

## Common Sense & Hindsight Bias

**Do you remember that you were asked to fill out a short 3-item survey in Week 1?**

**There were actually two different versions!**

**The differences between the two versions are pointed out below using different colors.**

Half of the student received Version **A**:

**Q1:** Please indicate the degree to which you think this statement is accurate in giving advice.

**BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY.**

not at all accurate	a little accurate	somewhat accurate	Moderately accurate	very accurate
1	2	3	4	5

**Q2:** Social psychologists have found that offering students money or prizes in exchange for good grades is a good way to get them interested and involved in their school work.

**Q2a:** Why do you think this might be?

**Q2b:** Do you find this research result surprising, or not surprising? Surprising      or      Not Surprising

The other half of the student received Version **B**:

**Q1:** Please indicate the degree to which you think this statement is accurate in giving advice.

**NOTHING VENTURED, NOTHING GAINED.**

not at all accurate	a little accurate	somewhat accurate	moderately accurate	very accurate
1	2	3	4	5

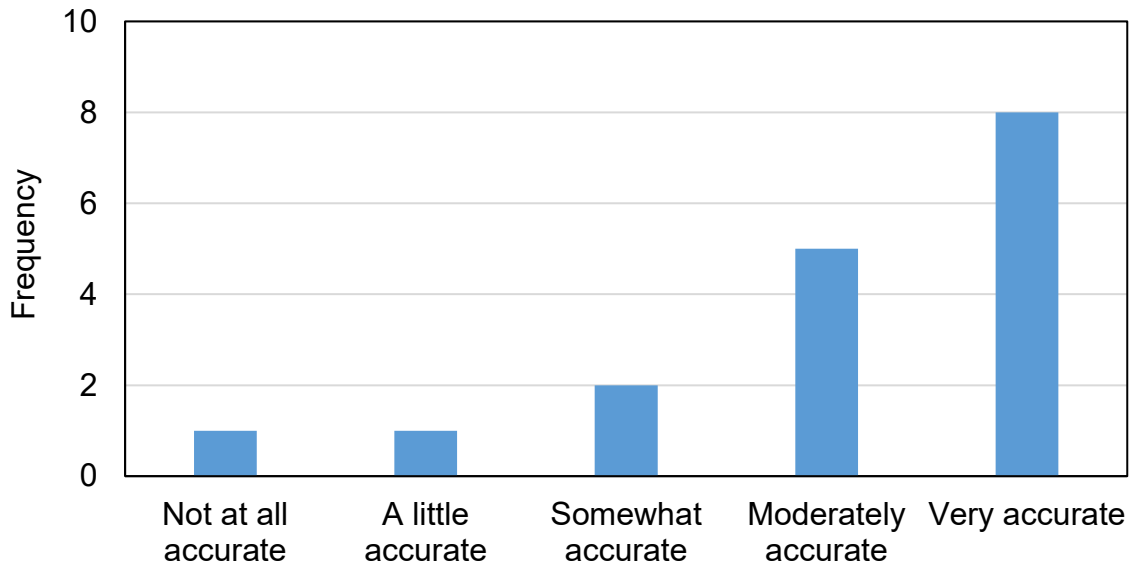
**Q2:** Social psychologists have found that offering students money or prizes in exchange for good grades can actually undermine students' interest in their school work because students then only want to do the work if they are going to get paid.

**Q2a:** Why do you think this might be?

**Q2b:** Do you find this research result surprising, or not surprising? Surprising      or      Not Surprising

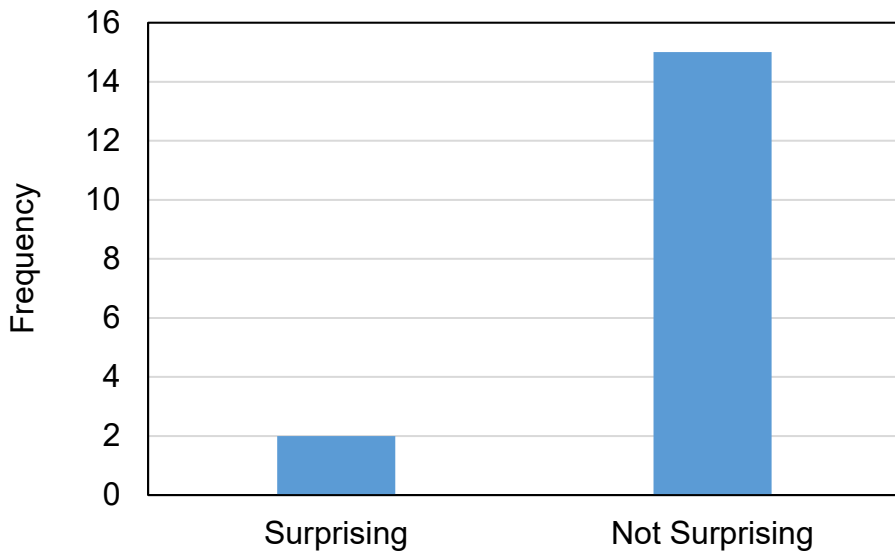
Here are the results for Version [A](#):

Question 1: **BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY.**



**Most people agreed that the statement is accurate (somewhat to very).**

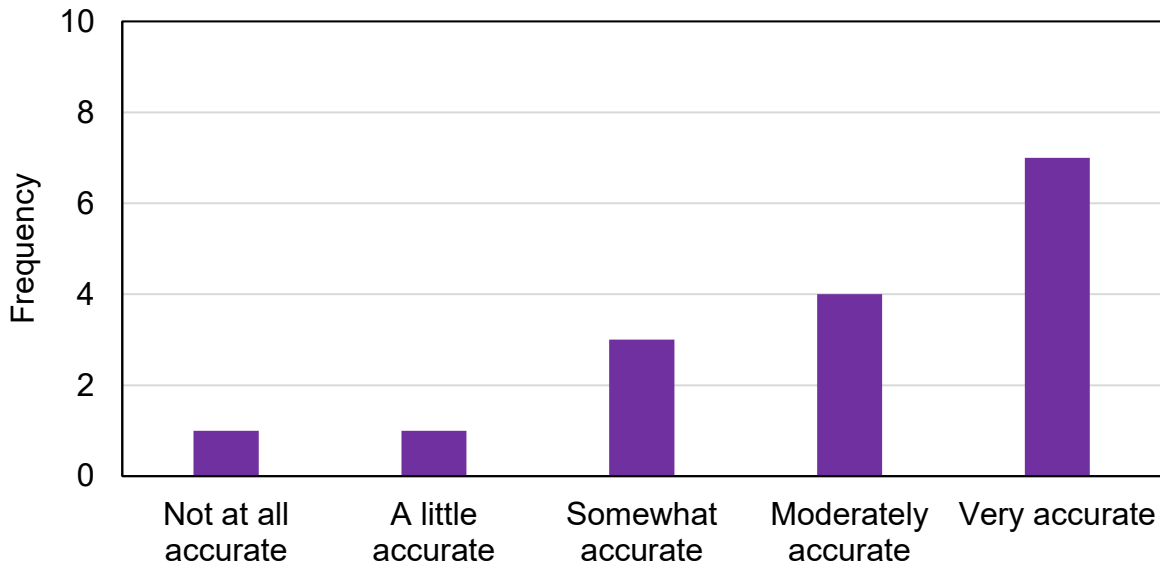
Question 2b: Offering students money or prizes in exchange for good grades is a good way to get them interested and involved in their school work.



**Most people reported that they did not find the result surprising.**

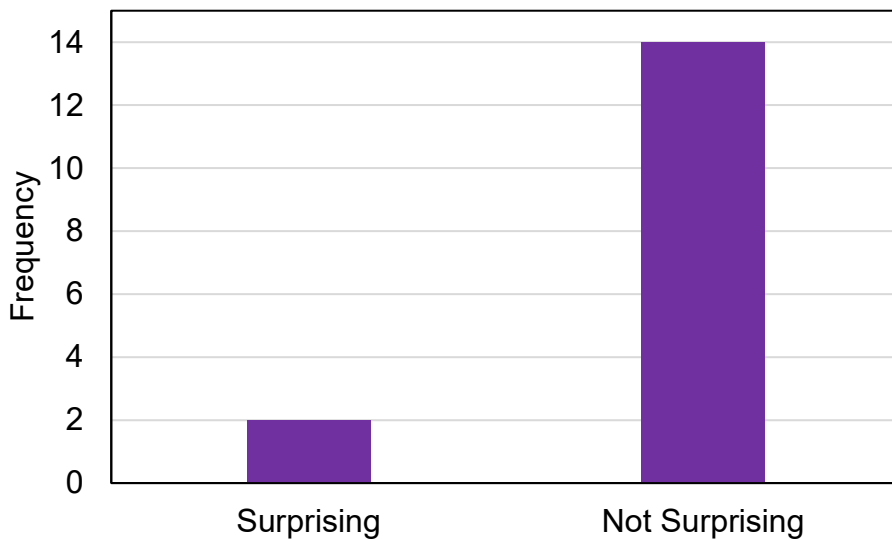
Here are the results for Version **B**:

Question 1: **NOTHING VENTURED, NOTHING GAINED.**



**Most people agreed that the statement is accurate (somewhat to very).**

Question 2b: Offering students money or prizes in exchange for good grades can actually undermine students' interest in their school work because students then only want to do the work if they are going to get paid.



**Most people reported that they did not find the result surprising.**

## So, what is the point of this exercise?

- **Half** of the class had findings opposite to those seen by the other **half** of the class. However, for both versions, most people agreed with the (opposing) statements in Question 1 (version a and b) and reported “not surprising” for the (opposing) results in Question 2 (version a and b).
- One of the main concepts I would like to introduce here is **hindsight bias**.
  - Hindsight bias: the tendency, *after* an event has occurred, to believe that one could have foreseen the outcome.
  - Hindsight bias can make some scientific research results seem more “common sense.”
  - Therefore, be aware of the *hindsight bias* we might have when reading research articles as well as when reporting finding of our own research studies.
- The other concepts I would like to talk about is **common sense**, which ties in neatly to the Gravetter & Forzano (GF) textbook’s chapter 1 discussion of **folk wisdom**.
  - Here is a quick review: **Folk wisdom** embodies generalizations about human nature. These old sayings are, in essence, society-wide implicit personality theories embodying “common-sense” notions about human behavior. They often have a basis in reality, and seem to be useful for making predictions.
  - However, as the exercise demonstrates, “**common sense**” may tell us different things. Look at the results for Question 1 in both versions again (on pages 2-3 of this file). Why do we believe that both homilies in a pair are generally true? What are some other examples where *folk wisdom* contradicts itself?
  - While it need not be discarded, common sense is not enough. We need to examine the evidence for and against each saying to discover the circumstances under which it may be accurate or inaccurate. How do psychologists go about trying to resolve the contradictions embodied in this folk wisdom? Empirical research is particularly helpful for this purpose.
  - Of course, you might also note that it would be foolhardy for any psychological researcher to completely abandon using common sense and to rely only upon empirical findings from previously conducted research. Empirical results or answers are only as good as the questions that have been asked, and when common sense is contradicted by an empirical result, it may indicate (as in the case of these contradictory common sense homilies) that the result is true only under certain circumstances—which the psychologist will then attempt to specify.