

# Integrating conflicting information from multiple texts: Effects of prior attitudes and text format

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# Integrating Conflicting Information from Multiple Texts: Effects of Prior Attitudes and Text Format

## Problem statement

What is the influence of **prior attitudes** on the integration of conflicting information, and does this differ for **text format** (linear vs. nonlinear)?

## Method

- Participants (117 Dutch pre-university students aged 15-18 years) read multiple texts (about 3000 words) on the relationship between violent videogames and aggression. Texts were presented on a computer screen in either a linear format (to be read from top-to-bottom) or in a nonlinear format (including hyperlinks), and included conflicting information (balanced positive/negative). A between-subjects design was used.
- Participants were asked to read the materials and write a short text on the topic. As a global measure of integration, these texts were scored on **perspective** (ambiguous, tentative, one-sided) and **position** (positive, negative, neutral) taken by the participant. As such, we could assess the extent to which participants acknowledged the ambiguity of the information in the texts – and thus acquired a clear overview of the debate – as well as the influence of their prior attitudes.

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### Perspective

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Ambiguous	Two-sided; No or a neutral conclusion in the text
Tentative	Two-sided, but author draws conclusion in favour of one side of the debate
One-sided	Author discusses only one side or uses the other side solely to refute it

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## Preliminary results

- Students with more positive attitudes were significantly more likely to write tentative or one-sided texts;
- But: Boys were significantly more likely to write one-sided texts than girls, who were more likely to write ambiguous texts (i.e., a significant **gender effect**);
- Students with more positive attitudes were significantly more likely to express a favourable position toward violent videogames in their texts;
- Thus, (strong) prior attitudes appear to hamper integration.
- But: There were **no significant effects of text format** on global integration.

## Further analyses

More fine-grained analyses on the level of idea units are carried out momentarily. Information in participants' written texts is coded as borrowed, added, or transformed. In addition, an eye-tracking study using the same tasks and materials is carried out to see how participants process information that is inconsistent with their prior attitudes (e.g., do they ignore it?).

## Questions for round-table discussion

- How to interpret the significant effects of gender? Is it really a unique predictor or simply a result of the overrepresentation of boys with more favourable prior attitudes?
- What are alternative ways to study and measure integration of conflicting information?

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