

## Role-Play Research Tasks

Here are two examples of open-ended tasks that give students opportunities to practice developing their creative, research and writing skills, and to end up with a document that they can show to prospective employers as evidence of their skills. (Indeed, one of the top students in my class of 2017 landed a job in a corporate behavioural insights team after supplying her response to Task 1 during the interview process when she was asked for an example of her written work.) If adequate resources for marking are available, Task 1 could be extended to include a requirement to prepare a set of PowerPoint slides to accompany the presentation, with further marks for this.

Possible marking templates follow both of the task descriptions. My tutors and I would normally mark this kind of assignment online using the course's Blackboard site and upload the completed mark allocation as an Excel file as well as writing a few sentences of overall comments/notes to each student.

### 1. Behavioural Economics and the Car Industry (30% weight)

Imagine that you have been asked to give a presentation to a meeting of your region's branch of the national trade association of auto traders, many of whose members offer vehicle servicing as well as retailing new vehicles to fleets and individual customers, though many merely deal in used vehicles. Members may also include representatives from firms that import vehicles and from companies that run auctions of used vehicles. The branch chair has asked you to offer lessons from behavioural and evolutionary economics for the automotive sector. Your task is to write a full-text version of the verbal presentation that you would give at this meeting. Imagine that your presentation is to take about 30 minutes to deliver. Given this, your draft should be about 4000 words in length, excluding references.

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This is a sector that is not standing still, so it is ripe for analysis in terms of evolutionary theory. Vehicles are changing rapidly, incorporating more and more electronics for entertainment, safety and, increasingly, to take over some of the driver's role, while new forms of power (hybrid electric/internal combustion, full electric, hydrogen/fuel cell) are being offered by more manufacturers, including unfamiliar new brands. Chinese auto firms seem to be following the kind of growth process that Korean firms followed, following on from the global expansion of Japanese car firms before them.

The automotive sector is referred to frequently in *Principles of Behavioral Economics*, with a extensive index section devoted it.

There is also considerable scope for using behavioural economics to analyse critically the interactions between customers and dealers, aspects of which include pricing and the presentation of the retail environment, as well as the face-to-face interactions. So, consider what will (and won't) work for the vehicle dealers in both the short run and long run.

Assume that you have been told that a copy of your presentation will ultimately be required from you for posting in the Association's online archives. As such, it should include source references via footnotes rather than via in-text author/date references, so that the main text of your document reads as if you were giving the presentation. However, your footnotes can have author/date references to a list of referenced at the end of the document

For example, a footnote might say 'See Earl (2012) and Thaler (2015)', with the full references then given in a list at the end. If you use Endnote for the reference list, the default 'APA' format is fine. A formal footnote might be given for a work that you mention informally in your speech (for example, 'In his autobiography *Misbehaving*, the leading US behavioural economist Richard Thaler uses the example of ....'). Sometimes you may be deploying existing work and duly crediting it via footnotes but since, much of the time, your draft talk should consist of *you* applying ideas from the course, you should not have any need to have footnotes for most sentences. Hence you should be writing it more as you would have done had this been an exam question.

The word count applies to the body of the document, with footnotes and any reference list excluded.

Here is a possible marking template for this assignment:

Mark Marks awarded for:

**/10: Evidence of the extent of relevant reading that has been undertaken, both in terms of breadth and depth**  
/3: Used ideas from the course textbook rather than relying merely on lecture notes  
/2: Used relevant statistics to support argument or as basis for discussion  
/5: Extent to which relevant scholarly research findings were reported to audience

**/12: Insight and creativity evident in applying theoretical literature to the topic**  
/2: Applied theory around a well-chosen focus theme or themes relevant to audience  
/2: Included evolutionary perspective on changing relative performance of firm rather than just focusing on consumer behaviour  
/4: Range of both 'old' and 'new' behavioural ideas used appropriately in the context of the automotive sector  
/1: Addressed both price and non-price aspects of competition in this sector  
/3: Creative connection-making that gave marker 'surprise and delight'

**/6: Quality of writing and suitability) for the target audience**

/2: Quality of written English (grammar, sentence construction, general clarity, conciseness and ease of reading)  
/1.5: Conveyed evolutionary/behaviours perspective without using lecturing style and unnecessary jargon  
/1: Professionally presented  
/1.5: Would leave audience with useful 'take home' messasges upon which they might act

**/2: Accuracy and consistency of referencing**

/1: References contained appropriate elements in a professional style  
/1: Referencing style consistent and references in alphabetical order

Late Penalty, if any (applied from Sunday 21 May onwards)

**/30: Total Mark**

## 2. Behavioural Economics, Poverty and Health (40% weight)

Imagine that you are working for your national government's behavioural insights team and that your boss has asked you to write a briefing document in which you critically appraise existing work that has applied 'behavioural insights' in the areas of health and poverty. Your boss is hoping to interest the Minister for Human Services in getting the team to devise policy suggestions in these areas but it is rumoured that the Minister is sceptical about the potential benefits. Your boss has said that she is hoping you can come up with something rather more useful than just a survey of what has been attempted in these areas previously. She has said he hopes your familiarity with a wider range of behavioural economics ideas than most recent converts to the field will mean that you will thus be in an especially good position to survey critically previous attempts to apply behavioural insights to health and poverty policies (e.g. to see why their achievements might have been rather limited) and to suggest things that might be worth exploring for new policy directions in these areas. Examples of new policy ideas would thus be very welcome, but she has asked you keep in mind that the team focuses on evidence-based policies and hence any novel suggestions should be ones that could be tested cheaply before any decisions are taken to implement them nationwide. Your boss has indicated that your briefing document might be part of what gets sent to the Minister in the team's pitch for work in this area, so it needs to be written in a manner suitable for being read by someone who has not been trained in behavioural economics.

Your report should be typed with double line spacing and should include a one-page executive summary at the start and a list of references at the end. The total length of your document should not exceed 4000 words.

The task description above is all that you have to work from, so you will have to make your own decisions about how to put the document together. Role models may be found amongst documents that come up during your online searches. In class, from time to time, prompts will be provided about how lecture material links to the areas of the task, and there will be opportunities in some tutorials to discuss your progress on the task. It is important to keep the task in mind from week 1 onwards and keep noting down any ideas that you have along the way. This is not a policy area in which the author of your textbook *Principles of Behavioral Economics* has specialised but Peter Earl does have one article applying behavioural economics to health policy: Foster, M.M., Earl, P.E., Haines, T.P., Mitchell, G.K (2010) 'Unravelling the concept of consumer preference: Implications for health policy and optimal planning in primary care', *Health Policy*, 97(33), October: 105–112. Sections 3.7 and 3.8 of *Principles of Behavioral Economics* could be thought-provoking places to start thinking about poverty.

Here is a marking template that could be used with this task:

Mark Marks awarded for:

- /10: Evidence of the extent of relevant reading that has been undertaken, both in terms of breadth and depth**
- /3: Evidence of applying ideas from the course textbook rather than merely relying on lecture notes
  - /2: Used relevant statistics to support argument or as basis for discussion

/5: Extent to which relevant scholarly research findings related to behaviour health and poverty were reported

**/10 Grasp of theoretical issues/absence of mistakes in explaining key concepts**

As shown by attempts to apply:

/1: Satisficing, bounded rationality and procedural rationality

/1: Personal construct psychology

/3: Bias-inducing heuristics

/1: Fast and frugal heuristics

/1: Prospect Theory and/or Potential Surprise

/1: Theories of motivation

/1: Cognitive dissonance theory

/1: Other relevant theoretical material

**/10: Insight and creativity evident in critically assessing previous work and suggesting new research/policy ideas to explore**

/2: Appreciation of links between poverty and health that relate to the decisions that people take

/2: Took account of the social and shopping environments in which people make choices that contribute to being poor and/or having avoidable health problems

/3: Considered behavioural insights relating to regulations and 'boosts' rather than just to 'nudges'

/3: Creative connection-making and/or critical insight that gave marker 'surprise and delight'

**/8: Quality of writing and suitability) for the target audience**

/2: Quality of written English (grammar, sentence construction, general clarity, conciseness and ease of reading)

/2.5: Displayed a good sense of what could be taken for granted with BETA colleagues who are familiar with Thaler-style behavioural economics, without seeming to lecture to them on other approaches

/1: Professionally presented

/2.5: Would leave BETA colleagues with a clear set of relevant 'take home' messages

**/2: Accuracy and consistency of referencing**

/1: References contained appropriate elements in a professional style

/1: Referencing style consistent and references in alphabetical order

Late Penalty

**/40: Total Mark**