

Standardisation

Standardisation means keeping everything the same for all participants so that the investigation is **fair**. For example, consider the instructions that are given to the participants. In order to ensure that all of the participants get precisely the same instructions, the experimenter should write them down. He or she should then either read them to the participants, or ask the participants to read them to themselves. This makes sure that the experiment is fair, and we can be sure that the IV is the variable that has affected the DV (and not a confounding variable).

In similar fashion, standardised procedures should be used for the collection of data.

Suppose we want to assess the effects of loud noise on learning from a book chapter. We might ask the participants to write down everything they could remember about the chapter. However, it would be very hard to compare the recalls of different participants with any precision. A standardised procedure would be to ask all of the participants the same set of, say, 20 questions relating to the chapter. Each participant then obtains a score between 0 and 20 as a measure of what he or she has learned.

Is it easy to make sure that standardised procedures are being used? No, it is not.

One way in which control can be exercised is by ensuring that all participants undergo the same experiences. Essentially this means ensuring that they are all given identical instructions in exactly the same way, as described below.

Standardised procedures

To ensure that all participants have the same experience, researchers should ensure that they are all tested:

- In the same place, with the same equipment and materials placed in the same way.
- Under the same conditions, so the level of lighting, noise and heat remains the same for all participants.
- At roughly the same time of day, as people may behave differently if tested at nine o'clock in the morning rather than five o'clock at night.
- Given identical standardised instructions in exactly the same way.

Before you collect your data

After you have designed your study and taken ethical issues into consideration you must write the brief, standardised instructions and debrief before any data can be obtained. This information will go in the **procedure** and **appendix** sections of your report.

Briefing: what is said to a prospective participant. At the end of this the person agrees to take part (i.e. gives their consent) or refuses. Make sure the brief includes the aim of your study (e.g. what is being investigated).

For example:

"I am a psychology student conducting a study investigating language. The study would only take 5 minutes of your time. Your results would be confidential. Would you like to take part?"

Standardised Instructions: these are given in the chosen location and there may be more than one set for different (IV) conditions of the investigation. The standardised instructions are important, as each participant must receive the same instructions so they understand what to do in the study. Also, it ensures that each participant is treated the same and should help eliminate experimenter effects. You can read the instructions to the participant(s), or let them read the instructions themselves.

For example:

"If at any time you feel uncomfortable and wish to leave the experiment you may do so.

If at the end of the experiment you wish your results to be removed, they can be.

All results will be kept in the strictest confidence.

- 1. Open envelope one and remove the sheet inside (sheet one).*
 - 2. Look at the list of pictures and words shown.*
 - 3. When you are told to do so replace sheet one back inside the envelope, and re-seal it.*
 - 4. Turn over sheet two and read the instructions.*
 - 5. Once you have completed the experiment, hand all the sheets and envelopes in.*
 - 6. After completing the experiment, please do not discuss the experiment with any other participant. "*
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Debriefing: this is where all is explained to the participant who is thanked at the end of his/her contribution. Makes sure the aim of your study is included and also a reference to ethical guidelines.

Make sure in your debriefing statement that you refer to participant's results being confidential. Next, make sure that participants' names are not shown/written on the results sheets, raw data or anywhere else in the report (re: confidentiality). The best thing to do here is to cross them out.

Again, you can read the instructions to the participant(s), or let them read the instructions themselves.

For example:

"Thank you for taking part in this experiment. The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of language (i.e. two different lists of words) on the reproduction of a series of abstract figures (pictures) i.e. the effect of language on thought. This was done by splitting the participants into two groups. Each group saw a different list of words. If after reproducing the picture they are distorted towards their given verbal labels then the

experiment will show the language effects thought. Please remember that your results are confidential and you can choose to withdraw your results at any time. Do you have any questions?"

Now write the following sections for your investigation

Brief

Standardised instructions

Debriefing

Notes