

This Week's Citation Classic

Jensen A R & Rohwer W D, Jr. The Stroop color-word test: a review.

Acta Psychologica 25:36-93, 1966.

[University of California, Berkeley, CA]

The Stroop test is based on the differences between the speeds of (a) reading color names, (b) naming colors, and (c) naming the colors of words that are printed in incongruous colors, e.g., RED printed in green, yellow, or blue. It presumably measures a person's susceptibility to interference effects in various mental functions, especially learning and memory. The article reviews the results of the test's extensive uses in research on mental abilities, cognitive style, personality, and drug effects. [The Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI®) indicates that this paper has been cited over 160 times since 1966.]

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"At first, I was quite surprised to learn that this review article has become a Citation Classic. But on second thought, I should have seen it coming, as it is one of the only two of my articles (out of some 200) for which I have continuously received reprint requests over more than ten years after its publication. The other article, 'How much can we boost IQ and scholastic achievement?', was also a Citation Classic.¹

"In the early 1960s, I was using the Stroop test in my research on individual differences in susceptibility to intrinsic interference effects in various kinds of learning and memory. To my graduate-student research assistant at the time, William Rohwer, I assigned the task of compiling a complete bibliography on the Stroop. (Rohwer has since become a well-recognized psychologist in his own right and is now a full professor at Berkeley.) This literature was inordinately scattered throughout the world's psychological journals, some of them

quite obscure, and in many unpublished research reports. Our compulsion for thoroughness eventually led us to all of these, through library searches, correspondence with researchers who had used the test, and notices in journals. While in England on a Guggenheim Fellowship, I tracked down the remaining few recondite references in the superb libraries of the British Psychological Society and the British Museum, and then wrote my review. I regarded the effort merely as an adjunct to my own research and as a service to other researchers using the Stroop. Its frequent citation suggests that it has fulfilled its purpose quite well. An updated review is in order. I would imagine that the number of studies involving the Stroop has more than tripled since our 1966 review. The considerable interest in the Stroop test is probably the result of its great simplicity and the fact that it shows significant (but usually modest) correlations with a host of other psychological variables and drug effects.

"John Ridley Stroop originally devised the color-word test and demonstrated some of its interesting properties as his psychology PhD thesis. He published only one other article² on the test, and then dropped completely out of sight in psychological and scientific circles. I had great difficulty trying to trace him in 1964. Professional organizations could offer no leads, nor could George Peabody College, where he had obtained his PhD. But finally I found him in Nashville, Tennessee, where for many years he had been professor of bible in the David Lipscomb College. He had long been out of touch with the psychological literature and was utterly unaware that his test had become quite famous and widely used. When later I sent him a reprint of our review, his laconic reply, scribbled on a postcard, was: 'Glad to know others have found the test useful. J.R. Stroop.'

"Today I phoned Lipscomb College with the hope of being able to tell Stroop that the review of his test had become a Citation Classic. The dean of the college informed me that Stroop died on September 1, 1973, at the age of 76."

1. Jensen A R. How much can we boost IQ and scholastic achievement? Harvard Educ. Rev. 39:1-123, 1969. [Citation Classic. Current Contents (41): 16, 9 October 1978.]

2. Stroop J R. Studies of interference in serial verbal reactions. J. Exp. Psychol. 18:643-62, 1935.