

# The Framing Effect

**PART ONE: Recent Discovery:** Faced with a decision between two classroom options, one labeled "80% fun," the other "20% hard work and misery," which would your students choose? The overall class time is exactly the same, but most students would pick "80% fun." The language used to describe options often influences what students choose, a phenomenon called the framing effect. Researchers link the framing effect to neural activity in a key emotion center in the human brain, the amygdala using fMRI scans. They also identify another region, the orbital and medial prefrontal cortex that may moderate the influence of emotion on decisions: The more activity subjects had in this area, the less susceptible they were to the framing effect. Statements made with a greater downside risk activates the amygdala. In other words, the more we use our frontal lobes and the less the amygdala, the less we are likely to base our decisions on emotion. Sounds like, "Duh?" research, but it's actually profound. See below...(Study authors De Martino B, Kumaran D, Seymour B, and Dolan RJ. "Frames, biases, and rational decision-making in the human brain" in Science Journal).

## **PART TWO: Applications and Contributions**

As you work with others, framing is the "spin" you put on things. I call it an intentional bias. We all have our biases, but framing is very intentional. For example, you can say,

"This last quiz was a disaster. One in five completely failed it. If we don't ensure everyone does their daily reviews, nobody will pass it next time."

OR

"Good work for most of you on the last quiz. We aren't yet at 100% pass rate, so this week we'll be trying out a few different things to get everyone in the pass column."

The framing effect could realistically be used all day long, and all year long. Too much can be annoying and a lot of work for you. But when things are not working well, one place to notice is how you frame the daily events. For example:

"I'm worried. You have only five minutes left and if you don't get your act together, your team loses out and you'll never make the deadline."

Or, you could say,

"Attention everyone: You're all right on track. In your last five minutes, be sure everyone gets his or her two items listed and the team report is finished just like the posted sample. This will ensure everyone gets full credit. Now turn to your team mates and say, 'We can do it!'"

Notice how there are many ways to say the same thing. We all have our biases. Why not put a positive spin to things so that students feel more capable and energized?

(Adapted from BrighterBrain® Bulletin by Eric Jensen) ©Jerry Clemens

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