a study of memory and learning (1).
- **Define volunteer sampling with this study** (2 marks): the researcher advertises, and whoever chooses to answer becomes the sample (1); Milgram's men replied to his advert in a local paper or to a mailed request (1). Don't define it with the word "volunteer".
- **Widening a volunteer sample** (2 marks each): a change to where or how he advertised (1), plus a detail (1). For example, ask in the advert itself for a **mix of people**, such as women or people from different ethnic groups; send the request well beyond **New Haven**, to other cities; or use **more outlets** aimed at different readers, such as other newspapers or notices in shops.
- **Payment** (2 marks): \$4.50; 50 cents of it for travel; paid for attending; not dependent on how the session went.

3. Applications to everyday life (8 questions)

Each application earns **what** (1) and **how** (1). It must be **ethical** and clearly based on Milgram. Looking **forward** (what we could do) is safest: the June 2023 report gave no credit for only explaining behaviour, though the 2025 mark scheme accepts a named historical event.

1. **What**: name a specific goal: patients taking a full course of medicine; workers following safety procedures; students finishing set work. "To make people more obedient" is too vague: the report says the "what" must be explicit.
 2. **How**, from the study: an authority **uniform** or **coat** (like the grey technician's coat); a **firm, calm voice**; **standard verbal prods** ("This must be finished before you leave"); an **official setting**; giving instructions in person rather than at a distance.
- **Scenario questions** (4 marks: someone obeys a harmful order and a friend asks why): use **evidence** from Milgram for each point: the person giving the order had status, like the experimenter; a uniform or coat; a serious, stern manner; firm repeated instructions like the prods; the person obeying felt the one in charge would carry the blame; a well-known institution, like Milgram's university. One mark can come from a Milgram result or conclusion (65% went to 450 V; people will harm an innocent person on orders).
 - **Two friends disagree about application** (4 marks): pick one side and use Milgram details; the mark scheme prefers explaining real events to plans for the future. **Has application**: the study was set up to check the claim that "Germans are different", and ordinary American men proved just as willing to obey, which helps us make sense of the Holocaust; 26 of the 40 kept going to the top switch on the word of a man in a technician's coat, which helps explain real cases such as a nurse giving a wrong dose because a doctor said so. **Has none**: every part was staged, from the rigged draw to the scripted pounding; no real job asks people to punish someone's memory with electricity; and real atrocities happen over long periods, among groups, for many reasons, which a one-hour session with one stranger cannot capture.
 - **Unethical suggestions score 0**: shocks, physical punishment, docking wages.

4. Results and conclusions (7 questions)

- **Numbers** (1 mark each, no tolerance): 40 participants; 26 (65%) to 450 V; 100% to 300 V; highest voltage at which all obeyed: 300 V; lowest label 15 V; highest 450 V. Give the number asked for: the reports say "26" was often given when the question asked how many took part.
- **Signs of tension** (definitive list): sweating; trembling; stuttering; biting lips; groaning; digging nails into flesh; nervous laughter; smiling; seizures. Saying they asked to stop also counts. Don't repeat one given in the question.
- **A conclusion** (2 marks): a full, general claim, such as the five under "The conclusions" above (the "Germans are different" one is max 1 mark on its own). "People obey authority" alone is brief (1). A result scores 0. "Conform" scores 0, "comply" at most 1. Never repeat the conclusion printed in the question.
- **What psychologists have learned, using two results** (8 marks, two levels-marked halves): for each half, a result with a **meaningful comparison** (all 40 reached 300 V, and 26 of them carried on to 450 V) **and** what it shows (an authority figure can push people into harming someone). For tension, name **two** signs.

5. Validity, reliability or one strength explained (6 questions)

Name the point (1), then give the Milgram detail that shows it (1), and say why it matters when there's a third mark.

- **Reliability through standardisation**: every man heard the same cover story, got the same 45 V sample shock, heard the same scripted feedback and the same prods, so the procedure can be repeated to see if the results hold. "Controlled" or "standardised" alone isn't enough; and avoid IV/DV arguments: there was no IV.
- **Validity (believability)**: features that made the set-up convincing: the 45 V sample shock; a real-looking generator; the rigged draw; the coat; a university; the memory-and-punishment cover story. Then **why**: a man who is convinced he is really hurting someone has no reason to see through the cover story and act the part he thinks is wanted (demand characteristics), so what he does reflects genuine obedience.
- **Why the generator had to look real** (2 marks): to avoid **demand characteristics** (1); if the men suspected the machine was a prop, pressing the top switch would cost them nothing, so reaching 450 V would show only that they saw through the set-up, not that they obeyed (1). Don't just say "so they believed it was real" (that repeats the question).
- **Valid or not** (two friends, 6 marks: 3 a side): identify a type of validity (1), Milgram evidence (1), why (1). **Has validity**: mundane realism (1): each man felt a genuine 45 V jolt from the machine before starting (1), which left little room to doubt that the later shocks were real, so he was not just playing along (1). Or internal validity (1): the learner's part was fixed in advance, from his error rate to the pounding at 300 V (1); with the victim held constant, the tension the men showed can be traced to the order-versus-conscience conflict (1). **Lacks validity**: low ecological validity (1): teaching word pairs with punishments has no counterpart outside the laboratory (1); an order given in a war or a workplace comes with a history, a group and a reason, and an hour with a stranger has none of these, so the men's choices may not show what they would do in a real case (1).

- **Why different occupations or ages mattered** (2 marks each): a linked suggestion (some jobs, such as soldiers or junior staff, train people to obey more than others; younger and older people may differ in how obedient they are) (1) plus an example (a junior doctor in a hospital is expected to carry out a consultant's instructions; a new army recruit is trained to follow an officer's commands without question; a teenager may be readier than a 50-year-old to challenge an order) (1). Just saying "generalisability" repeats the question.

6. The psychology, aims and reasons for obedience (5 questions)

- **Define obedience** (2 marks): doing what you are told (1) by someone who has power or status over you, such as a police officer or a manager (1). Don't use "obedience" to define it, and don't describe conformity.
- **An aim** (2 marks): "to find out whether, and for how long, people keep following a person in authority who tells them to hurt someone" (2); "to investigate obedience to authority" or "to test the Germans are different hypothesis" is brief (1). "To investigate obedience" alone repeats the question.
- **The psychology investigated** (4 marks, one per statement): what obedience is; the situational hypothesis, that circumstances rather than personality drive what we do; the idea that we are taught to obey as we grow up (socialisation); the agentic state; the autonomous state; moral strain (see "Understand it"). Only **one** mark can be a Milgram example, such as the prods being used to keep men shocking a stranger. The report says many answers just retold the aims.
- **A reason for obedience other than payment** (1 mark): the authority figure; his prods; his coat; being in a university.
- **Social-approach assumptions with an example** (6 marks: 2 + 1 per assumption): a full assumption needs two of behaviour, thoughts and emotions ("behaviour and emotions are shaped by other people"); "behaviour is influenced by others" is brief (1). Example: men who wanted to stop went on pressing switches once the experimenter told them to carry on, so another person's presence changed what they did.

7. Evaluate in 10 marks: two strengths and two weaknesses (4 questions)

The named issue has been reliability, the sampling technique, validity and generalisability.

1. **Plan four points of equal depth**, one on the **named issue**. Without it the answer is capped (6 marks).
2. For each point: say what it is and whether it's a strength or weakness of **this** study, give **at least two** Milgram details, and explain **why** it matters.
3. **No description** of the study for its own sake, and **no applications**: the March 2026 report says a "GRAVE" plan with its "A" doesn't fit this question.
4. **Don't call it a laboratory experiment**, and don't say the learner screamed (both errors in the March 2026 report).

Point	Strength or weakness	Evidence from the study
Standardisation (reliability)	Strength	Same cover story, same 45 V sample shock, same scripted learner responses, same four prods in the same tone for all 40, so a second researcher could copy it exactly and see if obedience comes out the same
Quantitative data	Strength	The highest voltage each man reached; easy to compare (100% to 300 V, 65% to 450 V)
Qualitative data	Strength	Comments and observed tension show the men obeyed against their conscience, not because they didn't care
Believable set-up (internal validity)	Strength	45 V sample shock, rigged draw, generator with lights and buzzing: men believed it, so demand characteristics were low
Debriefing	Strength	Interview and dehoax; friendly reunion with the unharmed learner
Sample and sampling technique	Weakness	Only men, only from around New Haven, and only those who chose to reply to an advert: women, other cultures and people who never sign up for studies were left out, so the 65% may not hold for them
Ecological validity / mundane realism	Weakness	Real orders to cause harm come from bosses or officers people know, often over a long time; a one-off hour with a stranger and a shock machine may not show how people respond to those
Ethics	Weakness	Deceived about the aim and the shocks; severe stress, even seizures; prods made withdrawing hard

8. Types of data and how obedience was measured (4 questions)

- **The measure of obedience** (2 marks): the voltage on the shock generator (1), with detail: the highest switch pressed; 450 V counted as fully obedient; the higher the voltage, the more obedient (1).
- **Voltage reached = quantitative** (objective) data. **Comments = qualitative** (subjective) data.
- **Qualitative data** (1 mark): data in words rather than numbers, which describes behaviour or experience in depth. **From Milgram** (2 marks): name a kind of qualitative data (1), such as protests made out loud during the session, or interview answers on whether they were sorry to have taken part; then add an example or say how it was used (1), such as one man saying "The guy is suffering in there".
- **A strength of each type** (2 marks each): words capture the reasons and emotions behind an action, which a number cannot (1); when a man asked whether the learner was all right, his worry was plain to see (1). Numbers are objective and can be totalled and set side by side quickly (1); putting the 40 final voltages together shows at once that nobody had stopped by 300 V and that 26 carried on to the end (1).
- **The office-block comparison**: IV = location (university laboratory versus office block); DV = obedience (voltage reached).

9. Ethics: define a guideline and apply it (3 questions)

- **Informed consent** (2 marks): a person's "yes" to taking part only counts if they were first told enough to know what they were agreeing to (2). "Deciding whether to take part" alone is brief (1).
- **How a guideline was broken** (3 marks): name it (1), say what it means (1), Milgram evidence (1). For example: **right to withdraw** (1): a participant must be free to quit whenever they like, without being pressured or losing anything (1); Milgram's men who said they wanted to stop were met with "Please continue" and further prods, so quitting was made hard (1). "He didn't tell the true aim" alone isn't enough evidence.
- **One way they were deceived** (2 marks): needs the detail of what was false: no current ever reached the learner, though every man thought each switch hurt him (2); the hat draw looked like luck, yet it could only ever make the participant the teacher (2); the stated purpose, memory and punishment, hid the real one, obedience (2); the pounding on the wall came from a script, not from a man in pain (2). "They thought the shocks were real" alone is brief (1). Don't say the learner shouted or screamed.
- **Why it was unethical, with evidence** (4 marks): deception (fake shocks, fixed draw); psychological harm (sweating, trembling, seizures); right to withdraw (prods). Evidence is the key: the report says many answers just described guidelines.

10. Issues and debates (3 questions)

- **Individual and situational** (4 marks): define each without repeating the word: **individual (dispositional)**: the cause lies in the person themselves, for example their personality or values (1); **situational**: the cause lies in the circumstances around them, such as other people, the place or the instructions they are given (1). Milgram examples: the same setting produced different choices, since 14 men broke off early while 26 went to the top (individual) (1); the experimenter's presence and his prods kept men pressing switches they wanted to stop pressing (situational) (1). If the question says "other than Milgram", use another core study.
- **A problem with using children** (3 marks, **one** problem only): identify it (1), elaborate (1), link it to Milgram (1). Protection from harm (1): children are more vulnerable and have fewer ways of making sense of a frightening experience (1); believing that your button presses made another child bang on the wall and then go quiet could stay with a child long after the dehoax (1). Or understanding (1): a young child may not follow the idea of a memory test with punishments, or what the voltage labels mean (1); the lights and buzzing could turn it into a game, so pressing on to 450 V would show curiosity rather than obedience (1).

11. Compare Milgram with another study (3 questions)

8 marks: a similarity (Level 1–4) and a difference (Level 1–4). Level 4 needs the point **explained** with an example from **both** studies.

- **Similarity with Piliavin et al.**: both broke the **deception** guideline: in Milgram no current ever reached anyone, yet the men thought each switch hurt the learner; on Piliavin's train the collapse was acted, though passengers took it for a real emergency. Or both collected **quantitative data**.

- **Difference with Perry et al.:** the **stooge**: Milgram's was a real man met in person, then only heard; Perry's was an animated figure on a screen. For an **ethics** difference, explain why Milgram was less ethical, naming a guideline with an example from each study (for example, deception or psychological harm). Confidentiality and debriefing don't score as an ethics difference.
- "Different aims", "different designs" or "both used volunteers" stay at the bottom. Check the other study really is from the social approach when the question says so.

Worked examples

Example 1

From the study by Milgram (obedience):

- (a) A participant began at the lowest switch and moved up one switch after each wrong answer. Calculate how many wrong answers the learner had given by the time the participant pressed the 300 V switch. **[2]**
- (b) Calculate the percentage of participants who stopped before the final switch. **[1]**
- (c) Explain one limitation of measuring obedience only by the highest voltage reached. **[2]**
- (a)** Each switch is 15 V, so the 300 V switch is switch $300 \div 15 = 20$ **(1)**. Every switch press follows one wrong answer, starting with 15 V for the first, so the learner had given **20** wrong answers **(1)**.
- (b)** $40 - 26 = 14$ stopped early, and $\frac{14}{40} \times 100 = \mathbf{35\%}$ **(1)**.
- (c)** The highest voltage shows how far each man went, but not what he was thinking or feeling as he did it **(1)**. Two men could both reach 450 V, one calmly and one trembling and begging to stop, and the number would treat them as the same, so the stress that Milgram also found would be missed without the observations and comments **(1)**.

Example 2

A museum has fragile exhibits that school visitors keep touching, even though there are signs asking them not to.

Using your knowledge of the study by Milgram (obedience), suggest two ways the museum could increase visitors' obedience to its rules. Your suggestions must be ethical. **[4]**

1. The museum wants pupils to keep their hands off the displays (**what**, 1). A member of staff in a museum uniform, like the experimenter's grey coat, could meet each school group at the entrance and give the rule in person, since a visible authority figure was obeyed in Milgram (**how**, 1).
2. The museum wants pupils to stay behind the barriers when guides move them on (**what**, 1). Guides could use short, calm, scripted instructions, such as "Please stay behind the rope", repeated firmly each time someone hesitates, the way the experimenter's standard prods kept participants going (**how**, 1).

Both are ethical: nobody is harmed, misled or punished.

Example 3

Explain one difference between the study by Milgram (obedience) and the study by Piliavin et al. (subway Samaritans). [4]

Difference: whether the participants knew they were in a study. Milgram's 40 men had replied to an advertisement, been paid \$4.50 and walked into a university laboratory, so each one knew he was taking part in research, even though he was misled about what it was really testing. Piliavin et al.'s participants were just passengers who happened to be riding in the carriage of a New York subway train; nobody asked them to take part, and none of them realised that the collapse or the people watching were part of a study. This matters because someone who knows a scientist is watching may act the way he thinks he is expected to, so some of Milgram's obedience could come from trying to be a good participant, whereas the passengers' helping was what they would naturally do on an ordinary journey. **(Level 4: the difference explained, with an example from both studies, 4 marks.)**

A weaker answer, "the participants were different in the two studies", would stay at Level 1 (1 mark): it states a difference but gives no detail from either study and no explanation.

Example 4

Evaluate the study by Milgram (obedience) in terms of two strengths and two weaknesses. At least one of your evaluation points must be about ethics. [10]

Plan: strengths are standardisation and qualitative data; weaknesses are ethics (the named issue) and the sample. Each paragraph has the point, two or more details, and why it matters.

Strength 1: standardisation. Every participant went through the same steps: the same story about punishment and learning, the same rigged draw, the same 45 V sample shock and the same scripted learner, who was silent until 300 V and then pounded on the wall. When men hesitated, the experimenter used the same four prods in the same firm tone. With every step fixed, the study can be rerun step for step elsewhere; if obedience comes out at a similar level again, we can trust the original figures more, which is what reliability means.

Strength 2: qualitative data. As well as the voltage reached, Milgram recorded what the men said and how they behaved. Many sweated, trembled or laughed nervously, and some told the experimenter they could not go on. This shows the men were not cruel people who enjoyed giving shocks: they obeyed while under great strain, which is exactly the clash between orders and conscience the study set out to examine.

Weakness 1: ethics (the named issue). The men were deceived: they were told the study was about memory, the draw was fixed so they were always the teacher, and they believed the shocks were real. Several suffered extreme stress, including seizures, and the prods made it hard for them to use their right to withdraw. Even with the dehoax at the end, some may have left knowing they had been willing to seriously hurt a stranger, which could cause lasting distress.

Weakness 2: the sample. Milgram's 40 were all men between 20 and 50, they all lived in or near New Haven, and every one of them had put himself forward by replying to an advertisement. People who offer to help with research may be unusually cooperative to begin with, and women and people raised in other cultures were never tested, so we cannot simply assume the 65% figure would be repeated in them.

How it would be marked: four points of equal depth, each with study details and an explanation, including the named issue: the top level (9–10 marks).

Common mistakes

- **Calling it a laboratory experiment:** there was no IV and no comparison of conditions (November 2021, November 2022, March 2023 and March 2026 reports). Say "a controlled laboratory study" or "a controlled observation".
- **Saying the learner screamed or shouted:** in this study he made no sound until he pounded on the wall at 300 V (March 2026 report). The March 2026 report also warns against calling him "Mr Wallace": call him the learner, or the stooge.
- **Answering about the wrong part of the procedure,** or about a different Milgram study (March 2021, June 2021 and June 2022 reports): for example, giving the prods when the shock instructions were asked, or the sample shock when the part after the preliminary run was asked.
- **Giving the wrong person's features:** the learner's when the experimenter was asked, or the sample's when the learner was asked (June 2021 and November 2021 reports).
- **Giving 45 V or 0 V as the lowest label:** it is 15 V (June 2021 report). And the number who **took part** is 40, not the 26 who went to 450 V.
- **Not knowing what participants were told before the draw** (June 2021 report): very few could describe the cover story about punishment and learning.
- **Giving a result as a conclusion,** or repeating the conclusion printed in the question (November 2021 and June 2023 reports).
- **Vague applications:** "to make people more obedient" isn't an explicit "what"; describing the study, or suggesting more research, isn't an application; unethical ideas such as physical punishment score nothing (June 2022 and June 2023 reports).
- **Repeating the question's stem:** "so they believed the situation was real" earns nothing when the question says the generator looked real (November 2022 report).
- **Defining a term with the term:** "the situational explanation is about the situation" scores 0 (November 2021 and November 2022 reports).
- **Explaining more than one problem when one is asked:** only the best one is marked (March 2023 report).
- **Missing the named issue** in the 10-mark evaluation, or writing a prepared essay with an application in it (November 2022 and March 2026 reports).

How to get the marks

- **"State" and "identify"**: a short exact answer, often a number (40, 26, 65%, 300 V, 15 V, 450 V, 45 V). Only the first answer is marked.
- **"Describe"** a part of the procedure: separate specific facts, one per mark, inside the start and end points the question gives.
- **"Outline"** an aim or conclusion: a full statement for 2 marks. An aim mentions authority and harm; a conclusion is a general claim, not a number.
- **"Explain"** a strength, a problem or a reason: the point (1), then the Milgram detail (1), then why it matters if there's a third mark. The examiner won't make the link for you.
- **"Suggest"** an application: **what** (explicit) and **how** (from the study), and ethical.
- **"Using evidence from this study"**: name the detail: the 45 V shock, the prods, the coat, the pounding at 300 V, 26 of 40.
- **Two friends disagree**: choose one side (or one reason each, when asked), name the type of validity or guideline, then give linked Milgram evidence.
- **"Evaluate ... two strengths and two weaknesses"** (10 marks): four equal points with the named issue, at least two study details in each, no description and no applications.
- **Similarity and difference** (8 marks): state it, give an example from **each** study, explain why it matters.

Quick check

1. The sample shock came from the third switch. Show that this was 45 V, and work out which switch number gave 300 V.
2. What fraction of the participants refused to go all the way to the final switch? Give it in its simplest form and as a percentage.
3. Say whether each is quantitative or qualitative data: (i) the last switch a participant pressed; (ii) a note that a participant laughed nervously and bit his lip; (iii) the number of men who reached 450 V.
4. Give one result and one conclusion from the study, and say which is which.
5. Give two ways the interview and dehoax tried to make sure participants left the study unharmed.

Answers

1. $3 \times 15 = 45$ V. For 300 V: $300 \div 15 = \mathbf{20}$, so it was the 20th switch.
2. $40 - 26 = 14$ refused, and $\frac{14}{40} = \frac{7}{20}$, which is **35%**.
3. (i) Quantitative (a number on a scale); (ii) qualitative (a description of behaviour); (iii) quantitative (a count).
4. Result: all 40 men reached 300 V, and 26 went on to 450 V (a measured finding). Conclusion: an order from someone in charge can lead most people to harm a stranger who has done nothing to deserve it (a general claim).
5. Any two: each participant had a friendly reunion with the learner, who was clearly unharmed; he was told the truth about the study (debriefed); he was asked how he felt and could ask questions; it was done in a friendly way.

Past questions to try

- 9990/13/M/J/23 Q4: the learner's feedback, then a second conclusion.
- 9990/11/M/J/22 Q4: the experimenter's prods, then an ethical application for a teacher.
- 9990/11/O/N/23 Q8: one reason the study is valid and one reason it is not.
- 9990/12/O/N/22 Q6: the individual and situational debate, with an example of each from Milgram.