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TOOLS FOR PRACTICE #305 | December 20, 2021



PEER's Guide to Gift-Giving

CLINICAL QUESTION

What kind of gifts do people like receiving?

BOTTOM LINE

Improve an undesirable gift with a note indicating you own the gift too, although some gifts cannot be improved (example: stapler). When in doubt, stick with a wish-list or something sentimental (example: framed photo of yourself with recipient). Research suggests late and/or cheap gifts might be acceptable. The gifts used in studies were ones few would recommend (example: pen). However, a lack of data exists when the recipient is your significant other: Tread carefully in this evidence-free zone.

EVIDENCE

- *Fancy versus practical gift:*
 - 189 participants rated preferences for "luxury" or "practical" pen;¹ scale (1=very little to 7=very much).

- Participants receiving practical pen:
 - Liked it more (score: 4.9 versus 4.4), felt happier (4.8 versus 3.9); all comparisons statistically different.
 - Limitation: No comparison to any other gift.
- *More versus less expensive gift:*
 - 197 participants: more expensive (iPod) and less expensive (CD) gifts similarly appreciated [score: 6.0 on 7-point scale (higher=greater appreciation)].²
 - Limitation: Both gifts now obsolete.
- *Sentimental gifts:*
 - 330 participants, 86% preferred sentimental gift (photo of gift-giver and recipient) over “preference-matched gift” (framed photo of favourite musician).³
 - Limitation: Photos of musicians may be suboptimal comparator.
- *Gift timing:*
 - 181 students rated importance of on-time birthday gift.⁴
 - Scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).
 - Timing unimportant: Mean rating=4.7
 - Limitations: Unclear how late gift would be (i.e., days versus months).
- *Wish-lists:*
 - 90 students, recipient’s satisfaction score higher with registry gift: 8.6 versus 6.8 (non-registered gift) on 10-point scale (higher=better), statistically different.⁵
 - Limitations: the gifts utilized were all lamps.
- *Improving bad gifts:*
 - 616 participants rated gift with/without notecard indicating: “I hope you like [this gift] -- I got myself [one] too!”.⁶
 - Some gifts (examples: cookbook, mug, socks) had improved “likeability, thoughtfulness and consideration” score (>0.5 points on 7-point scale) with notecard.
 - Others (examples: flashlight, stapler) no change.

CONTEXT

- No studies describing opinions of people receiving “regifted” items.
 - Original givers prefer their gifts be regifted versus thrown away.⁷
 - The Seinfeld cast give opinions in this [segment](#).
- Example desirable gifts from studies: Restaurant gift cards⁵, movie tickets⁵, blanket⁶, headphones⁶, and bourbon⁶.

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Authors do not have any conflicts of interest to declare.

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