Learning outcome: **With reference to relevant research studies, to what extent is one cognitive process reliable?**

Our cognitive process will be Memory-specifically reconstructive memory.

Command term: To what extent- Consider the merits or otherwise of an argument or concept. Conclusions should be presented clearly and supported with appropriate evidence and sound argument.

Evaluation of research on Eyewitness memory

Many studies that we have looked at were laboratory experiments. This raises the question of their ecological validity. There are many differences between eyewitness reports obtained in laboratory studies and those provided by eye-witnesses in real life situations.

* The victims themselves very often provide the reports of real accidents and crimes, unlike those in experimental studies. **Yuille and Cutshall (1986)** found that EWT of real life crimes remained accurate and were not influenced by leading questions.
* Watching a video is far less stressful than observing an accident or crime in real life and both anxiety and Weapons can influence EWT. **Loftus et al (1987) Weapons Effect and Deffenbacher et al. (2004) and Christianson and Hubinette (1993).**
* Cases of mistaken eyewitness identification in real life have real and often serious consequences. **Evidence from the Innocence Project**.
* Most of the memory distortions demonstrated seem to involve peripheral or minor details (e.g. the presence of broken glass) rather than central aspects of the scene (e.g. features of a criminal). **Loftus (1979) Red Wallet.**

However, although the differences between experimental demonstration and real-life cases of eyewitness testimony are real, they should not be over stated. **Ihlebaeket al (2003).**

**Conclusions: To what extent is memory reliable?**

Memory is an active reconstructive process. Our memory system is not a passive container of information. To a very great extent, every time we use it, stored information is altered. We live in a world which bombards us with far more information than we can handle. We are forced to simplify it by relying on our prior knowledge, which, according to many psychologists, is organized in the form of schemas. Schemas play an important role in comprehension of information, **Bransford and Johnson (1972)**, **Anderson and Pichert (1978).**

Of course, schematic processing can lead to error and distortion. **Bartlett (1932) and Allport and Postman (1947).** This may be because schema based expectations conflict with reality, or the wrong schema gets activated. It is because of this that errors and distortions in the way we perceive, remember and think are inevitable.

We concentrated on the effects on memory reliability of schematic processing, mostly in the area of eyewitness testimony where it has been most systematically investigated. Several studies including **Loftus and Palmer (1974)** point to the unreliability of eyewitness testimony. There are studies that dispute this claim however (see above). Research addressing specific factors or processes can no doubt help us predict the circumstances in which eyewitness testimony will be reliable or unreliable.

**TASKs**

1. Write out a possible SAQ using a level 1or 2 command term and briefly outline a response below.
2. Plan a response to the ERQ (at the top of this page) on the back of this page.