

Student activities

Tutors, examiners, researchers and textbook writers all tell us how important it is to be active in our learning. *Mark Griffiths* gives some useful activities that will consolidate and enhance your understanding of the article you have just read.



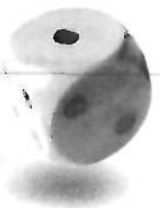
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Cognitive bias and skill in gambling

Exercise 1

Defining gambling

Spend 5–10 minutes on your own trying to devise your own definition of gambling. Share your definition with others in the class and discuss the problems in trying to specify it.



Post-task discussion

- (a) Was the task difficult or easy?
- (b) What parameters were you were working within?
- (c) Does your definition of gambling only include money or does it extend to other things of material value that can be gambled with (personal possessions)?
- (d) Do your definitions cover all types of gambling, such as:
 - gambling in a casino
 - gambling on the stock market
 - gambling on knowing the right answer to a television premium-rate telephone quiz
 - gambling on the outcome of an online auction

If not, why not?

Exercise 2

Evaluating the 'thinking aloud' method

The method used to research gambling activity in the cognitive bias study was the 'thinking aloud' method. In the next exercise, the idea is to use the method on an everyday activity to see what the advantages and disadvantages of the method are.



(a) To do this, choose a partner in the class and each of you decides on an activity. One person engages in this activity and the other person monitors their cognitive activity using the 'thinking aloud' method. For instance, get a person to play a video game for 10 minutes while 'thinking aloud'. During this period, the observer monitors (and records) all their verbalisations. Ideally, this is done using a tape recorder, but shorthand notes may suffice for the sake of speed and practicality in the classroom.

Remember that the 'thinking aloud' method consists of verbalising every thought that passes through a person's mind while they are doing something. It is important to remember the following points while doing this exercise. Remind the person being monitored to do the following:

- 1 Say everything that goes through their mind and do not censor any thoughts, even if they seem irrelevant.
- 2 Keep talking as continuously as possible, even if what is said is not clearly structured.
- 3 Speak clearly.
- 4 Do not hesitate to use fragmented sentences if necessary.
- 5 Do not worry about speaking in complete sentences.
- 6 Do not justify anything that is said.

Post-task discussion

Ask the person how easy it was for them to think aloud.

- Did they find it easy or hard to do? Why?
- Did it make a difference if the activity they engaged in was something they were good at or not?

In the gambling study, it was observed that some 'skilled' gamblers found it hard to verbalise their thoughts as their gambling behaviour was on automatic pilot. This suggests that the more competent and skilled the person is in the activity, the harder it may be to access their cognitive thoughts.

Exercise 3

Multiple choice recall

Once you have read the full study, there is a quick multiple-choice test that you can do on the internet. (My thanks to Kim Higgins for designing this.)



Log onto the website link at: www.psychexchange.co.uk/_hotpotatoes/21125361561235316453.htm and answer as many questions as you can, as quickly as possible. The test covers a wide range of areas that include all the basics of the study. Four of the questions are given below, so that you have an idea of the quiz's content. Answers are given on page 32.

1 While 'thinking aloud', the gamblers made some irrational verbalisations. Which one of the following statements made by the gamblers is not an irrational verbalisation?

- A The machine likes me.
- B I won 40 pence there I think.
- C I lost there because I wasn't concentrating.
- D That's a good little machine.

2 The study involved the use of triangulation. Which is the correct definition out of the following?

- A Using triangle-based software to map out the results.
- B A technique that involves a triangle of observers to collect the data.
- C Using a variety of methods to study one issue.
- D Three gamblers playing the fruit machines at the same time.

3 The ethics of the study may be questioned. Which of the following may be seen as a violation of the ethical guidelines?

- A Giving the gamblers money for free gambles.
- B Asking the gamblers to think out loud.
- C Classifying some of the participants as regular gamblers.
- D The researcher standing close to the gamblers while they are playing.

4 This study collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Which of the following formed the qualitative data?

- A The number of times the gamblers stopped for a break.
- B The gamblers' verbalisations.
- C The observation of the techniques used by the gamblers.
- D The behavioural data (number of wins, time taken to play, etc.)

You may also like to try out some other web resources relating to the study. One of the more fun ones is a crossword on the study compiled by Rebecca Semmens-Wheeler of Sussex University at: www.psychexchange.co.uk/resource/649/

Exercise 4

Excessive gambling as an addiction

There are number of things to consider when looking at gambling addiction. Get into groups in your class and discuss the following questions, spending about 5 minutes on each question. Share your answers with the rest of the class.



- How much control do people have over their gambling behaviour?
- What are the similarities and differences between chemical addictions and a behavioural addiction (like gambling)?
- Is a gambling addiction something that can happen to anyone (like catching measles) or are some people more likely to develop these behaviours than others? If so, then why? Is it due to chemical imbalances or genes or family background or something else inside them?

Post-task discussion

- As with Exercise 1, was the task difficult or easy?
- What parameters were you were working within?
- Thinking about these questions, it was probably useful to consider the psychological evidence when answering them. Are the methods of asking people to describe their experience (like the 'thinking aloud' method) the best way of capturing what is going on?
- Are there other ways of collecting reliable evidence about gambling and other potentially addictive behaviours?