

## **Exercise 6 Instructions**

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### **Background**

When examining content biases in the cultural evolution of narratives, researchers may need to create experimental material which varies in the content of interest, for example, how likely it is to evoke high emotions. This allows researchers to compare material that varies in that content in an experimental setting, while controlling for other differences. In this exercise you will edit two original scary stories to make versions that vary in how emotive they are.

### **The Exercise**

To complete the exercise, use the exercise work sheet and edit the original material (the Licked Hand and the Spider Bite) to produce variants which would be unlikely to evoke much emotional response (low emotion) and variants which would be likely to evoke a high emotional response (high emotion). The original material can be edited in any way you like but try and make the two versions (low emotion and high emotion) as similar as possible outside of the amount of emotion they would evoke. This means keeping similar word counts and word order, and similar phrasing of sentences. You can then compare your coding to the model answer. After completing the exercise, reflect on the key questions below.

### **Optional exercise**

Try giving the low emotion version of one story and the high emotion version of the other story to someone you know (check they're happy to take part first!). Then have them repeat the stories from memory sometime later. Which story did they remember best?

## **Key questions:**

### **How easy was it to keep the stories the similar while changing the level of emotional response they evoke?**

The key challenge to producing experimental material of this type is to keep the two types of material as similar as possible in all aspects except the target content, in this case, aspects which will evoke an emotional response.

### **How different are the stories you created? Would they be different enough to evoke different emotional responses?**

Another challenge is making material which evokes what you want it to, i.e. will exploit the cognitive bias of interest. To make sure this is the case, researchers will create more material than is needed in the experiment and will conduct a 'pre-test validation study' on the material before running the experiment. This will typically involve participants rating the material for the content of interest and also potential confounding variables. Based on those ratings researchers can select which material is most suitable for examining their research question.