

Demonstration: The Effects of Framing and Anchoring on Judgment

The following allows you to illustrate the effect of framing (the phrasing of a question or problem) and anchoring (influencing judgments by subtly inserting reference values that affect how respondents arrive at estimates) on decision-making.

Have two volunteers leave the room very briefly while you explain your procedure to the rest of the class and ask for their predictions about the results. Then bring one volunteer back and ask him or her to quickly offer a reasoned guess in response to each of the following:

- What is $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8$?
- Is the cost of the average college textbook more or less than \$70?
- Estimate an answer - What is the cost of the average college textbook?
- When Mohandas Gandhi, the Mahatma, was killed in January, 1948, was he older or younger than 9 years-old?
- Estimate an answer – How old was Gandhi when he was killed?

Now bring in the second volunteer and ask him or her:

- What is $8 \times 7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1$?
- Is the cost of the average college textbook more or less than \$700?
- Estimate an answer – What is the cost of the average college textbook?
- When Mohandas Gandhi, the Mahatma, was killed in January, 1948, was he older or younger than 140 years-old?
- Estimate an answer – How old was Gandhi when he was killed?

Both $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8$ and $8 \times 7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1$ equal 40,320. You'll almost certainly get higher estimates in the second condition as compared to the first, although both sets of guesses are likely to be well off target.

It's hard to precisely determine the average cost of a college text. Suffice it to say, it's probably more than \$70, and, happily, less than \$700.

We extracted the 'Gandhi' example from work done by Fritz Strack and Thomas Mussweiler. They found that the average estimate of Gandhi's age at his death in the first condition was '50'. In the second, it was '67'. Gandhi would have turned 79 later that year.

Alternatively, you could conduct this same progression with the entire class, using a PowerPoint presentation. Simply create single slides for each of the above questions, asking half of your class to respond in writing to the first five items, while the other half looks away. The latter half would silently answer the second set of questions, while the first respondents look away.