



Investigating compliance

This activity will help you to...

- Understand some of the factors that lead to compliance with requests
- Identify the features of a psychological research study
- Design, assess and improve psychological research studies

Studies of compliance

Langer (1978) carried out a study into compliance with a request to jump the queue at a photocopier. In her study, a confederate would ask to go to the front of the queue in three different ways. Langer recorded how often the confederate was allowed to jump the queue.

Question	% compliance
May I use the Xerox machine?	60%
May I use the Xerox machine because I'm in a rush?	94%
May I use the Xerox machine because I have to make some copies?	93%

- What were the control and treatment groups in Langer's study?
- How did Langer measure compliance?
- What does Langer's study tell us about why people might comply with a request?

Techniques for obtaining compliance

Cialdini (1984) has identified a number of techniques for obtaining compliance with requests. One way or another, they all exploit people's tendencies to react to certain types of social situation in automatic ways (what Cialdini calls the 'click, whirr' response).

Foot in the door	People who comply with an initial, small request are more likely to comply with a later, much larger request.	Once people have committed themselves to a particular way of behaving, they tend to act consistently with it in future.
Rejection & retreat	People who refuse an unreasonable initial request are more likely to comply with a later, smaller one.	People regard the retreat to a smaller request as a concession they must reciprocate ; the smaller request looks reasonable in contrast to the larger.
Social proof	People are more likely to comply with a request if they believe that other people already have.	People use the behaviour of others as a guide to their own (informational influence) and will often follow behaviours they think represent norms .

Design some studies to test these ideas out. You will need to think about the task, setting and sample for your study. What will be your treatment and control groups? How will you measure compliance? What do you predict the results of your studies to be?

When you have sketched out your designs, we will be swapping them round and suggesting improvements.