**Handout 1**

**Investigation: Examining short-term memory through the   
serial position effect**

**Information sheet for students**

**The background**

Research has shown that information processed in short-term memory (STM) can usually be stored for up to 30 seconds and that the capacity of STM is around seven (+ or – 2) pieces of information. When we are required to remember more than approximately seven items from a list, it is usual for us to only be able to recall a limited number of those items. Previous studies examining the capacity of individuals to remember lists of items have identified from a number of trials that a clear effect is evident. This effect is referred to as the ‘serial position effect’. The serial position effect finds that people are typically able to recall items from the start and end of a list more accurately than items in the middle of a list. When represented as a graph, the pattern of recall that represents the serial position effect is a U-shape.

This investigation will allow you to examine your short-term memory through the serial position effect.

**Your role**

Your role in this investigation will be to:

* participate (if you choose) in the data gathering activity for this investigation
* contribute to small group or whole class discussion about this investigation
* provide a critical analysis and interpretation of the data that has been collected
* produce your own investigative write-up in the style of a formal report.

**The activity**

You will be required to remember and recall as accurately as possible sets of 10-digits in the order they are presented to you. You will be presented with five sets of digits and will be given the chance to recall the digits at the end of each set on a provided data sheet (see Handout 4). You will then tally up your results and examine whether they reflect the patterns that characterise the serial position effect.

**The timeframe**

The activity part of this investigation will take about 15 minutes and the required write-up, which will be completed in class time, will take about 2 hours.

**The support**

Your final report will consist on an abstract, introduction, method, results, discussion and a list of references used.

You will be supported through this process in the following ways:

* by your teacher,
* by your classmate,
* being guided by the assessment criteria on the marking key
* by using the psychological support materials that you have access to.

**The endpoint**

You will need to submit your completed report at the end of the designated session.

Your report will be marked and contribute to your overall assessment for the unit.

**Handout 2**

**Investigation: Examining short-term memory through the   
serial position effect**

**Information letter**

Dear student,

As part of this unit on psychology, you will be examining your short-term memory through the serial position effect. Specifically, you will investigate whether your ability to recall items from a list reflects the pattern suggested by the serial position effect—more items from the start and end of a list are recalled correctly than items in the middle of the list.

Participants in this investigation will be required to remember and recall as accurately as possible sets of 10-digits in the order they are presented. Participants will be presented with five sets of digits and will be given the chance to recall the digits at the end of each set on a provided data sheet. The data collection for this investigation will take place during regular class time.

To safeguard anonymity, students’ written responses will be identified by a code number and all individual student data will be shredded at the completion of the unit.

Please ask me if you do not fully understand the information provided or if you would like further information. In understanding what is required of you as a participant in this investigation, you may choose to consent to participate fully in this investigation, in some part of this investigation or not at all. If you decide to participate, please read, complete and sign the attached consent form.

Your parent or guardian must also provide consent for your participation in this investigation. If they agree, please ask them to also sign the provided consent form.

Even if you have signed the consent form, you may withdraw from this investigation at any time. There will be no consequences if you do not want to participate, or if you initially agree to participate and later decide to withdraw. Your rights and responsibilities are detailed in the consent form.

Please feel free to speak with me if you have any concerns or queries about this investigation or about your involvement in this investigation.

Yours sincerely,

Chanel March

Terry Adler

**Handout 3**

**Investigation: Examining short-term memory through the   
serial position effect**

**Consent form**

Participant’s name

Investigation title **Examining short-term memory through the serial position effect**

Teacher’s name Chanel March / Terry Adler

I consent to participate in the research investigation named above. The nature of the research, including the procedures, has been explained to me, and is summarised on the information letter I have been given.

I give permission for the responsible teacher, named above, to use the outlined investigation procedures with me.

I understand that:

(a) I am free to withdraw from the investigation at any time. There will be no consequences if I decline to participate or if I initially agree to participate, but later decide to withdraw.

(b) The investigation is for the purpose of teaching and learning.

(c) The confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded. Written responses will be identified only by a code number in order to ensure that responses are anonymous.

(d) There are no known adverse effects of participation in this investigation.

(e) I will maintain the confidentiality of other participants in this investigation.

**Please return this signed consent form to your teacher.**

**Signed:** . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . **Date:** . . . . . . . . . . .

(student)

**Students under may participate in this investigation only if a parent or guardian completes the following section.**

I consent to the participation of . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . in the above research investigation.

**Signed:** . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . **Date:** . . . . . . . . . . .

(parent/guardian)