

Guided role play II

Presentation 2

Preparation for presentation and discussion.
Read the text carefully and then match the paragraphs with the headlines given below.

Self-experimentation – a useful research tool

1.
For centuries, self-experimentation was an accepted form of science. Sir Isaac Newton almost burned his cornea because he could think of no other means of understanding hallucinations than staring at the sun. The practice continues among a small number of professors and doctors who see it as the last chance to prove theories for which they lack funds.

2
Kevin Warwick is professor of cybernetics at the University of Reading. His experiment was carried out at Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford in 2002. A silicon chip with 100 electrodes was implanted in his arm. The goal was to fire electrical impulses into his brain and thus to find out whether a human could learn to sense, interpret and reply to computer-generated stimuli. The chip in Warwick’s arm did what it was expected to do – picked up the signals sent from the brain when a person thinks of moving an arm or a leg but does not actually do it. That allowed Warwick to use thoughts to control an electric wheelchair.

3.
A sort of self-experimentation is happening on the Internet and is known as self-tracking. It has made lay scientists of many of us. We buy the latest exercise device or nutritional supplement and then log into forums to compare our findings with other “investigators”. Although this self-experimentation does not meet the requirements of serious research, it has an advantage – the number of enthusiastic experimenters doing their mini-studies is enormous.

4.
Some researchers become self-experimenters because they want to be famous, some do it to satisfy their curiosity, some hope to help others. For most self-experimenters it is a combination of all three reasons. Warwick, whose next experiment may involve implanting electrodes into his brain, says that although the procedure scares him, it will be fascinating.

5.
Those in favour of self-experimentation emphasize its importance for scientific progress. Some even argue that researchers should take part in all medical experiments because it speeds up research, especially underfunded research. Opponents, on the other hand, believe that hospitals should not allow self-experimentation because it is in conflict with medical ethics. Doctors should do their best to preserve lives and not endanger people by risky experimentation.

6.
It is true that self-experimentation is risky and that researchers willing to experiment on themselves may place doctors in a dilemma. It is, however, equally true that self-experimenters help to achieve positive results faster for the benefit of others. We should therefore be grateful that there have been such people in the past and hopeful that there will be some in the future.

(Adapted from: Harrell, Eben: My body, my laboratory, Time, Feb. 28, 2011)

- A) Pros and cons of self-experimentation
- B) Self-experimentation on the Internet
- C) Conclusions
- D) Kevin Warwick's self-experiment
- E) Introduction
- F) Motivation for self-experimentation

Now use the headlines and the text to prepare the presentation. Follow the pattern given in presentation 1 (greeting the participants, introducing yourself, giving information on timing and questions, introducing the topic, etc.). As part of the preparation write brief notes (not full sentences) under each heading to remind you of the content.

Overview

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Part 1:

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Part 2:

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Part 4:

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Part 5:

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Part 6:
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Give the presentation. Choose phrases that are suitable for a situation in which people know each other well (e.g. a seminar/workshop for other PhD students) and are on first-name terms. Finish the presentation by inviting questions.

Topic: Self-experimentation – a useful research tool
Occasion: seminar

Discussion 2

Think of the questions you would like to ask about self-experimentation and prepare comments. Some questions and comments are suggested below.

1. You want to know whether the speaker has heard about any other scientists - apart from Newton and Warwick – who experimented on themselves.
2. You think that self-experimentation is overestimated as a serious research tool. Say why.
3. You want to know whether the speaker would be ready to become a self-experimenter. Ask him to give reasons for either of the two possible answers (yes – no).
4. You think that self-experimentation is a stupid risk. People do it because they want to become famous.
5. You have not heard the word self-tracking before. Ask the speaker to explain it once more.
6. Ask the speaker what he thinks about self-tracking and whether he has any experience of this form of self-experimentation.
7. You want to know whether doctors should be allowed to conduct hazardous experiments of the kind described in the presentation.
8. You think that self-experimenters do it to get adrenalin going just like free-style skiers or other similar madmen.
9. You would never experiment on yourself. Give reasons.
10. You would like to know more about self-experimentation. Ask the speaker where you could find more information.

