Stress and coping

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Sports, Exercise and Health Science · SL

Scope and prerequisites

This handout covers selected SL topics for the course first assessed in 2026; it is not the whole syllabus.

Prerequisites: read the stated quantities and units, and use arithmetic and the model conditions below.

The examples are original and fictional: they are not real measurements or real student investigations.

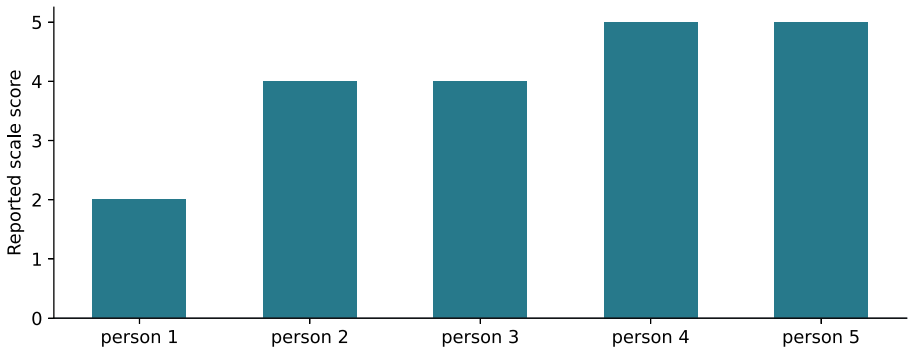
Stress and coping: appraisal and strategy

What would explain this observation?

- Two players face the same penalty shootout and call it differently: one a threat, one a chance. **Stress** follows the appraisal of a demand, and **coping** is what the player does about it.

Build the model

- Stress arises when a demand is appraised as taxing or exceeding resources.
- Coping strategies divide broadly into problem-focused (acting on the demand) and emotion-focused (managing the response).
- Both can be adaptive; the match to the situation is what matters.
- Stress responses are measured as reported experience: the self-report scale rules apply.
- coping: The strategies used to manage a stressor and its response.



Mean = 20 ÷ 5 = 4; range = 5 − 2 = 3

Choose evidence that can test it

- Compare the same task and time point (for example, rated ten minutes before competition).
- A coping log (strategy named after each situation) measures behaviour the scale misses.
- Analyse within-person patterns before claiming between-person differences.

In the lab: Anonymous, voluntary, school-approved questionnaires only; no clinical labels for classroom data.

Work from known quantities

- Known: two players rate pre-shootout stress 5 and 5 (of 5).
- Player A names problem-focused coping (a rehearsed routine); player B names emotion-focused coping (slow breathing).
- Both report 3 in the post-task rating; the coping log shows the routine used, the breathing used.
- The comparable claim: two routes to the same reported change, within-person each.

Your turn: A goalkeeper rates stress 2 yet concedes three. Why does the low rating not disprove a stress effect?

Check the conclusion and its limits

- One situation shows one appraisal; the same player may appraise the next differently.
- Self-report and coping log measure different things; neither measures physiology.

Not true: Emotion-focused coping is the weaker strategy. The match to the situation decides usefulness: an unchangeable referee call is not fixed by problem-focused effort.

Key:

- Stress is appraisal, not the event itself.
- Problem-focused and emotion-focused, matched to the situation.
- Watch for: clinical labels on classroom scale data.

Write from a re-appraisal

- Two students face the same exam; one reads threat, one reads challenge.
- Stress follows the appraisal, not the event – the situation is shared, the stress is not.

■ **Write from a matched strategy**

- A controllable deadline meets problem-focused planning; an uncontrollable wait meets emotion-focused regulation.
- Match the strategy to controllability: acting on the unchangeable, or accepting the changeable, both mis-fit.

■ **Write from a classroom-scale limit**

- A class stress scale flags elevated scores.
- It indicates who to talk to, not a diagnosis – clinical labels belong to clinicians, not questionnaires.

■ **Write from the appraisal flip**

- A sprinter reads the same pounding heart as readiness; a beginner reads it as panic.
- The arousal is identical – only the appraisal flipped, and the stress followed the appraisal, not the heart.