

**A LEVEL**  
*Candidate Style Answers*

# PSYCHOLOGY

H567  
For first teaching in 2015

## Component 3 - Criminal Psychology

Version 1



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## Question 7a

Explain how the research by Hall and Player (2008) could be used to improve fingerprint identification.

[10]

### Sample answer - Level 4

The research by Hall and Player highlights possible emotional bias which could affect the process of identifying fingerprints. In the study they created an experiment where 70 experienced forensic scientists were asked to compare a smudged fingerprint on a £50 note with a reference set of prints. This is a very subjective decision and could possibly be influenced by many cognitive factors.

The independent variable was the information that was included in a crime report supplied with the prints. Half were given a crime report describing fraud involving passing forged notes where the suspect fled the premises after the shop assistant spotted that the money was fake, this was the low emotional context condition. The other half were given the same information but at the end of the description it stated that the criminal fired two shots and killed the victim and then fled, this is the high emotional context condition. The reason for this was to see whether an emotional context influences the accuracy of the scientists.

When comparing the conditions there was little difference in identification rates between the high emotional context condition and low emotional context condition. This suggests that the emotional context actually had little effect on the sample in terms of their identification of the fingerprint. However, the participants were asked at the end of the study if they had read the crime report which contained the details of the crime, and if they had, did they think it had affected their analysis. 50% of the high condition said it had affected their analysis, compared to 6% from the low condition.

This result does suggest that emotional context can affect the fingerprint experts thinking, but maybe not to the extent of biasing their judgements in this artificial scenario. In the real world, emotional context may be more influential. To improve the future identification of fingerprints forensic experts should be "blind" to the details of the crime, being provided only with the fingerprints and no crime report. This would ensure that all fingerprint identifications would be carried out in exactly the same way with no bias affecting more or less violent crimes. Forensic scientists could be more objective in their analysis if they are unaware of the contextual details of a crime. This is known as de-biasing.

**Mark/Level:** 9 Marks – Level 4

### Examiner commentary

The response demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the study by Hall and Player (AO1). There is good application of psychological knowledge which is explicitly related to the question (AO2). There is a well developed line of reasoning and the answer flows and has good structure.

### How the answer could be improved

The improvement suggested in the answer could be developed further.

## Question 7a

Explain how the research by Hall and Player (2008) could be used to improve fingerprint identification.

[10]

### Sample answer - Level 3

Hall and Player asked 70 fingerprint experts to check whether a blurred fingerprint on some money belonged to a suspect. There were two versions, one group were told it was a violent crime and the other group that it wasn't violent. They then wanted to see if experts' identification was affected by the differences crimes. They thought that finger printers who had been told that it was from a violent crime would get upset and this might affect the conclusion they made. They asked them if the violence of the crime had affected their decision making. They said it had, so that is a big problem because this means that fingerprinting is not accurate always.

This research can be used to improve the study of fingerprints because it shows that emotion can influence people, so finger printers shouldn't be told about the type of crime, as if it is a violent/upsetting crime then this will affect their judgement which isn't fair. They should just be asked to match a print with no other information about what the crime was. All they would be required to do is say if it's a match. As there is no emotional information then they should make more accurate decisions regarding the fingerprints.

**Mark/Level:** 6 marks – Level 3

### Examiner commentary

Generally accurate description of Hall and Player, although the answer does lack some important details. Explanation is reasonable and the answer does engage with the question. (A01). The response demonstrates a reasonable application of knowledge and understanding to suggest improvements to fingerprint identification. (AO2). The answer is largely relevant and is supported by evidence.

### How the answer could be improved

More use of technical terminology would be helpful. Including key details of the study such as results and further analysis of them would improve also the answer.

## Question 7a

Explain how the research by Hall and Player (2008) could be used to improve fingerprint identification.

[10]

### Sample answer - Level 1

Hall and Player show that finger printers can be affected by their beliefs. If they think a crime is more violent then this makes them stressed which can lead to mistakes. They don't use computers like on CSI to check fingerprints, it is a man who looks at them and says if they are the same, this method isn't very useful.

This shows that they can get it wrong and then the wrong person goes to jail, so things need to improve. So if someone is very emotional they shouldn't look at fingerprints because they will get confused or think they have to solve it and make a wrong choice. If they did use computers like on CSI then that would be good as they won't get emotional and make mistakes like people do, this the main way we can improve fingerprinting.

**Mark/Level:** 2 Marks - Level 1

### Examiner commentary

This response is very anecdotal, demonstrating basic knowledge and understanding of the topic. (AO1). The improvements suggested are very weak and are unsupported, though showing basic concept of controlling bias. (AO2). The research is not used effectively and there is limited psychological knowledge.

### How the answer could be improved

More detail of the study is required and this should be used to engage with question. The improvement should be an application of the candidate's knowledge and understanding of the Hall and Player study to the requirements of the question. Clear links between the research and suggested improvements will demonstrate this. More use of psychological terminology and explanations will prevent the answer sounding so anecdotal.

## Question 7b

Assess the usefulness of research into the collection and processing of forensic evidence.

[15]

### Sample answer - Level 4

Research into bias in the collection and processing of forensic evidence is useful in a number of ways. Firstly, it is important that the legal system can rely on forensic evidence so that fair judgements can be made in cases using techniques like fingerprint analysis or other subjective techniques. Studies like Hall and Player indicate that details about the case may influence the decisions scientists make about forensic evidence, especially where there is an emotional context, for example where a violent crime has been committed. This is useful as it identifies possible bias in this type of evidence which judges should be aware of. However, in this study the emotional context had no effect on the accuracy of the identification, so it could be argued that although the forensic scientists felt that they had been influenced by the emotional nature of the crime, the results suggest that it did not affect their forensic analysis. This is useful as it may actually support the professional standing of forensic scientists.

Secondly, it is useful for forensic scientists to be aware of cognitive bias so that they can incorporate controls into their procedures to minimise or eliminate these factors. This could involve the use of "blind" analysis where no details regarding the nature of a case are passed onto the forensic scientists. The use of a line-up has also been shown to reduce misidentification, this is where the suspect's evidence is provided along with several others. Miller used this in a study using hair comparison experts. When just one "innocent" sample was provided for comparison it was wrongly identified as a match 30% of the time. However, when five "innocent" samples were given in a line-up the error rate was 4%. This research is very useful as it clearly identifies a superior method that could be used in the processing of forensic evidence.

Finally, some psychologists have discussed the "CSI effect"; this is where the inaccurate portrayal of forensic evidence procedures in crime shows creates an impression that fingerprint analysis and other techniques are 100% accurate. This means that jurors never tend to question this sort of evidence in a trial as they feel it is based on valid and reliable procedures, or that they believe it is superior to other sources of evidence. Publicising research which indicates that there may be bias in these procedures may help to reduce the CSI effect and create more critical consideration of evidence used in trials. Therefore, research into bias in the processing of forensic evidence is useful to society generally, as trials may be conducted more fairly for defendants, leading to less wrongful convictions.

In conclusion research into the collection and processing of forensic evidence is useful in that it should improve the validity and reliability in the processing of forensic evidence.

**Mark/Level:** 13 marks – Level 4

### Examiner commentary

Good knowledge and understanding of the issue (usefulness) is evident (AO1). The response has made a range of points showing good analysis and evaluation. The answer also considers many different aspects of usefulness which demonstrates excellent understanding and application of the concept. The points made engage with the context of the question (assess) and are supported with evidence. Points are well developed and explanation and elaboration are thorough. The answer is also clear and logically structured. (AO3)

### How the answer could be improved

This is clearly a top band answer. However, it could be argued that the third point could be linked to a specific piece of research. The answer could also benefit from another evaluation point being made.

## Question 7b

Assess the usefulness of research into the collection and processing of forensic evidence.

[15]

### Sample answer - Level 3

Research into the collection and processing of forensic evidence is useful as it might help forensic scientists to improve their procedures. Research like Hall and Player showed that the thinking of forensic scientists can be influenced by their knowledge about the crime. If the crime is emotional, for example if it was violent, that may influence the comparisons they make. Now they know this they can try to build in controls to stop the scientists knowing any details of the case.

Another way that research is useful is that it helps the legal system. Forensic evidence is used in cases to convince juries of the guilt of the defendant. If research shows that the evidence may be flawed, this can help lawyers to defend innocent people. In the past many innocent people have gone to prison for a long time and then been released.

However, research into forensic evidence can lack usefulness. Hall and Player's study lacks usefulness as the research lacks ecological validity because it wasn't a real case. The thinking of fingerprint experts may be very different if when they were working on an actual case. Therefore the results may not be accurate as they lack ecological validity and therefore cannot be generalised. We can't be sure how much the details of a real case would affect their ability to match finger prints.

**Mark/Level:** 9 Marks - Level 3

### Examiner commentary

There is good knowledge and understanding of the usefulness debate (AO1). There are a reasonable number of evaluative points included, but they often lack development. Several valid conclusions are made, while competent analysis, interpretation and evaluation skills are demonstrated (AO3). The answer is also well structured.

### How the answer could be improved

Evaluation points need to be developed and explained further. More research evidence could be used in order to effectively support the points that have been made.

## Question 7b

Assess the usefulness of research into the collection and processing of forensic evidence.

[15]

### Sample answer - Level 1

Research is useful because it shows that fingerprints can be wrong. When the finger print people get emotional they make mistakes. This is bad. They might pick the wrong person and they might even get the electric chair in America. That's why computers are better.

Research isn't useful because it was a lab experiment so it lacks ecological validity. It's not reliable or valid because of that. The sample was big though, so that's a positive. Bigger samples are more reliable.

**Mark/Level:** 3 Marks - Level 1

### Examiner commentary

There are a few basic points which are grounded in the research by Hall & Player, however the points are brief and unclear. There is little engagement with the question and evidence to support the points made are either peripheral or absent. Little evidence of understanding is demonstrated and there is some confusion over evaluative issues.

### How the answer could be improved

Points should be explained and supported with evidence. Explicit links should be made to the question. Greater understanding of "usefulness" should also be demonstrated in the explanation of evaluative points. Furthermore, a wider range of evidence should be included.

### Question 7c

A series of high profile serious violent crimes have been committed in a small village over the last year. Experts are working on the case but it remains unsolved. There are a number of potential suspects including one who has a previous conviction for assault.

Discuss how motivating factors might impact the collection and processing of forensic evidence in this case.

[10]

#### Sample answer - Level 4

There are a number of motivating factors which might affect the collection and processing of forensic evidence in this case. Firstly, the fact that the crimes are violent will have an emotional impact. The forensic scientists may be motivated to capture the offender due to the serious nature of the crimes.

Secondly, as the crimes here are high profile there would be a lot of media and public pressure upon the Police to solve the crimes. This again is a motivating factor as this could increase the need for a suspect to be linked to the crime.

Another factor is that there is a suspect who has a previous conviction for assault. If this information reaches the forensic scientists this could create an expectation bias, this is where the forensic scientists are expecting a particular outcome and are therefore likely to see what they expect, a match. This could also create a confirmation bias, which is where we seek out evidence in order to support our hypothesis, and ignore evidence which contradicts it. In this case the scientist (or the Police who they work with) may believe that this suspect is the murderer and this may increase the risk of an incorrect identification being made. Also suspects who have no previous criminal history may be ignored, the Police may believe that the criminal who committed these crimes must have a previous criminal record and this could influence the collection of forensic evidence.

All of these factors might impact the processing of the evidence as many forensic procedures involve the analysis of visual stimuli (e.g. fingerprint comparison, hair & fibre comparison, footprints, blood spatter analysis) and research has shown that visual perception is open to many types of cognitive bias.

**Mark/Level:** 9 Marks - Level 4

#### Examiner commentary

There is evidence of good application of knowledge and understanding to the scenario described. A number of factors which might affect the collection and processing of forensic evidence are also effectively explored. The response is well structured and explanations are clear and are well elaborated on. (AO2)

#### How the answer could be improved/ model answer

This is a very good answer. However, the conclusion is a little brief, so it would be beneficial for this to be expanded upon further.

### Question 7c

A series of high profile serious violent crimes have been committed in a small village over the last year. Experts are working on the case but it remains unsolved. There are a number of potential suspects including one who has a previous conviction for assault.

Discuss how motivating factors might impact the collection and processing of forensic evidence in this case.

[10]

#### Sample answer - Level 3

There are a few different factors which might affect the processing of forensic evidence in this case. There seems to be a prime suspect who is being considered, the one with a previous criminal record. This knowledge might affect the thought processes involved in analysing fingerprints. If they are comparing his fingerprints with crime scene prints, this knowledge might make them more likely to find matches, even if he isn't the murderer. Subjective decisions are open to bias and lack validity.

Another factor is that the crime is violent. Hall & Player showed that when crimes are violent, finger print experts reported that this kind of information would alter their thinking. This could be motivating experts to close the case quickly so no one else gets hurt. However, this means that they might see matches where they don't really exist because they want there to be a match. The end result is that incorrect matches might occur, which could lead to the Police focussing on and prosecuting the wrong suspect.

**Mark/Level:** 7 Marks – Level 3

#### Examiner commentary

The response demonstrates a reasonable application of psychological knowledge and understanding to the scenario and the question. The explanation is clear and the response flows and is competently structured. However, there is not enough included for it to be worthy of the top band. (AO2)

#### How the answer could be improved

More depth and detail should be included within the answer and points could be elaborated further with reference to research. The answer could also benefit from the inclusion of another possible motivating factor, which could be identified and explained.

### Question 7c

A series of high profile serious violent crimes have been committed in a small village over the last year. Experts are working on the case but it remains unsolved. There are a number of potential suspects including one who has a previous conviction for assault.

Discuss how motivating factors might impact the collection and processing of forensic evidence in this case.

[10]

#### Sample answer - Level 1

In this case there is a man who is violent. The Police think that he might be the killer. They just want to get someone for the murder to make their numbers look good. The experts work for the Police so they might "help" them get the killer. This happens all the time.

As well if the finger printers get emotional because it's a murder, which is serious they can't think straight. Then they might make a mistake. That's why they should use computers like on CSI. Computers are machines, they don't get upset and are more scientific.

**Mark/Level:** 2 Marks - Level 1

#### Examiner commentary

There is a basic application of psychological knowledge here. This is a very generalised and anecdotal response. It lacks any psychological explanation and engagement with the question. There is also no research evidence to support the points that have been offered. (AO2)

#### How the answer could be improved

The response should engage with the scenario and question much more fully. Knowledge and explanation of possible motivating factors needs to be demonstrated. More detail is required and the answer should be clear and logically structured. Points should be supported by psychology, rather than anecdotes and media references.



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