

Witness Psychology

PSY\_M\_WIT

Department of Psychology  
Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences

Semester 1 2008/9

**become what you want to be**

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## 1. UNIT DETAILS

<b>Unit Title:</b>	Witness Psychology
<b>Unit Level:</b>	Masters Year 1
<b>Unit Reference Number:</b>	PSY_M_WIT
<b>Credit Value:</b>	15
<b>Student Study Hours:</b>	150
<b>Contact Hours:</b>	33
<b>Private Study Hours:</b>	117
<b>Pre-requisite Learning (If applicable):</b>	None
<b>Co-requisite Units (If applicable):</b>	None
<b>Course(s):</b>	MSc Investigative Forensic Psychology
<b>Year and Semester</b>	Year 1 Semester 1
<b>Unit Coordinator:</b>	Dr Rachel Wilcock
<b>UC Contact Details (Tel, Email, Room)</b>	Room E341 extension block, <a href="mailto:wilcockr@lsbu.ac.uk">wilcockr@lsbu.ac.uk</a> Extension Number 5857 Office hours Thursday 1-3
<b>Teaching Team &amp; Contact Details (If applicable):</b>	Dr Anne Ridley, Room E332 extension block, <a href="mailto:ridleyam@lsbu.ac.uk">ridleyam@lsbu.ac.uk</a> Dr Coral Dando <a href="mailto:cjd28@le.ac.uk">cjd28@le.ac.uk</a>
<b>Subject Area:</b>	Psychology
<b>Summary of Assessment Method:</b>	Three equally weighted 1200 word reviews of three research papers

## 2. SHORT DESCRIPTION

This unit will begin by reviewing the importance of witness evidence in the Criminal Justice System and problems of inaccurate witness evidence will be highlighted using real life occurrences such as the recent DNA exoneration cases. The main focus of the unit will be to introduce you to psychological factors which may affect the accuracy of witnesses' performance and what empirical psychological research suggests may improve witnesses' performance. Fallibility of memory including suggestibility and problematic face recognition such as unconscious transference will be put forward as explanations as to how witnesses can make mistakes. Topics to be covered include memory, interviewing, and identification line-ups.

## 3. AIMS OF THE UNIT

- To introduce students to psychological factors affecting witness performance.
- To highlight to students the unreliability of witness evidence and problems this may lead to.
- To offer psychological explanations as to why witness evidence may not always be accurate.
- To review empirical psychological research concerned with improving the accuracy of witness evidence.

## 4. LEARNING OUTCOMES

### 4.1 Knowledge and Understanding

- Use psychological research to explain why witness evidence is sometimes unreliable.
- Critically evaluate psychological research concerned with improving the accuracy of witness evidence.
- Explain the potential for psychological research to be translated into practice.

## 4.2 Intellectual Skills

- Critically evaluate theory and research in this area.
- Successfully apply multiple perspectives to issues in witness psychology.

## 4.3 Practical Skills

- Apply psychological theories to real life situations.

## 4.4 Transferable Skills

- Can use a full range of learning resources such as Blackboard, web-based search engines and appropriate databases, the library.
- Effective verbal and written communication.
- Handle primary source material critically.

# 5. ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIT

Three equally weighted 1200 word reviews of three research papers, one for each of the three topic areas covered in the unit. Students will be asked to critically evaluate each research paper and to consider any implications of the research for real world investigations. The pass mark for this unit is 50%.

Students may be required to provide electronic copy of written work submitted. In such instances, the individual student will be written to requesting electronic submission. Failure to provide electronic copy within TWO WEEKS of a written request will result in the work being deemed an incomplete submission, and no mark will be given. The work will then have to be referred for a capped mark. When extenuating circumstances have already been accepted for a unit, this will not negate the proper investigation of any component of that unit for any allegation of academic misconduct, nor the subsequent imposition of any appropriate penalty for proven misconduct.

# 6. FEEDBACK

Feedback will normally be given to students 20 working days after the submission of an assignment.

# 7. INTRODUCTION TO STUDYING THE UNIT

## 7.1 Overview of the Main Content

Week	6.00 – 9.00 Thursday
1	<b>Introduction to the unit. Induction CLSD. Skills: Databases &amp; literature searches</b> Rachel Wilcock & Pat England
2	<b>Witness Memory - conceptual issues and witness confidence</b> Anne Ridley
3	<b>Witness Memory – moderating factors: e.g. emotion and delay</b> Anne Ridley
4	<b>Witness Memory – suggestibility</b> Anne Ridley
5	<b>Skills: Critically reviewing journal papers</b> Rachel Wilcock
6	<b>Interviewing Witnesses</b> Coral Dando
7	<b>The Cognitive Interview</b> Coral Dando
8	<b>Investigative Interviewing</b> Coral Dando
9	<b>The Effect of Witness, Perpetrator, and Situational Factors on Identification Accuracy</b> Rachel Wilcock
10	<b>Distinguishing Accurate and Inaccurate Witnesses</b> Rachel Wilcock
11	<b>Identification Procedures</b> Rachel Wilcock

## 7.2 Overview of Types of Classes

The unit will be taught during eleven three hour sessions over the course of eleven weeks. Teaching will comprise large and small group sessions. Some of the large group sessions will be participatory, some will involve demonstrations, and some will involve the imparting of information in standard lecture format to provide students with the core knowledge that they need. Small group sessions will focus on consolidating knowledge via discussion and practical illustrations where possible. In week one you will be introduced to the library and a full range of electronic learning resources such as different web based search engines. More generally small group sessions will provide you with an opportunity to critically discuss relevant research and recent scientific journal papers. Lecturers will encourage questions from you and try to foster interaction between students, and students and staff.

## 7.3 Importance of Student Self-Managed Learning Time

The unit requires 117 hours of private study time. In order to obtain the maximum benefit from the course it is important that you come prepared to teaching sessions by reading relevant chapters in the core texts. After the teaching session it is important that you follow up any references recommended by your lecturer and that you yourself investigate further relevant references that will help you with your understanding of the topic area which will in turn help you with your coursework assessment.

## 7.4 Employability

Students will learn about psychological issues relating to the accuracy of witness evidence. For students with an interest in policing and the Criminal Justice System this unit will provide you with new, up to date information which can be applied to real situations that you may come across in your current work or future employment. Furthermore, this unit will provide students with academic skills such as analytical thinking, problem solving, and good communication skills both written and verbal which are used in many different professions. In order to complete the unit successfully students will use different learning resources such as Blackboard, web-based search engines and appropriate databases, the library, and e-mail all of which may be used in different professions.

## 7.5 Equality and Diversity

Equality and diversity is addressed in the teaching of the unit and through the delivery of unit materials. Lectures will highlight issues pertinent to equality and diversity such as age/race of witness and their possible interaction with age/race of perpetrator. It is recognised that students enrolled are likely to have different backgrounds and some may be more familiar, through practical experience, with material covered in the course and others less so. Those students with less experience will receive as much support as they need, whilst students with more experience will be encouraged to share their knowledge, whilst at the same time, they will be pointed to reading that will stretch and challenge them. Blackboard will be used which will enable students with visual impairments or dyslexia to print out course materials in an appropriate format.

## 8. THE PROGRAMME OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

The following notes are indicative only and are liable to adjustments during the course of the semester. Where changes occur, updated information will be provided during lectures.

### TEACHING PROGRAMME

## **Week 1. Introduction to unit. Induction CLSD. Skills: Databases & literature searches**

**Synopsis:** In this initial session student will be introduced to the unit and asked to consider the importance of witness evidence and also the accuracy of witness evidence. During this session students will also receive an induction to CLSD (in the library). Throughout this unit and the whole course students will need to be familiar with using the different databases and be competent at searching for research papers. Therefore during this session students will be introduced to the databases and take part in a group exercise to find a specific research paper which will be reviewed in a later session in the unit.

### **Suggested reading:**

Kebbell, M.R. & Milne, R. (1998). Police officers' perceptions of eyewitness performance in forensic investigations. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 138 (3), 323-330.

## **Week 2. Witness Memory: conceptual issues in eyewitness recall and testimony.**

### **Synopsis:**

We will look at the storehouse and correspondence metaphors of eyewitness memory, which offer insights into how what we report of what we have seen has a particular 'grain size' which can be affected by a number of factors including our confidence, what we actually remember, the context of the interview and the kind of questions asked etc. The impact of this for interviewing practice will be discussed.

### **Suggested reading:**

Brewer, N. & Williams, K.D. (2005). *Psychology and law: An empirical perspective*. New York: The Guildford Press. Chapter 4.

## **Week 3. Witness memory: moderating factors**

### **Synopsis:**

This week we will look at the effect of various factors on eyewitness recall. There is a vast body of literature in this area, so we will be concentrating initially on the effect of delay – which is of particular forensic relevance, moving on to the effect of mood states and emotion.

### **Suggested reading:**

Toglia, M. P. et. al. (2007). *The Handbook of Eyewitness Psychology: Vol. 1 Memory for Events*. Mahwah, NJ: LEA. Chapters 3 and 4.

## **Week 4. Suggestibility**

### **Synopsis:**

In this lecture we will consider the nature of suggestibility and the debate into whether it is due to cognitive factors, the social situation of an interview or both. We will discuss the importance of suggestibility in the investigative setting. If there is time, we will briefly look at research into individual differences in suggestibility, particularly with respect to anxiety.

### **Suggested reading:**

Toglia, M. P. et. al. (2007). *The Handbook of Eyewitness Psychology: Vol. 1 Memory for Events*. Mahwah, NJ: LEA. Chapter 7.

## **Week 5. Skills: Critically reviewing papers.**

### **Synopsis:**

This week's session will be devoted to learning how to critically review papers. We will look at good and bad examples of critical review of journal papers and then using the Kebbell and Milne (1998) journal paper that you found during your induction to the databases in the library in week one, in small groups you will have a go at writing a critical review. This session will be very important in terms of helping you to understand the demands of the assessment for this unit.

### **Suggested reading:**

Kebbell, M.R. & Milne, R. (1998). Police officers' perceptions of eyewitness performance in forensic investigations. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 138 (3), 323-330.

## **Week 6. Interviewing Witnesses.**

### **Synopsis:**

In this session students will be introduced to witness interviewing and encouraged to consider the importance of the witness interview situation, not only as an information gathering opportunity, but also from both a social and information processing perspective. The common problems encountered by investigative interviewers, pertaining to adult witness memory, will be discussed. The cognitive and social aspects of the interview situation which can reduce and/or intensify such problems will be highlighted and discussed with reference to key empirical research findings. In the second half of this week's session there is a research seminar taking place in the psychology laboratory given by Professor Aldert Vrij, an International expert on detecting deception.

### **Suggested reading:**

Milne, R. & Bull, R. (1999). *Investigative Interviewing*. Chichester: Wiley. Chapter 1 and 2.

Bull, R. & Carson, D. *Handbook of psychology in legal contexts*. Chichester: Wiley. Chapter 3.4. 215-222.

## **Week 7. The Cognitive Interview**

### **Synopsis:**

This session introduces the Cognitive Interview procedure; one of the most widely researched and generally accepted methods for improving the memorial performance of cooperative eyewitnesses. The development of the Cognitive Interview procedure and its theoretical underpinnings will be described and discussed. Psychological research undertaken to assess its effectiveness will be introduced, discussed, and critically evaluated.

### **Suggested reading:**

Memon, A. & Bull, R. (2000). *Psychology of interviewing*. West Sussex: Wiley. p. 343-355.

Milne, R. & Bull, R. (1999). *Investigative Interviewing*. West Sussex: John Wiley. Chapter 3.

## **Week 8. Investigative Interviewing in England and Wales**

## Synopsis:

This session will consider the current investigative interview model in England and Wales and police officers' application of the Cognitive Interview procedure when interviewing witnesses. The Cognitive Interview procedure, as a practical forensic 'tool', will be evaluated in light of research pertaining to police officers' perceptions and application of the technique. Research currently being undertaken will be discussed and evaluated.

Milne, R. & Bull, R. (1999). *Investigative Interviewing*. West Sussex: John Wiley. p. 157-180.

Heaton-Armstrong, A. & Wolchover, D. (1999). *Analysing witness testimony*. London: Blackstone. Chapter 9.

## Week 9. The Effect of Witness, Perpetrator, and Situational Factors on Identification Accuracy

### Synopsis

Many different factors affect the accuracy of eyewitness identification evidence. Wells in 1978 divided these factors into *Estimator Variables* and *System Variables*. In this teaching session we will cover the effects of *Estimator Variables* which can be viewed as factors that the Police and the Criminal Justice System has little control over, hence, the effect of these variables on subsequent identification accuracy can only be estimated after the crime has occurred. Examples of *Estimator Variables* include age of the witness and the circumstances in which the crime occurred such as poor visibility of the perpetrator because the crime was committed at night in a poorly lit area. Whilst considering the impact of estimator variables on identification accuracy, issues relating to the utility of studying estimator variables in terms of ecological validity of the research and the existence of multiple estimator variables operating in any one crime scenario will be discussed.

### Suggested Reading:

Brewer, N. & Williams, K.D. (2005). *Psychology and law: An empirical perspective*. New York: The Guildford Press. p177-212

Wilcock, R., Bull, R., and Milne, R. (2008) *Witness identification in criminal cases: Psychology and practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 4

## Week 10. Distinguishing Accurate and Inaccurate Witnesses

### Synopsis:

There are a number of measures that can be taken during or after a witness has made an identification which researchers have investigated to see if they 'postdict' the accuracy of a witnesses line-up decision. One such postdictor is how confident a witness is that their line-up decision was correct. The relationship between how confident a witness is and the accuracy of their line-up decision has provoked considerable debate among psychologists. Key arguments in the confidence accuracy debate will be discussed including the effect of line-up administrator feedback on witnesses' reports of confidence. Additional postdictors of response latency and reported judgement strategies will also be considered.

### Suggested reading:

Brewer, N. (2006). Use and abuses of eyewitness identification confidence. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 11, 3-23.

## Week 11. Identification Procedures

### Synopsis:



Wells (1978) divided factors that are likely to affect identification accuracy into *Estimator Variables* (discussed in week 10) and *System Variables* which are factors that are under the control of the Criminal Justice System. Examples of system variables include, how a lineup is constructed, how it is presented, and the instructions given to the witness. Vast amounts of research have been conducted which examine the impact of system variables on identification accuracy and some of this research has guided current legislation and guidelines related to the conduct of identification procedures here in the UK (Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) Code D) and in America (United States Department of Justice Eyewitness Evidence A Guide for Law Enforcement). This session will give an overview of the empirical research upon which some of the recommendations for conducting lineups have been made.

### **Suggested reading:**

Kebbell, M.R. & Davies, G. M. (2006). *Practical Psychology for Forensic Investigations and Prosecutions*. Chichester: Wiley. p25-46.

Wilcock, R., Bull, R., and Milne, R. (2008). *Witness identification in criminal cases: Psychology and practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 7

## **9. LEARNING RESOURCES**

### **9.1 Core Materials**

Brewer, N. & Williams, K.D. (2005). *Psychology and law: An empirical perspective*. New York: The Guildford Press.

Howitt, D. (2006). *Introduction to Forensic and Criminal Psychology*. Harlow: Pearson

Kebbell, M.R. & Davies, G. M. (2006). *Practical Psychology for Forensic Investigations and Prosecutions*. Chichester: Wiley

Milne, R., & Bull, R. (1999). *Investigative Interviewing: Psychology and Practice*. Chichester: Wiley.

Wilcock, R., Bull, R., and Milne, R. (2008). *Witness identification in criminal cases: Psychology and practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### **9.2 Optional Materials**

Lindsay, R., Ross, R., Read, D., & Toglia, M. (2007). *Handbook of eyewitness psychology: Memory for people*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Newburn, T. Williamson, T & Wright, A. (2007). *Handbook of Criminal Investigation*. Devon, UK: Willan

Toglia, M. Read, D., Ross, R., & Lindsay, R. (2007). *Handbook of eyewitness psychology: Memory for events*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Williamson, T. (2006). *Investigative interviewing: Rights, research, regulation*. Devon, UK: Willan Publishing

## NOTES