

Before & After Examples of Insert Text

Below are some examples of inserts that needed very little editing, some that needed minor editing, and some that needed major editing and rewriting.

1) Inserts that needed very little editing (if any).

These study explanations adhered to our format for insert sections, and included very little jargon. They were used as-is, with the addition of a picture of the research stimuli.

“Nonverbal Behavior” from the MIT Kanwisher Lab

How do kids learn to read “body language”?

Can you tell what someone’s thinking even when they don’t say anything? We want to know if you’re a good “face detective” who can read people’s body language to figure out what they might be thinking and feeling.

In our experiment, we show children videos of other children playing with some toys at the Museum of Science. Sometimes the children were playing all by themselves and sometimes they were playing with somebody else, but all of our videos show only one child playing and not what is going on nearby. In our study, we ask people, can you tell whether the child is playing with someone or playing alone? If someone else is there, is it someone the child knows, like their mother or father, or is it someone they don’t know very well?

These games are designed to tell us how kids use face and body movement to understand social interactions. Can kids “decode” social behavior? How quickly can they tell what’s going on in a social setting? How do children of all ages read other people’s facial expressions and gestures in order to figure out what’s going on around them?

By playing these games with kids, we can figure out how kids are able to understand social situations in everyday life. If we can figure out what kind of judgments typically developing children are able to make (and how quickly they are able to make them) we can learn how to help children who have problems understanding social behavior.

This research is conducted by the Kanwisher Lab at MIT.

“Cooperation” from the Harvard Laboratory for Developmental Studies

How do children decide who to play with?

Both children and adults face choices about when to cooperate and who to cooperate with. As adults, we sometimes base these decisions on information we hear from others. Do children rely on the advice and experiences of others when deciding who to play with? How do they decide whose advice to follow? We are exploring whether children listen to others’ opinions when deciding whether to share with another person and when deciding between cooperation partners.

In this study, children ages 3-10 will decide who they would want to play games with. Children will do this by choosing between possible partners presented on a computer screen. Before making a choice, children will be introduced to other individuals who provide conflicting information about these characters. For example, Alex might tell the child that when he played with a particular character, that character was selfish. Then Joseph might tell the child that he heard that the character was kind. We are interested in whether children take these kinds of statements into account, and how children decide which pieces of information are most reliable and most important for picking partners. Do children pay attention to whether information was obtained first-hand or through gossip? Do they take into account the relationship between the character and the person providing the information?

With this study, we hope to gain deeper insight into the way children use information about others’ reputations to make social decisions.

This research is conducted by the Laboratory for Developmental Studies at Harvard University, under the supervision of Dr. Felix Warneken.

2) Inserts that needed minor editing.

The following inserts needed editing to remove jargon, needed to be shortened, or needed additional information added.

“Traits & Memory” from the Paul Harris Lab

Before (version sent in by the researcher):

How well do children remember others’ faces and personalities?

Previous research has shown that children are attentive to different social groups (e.g., race, gender, age) even at a very young age (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Shutts, Banaji, & Spelke, 2010). Additionally, children are sensitive to social group membership cues when learning new information from unfamiliar adults (Chen, Corriveau, & Harris, 2010). In this study, we are interested in how children use social group information to remember stories about unfamiliar characters.

We show children eight pictures of children’s faces, asking them to try and remember every single face. As each face is presented, we tell children a short story about the child in the picture. For example, children may hear the following story: “This little boy is walking in his neighborhood. He sees an old woman having a lot of trouble carrying a big box. This boy carries the box for the old woman to her front door.”

To test children’s memory for the faces, we present the eight previous pictures shuffled with another eight pictures of different children. As we show children each picture, we ask them to say whether they have seen the face before. At the end, we present the eight “old” pictures (the ones previously used with the short stories), asking the children if they would feel happy or sad if they were playing with the various characters.

We are interested in children’s ability to remember different faces, as well as to link these faces with various traits (for example, “good” and “bad”). The first eight faces presented to the children vary in gender and ethnicity. Will children find it easier to remember stories or traits about the characters belonging to the same social group (gender, ethnicity) as them? Will they have more trouble remembering the good kids or the bad kids? We hypothesize that children may remember the characters who share one or both social groups with them more easily.

This study will help us learn more about the role of social groups in children’s cognitive processes. Given our knowledge of children’s early sensitivity to social group differences and the impact of social group membership cues on children’s learning, it is important for us to examine how children associate traits with different people’s faces. As children grow older, they meet peers from many different kinds of social groups, peers who will also have many different personality traits. Gaining insight into children’s ability to learn and retain information about unfamiliar people will help us understand how children interact with one another in their social environments.

This is too long and includes some jargon in the first paragraph, but the description of the study is very understandable and there is a good explanation of what the researcher is looking for. We can make it shorter and use a lot of the text as-is.

After editing:

How well do children remember others’ faces and personalities?

Previous research has shown that children pay attention to a character’s gender, race, or age when learning new information from them. We want to find out whether these kinds of social group cues affect what children remember about the characters themselves.

In this study, we show children photographs of other children’s faces (both boys and girls with different ethnicities), and we ask them to try to remember every single face. Then we tell them a short story about the child in each picture. For example: “This little boy is walking in his neighborhood. He sees an old woman having a lot of trouble carrying a big box. This boy carries the box for the old woman to her front door.”

To find out if children remember the faces, we mix up the eight original pictures with pictures of different children, and ask children which faces they have seen before. Finally, we present the eight original pictures again, and we ask children if they would feel happy or sad if they were playing with each child.

We want to know whether children remember the faces, and whether they link these faces with various traits (for example, “good” and “bad”). We hypothesize that children may find it easiest to remember the characters that are most like them (either the same gender or the same ethnicity).

This study will give us insight into children’s ability to learn about unfamiliar people, and will help us understand how children interact with one another in social settings.

This research is conducted by the Paul Harris Lab at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

“Emotion concepts” from the Emotion Development Lab at BC:

Before:

Do children from different cultures understand facial expressions in the same way?

It is traditionally assumed that young children from all around the world understand that there are distinct types of facial expressions. For example, they understand that “sad” faces are different from “scared” faces, and so on. In this study, we want to find out whether this understanding of emotion changes with age, and whether children’s culture can change their concepts of emotions and their meanings.

In this study, children (3-9 years) are shown different types of facial expressions on a computer screen. We measure how children categorize the faces by asking them: Do you see anybody who feels happy? Do you see anyone who feels scared? We also ask them to choose Sad, Angry, and Surprised faces as well.

Results thus far indicate children understand facial expressions largely in terms of valence (“feeling good” versus “feeling bad”). As they get older, they begin to differentiate between facial expressions of the same valence (*sad* versus *scared* faces). At a given age, Palestinian children have much broader concepts of emotion than do American children. Palestinians see fear, for example, in faces assumed to signal other negative emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, and disgust).

This research can help adults better understand how children from different cultures understand others’ facial displays, and how this understanding changes with age.

This just needed a little additional information about the cross-cultural comparison. We also made the research question a little more general, so that it would apply to what researchers hoped to learn from the American kids at MOS, rather than the kids in Palestine.

After:

How do children interpret facial expressions?

Young children world-wide understand that there are distinct types of facial expressions that each have different meanings (e.g. they understand that “sad” faces are different from “scared” faces). In this study, we want to find out whether children’s understanding of emotion changes with age and/or with different cultural backgrounds.

In this study, we show children (ages 3-9 years) different types of facial expressions on a computer screen. We ask children to pick out the faces that are Happy, Sad, Scared, Angry, and Surprised. For example, we ask them: “Do you see anybody who feels happy?” We want to know how American children classify these faces, and whether children in non-Western cultures (e.g. children in Palestine) have a different understanding of emotions.

So far we have found that young children clearly differentiate between positive and negative emotions (e.g. “feeling good” versus “feeling bad”). However, young children don’t yet understand subtle differences between similar expressions (e.g. “sad” versus “scared” faces). As they get older, children begin to understand that there are many types of facial expressions that all have different meanings. We’ve also found that Palestinian children have much broader concepts of emotion than American children. For example, Palestinians see fear in faces which express other negative emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, and disgust).

This research can help adults better understand how children from different cultures understand others’ emotions and how this understanding changes with age.

This research is conducted by the Emotion Development Lab at Boston College: <http://www2.bc.edu/~russeljm>

3) Inserts that needed major editing

“Peak shift” from the Interdisciplinary Affective Science Lab at Northeastern.

Before:

How Do We See Emotions?

Often times it feels easy to look at another person’s face and judge how they feel. For example, you judge a scowl to mean that the person is angry. The whole process seems pretty easy – like you’re just “reading” another person’s face – that all the information you need to judge that this person is angry is right there in his or her face. But is the process as easy as it feels? We investigate this question by looking at the role that language has on emotion perception.

Do the words a person knows or is thinking change what emotion they see in another person’s face? You might not think so, but actually they do. It turns out that the ability to judge an emotion is less about what is right there in another person’s face and more about what words you might know. Words help you make categories, including emotion categories. These categories guide your judgments. **Currently, we have an exciting study that you can participate in right here at the Museum of Science.** We are looking for anyone 6 years old or older to participate. Participation is completely voluntary.

The research looks at how words affect emotion perception. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will first view some faces. You will then be shown words and faces on the computer screen. Some of the faces you will see on the computer screen will be the faces you saw beforehand, and some of the faces will be new. You will be asked to judge whether you have seen a particular face before or whether you have not seen the face before. The study lasts about 10 minutes. This research might one day help people change the way they look at faces. People can become more aware of how language can change the way we view emotions and faces.

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This insert is too long and much of the information is vague (e.g., what exactly the research question is, the description of what kids will do, what exactly researchers will measure or look for, and what the practical applications are). Also, the tone sounds more like a recruitment flier that the researcher might use in the lab. The Living Lab inserts should just describe the study and what the researchers hope to find out, so we should make this one consistent with our usual style.

After:

How do we “read” others’ emotions?

If you’re wondering how someone is feeling, a smile or a scowl may give you a lot of information. Facial expressions are often the most obvious sign that someone is feeling happy, sad, or angry. But you may not realize how much information you are getting from other types of cues, like the environment, the context, or the words you are seeing or hearing. Because words allow us to generalize and label things, they may affect how we perceive and categorize other things that we see.

In this study, we want to know whether the words people see affect the emotions they perceive in others’ faces. To find out, we show people (ages 6 and older) pictures of two faces with different expressions (e.g., afraid and angry)

on a computer screen. We ask them to remember these faces as well as they can. Then they play a computer game where they see other faces with slightly different expressions, and we ask them to choose which of the two original faces it looks like. Before they see some of the faces, a word (like “angry”, or “honest”) might briefly appear on the screen.

We want to know whether the words (especially those that describe emotions) change the way that people judge the emotions in the face. Our previous research has shown that many aspects of the environment and the context of the situation (including words and other images) can affect people’s judgments of emotions.

This research will help us to better understand how people use all of the information in their environment to make decisions about others’ emotions.

This research is being conducted by the Interdisciplinary Affective Science Laboratory at Northeastern University: www.affective-science.org.

“Triangles” study from the Laboratory for Developmental Studies at Harvard:

Before:

Geometry was thought by the ancient philosophers to be one of the purest forms of knowledge. In the present study, we are implementing a spatial memory task to test children’s use of three basic Euclidean geometric properties – *distance*, *angle*, and *direction* (relative spatial positions) – in both 2D and 3D objects. The results so far suggest that with small-scale objects, in contrast to their use of *direction* and *distance* in navigation tasks, children use *angle* and *distance* but not *direction*.

The broad goal of this research is to explore whether and how children start out with limited core systems of geometry, independent and specific to tasks such as navigation or object recognition, and construct from them a more abstract, uniquely-human sense of Euclidean geometry.

This needed a lot of concrete details about the study, information for each of the sections that we require, and editing to eliminate jargon.

After:

What types of geometrical properties do children understand?

As adults, we use geometric properties (like distance, direction, and angle) to recognize objects and navigate through the world. Research suggests that children may have an intuitive understanding of some types of geometric properties, even before they learn about them in school. In this study, we are investigating whether children understand the concepts of distance, direction, and angle in 2D and 3D objects.

In this study, 2-4 year-olds play a hiding and finding game. We show children a shape on a tabletop (for example, a triangle), and we show them where “Mr. Bear” likes to sit (for example, the far corner of the triangle). Then, we cover the tabletop and rotate it, so that the shape is facing in a different direction. When we uncover the tabletop again, we ask children to put Mr. Bear back in his favorite place. Children play this game several times, with different 2D or 3D shapes.

We want to find out whether children can accurately place Mr. Bear in the shape after it is rotated. To do this, they have to distinguish either the angles in the shape, or the relative position of the bear (near vs. far, to the right vs. left) compared to the parts of the shape.

This study will help us explain how children begin to understand geometrical properties, and at what ages they are able to use different cues to locate objects in their environment.

This research is being conducted by the Laboratory for Developmental Studies at Harvard University: <http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~lds/>