

Open Your Class With This Tomorrow *Talking to Strangers*

Word Completion Task

Directions: The instructor should distribute the handout on the following page to students. Ask students to leave the paper upside down until the directions are explained. All students should begin at the same time. Students should NOT write their names on their papers. When the task has been completed, students should again flip their papers upside down. Before collecting the papers, ask students to read through the list they wrote one more time but do not change anything, this should help them recall the words for later evaluation. Collect each paper and randomly distribute to others in the class. Ask the students to read through the list of words written by one of their classmates. After they have read through the list their classmate wrote, ask the students to answer the following questions.

1. What do you think your choices of words say about you? For example, if you completed T O _ _ _ as Touch does that suggest you are a different kind of person than if you answered Tough?
2. What do you think the words you just read from your classmate say about this person?

Debriefing:

A team of psychologists lead by Emily Pronin tried this exercise and found that people reported that when assessing the result of their own word completion exercise, people were far more likely to declare that the words did not mean anything and were not a measure of their personality. When describing their own responses participants made statements such as “I don’t really think that my word completions reveal that much about me” or “I do not think there was any relationship, the words were just random.” We tend to attribute our own behaviors to situational or external factors. When asked about other people’s word list, they were far more likely to suggest internal (dispositional) characteristics as explanations for the word choice. “He doesn’t seem to read too much since the natural (to me) completion of B _ _ K would be book. *Beak* seems to indicate deliberate unfocused of mind. I get the feeling that whoever did this is pretty vain. The person is goal-oriented and thinks about competitive settings.”

This is an example of the **actor-observer effect**. When judging our own behavior, we are far more likely to make situational or external attributions and see our behavior changing based on the situation that we are in. When we are judging others behaviors, however, we are more likely to make internal (dispositional)attributions. This activity can also be used to demonstrate the **fundamental attribution error**. In this case, students would not be asked about their own words, only asked to explain the words others choose. In the fundamental attribution error, we are evaluating other behaviors while in the actor-observer effect, we are judging both our own behavior and the behavior of others.

Word Completion Task

Directions: For each of the following prompts, fill in the blanks to create a complete word. Do this as quickly as possible.

1. G L _ _
2. _ _ T E R
3. S _ _ R E
4. P _ N
5. T O U _
6. A T T _ _ _
7. B O _ _
8. F L _ _ T
9. S L _ T
10. S T R _ _ _
11. G O _ _
12. C H E _ _
13. _ _ O R
14. S L _ _ _
15. S C _ _ _
16. _ _ N N E R
17. B _ _ T
18. P O _ _ _
19. B A _ _
20. _ _ _ E A T