

## IMPLICATIONS OF SAMPLING STRATEGIES

The specification identifies **random**, **volunteer**, and **opportunity sampling**, so these are the only ones that can be asked about in an examination.

All three of these methods *can* produce a **biased sample**, that is, a sample that does not reflect the underlying **population** to whom the researcher wishes to **generalise** the results. In general, **large samples** are better than sample samples, but even a large sample size does not guarantee that the sample will not be biased. This is because in all three kinds of sampling, the sample may be biased because it is **not representative**.

For example, **volunteer sampling** can produce a sample that differs from the population in terms of its personality characteristics. People who volunteer for psychological investigations may have little else to do with their time, may be desperate to form friendships, and so on.

**Opportunity sampling** uses whoever happens to be available at the time the study is being conducted. Most psychological research is conducted in universities and uses students as the sample. Like volunteers, students may not be representative of the underlying population.

At first sight, **random sampling** might appear to avoid the pitfalls of the other two methods. After all, a random sample is defined as one in which everyone has an equal chance of being selected for the study. However, just because a sample is random, it does not necessarily mean that it will be representative.

For example, suppose you wanted to select a random sample of four children from a classroom of thirty. In the class, there are fifteen boys and fifteen girls. For your sample to be representative of that population, 50% should be boys (i.e. two) and 50% girls (i.e. 2). However, because everyone has an equal chance of being selected, you may randomly select three girls and one boy which would not, of course, be representative of the population from which it has been drawn.

A method which does guarantee representativeness is **stratified sampling**. However, this is a more time consuming method, and researchers typically do not use it for that reason. This is why we must always look at the sample that was used in a psychological investigation and treated any conclusions from a study with caution.