

AP Psychology & Sociology Electives

Social Psychology Experiments &
Research Methods Pack

Grades 10–12 | 15 Interactive Activities

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Activity 1: Introduction to Social Psychology & the Scientific Method

Objective: Students will understand the scope of social psychology and how the scientific method is applied to study social behavior.

Background: Social psychology is the scientific study of how people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others. Unlike sociology, which focuses on group-level dynamics and institutions, social psychology often focuses on the individual within a social context. To avoid bias and ensure accuracy, social psychologists rely on the scientific method: forming a hypothesis, operationalizing variables, collecting data, and analyzing results.

Activity Instructions:

1. Read the background above and discuss with a partner the difference between a personal anecdote and scientific evidence.
2. Identify a common social belief (e.g., 'Opposites attract' or 'Birds of a feather flock together').
3. Formulate a testable hypothesis based on one of these beliefs.
4. Identify the Independent Variable (IV) and Dependent Variable (DV) of your hypothesis.

Reflection Questions:

1. Why is it dangerous to rely solely on intuition to explain social behavior?
2. How does the scientific method protect researchers from confirmation bias?

Activity 2: Conformity Demonstration: The Asch Paradigm

Objective: Students will experience and analyze the pressure to conform in a group setting, differentiating between normative and informational social influence.

Background: Solomon Asch's classic conformity experiments (1951) demonstrated that individuals will often go along with a group's incorrect answer to avoid social rejection (normative influence) or because they assume the group is better informed (informational influence). In his study, 75% of participants conformed at least once.

Activity Instructions (Class Demonstration):

1. **Setup:** The teacher selects 4-5 'confederates' (secret actors) and 1 'naive participant' (unsuspecting student). The rest of the class observes.
2. **Task:** Display a slide with one standard line and three comparison lines (A, B, C). The correct answer is obvious.
3. **Execution:** Go around the room. Confederates intentionally choose the wrong line. The naive participant answers last.
4. **Debrief:** Reveal the true nature of the experiment immediately. Discuss the participant's feelings and the observers' thoughts.

Analysis & Application:

1. Did the naive participant conform? Why or why not?
2. Was this an example of normative or informational social influence? Explain your reasoning.
3. How might the results change if the task was highly ambiguous (e.g., identifying a very faint sound) rather than obvious?

Activity 3: Obedience & Authority: Understanding Milgram

Objective: Students will analyze Milgram's obedience experiment, evaluate its ethical implications, and understand the agentic state.

Background: Stanley Milgram (1963) designed a study to test how far individuals would go in obeying an authority figure. Participants ('teachers') were instructed by an experimenter to administer increasingly severe electric shocks to a 'learner' for incorrect answers. Despite the learner's protests, a majority of participants (65%) administered the maximum 450-volt shock. Milgram attributed this to the *agentic state*, where individuals passively follow orders because they believe the authority figure assumes responsibility.

Activity Instructions:

1. Read the background and review the diagram of Milgram's experimental setup.
2. In small groups, discuss whether you believe you would have obeyed the experimenter. Be honest.
3. Identify two ethical violations in Milgram's original study (hint: consider deception and psychological harm).
4. Propose how Milgram's study could be replicated ethically using modern APA guidelines.

Ethical Dilemma Discussion:

Milgram argued that the scientific value of his findings justified the temporary distress caused to participants. Critics argued that the ends do not justify the means. Where do you stand? Write a 1-paragraph defense of your position using specific ethical principles (e.g., informed consent, debriefing, protection from harm).

Activity 4: Attribution Error Analysis & Scenario Cards

Objective: Students will differentiate between the Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE) and the Self-Serving Bias (SSB) through the analysis of 12 real-world scenarios.

Background: Fundamental Attribution Error is the tendency to overemphasize personal traits (dispositional factors) and underestimate situational factors when explaining *others'* behavior. **Self-Serving Bias** is the tendency to attribute our own successes to internal factors and our failures to external (situational) factors to protect our self-esteem.

Instructions: Read each scenario card. Identify whether the primary error is FAE or SSB. Explain the internal vs. external attributions being made.

Card 1: The Bad Driver

Scenario: You are driving and someone speeds past you, weaving through traffic. You think, 'They are a reckless, selfish jerk.' You later learn they are rushing a sick child to the hospital.

Error Type: FAE

Student Analysis:

Card 2: The Failing Student

Scenario: A classmate fails their AP Psychology exam. You assume it is because they are lazy and don't study. In reality, they were working a night shift to support their family.

Error Type: FAE

Student Analysis:

Card 3: The Acing Student

Scenario: You get an A on your Sociology essay. You tell your friends it is because you are highly intelligent and a great writer.

Error Type: SSB

Student Analysis:

Card 4: The Lost Match

Scenario: You lose a competitive tennis match. You tell everyone that the referee made terrible calls and the sun was in your eyes.

Error Type: SSB

Student Analysis:

Card 5: The Rude Coworker

Scenario: A new employee at your part-time job snaps at you. You assume they have a terrible personality. You don't realize they just received a distressing phone call.

Error Type: FAE

Student Analysis:

Card 6: The Successful Project

Scenario: Your group project wins first place. You believe the win was entirely due to your leadership and the late hours you put in.

Error Type: SSB

Student Analysis:

Activity 13: Data Analysis & Interpretation Basics

Objective: Students will calculate and interpret measures of central tendency and variance to analyze experimental data.

Key Concepts:

Mean: The mathematical average of all scores (Sum of scores / Number of scores).

Median: The exact middle score when all scores are arranged in numerical order.

Mode: The most frequently occurring score.

Standard Deviation: A measure of how spread out the scores are from the mean. A small SD means scores cluster tightly; a large SD means scores are widely spread.

Practice Data Set: A researcher measures the number of aggressive behaviors in a group of 7 children after watching a violent cartoon. The scores are: 4, 2, 5, 5, 3, 10, 5.

Calculations:

1. Mean: _____

2. Median: _____

3. Mode: _____

Teacher Key: Mean = $(4+2+5+5+3+10+5)/7 = 34/7 = 4.86$. Median (ordered: 2, 3, 4, 5, 5, 5, 10) = 5. Mode = 5.

Interpretation Question: One score (10) is much higher than the rest. How does this outlier affect the mean compared to the median? Which measure of central tendency best represents the 'typical' participant in this data set?

Activity 14: APA Format Reference Guide

Objective: Students will learn the APA 7th Edition formatting rules for citing academic sources and creating a reference page.

General Rules for a Reference Page:

- Title the page **References** (bold, centered at the top of the page).
- Double-space all entries.
- Use a **hanging indent** for each entry (first line flush left, subsequent lines indented 0.5 inches).
- Alphabetize entries by the first author's last name.
- Italicize titles of books, journals, and volume numbers.

Journal Article Format:

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Year). Title of the article: Capitalize only the first letter. *Title of the Periodical*, Volume(Issue), Page–Page. <https://doi.org/xxxxx>

Journal Article Example:

Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: A minority of one against a unanimous majority. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied*, 70(9), 1–70. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0093718>

Book Format:

Author, A. A. (Year). *Title of work: Capitalize only the first word and proper nouns.* Publisher.

Book Example:

Myers, D. G. (2018). *Social psychology* (12th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Activity: Create a properly formatted APA reference for the following mock source:

Book written by Amelia Vance and Jordan Lee, published in 2022, titled 'The digital generation: Social media and the teenage brain', published by Academic Press.

Your APA Reference:

Teacher Key: Vance, A., & Lee, J. (2022). The digital generation: Social media and the teenage brain. Academic Press.

Activity 15: Student Mini-Research Project (Culminating Activity)

Objective: Students will independently execute a social psychology research project from hypothesis to final APA-formatted paper, demonstrating mastery of course concepts.

Project Overview: It is time to become the researcher! Using the Research Proposal Template (Activity 12), you will conduct an ethical, small-scale study on a social psychology topic of your choice. You will collect data, analyze it, and write a formal scientific paper.

Step-by-Step Requirements:

Step 1: Proposal Approval: Submit your completed Research Proposal (Activity 12) to your instructor. You may NOT collect data until this is approved for ethics and feasibility.

Step 2: Data Collection: Collect data from your participants using your approved method (survey, observation, etc.). Aim for a minimum of 10-15 participants for meaningful analysis.

Step 3: Data Analysis: Calculate the mean, median, and mode for quantitative data, or identify themes in qualitative data. Create at least one graph (bar chart or scatterplot) to visualize your results.

Step 4: Final Paper: Write a 2-3 page paper using APA format (see Activity 14) containing the following sections:

Introduction: Introduce the topic, summarize prior research, and state your hypothesis.

Method: Describe your participants, materials, and procedure in enough detail that someone could replicate it.

Results: Report your data and statistics. Include your graph.

Discussion: Did your results support your hypothesis? Explain why or why not. Identify limitations of your study and suggest future research.

Section	Exceeds Expectations (4)	Meets Expectations (3)	Approaching (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Methodology & Design	IV/DV flawlessly defined; rigorous controls; ethical considerations thoroughly addressed.	IV/DV defined; basic controls present; ethical considerations addressed.	IV/DV unclear or missing controls; superficial ethics.	Cannot identify IV/DV; no controls; unethical.
Data Analysis	Appropriate statistics calculated flawlessly; graph is highly accurate and clear.	Statistics calculated correctly; graph included but minor formatting issues.	Some calculation errors; graph missing or misleading.	No analysis provided; missing graph.
Discussion & APA	Deep insight into limitations; flawless APA formatting throughout.	Adequate discussion of results; minor APA errors.	Superficial discussion; multiple APA errors.	No discussion; ignored APA format.

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