



## Availability Heuristic: Lesson Plan

Topic	
The phrase “availability heuristic” refers to when you base your understanding of the world upon only the information that is most readily accessible to you, such as a popular movie or book. One of the negative consequences of the availability heuristic is that people tend to develop limited understandings about a variety of subjects, and don’t seek to learn nuances or others’ opinions on those subjects.	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
Psychology	30 - 35 minutes
Video link:	
<a href="https://academy4sc.org/topic/availability-heuristic-it-must-be-true-if-its-on-the-internet/">https://academy4sc.org/topic/availability-heuristic-it-must-be-true-if-its-on-the-internet/</a>	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define availability heuristic.</li> <li>• Summarize the K study and explain how it helped prove the existence of an availability heuristic.</li> <li>• Give examples of how the availability heuristic affects people’s beliefs and behaviors towards each other.</li> </ul>	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Heuristic	
Materials Needed	
Worksheet	
Before you watch	
Ask the students if they’ve ever heard the phrase “you are what you eat” and call	



on a few students to explain what it means. Then explain that the information we consume has a similar effect on our brains. Present them this scenario: if they only watched nature documentaries about cute baby animals and read articles about the disgusting process of making Chicken McNuggets, how might that affect their meal choices? How might that affect their opinions on vegetarianism?

#### While you watch

Answer the “quick quiz” questions on the Worksheet.

#### After you watch/discussion questions

1. Other than the Internet, can you list 3 other sources of information that are readily accessible to people?
2. What are some advantages to using the availability heuristic?
3. What are some possible negative consequences to using the availability heuristic?

#### Activity Ideas

- Complete the “propaganda on an alien planet” section of the Worksheet and discuss answers in small groups. Can you connect the experience on the alien planet to current events on Earth?
- Have students devise a “plan” for avoiding the availability heuristic. Some ideas could be: for every news article I read, I need to search for one that gives an opposite opinion; if someone tells me a fact that I've never heard before, I will look it up before automatically believing it; etc. Encourage creative ideas that they can share with family and friends.

#### Sources/places to learn more

1. Fox, Craig R. “The Availability Heuristic in the Classroom: How Soliciting More Criticism Can Boost Your Course Ratings.” *Judgment and Decision Making*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2006, p. 6.
2. Kliger, Doron, and Andrey Kudryavtsev. “The Availability Heuristic and Investors’ Reaction to Company-Specific Events.” *Journal of Behavioral Finance*, vol. 11, no. 1, Mar. 2010, pp. 50–65. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, doi:[10.1080/15427561003591116](https://doi.org/10.1080/15427561003591116).



3. Schwarz, Norbert, et al. "Ease of Retrieval as Information: Another Look at the Availability Heuristic." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 61, no. 2, 1991, pp. 195–202. *APA PsycNET*, doi:[10.1037/0022-3514.61.2.195](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.61.2.195).
4. Tversky, Amos, and Daniel Kahneman. "Availability: A Heuristic for Judging Frequency and Probability." *Cognitive Psychology*, vol. 5, no. 2, Sept. 1973, pp. 207–32. *ScienceDirect*, doi:[10.1016/0010-0285\(73\)90033-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(73)90033-9).