NO PREP

The Power of Attention

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

The Power of Attention

Introduction

Attention is a fundamental cognitive process that allows us to focus on specific stimuli while ignoring others. It plays a crucial role in perception, memory, and learning. Without attention, we would be overwhelmed by the constant barrage of sensory information and would be unable to perform even the most basic tasks.

Selective Attention

Selective attention refers to the ability to focus on a particular stimulus while ignoring others. For example, when we are engaged in a conversation, we can tune out background noise and focus on the person we are speaking to. Selective attention is essential for performing tasks that require concentration and focus. One of the classic experiments on selective attention is the dichotic listening task. In this task, participants are presented with different messages in each ear and are asked to attend to one message while ignoring the

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Divided Attention

Divided attention refers to the ability to attend to multiple stimuli simultaneously. While we are generally better at focusing on a single task at a time, we can sometimes divide our attention between two or more tasks. However, the ability to divide attention is limited, and when we try to focus on too many things at once, our performance on each task tends to suffer.

Automatic Processing

Some tasks become so automatic that we can perform them without conscious effort. This is known as automatic processing. For example, once we have learned to read, we can read words without consciously thinking about each letter. Automatic

processing is efficient, as it frees up our cognitive resources for other tasks. However, automatic processing can also be a disadvantage. Once a task has become automatic, it can be difficult to change our behavior, even if it is no longer adaptive. For example, it can be difficult to break bad habits, such as smoking or nail-biting, because these behaviors have become automatic.

The Stroop Effect

The Stroop effect is a classic demonstration of the limitations of automatic processing. In the Stroop task, participants are asked to name the color of ink used to write words that are incongruent with the meaning of the words. For example, the word "red" may be written in blue ink. The Stroop effect shows that it is difficult to ignore the meaning of the word and to focus solely on the color of the ink. This is because reading is such an automatic process that it interferes with our ability to focus on the color of the ink.

Primary Source: The Psychology of Attention (William James, Principles of Psychology)

"Attention is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem to be several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought. It involves withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others."

1. According to James, what is attention?

2. How does James's definition of attention relate to the concept of selective attention?

Multiple Choice

1. The ability to focus on a particular stimulus while ignoring others is called:
    a) Selective attention
    b) Divided attention
    c) Automatic processing
    d) Sustained attention

2. The Stroop effect demonstrates the limitations of:
    a) Sustained attention
    b) Divided attention
    c) Selective attention
    d) Automatic processing

3. Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of automatic processing?
    a) Fast and nearly effortless
    b) Accurate
    c) Requires conscious effort
    d) Efficient

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Selective attention	A) The performance of a task without conscious effort
2. ___ Divided attention	B) The phenomenon of interference between automatic and controlled processes
3. ___ Automatic processing	C) The ability to focus on multiple stimuli simultaneously
4. ___ Stroop effect	D) The ability to focus on a particular stimulus while ignoring others

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. The _____ effect demonstrates the limitations of automatic processing.

2. _____ is the ability to focus on a particular stimulus while ignoring others.

3. The process of performing a task without conscious effort is called _____.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Explain the difference between selective attention and divided attention.

_____

_____

_____

2. Discuss the role of attention in perception.

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3. Describe the Stroop effect and explain why it is difficult to overcome.

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