Application of psychology to everyday life

Lesson 1.5.1 | Concepts and methods

1. What is an application?

An application uses psychological knowledge to inform a practical decision, intervention or design. It needs a clear connection between a finding, a proposed action and an intended benefit. A plausible suggestion is not the same as an intervention demonstrated to work.

Hint: Use finding → who changes what → intended benefit → evidence needed to check that benefit.

2. From evidence to a usable proposal

Finding: identify the actual behaviour measured, participants and conditions.
Mechanism: explain why the finding makes the proposed action plausible, distinguishing a tested process from speculation.
Action: say who would do what, rather than simply stating that the study is useful.
Outcome: define the practical improvement, such as retained information or safer animal cooperation.

3. Three important distinctions

Research instrument versus treatment: the Eyes Test measures a component of social cognition; this study did not test therapy.
Biological measurement versus functional benefit: brain structural change after MBSR does not establish better memory.
Possible use versus tested use: Milgram can inform authority training, but did not test whether training prevents harmful obedience.

4. Applications differ in closeness to the evidence

Fagen trained the veterinary sequence itself, providing direct feasibility evidence for that activity. Saavedra and Silverman followed an actual treatment, but only in one child. A recommendation about classroom doodling extends beyond Andrade's short adult listening task.

The stronger the change in target population, setting, task or outcome, the more evidence transfer requires. A controlled experiment may have strong internal validity yet still offer limited evidence about an everyday intervention.

5. Avoid stereotypes

Group averages do not prescribe what every individual needs. Monkey toy preferences cannot determine a child's toys; personal-space means cannot establish an ideal distance for every person. Applications should respect individual variation and avoid unfair labelling.

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Lesson 1.5.1 | Evidence and interpretation

1. Biological and cognitive applications

Study	Possible use and boundary
Dement and Kleitman	Objective sleep/dream-recall investigation; not proof of a universal sleep treatment.
Hassett	Investigate activity preferences and socialisation; not rules about children's toys.
Hölzel	Study training-related plasticity; clinical and functional benefits need separate tests.
Andrade	Try low-demand activity during dull listening; not all drawing or multitasking.
Baron-Cohen	Research social sensitivity; not stand-alone diagnosis or complete empathy assessment.
Pozzulo	Make line-up rejection clear and acceptable; real police procedures need direct evaluation.

2. Learning and social applications

Study	Possible use and boundary
Bandura	Consider models children observe; no direct proof of lasting violence prevention.
Fagen	Reward-based veterinary cooperation; no comparison proving superior welfare.
Saavedra and Silverman	Assess disgust as well as avoidance; one combined-treatment case limits generalisation.
Milgram	Discuss harmful authority pressure and speaking up; workplace training was not tested.
Perry	Consider individual/context differences in spacing; no universal OT or seating prescription.
Piliavin	Consider visible need and perceived costs; no universal crowd or emergency rule.

Each proposal must remain attached to its evidence. For example, Andrade's combined adjusted recall was 7.5 versus 5.8; the tested activity was shading supplied shapes during a monotonous message, not unrestricted drawing in a complex lesson.

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Lesson 1.5.1 | Evaluation and connections

1. Evaluating validity and generalisation

Construct validity: does the outcome measure the intended real-life benefit? Liking an activity is not evidence of better retention.
Population: do adults, children, clinical cases or selected animals match the proposed users?
Task and setting: does a laboratory response resemble the everyday problem?
Time: was the outcome immediate or maintained over months?

2. Evaluating feasibility and ethics

Consider time, training, resources and accessibility. A useful intervention may be impractical at scale or benefit only some users. Weigh likely benefits against distraction, distress, privacy costs or unfair treatment. Biological or diagnostic findings require careful, respectful interpretation.

Animal-care applications need welfare checks as well as successful task completion. Rewards do not automatically resolve housing, restricted movement or health concerns. A human application must protect voluntary choice and confidential data.

3. How to test a proposed application

Define the target population and a relevant outcome. Compare the proposed approach with normal practice or a suitable alternative; use allocation and controls where possible. Measure benefits, unintended effects and persistence, rather than relying only on impressions.

For a doodling proposal, compare clearly defined listening activities, measure later retained information and check distraction. Extending to children requires age-appropriate procedures and consent/assent, rather than assuming an adult result transfers unchanged.

4. Writing an application answer

A developed answer links a named study detail to a realistic action and explains why it might help. If evaluation is required, identify a specific difference between research and proposed use and explain its consequence.

> Hint: Replace "this improves education" with a precise user, action and outcome. Then identify what the study did and did not demonstrate.

Example reasoning: stronger recall during simple shading makes a low-demand listening aid plausible. However, complex drawing could compete for attention, so the result cannot justify all classroom multitasking.