Points based on FAQs “**Social information processing is significantly prone to errors”: Critically discuss this statement with reference to at least 2 theories of social information processing**

1. **How should I define/what is the definition of Social Information processing?**

There are numerous definitions of Social Information Processing. A referenced definition of this term may be included but is not essential. You will be able to find numerous examples in your wider reading – but the only thing that is essential to your work is that you set out (in the intro) how you are defining SIP. Or you can define SIP, in its broadest sense, in your own words. For example, you can consider SIP as the way people process, take in, and make sense of information from the social world. So, schemas, stereotypes, heuristics etc are all theories of SIP (ways of understanding/explaining how we process information). In this way, most of the lecture and seminar content can be seen as examples of SIP in some way or other.

1. **Can I abbreviate?**

One you have used the term social information processing once and abbreviated it in brackets (SIP), it is perfectly acceptable to simply use SIP and thus save yourself words.

1. **Errors/biases/mistakes?**

We do not mind how you interpret, define or approach the term 'error' in the essay question. As long your intro gives a clear outline of how you will be tackling the question in your essay, any approach is fine. The Funder article we directed you to in the last seminar may also help you with this. You may also refer to as a bias as a type of error/something that may lead to an error (in that it prevent the full/complete processing of information).

1. **Can I talk about errors generally or be specific (e.g. errors in judgments)?**

You can talk about errors generally or be specific (if you wish to be specific, you simply have to outline this in the intro the reader knows what approach you are taking).

1. **I can’t find studies. Where do I get my info?**

Lecture and seminar slides do not contain all the delivered content (we say a lot more than is written on the slides) so do make notes in your sessions and use the recommended wider reading to support your essay writing. There are also many journal articles that will help you (you can find them through discover more, Psychinfo or Google scholar). Little tip: If you find an article you like, click cited by and you will get a list of other articles that have spoken about this research and may therfore be similar/relevant.

1. **A) Can I cover schemas and stereotypes as my two types of SIP or should I only use one?**

As you know, schemas are a cluster of information which allow us to make quick judgments. Stereotypes are a type of schema (a cluster of info based on visual factors etc). There are a number of acceptable approaches for this essay if you want to cover one/both of these:

a)You can cover schemas as one type of SIP and use stereotypes as an example. Then talk about another type of SIP entirely e.g. heuristics.

b)You just cover stereotypes or just schemas.

c) OR you can do both. HOWEVER, if you do both it is very important that you do not *repeat yourself*. In the past we have had essays that cover schemas and various points which make errors more or less likely. They have made the same/very similar points for stereotypes. This would not be acceptable and you would lose marks for showing less reading/originality. So, if you should choose this option, you should do so carefully.

**6. B) Can I cover 2 different theories of stereotypes as my two theories of SIP (see also question 8 below)?**

There are multiple attribution theories. I would suggest you focus on a specific theory, as each one suggests a different way in which social information is processed -thus there may be different social judgments being made (erroneous or otherwise) depending on the type of attributions used/applied. theories of attribution. You could consider doing two attribution theories if you wished and if you covered them sufficiently and it was not repetitive, that would be fine, but the point in 6a applies still..

1. **I have defined heuristics as a broad term, but am unsure whether I need to define/explain the different types of heuristics I will talk about.**

Heuristics is a term which means mental shortcut. If you wish to use this in your essay you should look at the specific types of heuristic (e.g availability heuristic) as they lead to processing of social information in different forms and may thus lead to different conclusions (erroneous or otherwise) e.g. I can easily call to mind an instance of terrorism so these things must be common (is this true?)

1. **If I focus on attribution theories do I have to choose a specific one or can I talk about it generally?**

I would suggest you focus on a specific theory, as each one suggests a different way in which social information is processed -thus there may be different social judgments being made (erroneous or otherwise) depending on the type of attributions used/applied. theories of attribution. For example, Heider’s talks about an attribution theory whereby people make internal attributions in some circumstances and external ones on others. So you would need to explain this (briefly). This may then lead you on to talk about whether this leads to errors. For example, you may want to talk about fundamental attribution error/bias which results from this internal and external attributions.

1. **Is it the schemas/stereotype/attribution/ heuristic (etc etc) that is prone to error?**

This is a phrasing question and it is addressed in seminar 2. Theories of SIP explain how we process info from the social world, this can sometimes lead us to making an error (or incorrect judgment or being biased in our opinions/beliefs). As such, a statement such as “schemas are significantly prone to error” are not 100% accurate in terms of phrasing. Attribution theory does not have errors per say. Attribution theory explains why/how errors (of SIP) may occur**.**

1. **Do we need an intro?**

Yes we want an introduction! As I have said in the guidance notes and in the seminar sessions - we want to see (and credit) and introduction which sets the scene and sets out how the essay will be approached (and even what will be concluded). See seminar slides for more info. Whilst this may be a stylistic preference and some modules may suggest you do not include this, for this module, please do include this (please not comment or mark students down for this as I have asked them to do it and want to credit this, in the same way as we would credit a structured conclusion)

1. **Do I need to examine the strength and weaknesses of studies?**

Yes, but only do so with a purpose (a clear link back to the question). Examining the strengths of a study will not likely help you address the question (unless you are presenting a counter point). The limitations of a study may be useful but only of these points are applied back to the question (please check the guidance document for more on this).

1. **Where do I find studies from (I can’t find studies that look at “errors” specifically)?**

When looking for research, a good place to start is the lecture and seminar slides. If you find one you like, read the full article and look at the studies they cite in the intro. When using Google scholar, you can also slick cited by for a list of research which is more recent and often builds upon the core findings. You can also search for/cite studies which look at factors/variables which affect the given type of processing you are looking to use. For example, gender, age, ethnicity, mental health, individual differences in cognition, mood, time constraints, cognitive load etc etc etc (the list is endless). Just remember to link back to the question once you have raised such points (See CW guidance notes for more specific help on this).

You may very well not find studies referring to people making “errors”. More like you will find, for example, people using stereotypes under some experimental condition an don’t others. Your challenge is then to use this finding to make a point in relation to the question. Focus on telling the story.

For example, “Smith et al (year) found that those who were higher in personal need for structure (PNS) were more likely to utilise stereotypes when making their decisions. Similarly, it has indicated that people are more likely to do xxxxx, when they are yyyy (Bob et al, year). This suggests that the extent to which people use stereotypes to process social information may be mediated by individual differences in PNS. As such it may be argued that SIP is not significantly prone to error but rather, this error may be more likely in some individuals more than others”.

1. **What is the essay title?**

'Social information processing is significantly prone to errors': Critically discuss this statement with reference to at least 2 theories of social information processing.

1. **Are in-text references included in the word count? Do we include the reference list in the word count?**

It’s just the reference in the list at the end that don’t count. If you’re struggling with the word count, I suggest you take a look through your work again. 2000 words is plenty so if you’re over the limit,  it is likely that there are some places where you can be more succinct. There may also be some unnecessary description.

1. **Do we have to criticise the studies based on methodological grounds or would it be appropriate just use studies which counter the findings of a previous piece of research?**

**As noted in your cwork guidance, there are two approaches here. Either/or/both are fine**

A) Will people always make schema based errors (for example) or are there occasions where this will not happen – e.g. when people have more time etc? What does this suggest about the nature of the statement “SIP is significantly prone to error”?

B) Is the research that has shown that people will make errors of sufficient quality in order to convince us that SIP is significantly prone to errors? If the research is rubbish, maybe we can’t be all that sure?

1. **The majority of the essay is going to argue in agreement with the statement that SIP is prone to error, are we still supposed to include an argument against the statement to show balance and critical evaluation?**

It is important to show a balanced argument in your essay. Also remember that better essays do not just focus on SIP “error” but are able to take a more balanced view and consider cases when this may not be the case. After all, the statement in the essay is quite broad and pretty critical about humans’ ability to process social information. Is this outlook a bit too cynical?

1. **Shall we use rhetorical question in our academic writing?**

NO, this can seem a bit lazy and should not be needed to make an argument. You should be answering the questions not asking more of them.

1. **How many references should I include? How many studies?**

This is an impossible question to answer. Clearly, it is important to show breadth and scope of knowledge. However, there isn’t a magic number. You should back up all your points with academic references and use journal articles to show you have read widely.

1. **I’ve gone over the word count, will I be penalised?**

We do not operate deductive marking so you will not have marks removed. However, the word count is there for a reason and we award marks for style of writing. This includes having flowing points which are made clearly and precisely. Likewise, critical points are more important than excessive description at this level of work.

You cannot cover everything in your work, the important thing is to select the strongest points to make your argument. Sometimes this means being strict with yourself and cutting out some of your less developed points. Often students get towards the end of an essay and seem to be running out of words. This results in some small, underdeveloped paragraphs. If this happens, take a step back and ask yourself, do I need to include this? Or will the maker look at this and say the point has not been expanded/developed enough? Alternatively, look back though your essay and see if there are places where you could make your points more succinctly and/or remove some unnecessary description. Similarly, if you’re on 2,200 words, you’re within the allotted “10%” leeway area. However, it is likely that you have been verbose in parts and can reduce this down somewhat.

1. **Are the sample essays on BB or can you send them to me please?**

Hopefully you were able to take inspiration and notes during the session itself, but these essays represent just one way to tackle the question, the main purpose of the session was to show you common pitfalls and demonstrate some good practice. As stated in the session (and on the seminar slides on BB) these are not available owing to concerns about plagiarism and stifling original thought.

1. **Should I include xx (insert any example here) theory or xxx (insert any example here) study?**

The answer to questions about content is always that it is about *how* you use something, as opposed to there being things that clearly must (and must not) be included. If you think you can use this literature to make a relevant point in relation to the question (i.e. whether this suggests that SIP is indeed sig prone to error, or not) then you can, of course, use it. If you are unsure, I would suggest that you focus on points that you would find easier to make.

1. **Can I email you my essay plan or essay draft?**

Staff can’t look at essay drafts at all. The also can’t look at plans over email, its departmental policy that we look at them in person/writing so they have to be brought to the seminar or to staff office ours if there is a special reason that you can’t attend your seminar.

1. **I’m confused about the essay. Can you offer me some advice?**

Staff sympathise that students may struggling with assignments; University essays are supposed to be challenging and we’re here to help you. However, when you are emailing staff, please try to have specific questions that we can answer over email. If your questions are long, asking in person will be easier. If you don’t have a specific question and you’re just finding it hard to know where to start, please don’t panic. Follow these steps: A) look through this document and the essay guidance document B) Make some notes on what *you* think you would include and/or anything that doesn’t make sense to you C) bring these notes to the seminar and/or the module leader for discussion.

1. **Is stigma a type of SIP?**

I would not really class stigma as a theory of SIP. A stigma is a mark of disgrace associated with a particular person, quality or circumstance. Rather, I think it would be fair to say that stigma’s often result from stereotypes. As such you can certainly talk about stigma if you wish but this would be part of your coverage of stereotype, rather than a separate facet.

1. **How many points should I include on each section?**

This is a tricky question to answer. It is more about suitably developing and supporting your points/argument, there is no set number of points you should be making. Ultimately, the marker will be assessing whether you have sufficiently answered the question.

1. **Do we provide strengths and weaknesses of theories of SIP or of the studies?**

Remember, this essay is about critical evaluation with a purpose ! Yes, but only do so with a purpose (a clear link back to the question). Examining the strengths of a study or theory will not likely help you address the question (unless you are presenting a counter point). The limitations of a study or a theory may be useful but only of these points are applied back to the question (please check the guidance document for more on this).

**An example approach/structure (please note that the following is an indicative example of one approach only!! Designed to give you an example of a higher liver critical rgument ending with “so what” sentences:**

Introduction (structure outlined in seminars)

One parag on schemas and how they may lead to errors or bias. With supporting evidence. *It may therefore appear that SIP is sig prone to errors*

However, research suggests that this may not always be the vase. It has been found, for example, that when people have more time (REF) they xx complete the sentence xx. Similarly, it has been found that xxxxx (REF – on another factor that mediates schema use). *It therefore appears that schema-based SIP may not be sig prone to error, but rather that schema use and associated errors may be more likely in some cases but less so in others. The notion that SIP is sig prone to error may therefore be too broad/overly critical.*

Perhaps another parag further expanding on more research of this nature ending ona similar “so what” statement = summing up the relevance of the parag and linking to the qu with your own words (not ending on a refernce110

Same again with theory number 2

Structured conclusion summarising your argument and ending again by answering the question