

AP® STATISTICS
2016 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 3

Intent of Question

The primary goals of this question were to assess a student's ability to (1) identify explanatory and response variables from the description of a research study; (2) indicate and justify whether a study is observational or experimental; and (3) explain what confounding means in the context of a particular study with a specific confounding variable.

Solution

Part (a):

The explanatory variable is the person's degree of cigarette smoking. The response variable is whether the person develops Alzheimer's disease during the course of the study.

Part (b):

This is an observational study because the people in the study were not assigned to a certain degree of cigarette smoking. Rather, the degree of cigarette smoking for each person was passively observed and recorded, not manipulated by the researchers.

Part (c):

A confounding variable is one that is related to the explanatory variable and possibly influences the response variable. In this case it seems plausible that people who exercise more regularly might be more health conscious, therefore, less likely to smoke cigarettes than people who do not exercise regularly. Similarly, it's possible that people who exercise more regularly are less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease than people who do not exercise regularly. If both of these relationships turn out to be true, then smoking cigarettes would be associated with developing Alzheimer's disease due to the association of both variables with exercise, even if there were no cause-and-effect relationship between smoking cigarettes and developing Alzheimer's disease.

Scoring

Parts (a), (b), and (c) are scored as essentially correct (E), partially correct (P), or incorrect (I).

Part (a) is scored as follows:

Essentially correct (E) if both variables are described correctly. A correct description includes some degree of status of the variables, such as smoking versus not smoking and developing Alzheimer's versus not developing Alzheimer's.

Partially correct (P) if one variable is described correctly and one is not described correctly;

OR

if neither variable is described correctly but smoking is mentioned as the explanatory variable, and Alzheimer's is mentioned as the response variable;

OR

if the explanatory and response variables are correctly described but are interchanged.

Incorrect (I) if the response does not meet the criteria for E or P.

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Question 3 (continued)

Note: Describing the variables only as smoking and Alzheimer's without a reference to levels/status is not sufficient for E. But making the connection between smoking and explanatory and between Alzheimer's and response is sufficient for P.

Part (b) is scored as follows:

Essentially correct (E) if the response selects the correct type of study (observational) and provides the correct explanation that smoking status was not assigned *OR* that smoking status was only observed.

Partially correct (P) if the response selects the correct type of study (observational) and provides a correct explanation but does not refer to smoking status as the variable that would have been assigned had it been an experiment; for instance, by simply stating that treatment was not assigned;

OR

if the response selects the correct type of study (observational) and provides an explanation that says that smoking is observed (or that smoking status and Alzheimer's are observed) without a modifier for observed (such as, only, just, merely, simply) *AND* without indicating that treatments were not assigned.

Incorrect (I) if the response does not meet the criteria for E or P.

Notes:

- A response that states the explanatory variable was not assigned without naming smoking status is sufficient for E if the explanatory variable is correctly defined in part (a).
- A response that states that smoking status is *ONLY* observed (or that smoking status and Alzheimer's are *ONLY* observed) is sufficient for E.
- A response that says that Alzheimer's is observed without mentioning smoking status is scored I.
- A response that provides an incorrect statistical explanation (such as, "the study is observational because an experiment must have a control group") lowers the score in part (b) by one level (from E to P or from P to I).
- If Alzheimer's is given as the explanatory variable and smoking is given as the response variable in part (a), then part (b) should be scored accordingly with the two variables interchanged.
- Any phrase that refers to the "effect of smoking on Alzheimer's" or "the association between smoking and Alzheimer's" (rather than smoking status) should be ignored.

Part (c) is scored as follows:

Essentially correct (E) if the response includes the following two components:

1. Provides a reasonable explanation that exercise status is related to smoking status.
2. States that exercise status might influence whether the person develops Alzheimer's disease.

Partially correct (P) if the response describes only one of the two components;

OR

if the response only describes how smoking and exercise jointly influence whether the person develops Alzheimer's;

OR

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if the response mentions both of the associations in each component, but also includes an incorrect statistical statement. For instance, part (a) is correct, but in part (c), the explanatory and response variables are interchanged.

Incorrect (I) if the response does not meet the criteria for E or P.

4 Complete Response

Three parts essentially correct

3 Substantial Response

Two parts essentially correct and one part partially correct

2 Developing Response

Two parts essentially correct and no parts partially correct

OR

One part essentially correct and one or two parts partially correct

OR

Three parts partially correct

1 Minimal Response

One part essentially correct

OR

No parts essentially correct and two parts partially correct

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