

# Boring Ideas: Exploring Boredom as an Incubator to Creativity

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# Is Boredom All Bad?

Defined as a negative experience where one wants - but is unable - to engage in something satisfying<sup>1</sup>.

Negative associations across many contexts including:

Education<sup>2</sup>

Work<sup>3</sup>

Substance abuse<sup>4</sup>



1. (Eastwood et al., 2012), 2. (Acee et al., 2010; Farrell et al., 1988; Fisher, 1987; Pekrun et al., 2010), 3. (Loukidou et al., 2009; van Hooff & van Hooft, 2014) 4. (Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991; Weybright et al., 2015)

# Is Boredom All Bad?

Adaptive state that functions to pursue a new goal<sup>1</sup>

Signals mental locomotion and exploration<sup>2</sup>

People who are bored can generate more ideas and more original ideas<sup>3</sup>

Task interruptions that are simple and allow for mind wandering can increase creative problem solving<sup>4</sup>



# **Research Question #1**

**Can boredom function as an incubator that facilitates creativity?**

## **Research Question #2**

**Does freely moving thought predict idea generation or originality?**

# **Pre Experiment Learning Session**

## **Freely Moving Thought**

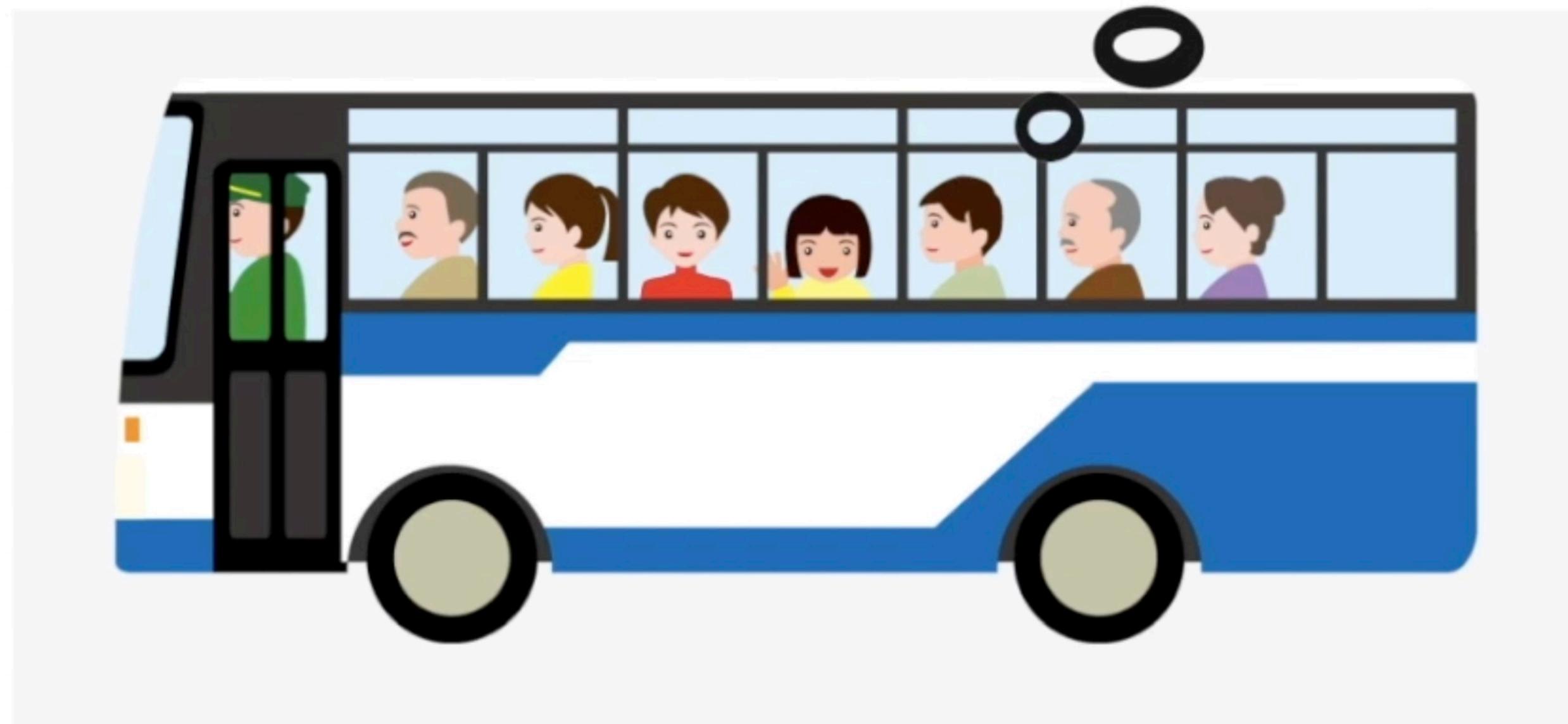
*Thoughts that wander around freely,*

*drift from one thing to another without focusing on anything for too long,*

*and have no overarching purpose or direction.*

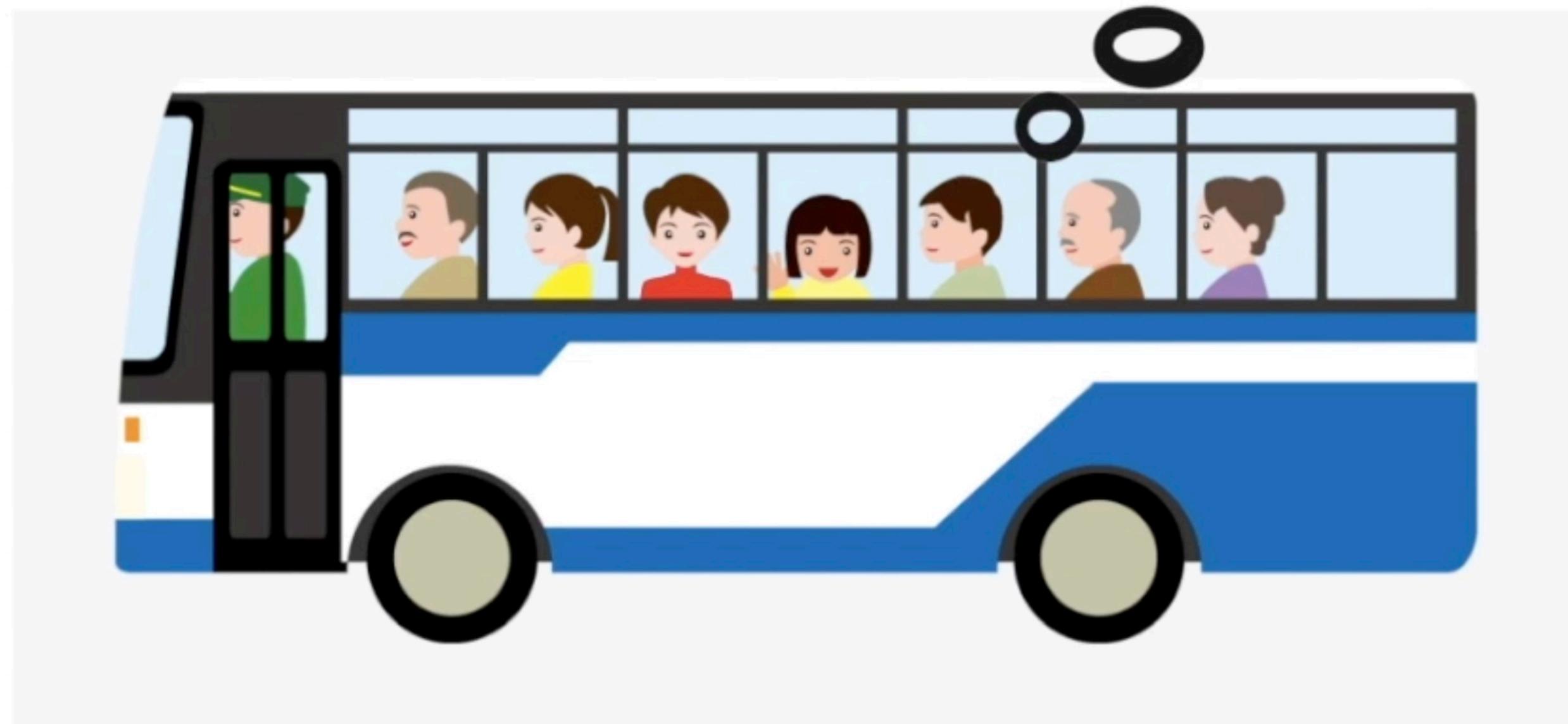
# Pre Experiment Learning Session

Freely Moving Thought



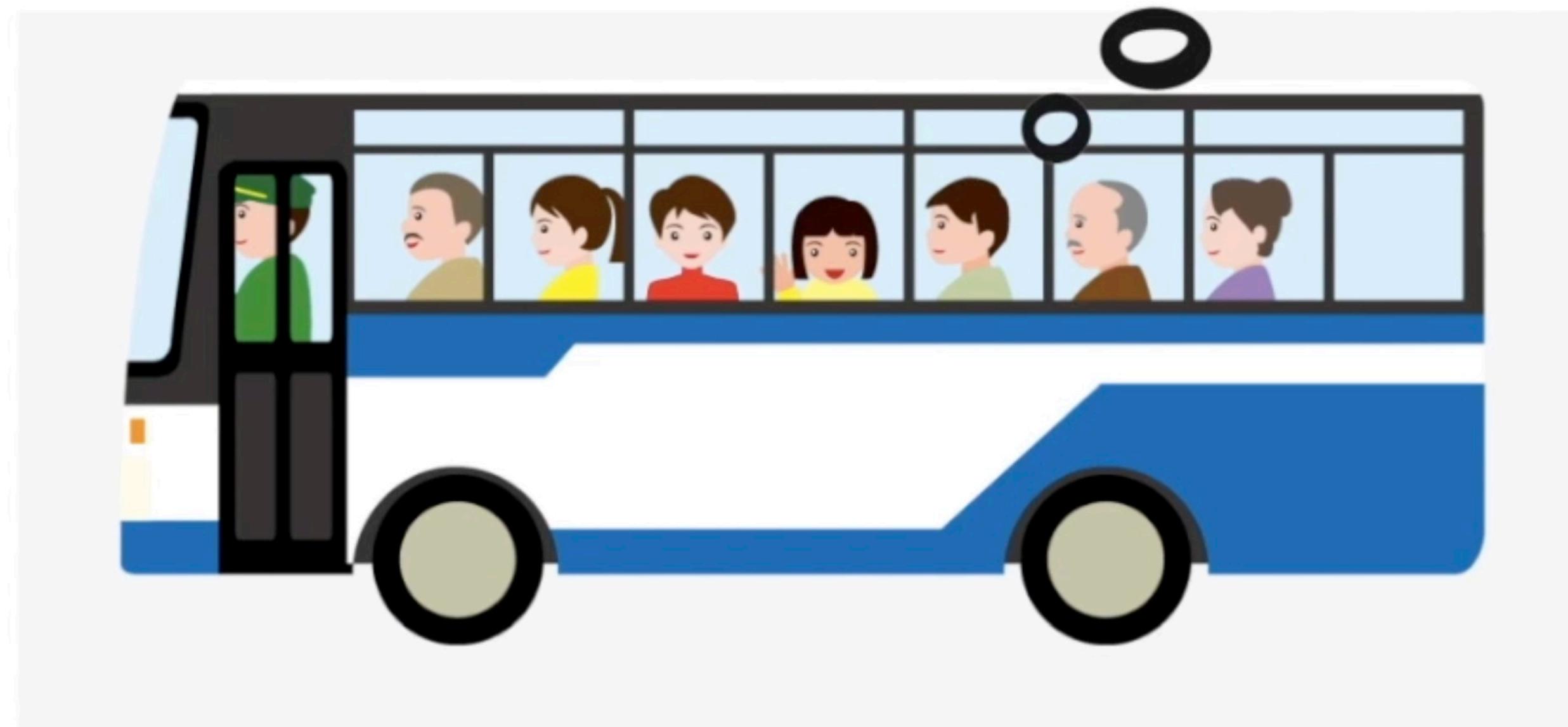
# Pre Experiment Learning Session

Freely Moving Thought



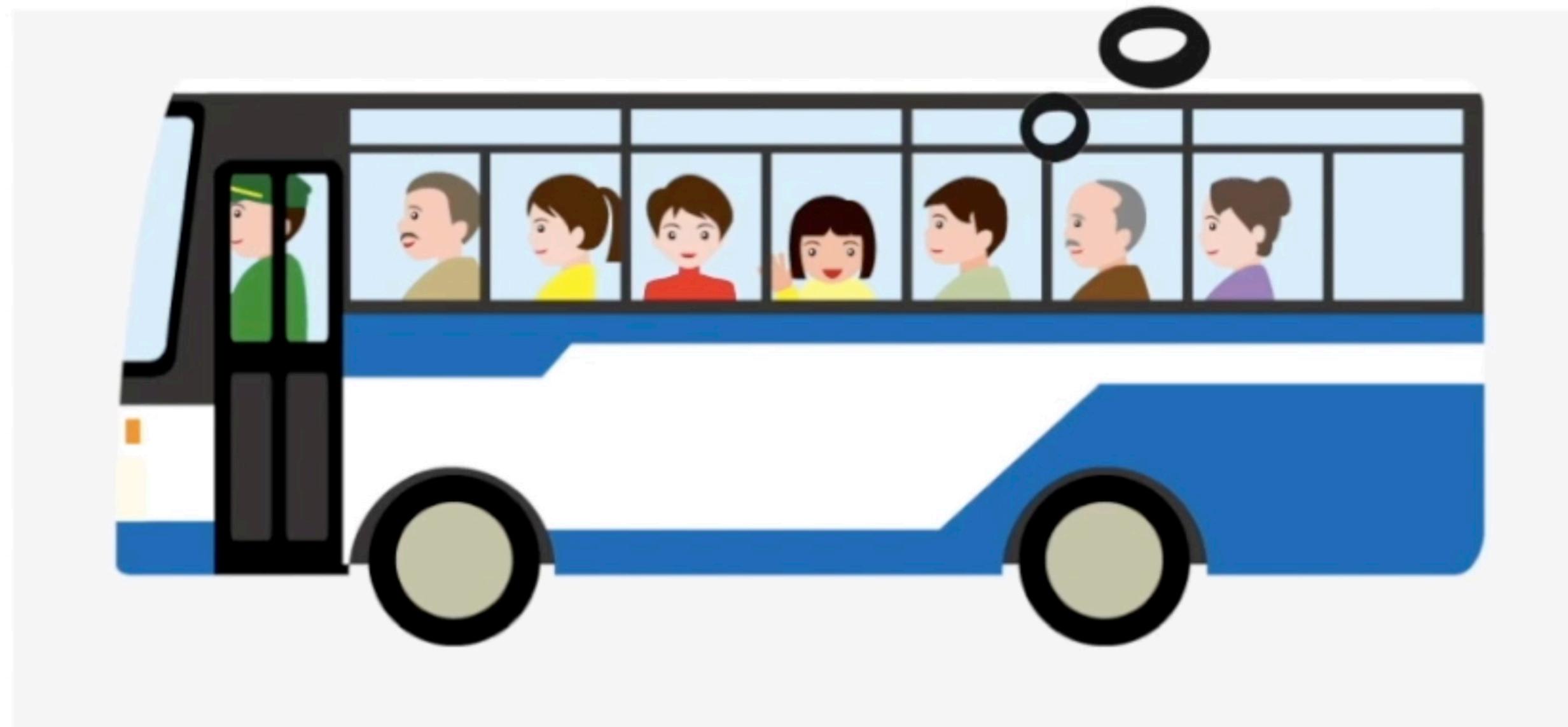
# Pre Experiment Learning Session

Freely Moving Thought



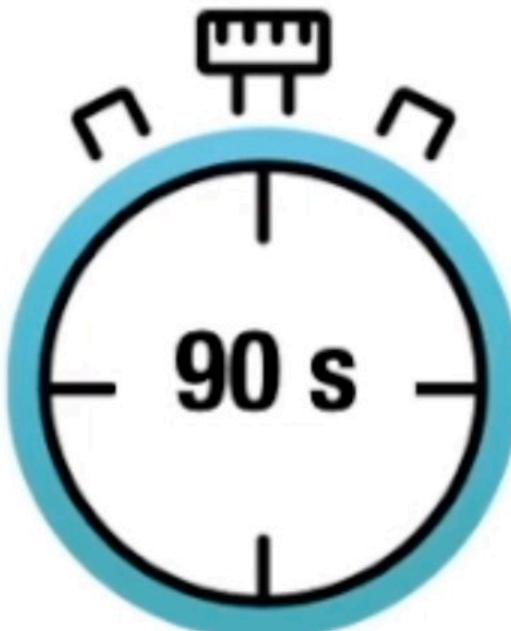
# Pre Experiment Learning Session

Freely Moving Thought



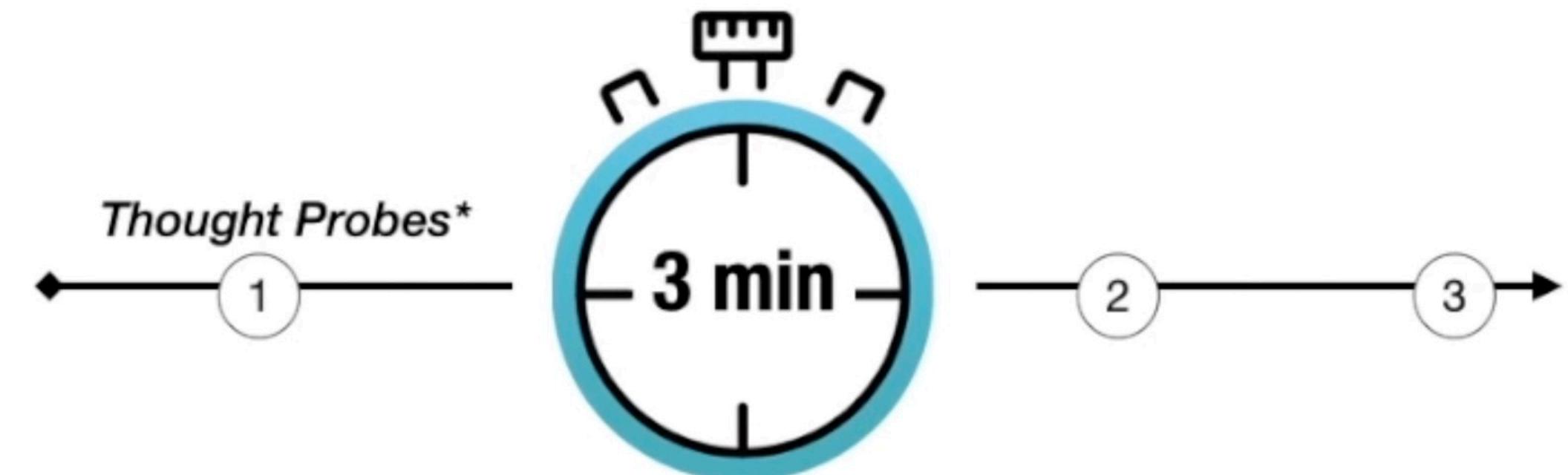
# **Part 1**

## Alternate Uses Task (AUT)



# Part 2

## Video



Boring



Engaging



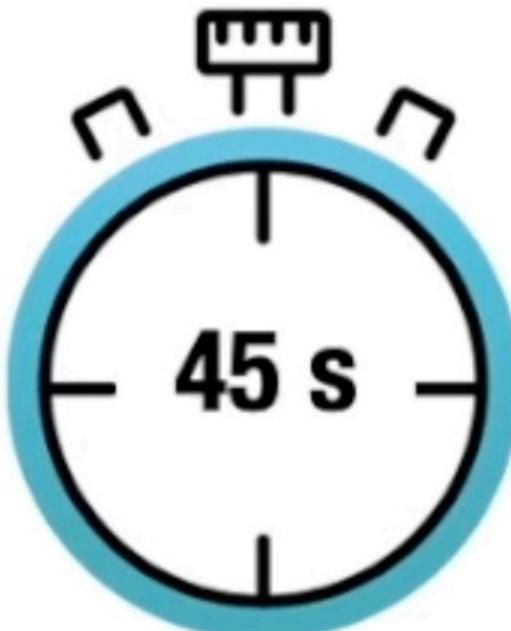
Thought Probes\*

**Rate how freely  
moving your  
thoughts are on a  
scale of 1 (not at all) to  
7 (very much so).**

## Part 3

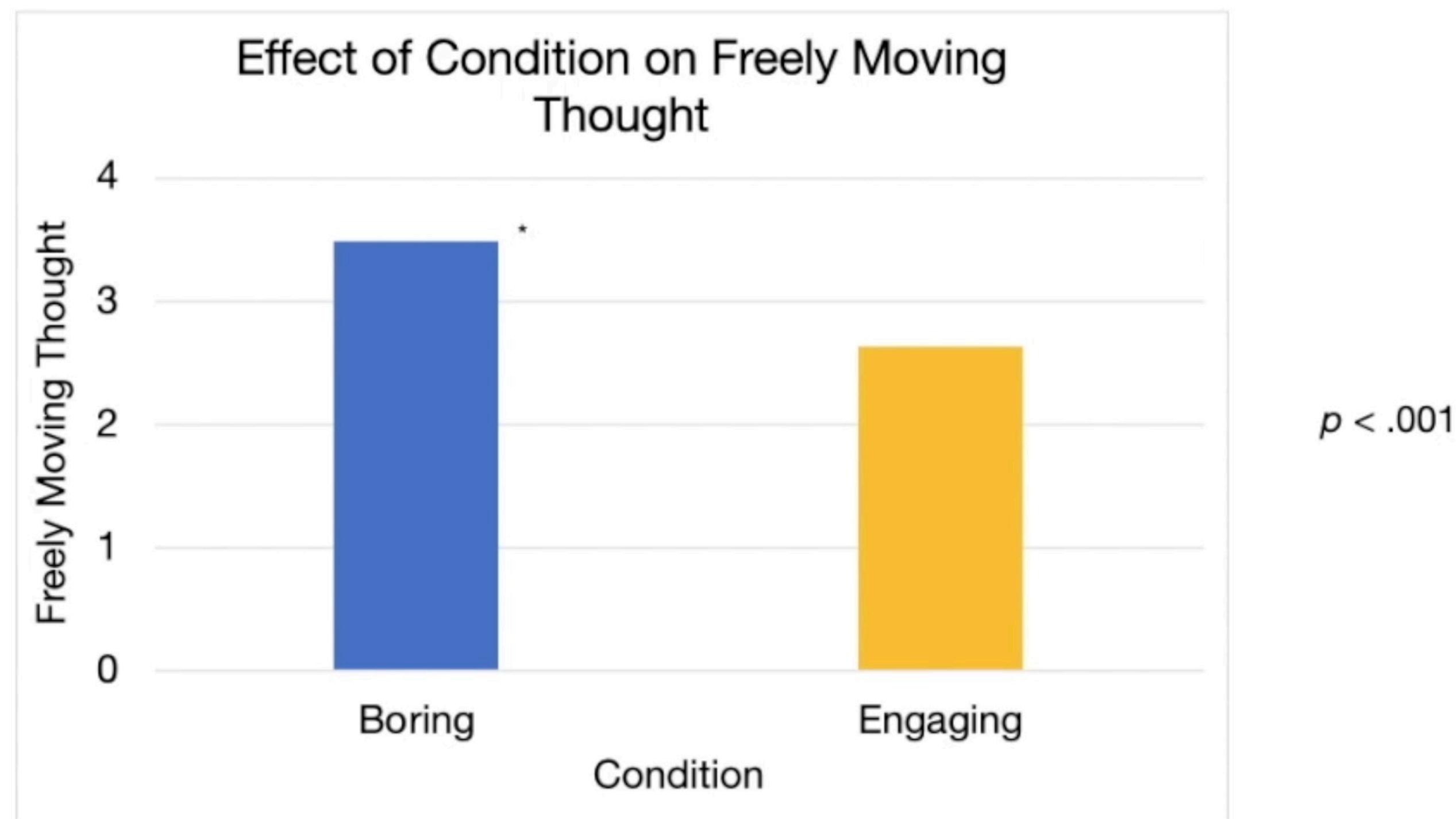
Post Video

AUT



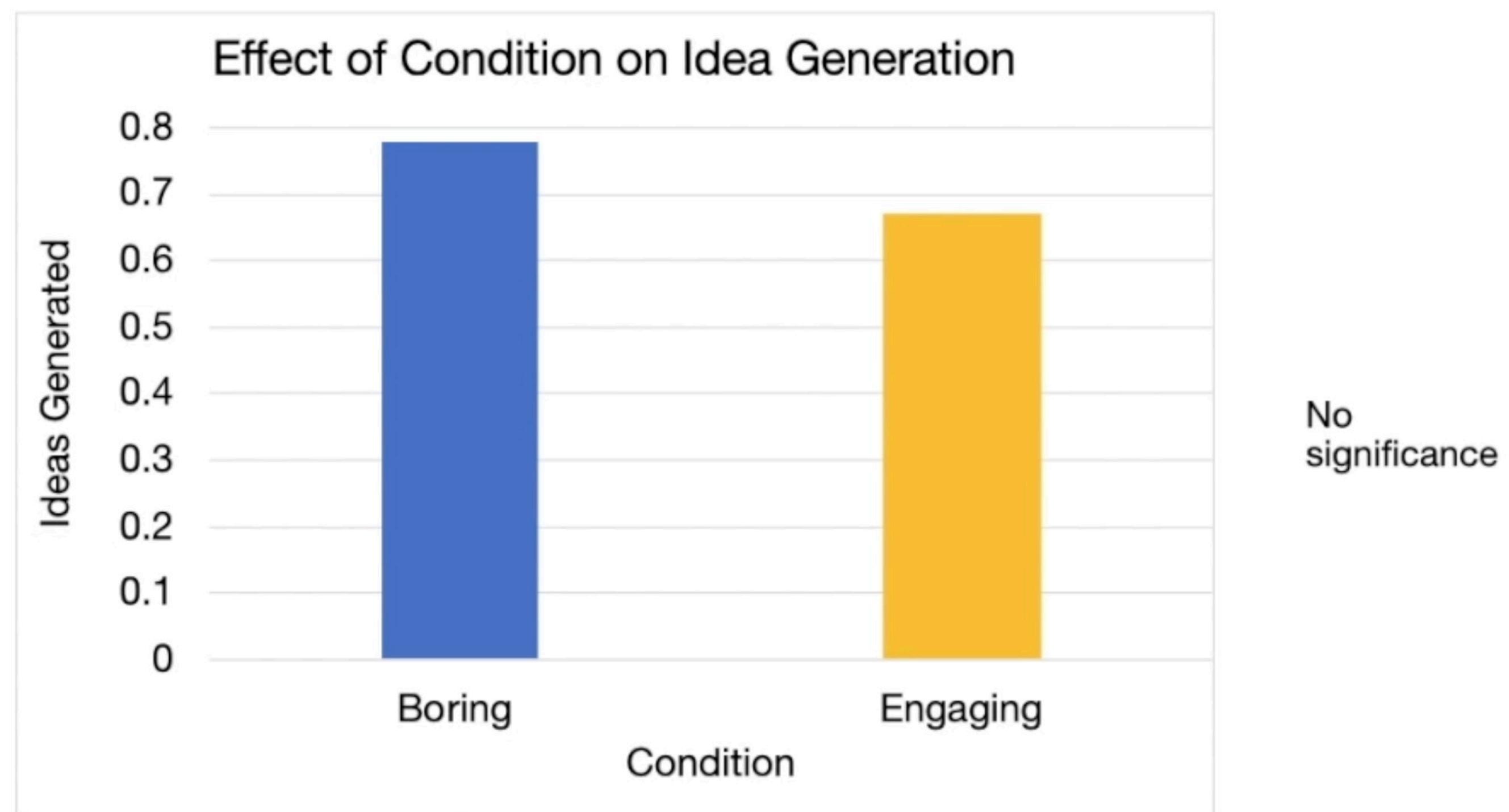
# What were the effects of boredom...

On the occurrence of freely moving thought during the video?



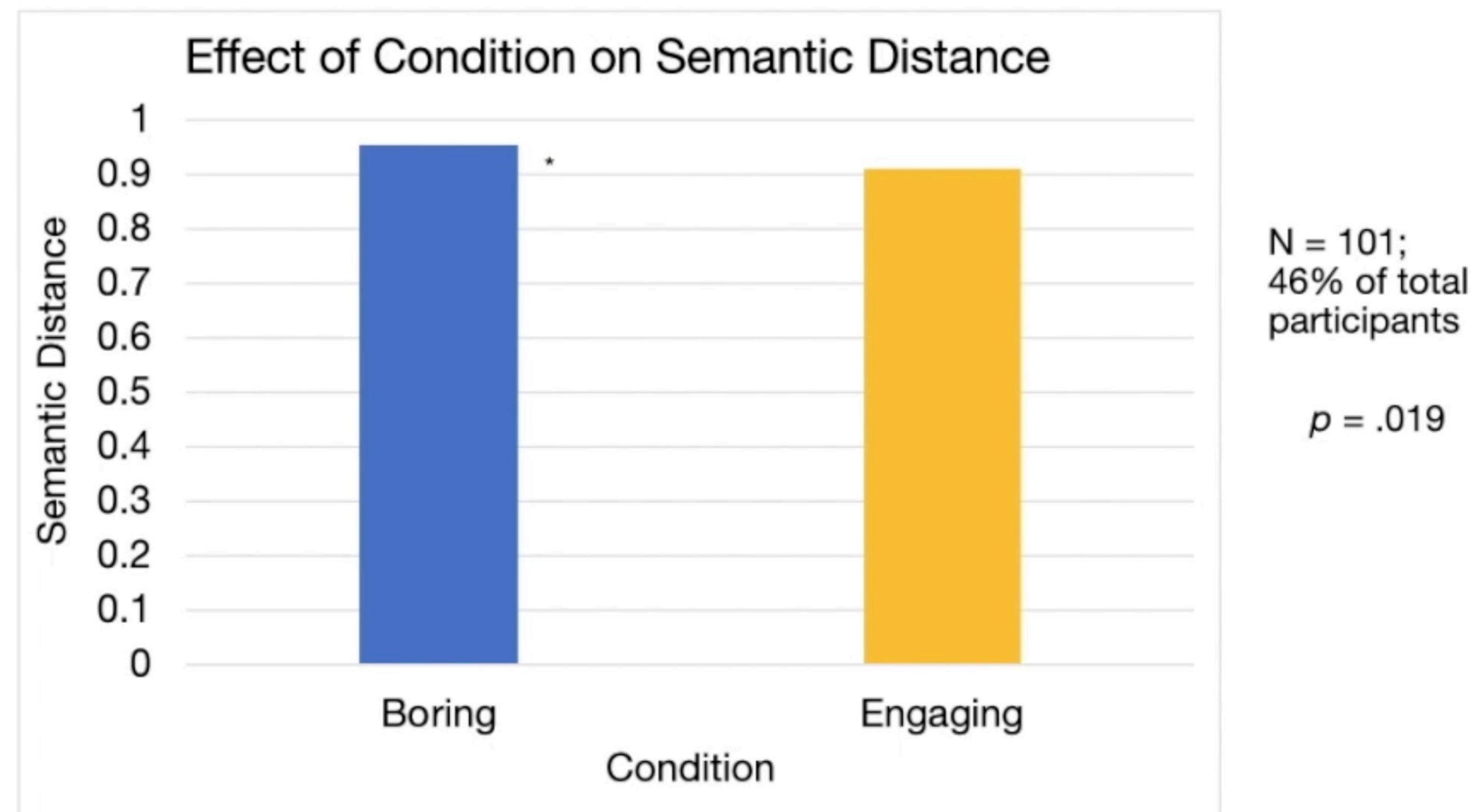
# What were the effects of boredom...

On the number of ideas generated during the video?

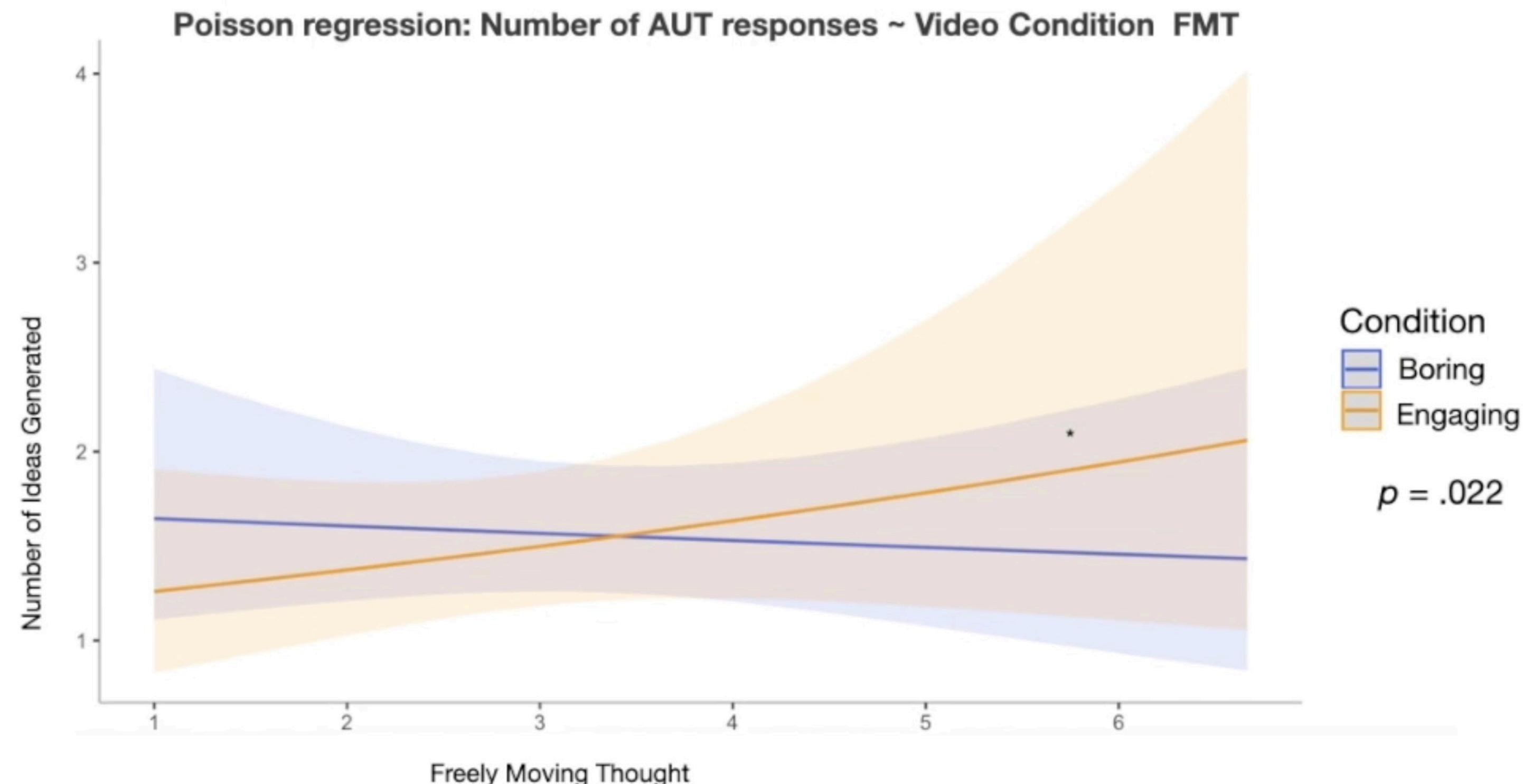


# What were the effects of boredom...

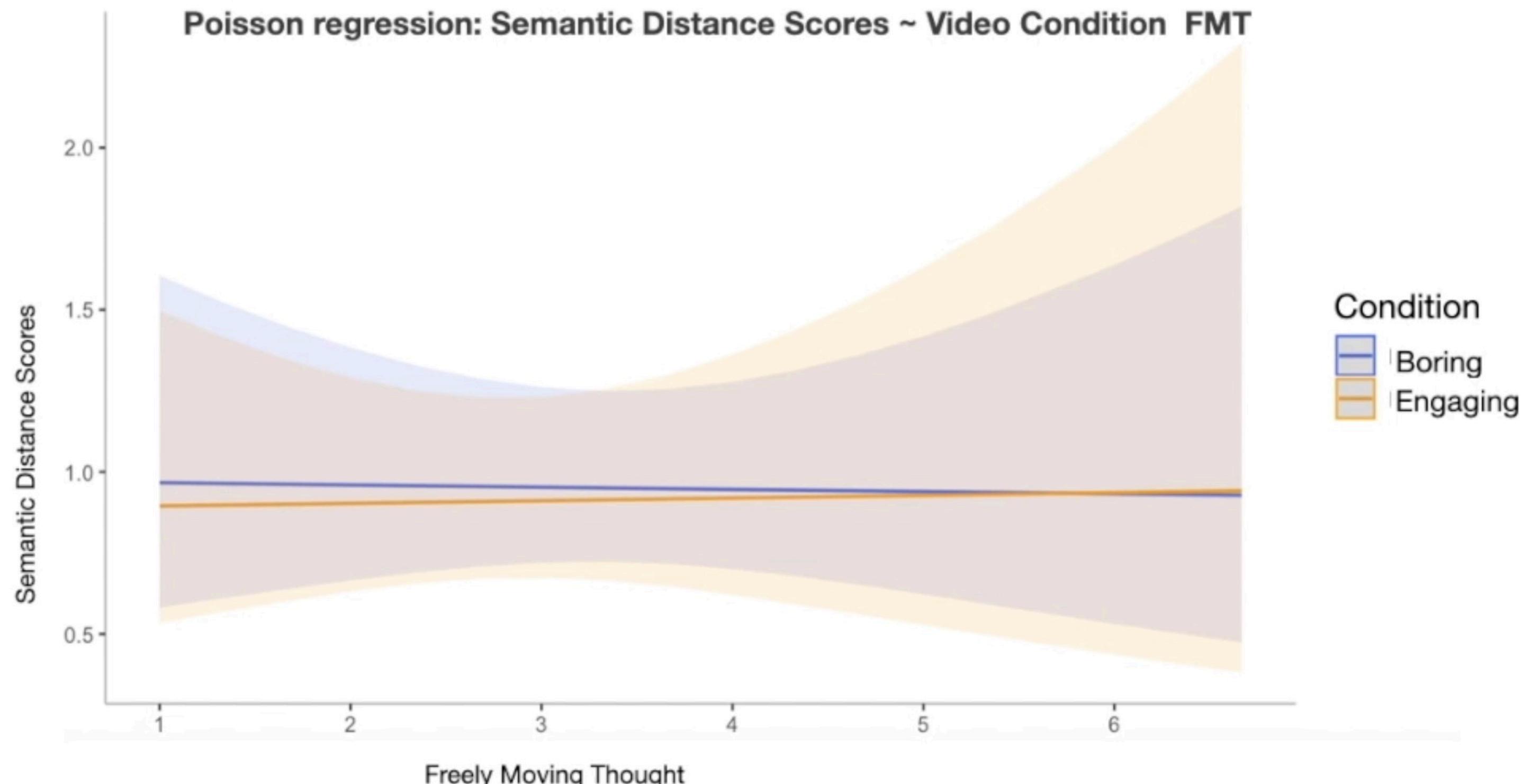
On the quality of ideas generated during the video?



# Does freely moving thought predict... Idea Generation?



# Does freely moving thought predict... Semantic Distance?

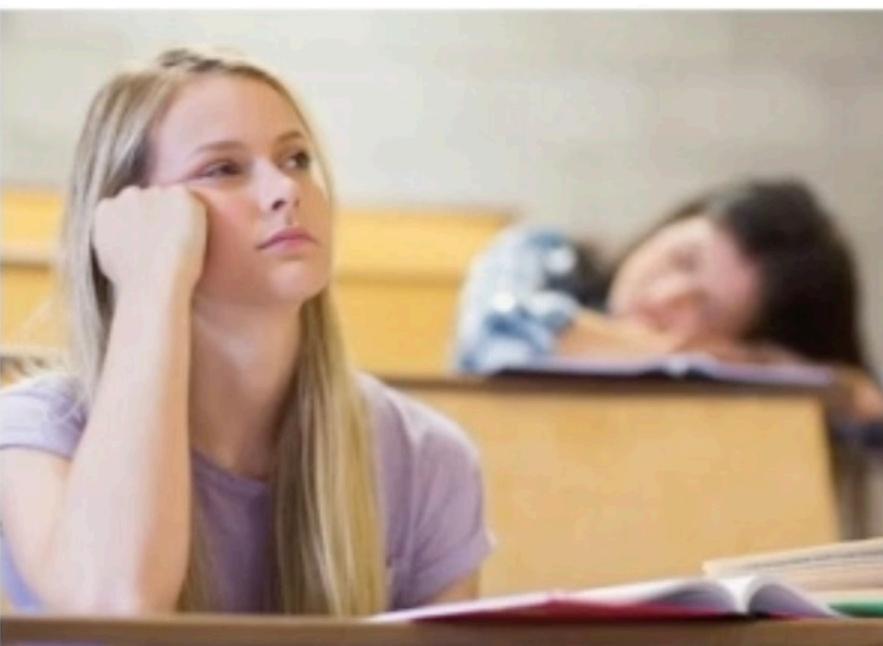


# Discussion

## Summary of Findings

### Boring Condition

- More freely-moving thought
- No significant difference in idea generation
- Greater semantic distance in ideas generated
- Freely-moving thought does NOT predict idea generation



### Engaging Condition

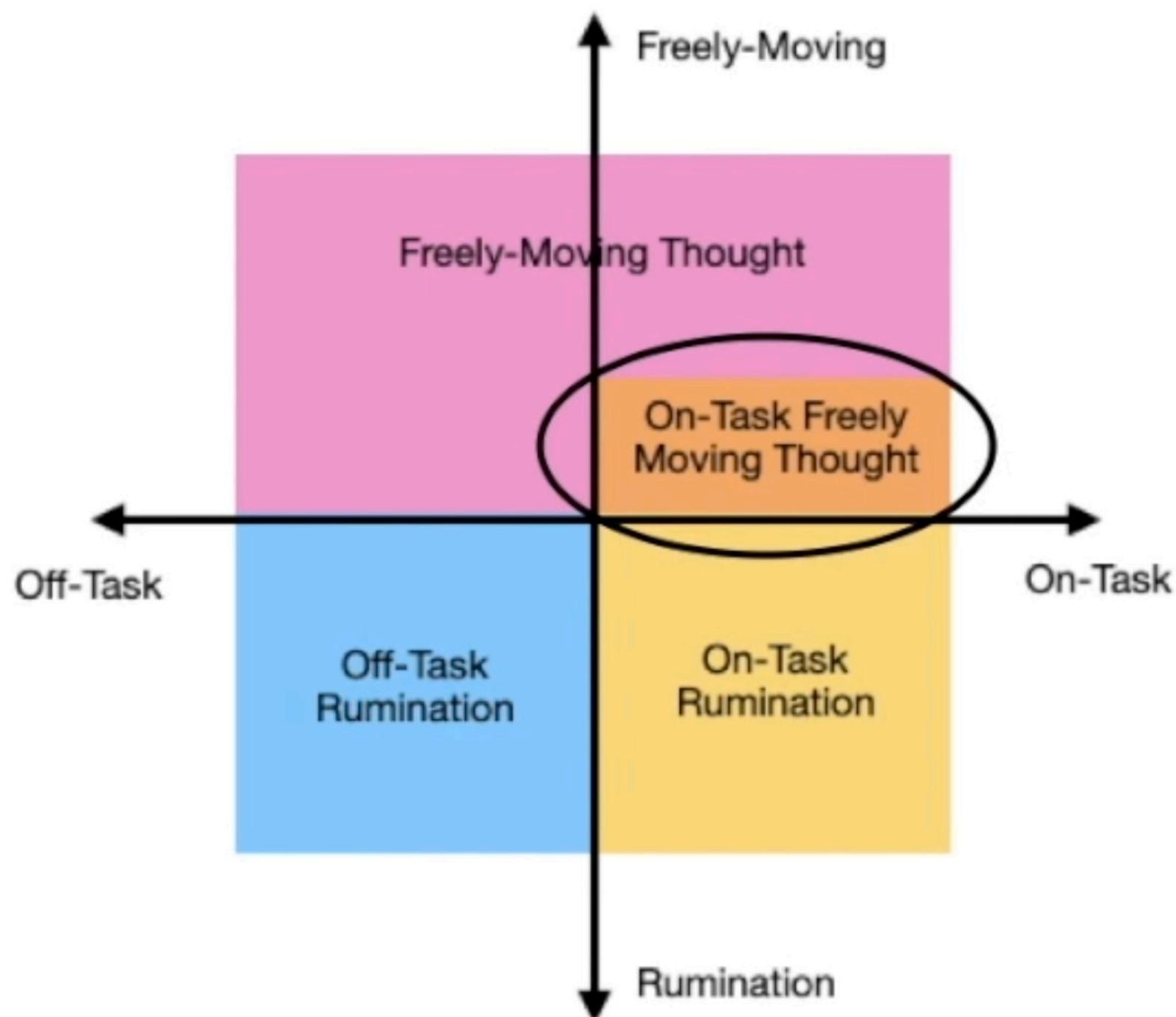
- Less freely-moving thought
- No significant difference in idea generation
- Less semantic distance in ideas generation
- Freely-moving thought predicts idea generation



# Discussion

## Implications

- Creativity may be optimally fostered in settings where stimuli are perceived as having value — By introducing external constraints, idea generation and freely-moving thought seem to significantly increase
- Limitation: We did not assess the content of the thought our participants reported experiencing
- Future research should aim to explore the interaction between feelings of engagement, idea generation, and semantic distance. May also benefit from investigating how to maximally constrain freely-moving thought to be more on-task



# A special thank you to all that helped us!



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The Affect, Cognition, and Computations Lab



Millie Mills