

Cambridge AS & A Level · Psychology 9990 · Notes

The product A2

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What you need to know

The product is the fourth topic of the Consumer psychology option (Papers 3 and 4). You should be able to:

1. **Gift-wrapping**: why people wrap presents, the kinds of wrapping, and what givers and receivers believe about it.
2. **Food package design**: how a package changes what people expect of the food inside, through the key study **Becker et al. (2011)**.
3. **Attention and shelf position**: **planograms**, the **central gaze cascade effect** and **eye-tracking**, with a study such as **Atalay et al. (2012)**.
4. **Sales techniques**: **customer-focused**, **competitor-focused** and **product-focused** selling, and how each shapes the **buyer–seller relationship**.
5. **Interpersonal influence**: **disrupt-then-reframe**, the **need for cognitive closure** and what affects it, with a study such as **Kardes et al. (2007)**.
6. **Cialdini's six ways to close a sale**.
7. **The Engel Kollat Blackwell (EKB) model** of buyer decision-making.
8. **Deciding where to buy**: reasons for choosing a store, and the part played by **age** and **gender**, with a study such as **Sinha et al. (2002)**.
9. **Post-purchase cognitive dissonance**: what it is, what makes it worse, how it is reduced, with a study such as **Nordvall (2014)**.
10. **Evaluate** all of it with the syllabus issues: reductionism versus holism, determinism versus free will, generalisations from findings, objective and subjective data, validity, application to everyday life, cultural differences, idiographic versus nomothetic, and field experiments.

Older questions on product colour, product placement, the black box model, the theory of planned behaviour and Knutson et al. are not on the current syllabus, so this note leaves them out.

Understand it

Gift-wrapping

Paper and ribbon turn an ordinary object into a present. Wrapping does two jobs: it marks the object out as a present rather than a purchase, and it shows the receiver that the giver took some trouble.

There are three ways of handing over a present:

- **Traditional wrapping:** patterned paper, ribbon, perhaps a bow; anyone seeing it knows at once what it is.
- **Non-traditional wrapping:** plain brown paper or similar; a stranger might take it for an ordinary parcel.
- **Unwrapped:** fine in some settings (flowers handed over on a visit), but in an exam it is not a *way of wrapping* and earns nothing.

Porublev et al. (2009) gathered **qualitative** data from people in **Victoria, Australia**, mostly aged **25 to 35**, with more women than men (the group most involved in gift-giving).

Method	What happened
Observation	researchers watched customers at a Christmas gift-wrapping stall
Interviews	twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews about when and why people wrap presents
Projective workshops	six workshops ; two people at a time each wrapped two presents , one for someone close and one for an acquaintance , chatting about wrapping as they worked; the parcels were photographed

Most people would rather **receive** a wrapped present, and two shared expectations came through: a present ought to be **wrapped**, and it ought to **look like a present**.

Howard (1992) looked at the receiver. Students were promised a gift (a sheepskin bicycle-seat cover) for rating some products. In the first experiment, **45** students got it either in decorative paper with a ribbon or bare; the wrapped one was rated higher (**7.14** against **6.06**). In the second (**82** students), wrapping raised the ratings of people who thought the cover was **theirs**, but not of people who thought it was for **someone else**.

Rixom et al. (2019) looked at the giver. **261** adults pictured a present at a party, neatly or messily wrapped, from a close **friend** or an **acquaintance**. From a friend, the **messy** parcel pleased people **more**: it lowers what you expect, so the present seems better by comparison (a **contrast** effect). From an acquaintance, the **neat** one won: care over the parcel suggests they took you seriously, and that impression spreads to the present (**assimilation**).

Food package design: the key study Becker et al. (2011)

Can the cup change the taste? Becker et al. tested whether a food package's design affects how the food is perceived. Cambridge's mark schemes and reports set out the study's pre-test and measures but give no findings, so learn the procedure in detail.

The **pre-test** checked that the planned shape change really looked more or less forceful (**potency**) before the main study used it.

Feature	Detail
Raters	20 people
Materials	six yogurt cups, three pairs : two versions of a cup that differed only in shape
Scale	a 12-item potency measure: words such as impressive, rebellious, spicy and bitter, plus opposites such as mild, weak and bland that were reverse-scored
Ratings	each word from 1 to 7, "not at all" up to "very much so" (a 7-point scale)
Order	the cups came in a random order

The **main study** took three kinds of measure. Participants:

- rated how **sharp**, **bitter** and **mild** it was (**taste intensity**, 7-point scales);
- rated how **superior**, **eye-catching** and **high-quality** it seemed (**product evaluation**, 7-point scales);
- wrote down the price they expected, in **euros** (**price expectation**).

Sensitivity to design was treated as a **participant variable**: some people notice how products look and others hardly do. High and low groups were analysed apart, so a strong reaction in one could not be hidden by a flat reaction in the other.

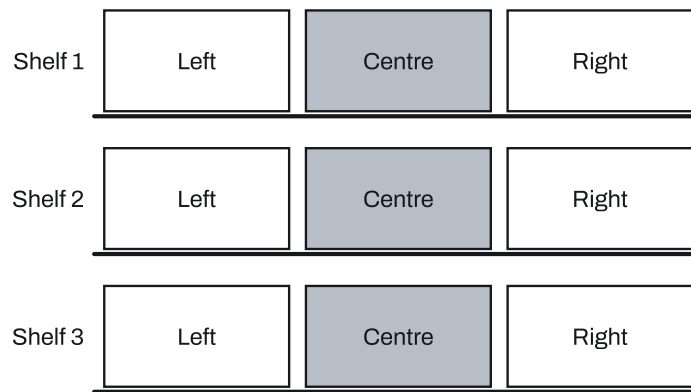
Evaluating it:

- **Pre-test**: without it the shape change might have been one shoppers would never see in a real shop, or one that suggested nothing at all, so the main study would have tested the wrong thing (lower **validity**) and been wasted effort.
- **Testing in a supermarket's entrance hall** (the setting a November 2025 question asks you to judge): the people asked are the very people who buy yogurt, in the place they buy it, and a steady stream passes the door, so an **opportunity sample** fills quickly. But shoppers have their own errands on their minds, so their ratings may be rushed or careless, and crowds, noise and queues cannot be held constant (a **field experiment** weakness).
- **7-point scales**: numbers that are easy to compare, but people can hide on the middle point, and nobody explains **why** a cup seemed stronger (no **qualitative** data); the ratings are **subjective**.
- **Reductionism and generalisation**: studying package design on its own gives control, but real shoppers also weigh brand and price; it used one kind of product (yogurt), and what a shape suggests may vary with **culture**.

Attention and shelf position

- A **planogram** is a map of a display: it fixes which product goes in which spot on which shelf.
- The **central gaze cascade effect** has two parts. The eyes tend to land on the middle option first (an **initial central fixation bias**); then, in the last moments before deciding, the gaze returns to the middle option more and more. The middle option is **picked more often**.

- **Eye-tracking** uses a camera that follows the eye to record which item a person looks at, how many times (**fixations**) and for how long.



Centre option: more and longer eye fixations
just before the choice, and chosen most often

Atalay et al. (2012) ran three studies.

Study	Who	Set-up	Result
1A	67 undergraduates in France , mean age 20	eye-tracking while they viewed made-up brands of vitamin supplements and meal replacement bars in a 3 × 3 matrix on a screen; they picked one, then answered a survey	the eyes rested on the middle brands more often and for longer, and these were bought most
1B	64 undergraduates in Paris	the same task, but the whole grid sat to one side of the screen, so the middle of the grid was no longer the middle of the screen	the middle of the grid still won
2	84 students at Concordia University	real packs on a shelf (not in a shop): three made-up energy drinks in a row, their selling points swapped between brands; each student was placed off to one side and stayed there, so the middle drink was never straight ahead	they still chose the middle drink most, even though from where they stood it was off to one side; the drink chosen was not always the one they rated best

Evaluating it:

- **Eye-tracking:** **objective**, precise, **reliable** equipment, a **valid** measure of attention. But people who know their eyes are tracked may look differently; it shows **where** people look, never **why**; and where people learn to look first may differ between **cultures**.
- **Self-report:** Study 1A's survey is **subjective**, and a screen choice may not match a real purchase.
- **Reliability:** the same products, instructions and equipment in a controlled room, so it can be repeated; some students may already use such products.

- **Generalisations:** every participant was a student (undergraduates in France, then students at Concordia University), so older shoppers may behave differently. **Reductionism:** position alone, without price or brand; shelf position seems to **determine** choice, yet shoppers can pick anything.

Sales techniques and the buyer–seller relationship

Each technique starts from a different place: the **person**, the **rival** or the **item**.

Technique	Starting point	What the relationship becomes	Example
Customer-focused	the person : the seller asks, listens and shapes the offer around this one buyer's problem, aiming to help them choose well	the buyer feels cared about and never pushed, so trust grows; they return and recommend the seller (loyalty)	a phone shop worker asking how you use your phone before suggesting a plan
Competitor-focused	the rival : the pitch is "we beat them" on price, warranty, reviews or aftercare	the bond rests on the deal ; every buyer hears the same pitch, and loyalty lasts until someone is cheaper	an electronics store promising to beat any local price on televisions
Product-focused	the item : the seller is an expert on its features and trusts its quality to win buyers; this buyer's needs are barely explored	buyers who value quality respect the brand ; a buyer with particular needs may feel ignored	a coffee-machine maker's staff explaining pressure, grinders and milk systems

Evaluating them: competitor-focused selling is cheap to run (staff can sell without being experts or getting to know each customer) and the buyer gets a keen price. But it ignores what each buyer actually needs, as if price were the only thing that could win a sale, and it is **reductionist**: the whole decision shrinks to one comparison, such as price. Customer-focused selling is more **holistic** and suits costly items, but takes time and skill. Real sellers mix the three.

Disrupt-then-reframe and the need for cognitive closure

Disrupt-then-reframe (DTR) persuades in two steps: first **disrupt** (say something in an odd, slightly puzzling way), then straight away **reframe** (give the clear, positive version). For example: "It's 400 pence... so £4. Great value."

Why it works: the puzzle creates a moment of uncertainty. The **need for cognitive closure (NFCC)** is how strongly a person craves a firm, settled answer and dislikes being kept in doubt. The reframe supplies that answer, so people grab it and spend less effort arguing against the offer.

What affects NFCC: the syllabus asks for factors, but the official materials show only one: the **person**. Some people want closure much more than others, a difference Kardes et al. measured with a **questionnaire**, and DTR changed the behaviour only of people high in NFCC.

Kardes et al. (2007) ran three experiments.

Experiment	Who and where	Conditions	Result
1 (field)	147 shoppers in a supermarket (43 men and 104 women, mean age 46), offered a box of sweets	DTR: price given in cents , a short pause, then 1 euro and "it's a bargain"; reframe only: the euro price and the bargain line	65% bought with DTR, 44% with reframe only (54% overall)
2 (field)	155 students at the University of Twente , Netherlands, asked to join a student society for €3 for half a year	cents first or euros only, then a 20-item NFCC questionnaire	30% joined with DTR, 13% with reframe only (22% overall); 43% agreed after DTR among high-NFCC students, while for low-NFCC students DTR made no significant difference
3 (laboratory)	137 undergraduates at Indiana University	a statement about a \$75 rise in tuition fees: DTR, reframe only or disrupt only; NFCC measured	DTR worked, and NFCC accounted for its effect

So DTR works **through** NFCC, and does most with people who badly want closure.

Evaluating it: experiments 1 and 2 used real decisions in real places (**ecological validity**) and still showed **cause and effect**; experiment 3 added laboratory control, and the effect appeared in all three experiments, with shoppers and with students. But the sums were small (sweets, €3), so it may not work on a car; a seller cannot see who is low in NFCC, which limits its **usefulness**; confusing buyers on purpose is ethically questionable; and the results are group percentages (**nomothetic**).

Cialdini's six ways to close a sale

Principle	Why it works	Example
Reciprocity	when someone gives us something, we feel we owe them	a free perfume sample, then you feel you should buy
Commitment and consistency	after a small yes we like to stay consistent and say yes to more	a free one-week gym pass, then a membership
Liking	we buy from people and brands we like, especially ones like us	an assistant who supports your football team
Authority	we follow experts	a pharmacist recommending a sun cream
Social proof (consensus)	we copy what others do	a "most popular" tag and five-star reviews

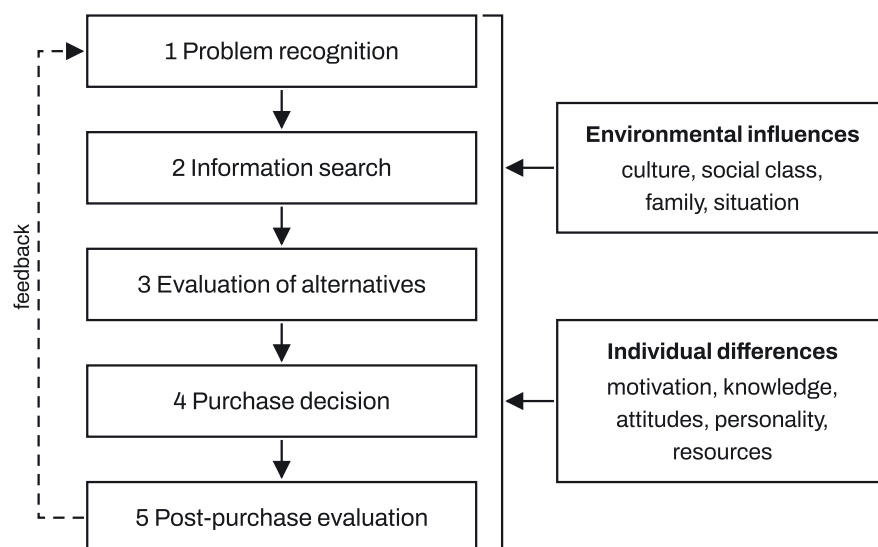
Principle	Why it works	Example
Scarcity	something that is running out seems worth more	"3 left in stock"

Scarcity in more depth. When an offer is limited, people want the bargain before it disappears, want to get the item before anyone else does, and fear missing out if they wait. In Worchel et al.'s (1975) cookie-jar experiment, people rated the quality of cookies higher when the jar held only **two** than when it held **ten**. For the **seller**, scarcity shifts more stock, even when plenty is left (rooms, seats), and clears an old model before its replacement arrives.

Evaluating closing techniques: practical and effective, but buyers may feel pushed and later regret buying, which damages the seller's name.

The Engel Kollat Blackwell (EKB) model

The EKB model treats buying as a decision made in **five steps**, with two sets of influences acting on every step.



Follow Leila, whose headphones have stopped working:

Stage	What goes on	Leila
1. Problem recognition	the buyer realises there is a gap between what they have and what they want; the push can come from inside the person or from the world around them	her headphones break (or a friend shows off a new pair)
2. Information search	memory first (brands, past buys), then outside sources	she recalls a brand she liked, then reads reviews and asks her cousin
3. Evaluation of alternatives	options compared on the features that matter, some measurable, some personal taste	battery hours and price, but also which pair looks good

Stage	What goes on	Leila
4. Purchase decision	the best fit is bought, though that day's offer or what is in stock can still sway it	she buys the pair on offer this week
5. Post-purchase evaluation	did it live up to their hopes? Pleased, or let down and perhaps returning it; the result is remembered for next time	a month later she is glad of the long battery

Around the steps sit the influences. Incoming information has to be noticed, understood and remembered.

Environmental influences come from outside the person: **culture**, **social class**, **family**, other people and the **situation**. **Individual differences** come from the person: **resources** (money, time), **motivation and involvement**, **knowledge**, **attitudes**, **personality**, and **values and lifestyle**.

Evaluating the EKB model:

- **Strengths:** **comprehensive** and **holistic** (budget, needs, availability, culture, personality); good **face validity** for big, planned purchases such as a car; **useful**, because a firm can act on each step (an advert to make people notice a need, a comparison page for the search).
- **Weaknesses:** it pictures a **rational** buyer who works through every step, which does not fit impulse or routine buying.
- **Culture** cuts both ways: what is on sale differs between countries, yet people everywhere can still go through the same steps; but where goods are in short supply there are few brands to weigh up, so step 3 means little.

Deciding where to buy: store choice

Before buying, a shopper has to pick a shop, and the reasons usually fall into a few kinds:

- **Convenience:** the shop is close, on the way home, easy to park at, or open late.
- **Range of goods:** it stocks what the shopper wants, with plenty to compare.
- **Value for money:** prices, offers and loyalty schemes.
- **Service:** helpful staff, quick checkouts, easy returns.
- **The feel of the shop:** clean, pleasant and easy to find your way around.
- **Familiarity:** the shop they always use, out of habit or loyalty.

The syllabus asks how **demographics** such as **age** and **gender** change which reasons matter most. Explain each link with a reason: a parent with young children may put parking and a quick trip first, a student on a small budget may put price first, and someone with more free time may enjoy browsing a shop with a wide range. For **age**, an older shopper may prefer a nearby shop they have used for years, with staff they know, while a younger shopper may be happier to try a new shop or compare prices online first. For **gender**, a shopper who sees the trip as a chore may choose the shop where it is quickest to get in and out, while one who enjoys shopping may choose a shop with more to look at; in an answer, explain why men and women in a given

setting may differ in this way, rather than stating it as a fixed rule. The point is that the same shop does not appeal equally to every group, so a retailer chooses its location, layout and stock with its target shoppers in mind.

Sinha et al. (2002) studied store choice among shoppers in **India**. This note does not give its procedure or results; if you use it in an answer, use the details your class learned.

Evaluating store-choice research: findings from shoppers in one country may not **generalise** to other **cultures**, where the kinds of shop and shopping habits differ; and treating "men" or "students" as one group is **nomothetic**, ignoring the individual shopper.

Post-purchase cognitive dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is the mental discomfort of holding two ideas that do not fit together. After a purchase, one idea is fixed: "I bought this." If a second idea arrives that contradicts it, such as "the shop down the road sells it for less", the two collide and the buyer feels regret, often called **buyer's remorse**.

It is stronger when the buyer had to give up an option they liked **just as much** (the situation Nordvall created on purpose); when they find out **afterwards** that the item is now cheaper, on sale, or sold for less by a rival; and when the purchase was a big, **expensive** one (a car or a computer) bought on **impulse** without checking it fits their needs or budget.

How it is reduced:

	Before buying	After buying
The buyer	research it first; budget for the whole cost; hold off for a few days, since a choice that survives the wait is less likely to be regretted	think up reasons the choice was right; see the chosen item as better and the rejected one as worse; take it back
The seller	honest advice at the point of sale, so the buyer leaves with something that suits them	promise to match a lower price found elsewhere; easy returns, warranties and aftersales service

A price-match promise works because the "cheaper elsewhere" thought loses its sting: any lower price will be refunded, so the purchase no longer looks like a mistake.

Nordvall (2014) tested whether shoppers adjust their opinions after a hard choice.

Feature	Detail
Method and sample	a laboratory experiment ; 100 people at a Swedish university (47 men, 53 women, mean age 23), told it was about shopping
First rating	on a computer, 50 groceries (25 organic, 25 non-organic), each rated for how often they buy it, from "never" to "very often" (7 points)
Creating dissonance	people had to pick one item from pairs they had rated the same , giving up something they liked just as much

Feature	Detail
Second rating	every item rated again, shown with a reminder of whether it was picked or turned down; people ticked their reasons (price, taste, health, environment, animal welfare and others), then did a 12-question values survey
Results	ratings of picked items went up (about 2.62 to 2.90); rejected items dropped only slightly, not significantly . People said they cared most about the environment and animal welfare , yet did not pick organic items more often; when people did take the non-organic item, cost was the reason they gave most
Conclusion	stated values are a poor guide to what ends up in the basket, and once a choice is made people talk themselves into it to calm the dissonance

Evaluating it: laboratory control and a standard procedure give **reliability** and **cause and effect**. But rating and choosing items on a computer screen is not real shopping, so it lacks **ecological validity**; ratings are **subjective**; and a sample from one Swedish university limits **generalisation**, because attitudes to organic food and price vary with **culture** and income. Against that, the groceries are everyday items found in most countries, and regret after buying may be a feeling people share everywhere.

Issues and debates for this topic

Issue	How it applies here
Reductionism versus holism	Becker (only the package), Atalay (position alone) and competitor-focused selling (price alone) are reductionist ; gift-wrapping research and the EKB model are more holistic .
Determinism versus free will	Wrapping, shelf position and DTR seem to steer reactions, but shoppers can still say no: soft determinism at most.
Generalisations from findings	Only students (Atalay: France and Concordia University), 25–35-year-olds in Victoria, Australia at Christmas (Porublev), people from one Swedish university (Nordvall), one product (Becker), Indian shoppers (Sinha).
Objective and subjective data	Eye-tracking and real purchases (Kardes) are objective ; ratings, interviews and surveys (Becker, Porublev, Nordvall) are subjective .
Validity	Eye-tracking measures attention well but in a laboratory; Porublev's mix of methods gives rich insight; Kardes's field experiments have high ecological validity because people really bought; rating cups in a supermarket entrance is a real setting but not a real purchase.
Field experiments	Kardes (1, 2): real shoppers and students making real decisions to spend money, but less control. Becker: questions set it in a supermarket entrance hall (the November 2025 question's setting), with shoppers rating cups rather than buying.
Cultural differences	Wrapping customs, what shapes suggest, where people look first, types of shop and regret after buying may all vary.

Issue	How it applies here
Idiographic versus nomothetic	Most studies report averages (nomothetic); Porublev's interviews come closer to idiographic .

Key facts and formulas

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

Fact	Status
Wrapping: traditional (looks like a present), non-traditional (plain brown paper), or unwrapped; Porublev et al.: a present should be wrapped and should look like a present	Learn it
Porublev et al. (2009): Christmas stall observation, 20 in-depth interviews, 6 projective workshops; qualitative data	Learn it
Becker et al. (2011) pre-test: 20 raters, six cups in three pairs, 12-item potency scale rated 1–7, random order	Learn it
Becker et al. (2011) measures: taste intensity, product evaluation, expected price in euros; high and low design sensitivity analysed apart	Learn it
Central gaze cascade effect: eyes go to the middle first and return to it more and more just before choosing	Learn it
Atalay et al. (2012): 1A 67 students, 3 × 3 matrix, eye-tracking; 1B 64 students, matrix off-centre; 2 84 students, energy drinks on a shelf	Learn it
Sales techniques: customer-focused (the person), competitor-focused (the rival), product-focused (the item)	Learn it
Disrupt-then-reframe: puzzle, then the clear positive version; it works through the need for cognitive closure	Learn it
Kardes et al. (2007): sweets 65% against 44%; student society 30% against 13%, effect only for high NFCC	Learn it
Cialdini: reciprocity, commitment and consistency, liking, authority, social proof, scarcity	Learn it
EKB stages: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, post-purchase evaluation	Learn it
Store choice: reasons include convenience, range of goods, value for money, service, the feel of the shop and familiarity; age and gender change their weight; Sinha et al. (2002) studied Indian shoppers	Learn it
Nordvall (2014): 100 people from a Swedish university, 50 groceries, forced choice between equal pairs; picked items rose from 2.62 to 2.90	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 36 questions on this topic, from 2021 to 2025 (Papers 3 and 4; 27 different questions, as variants repeat them). 22 of them have parts of more than one type, so the counts add up to 77.

Question type	Questions
Outline or explain a term, concept or model	14
Describe a named study's procedure, measures or findings	12
Explain strengths or weaknesses of a research method or study	12
Suggest a research method, control or design choice	8
Plan or design a study	8
Evaluate a sales or buying technique or model	7
Apply a technique or model to a scenario	6
Discuss strengths and weaknesses of a method, with a conclusion	5
Essay: describe, then evaluate with a named issue	5

1. Outline or explain a term, concept or model (14 questions)

Usually 2 marks: the meaning in your own words (1), then a detail or example (1). "In this study" versions give the second mark only for the study's own detail.

- **Scarcity**: a product seems worth more when it is limited or about to run out (1); a hotel website showing "only two rooms left at this price" (1).
- **Post-purchase cognitive dissonance**: discomfort when the thought "I bought this" clashes with a later thought (1); for example, finding the same jacket half price a week later (1).
- **Customer-focused selling**: the seller finds out what this particular buyer needs and builds the offer around it.
- **Central gaze cascade effect**: attention drifts more and more to the middle option just before choosing; in Atalay et al., the middle of the 3 × 3 matrix or the middle energy drink.
- **Ways to wrap a gift**: traditional (ribbons, bows) and non-traditional (plain brown paper); "unwrapped" earns nothing.
- **A debate** (such as reductionism versus holism): one mark for each side. Rarer: name EKB stages, or describe two ways to close a sale.

2. Describe a named study's procedure, measures or findings (12 questions)

Mostly 1 mark per accurate detail, so give who took part (how many, where), the materials, the conditions, the measures, then the result.

- **Becker pre-test:** 20 raters, six cups in three pairs, 12-item potency scale, 1–7, random order. **Becker measures:** each of the three, with how it was measured.
- **Atalay:** describe **one** study fully, never all three blended. Study 2 was **not** in a supermarket.
- **Porublev methods:** the stall observation, the 20 interviews, the 6 workshops, each with its detail.

3. Explain strengths or weaknesses of a research method or study (12 questions)

2 marks a point: the point (1), applied to this study or product (1). A 6-mark "one strength and one weakness" or "discuss the reliability" part is marked in levels and needs two developed points with detail from the study.

- **Eye-tracking, 7-point scales and testing at a supermarket entrance:** use the points under each study above.
- **Features of observation** for gift-wrapping: covert (people wrap as they normally would), more than one observer (agreement can be checked), structured (observers know what to look for, such as a bow).
- **Porublev:** several methods give fuller qualitative data, with photos of the parcels; but Christmas only, one culture, a narrow age range, no numbers to compare groups.

4. Suggest a research method, control or design choice (8 questions)

2 marks: a suggestion (1) linked to this study (1).

- **Without Becker's pre-test:** the shapes might be unrealistic or mean nothing to shoppers, lowering validity. **Why control design sensitivity:** a participant variable; groups analysed apart so they do not cancel out.
- **Central gaze without eye-tracking:** an experiment where people pick from a shelf with a middle item; a questionnaire asking where they look first; an observation of which item is taken. EEG or fMRI score 0: they cannot follow the eyes.
- **Unstructured observation of wrapping:** no categories fixed in advance; the observer writes down every wrapping behaviour as it happens.
- **Why Porublev used semi-structured interviews:** fixed questions for everyone, plus follow-ups that let people explain why.

5. Plan or design a study (8 questions)

Paper 4 Section B. Since 2024 (24 marks): (a) a plan [10] with the two named features; (b)(i) the psychological knowledge [4]; (b)(ii) how two features of it shaped the plan [4]; (c) reasons for and a weakness of the named choices [2 each]. Before 2024: a design [10] plus psychological and methodological evidence [8].

1. **Use the method named.** An **interview** needs face-to-face or telephone, structured, semi-structured or unstructured, **open and/or closed** questions with examples, and how answers are scored. An **experiment** needs the IV's conditions, a measurable DV, the design and controls.
2. **General features:** sample and sampling technique (for example an opportunity sample of shoppers leaving a shop), ethics, procedure, location, data and analysis.

3. **Hypothesis: directional** when research predicts the direction, for example "more shoppers will buy when the price is disrupted then reframed than when it is only reframed" (Kardes et al.).
4. **(b)(ii)**: name a feature and say how you **used or changed** it, for example "Kardes et al. measured NFCC with a questionnaire, so I add closed NFCC items to my interview".
5. **(c)**: tie each reason or weakness to **your** plan: open questions give rich detail on how the technique felt, but some people say little; closed questions are quick to score, but give no reasons; an opportunity sample is quick and easy, but may not represent all shoppers.

6. Evaluate a sales or buying technique or model (7 questions)

2 marks a point: the point (1), developed or applied (1). "It increases sales" alone scores 0 unless tied to the model.

- **Scarcity, for the seller**: more sales even with plenty of stock; old models cleared before new ones.
- **Competitor-focused**: a keen price, no need for expert staff; but every buyer treated the same. It is **reductionist** because the sale narrows to one comparison, such as price, and a firm can test what sells by altering that single thing.
- **EKB model**: comprehensive, face valid, suits expensive purchases; but assumes a rational buyer.
- **A way to close a sale** (6 marks, levels): an advantage (the buyer gets what they need, word of mouth) and a disadvantage (it feels pushy, the sale is lost).

7. Apply a technique or model to a scenario (6 questions)

Name the technique, stage or way (1), then show what the seller or buyer in **this** scenario would do and why it works (1). Without the context, only 1 of the 2 marks.

- **Competitor-focused ways to sell**: a price and features table against rivals on the website; reviews set against a rival's; green credentials compared with the competition.
- **EKB stages**: visiting three garages = information search; weighing price, mileage and size = evaluation of alternatives.
- **Reducing dissonance**: a price-match promise (1), which removes the clashing thought (1).

8. Discuss strengths and weaknesses of a method, with a conclusion (5 questions)

Paper 4 Section A, 2021–2023 (5 marks): 1 mark per strength or weakness tied to the question, up to 4, plus 1 for a **conclusion** that makes a reasoned decision; a summary scores 0. Points that are not tied to the question are capped: two of them earn at most 2 marks between them.

- **Laboratory experiments on product choice**: cause and effect, precise equipment; but demand characteristics, and real buying happens in shops.
- **Observations of gift-wrapping**: natural behaviour, more than one observer; but people move out of view, a checklist misses the unexpected, and what is said is not recorded.

- **Conclusion** example: "Observation shows what people do with presents, but it needs interviews alongside it to learn why."

9. Essay: describe, then evaluate with a named issue (5 questions)

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

1. **(a)**: cover **every** part named; leaving one out caps (a) at 4. Give the ideas (why and how presents are wrapped; planograms, central gaze, eye-tracking; the EKB stages) and a study for each with procedure **and** a result. No evaluation.
2. **(b)**: the **named issue first**, applied to both parts (for generalisations: samples, cultures, settings), then other issues from the table above, each with evidence from (a) and **why** it matters, then a judgement.

Worked examples

Example 1

A furniture shop wants to sell more sofas.

(a) Suggest **two** ways its staff could use a customer-focused sales technique when selling a sofa. **[4]**

(b) Explain **one** effect a customer-focused technique could have on the buyer–seller relationship. **[2]**

(a) The salesperson could start with questions instead of a sales talk: how many people will use the sofa, how big the room is, whether there are pets **(B1)**. They would then show only the sofas that fit, such as a stain-resistant fabric for a family with a dog **(B1)**.

The salesperson could help the customer work out what they can comfortably spend each month **(B1)** and point them to a sofa within that budget rather than the dearest one, even if the shop earns less on this sale **(B1)**.

(b) The customer feels listened to and not pushed **(B1)**, so they trust the shop, come back for their next piece of furniture and tell friends, building a loyal, long-term relationship **(B1)**.

Example 2

(a) Outline what is meant by the 'disrupt-then-reframe' technique, using any sales example. **[2]**

(b) Explain **one** reason why disrupt-then-reframe may not work on every buyer. **[2]**

(c) Explain **one** strength and **one** weakness of using a field experiment to investigate the disrupt-then-reframe technique. **[4]**

(a) The seller first puzzles the buyer with an oddly worded statement, then at once gives a clear, positive version the buyer can accept **(B1)**: "This lamp is 1500 pence... that's just £15, a bargain!" **(B1)**.

(b) The technique depends on the buyer's need for cognitive closure (**B1**); in Kardes et al.'s second experiment it made no significant difference for students low in NFCC, so a relaxed buyer who is happy to stay unsure may simply ignore the reframe (**B1**).

(c) *Strength*: the buyers are real shoppers deciding whether to spend their own money (**B1**), as in Kardes et al.'s first experiment with a box of sweets, so ecological validity is high (**B1**).

Weakness: extraneous variables are hard to control (**B1**); a shopper in a hurry or one who loves those sweets may buy whatever the wording, so a difference between the groups may not be caused by the technique (**B1**).

Example 3

(a) Plan a field experiment to investigate whether a product sells more when placed in the centre of a shelf. Your plan must include details about the experimental design and ethical guidelines. [10]

(b) Explain **one** weakness of your choice of experimental design. [2]

(a) *Directional hypothesis*: more cartons of Brand X juice will be sold per day when it is in the middle of a row of three juice brands than when it is at either end (based on Atalay et al.). *Type*: a field experiment in a supermarket that agrees to take part. *IV*: Brand X's position (left, centre or right, same shelf height). *DV*: cartons of Brand X sold each day, from the till records. *Design*: **independent measures**, because different shoppers pass through on different days; **18** trading days (three weeks, Monday to Saturday), so each position is used on **6** days, rotated so that each falls once on each weekday, which spreads busy and quiet days evenly across the three positions. *Controls*: the same brands, prices and pack sizes throughout; no special offers; the shelf refilled each morning so no brand looks scarce. *Sample*: everyone who shops in the aisle (an opportunity sample). *Ethics*: the store manager gives consent; shoppers are not asked one by one, since they are in a public place doing their normal shopping and only the shelf position changes, so no one is harmed or misled about anything that matters; only anonymous till totals are used, so no shopper can be identified, and the figures are kept confidential. *Data*: mean sales per day for each position, in a bar chart.

Level reached: Level 5 (9–10 marks). The method is the one asked for; the specific features (type, IV, DV, design, controls) and the general ones (hypothesis, sample, ethics, data) each come with accurate detail; the plan hangs together and is clear enough for someone else to repeat; and the ethical guidelines are applied to this study, not just listed.

(b) With independent measures, the shoppers on centre days are different people from those on end days (**B1**); if a centre day happened to fall on a local payday or a hot spell, more juice might be bought wherever Brand X stood, so a difference could come from who shopped rather than from shelf position (**B1**).

Common mistakes

- **Guessing at gift-wrapping**. Saying how you would wrap a present, or "a gift should have a ribbon", scores little or nothing; give the traditional and non-traditional types and Porublev's expectations (June 2021 and March 2025 reports).

- **Inventing methods.** Porublev used observation, interviews and projective workshops, not questionnaires (June 2021 report).
- **Blending studies.** Describing all three Atalay studies as one (March 2023 report), or saying Study 2 was in a supermarket (November 2021 report).
- **Confusing reliability.** It is the consistency of a measure or procedure, not "trustworthy" or "repeating the study" (June 2021 report); back each reliability point with detail from the study (March 2023 report).
- **Not knowing the features of observation.** "Unstructured" means no categories fixed in advance; writing about covert or naturalistic observation instead scores little (March 2025 report).
- **Strengths and weaknesses in general terms.** Many answers on observations listed two strengths and two weaknesses that never mentioned gift-wrapping, which caps the marks; and some wrongly said watching people is always unethical, when observing ordinary behaviour in a public place needs no consent unless the situation is set up by the researcher (June 2022 report).
- **Common-sense selling.** Essays on selling often skipped the three sales techniques or described adverts and discounts, which earns nothing (November 2022 report).
- **Describing your own shopping instead of the EKB model,** or using a study that is not about dissonance, such as Hall et al.'s choice-blindness study (March 2026 report).
- **Naming an issue without explaining it.** "Nordvall was done in Sweden" scores low; say **why** culture matters, or whether regret after buying could be universal (March 2026 report). Likewise, say how a technique would or would not help a firm (November 2022 report).
- **Plans that drift.** No link to ways to close a sale, a list of short statements instead of explained choices, or repeated measures where one person would not want to buy two computers (June 2021 report).

How to get the marks

- **"Identify", "state", "give":** short exact facts. **"Outline"** (2 marks): the point plus a detail or example.
- **"Explain" or "suggest"** (2 marks a point): the point (1), applied to the study, product or person in the question (1). Repeating the question earns nothing.
- **A named context** (bicycles, a car, gift-wrapping): the second mark needs that context in your answer.
- **Study recall:** numbers earn marks: 20 raters and six cups (Becker), 67, 64 and 84 (Atalay), 65% against 44% (Kardes), 100 people and 2.62 to 2.90 (Nordvall).
- **Essays:** (a) every named part, each with a study; (b) the named issue first, then other issues with evidence from (a), then a judgement.

Quick check

1. In Kardes et al.'s first experiment, 65% bought after disrupt-then-reframe and 44% after reframe only. How many percentage points higher was the DTR figure? In the second experiment the figures were 30% and 13%: how many times as likely, to 1 decimal place, was a student to join after DTR?
2. In Nordvall's study, ratings of picked items rose from 2.62 to 2.90. By what percentage did they rise, to 1 decimal place?

3. Name Cialdini's principle: (a) "Nine out of ten customers chose this model"; (b) a free coffee while you browse; (c) "Sale ends at midnight".
4. Which EKB stage? (a) Sami's laptop stops working; (b) Sami reads reviews of four laptops; (c) a week later Sami is pleased the laptop is fast.
5. Which reason for choosing a store does each shopper give? (a) "It's on my way home from work." (b) "The staff there always help me find what I need." (c) "I've shopped there for years."

Answers

1. $65 - 44 = 21$ percentage points. $30 \div 13 = 2.3$ times as likely.
2. $2.90 - 2.62 = 0.28$, and $\frac{0.28}{2.62} \times 100 = 10.7\%$.
3. (a) **Social proof**. (b) **Reciprocity**. (c) **Scarcity**.
4. (a) **Problem recognition**. (b) **Information search**. (c) **Post-purchase evaluation**.
5. (a) **Convenience** (location). (b) **Service**. (c) **Familiarity** (habit or loyalty).

Past questions to try

- [9990/32/M/J/25 Q5](#): competitor-focused ways to sell more bicycles.
- [9990/32/O/N/24 Q7](#): two EKB stages for someone buying a new car, and a strength of the model.
- [9990/43/M/J/24 Q3](#): Becker et al.'s measures, design sensitivity and 7-point scales.
- [9990/42/M/J/24 Q4](#): Atalay et al.'s findings and the weaknesses of eye-tracking.