

Story 1

Content / Condition: Perception

Audio: S01-1.wav

From her spot backstage, Hannah caught a glance of the spacious theatre hall where the music competition was being held. The hall's ornamented balconies hung over the heads of those sitting on the lower level. The buzz of their talking was loud, and yet they seemed small, almost miniature, in their seats. She heard orchestra players tuning their instruments and felt butterflies in her stomach. It was the first time she would be competing while accompanied by an entire orchestra.

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Audio: S01-2.wav

Hannah slowly walked out onto the stage. The theatre-goers abruptly fell silent, before clapping their hands enthusiastically. She sat at the piano stool, placing her hands on the piano keys, ready to begin. The conductor waved both his hands, vigorously, and the orchestra started playing. Her fingers moved swiftly across the keys and her feet lightly pressed the piano pedals. Her body swayed gently back and forth, as if the very sound of the music was moving her.

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Audio: S01-3.wav

Only when she was in the backstage room did Hannah let herself feel the joy. With the thunderous applause still in her ears, she felt a wave of pleasure overcome her. Before long, she was being called back to the stage by the judges and she walked out unsteadily, her face flushed with excitement. With tears of joy in her eyes, she accepted a large bouquet of flowers and a check that was awarded to her. She felt the thrill of victory.

Story 2

Content / Condition: Perception

Audio: S02-1.wav

The big bag weighed heavily on Kevin's shoulder – it was full of tools. He took in the sights of his route home – the clatter of the New York subway cars, the starry ceiling of Grand Central Station. He listened to the buzz of people as they rushed about, and saw them line up in an orderly fashion at ticket booths below a four-faced clock. He left the station and walked to his tiny apartment in Midtown Manhattan.

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Audio: S02-2.wav

Once he got home, Kevin quickly unpacked his tools and rolled up his sleeves. He dug through his toolbox until he found the cordless drill. He carefully put in the proper drill bit, and pulled the trigger gently to test the battery. It still worked fine. With a pencil he carefully marked a point on the wall and then started to drill. But as soon as he started there was staccato banging from the other side of the wall.

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Audio: S02-3.wav

Kevin stopped, frustrated. He started drilling again, feeling agitation rise in him, but now the banging was even louder. Kevin became furious, and yelled through the wall, banging on it too. In a few moments, when he heard a knock on his front door, he felt heat in his face. Flushed with anger, his fists clenched tight, he ran to the door and as soon as he opened it and saw his neighbor standing there, Kevin slammed the door in his face.

Story 3

Content / Condition: Perception

Audio: S03-1.wav

Beth looked out from the balcony of her sister's apartment in Paris. She could see the outline of the Eiffel Tower in the distance. Yesterday, while she was excitedly surveying Le Champs-Élysées, she was tingling with awe as she walked through its famous Arc de Triomphe. She didn't like the Montmartre cafés as much, as they were loud with the chatter of tourists and the heavy smell of cigarette smoke. Now, on the balcony, she enjoyed the light wind on her face.

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Audio: S03-2.wav

Beth turned away from the view to look into the apartment. Her nephew, Jean-Paul, was crawling unsteadily toward her. She swiftly got up from her chair and scooped him up and lifted him energetically into the air. The child moved his arms up and down rapidly, as if he were flying, and Beth held him aloft and ran around the apartment, carrying him. After a while she put him back onto the floor.

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Audio: S03-3.wav

The boy sat on the floor, busying himself with some toys that were left lying around, and Beth went into the kitchen to make him a snack. After the snack, Jean-Paul was tired and needed a nap, and soon enough, Beth's sister and her brother-in-law returned from work. Beth and her sister prepared dinner together. After dinner, Beth watched a recent movie on TV. When she went to bed, it was already 10 p.m.

Story 4

Content / Condition: Perception

Audio: S04-1.wav

Jimmy looked up and saw that the basketball stadium was filled to the last seat for the high-school finals. He felt the body heat of his teammates as they pressed together around the coach. He saw the glistening sight of a sea of spectators waving team flags. The sound of cheerleaders screaming their cheers, and the sound of his own heart racing away almost deafened him. He felt sweat trickling steadily down his face.

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Audio: S04-2.wav

Within seconds, Jimmy and his teammates were running back onto the court. It was their ball, and they needed to score three points in the 10 seconds left before the game ended. As his teammates swiftly passed the ball amongst themselves, he pivoted to lose his defender and dashed to outside the three-point line. With only 3 seconds left, a teammate made a quick pass to him. Jimmy caught the ball, leapt high into the air and shot it.

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Audio: S04-3.wav

He scored! Jimmy screamed for joy. It was his moment of pure rapture, and he barely recovered before his teammates lifted him to their shoulders. The fans poured out of their seats onto the court, laughing, cheering, crying, and waving their flags and jerseys, singing the team song. Jimmy got down from his teammates shoulders, his mouth stretched into a huge grin and tears rolled down his cheeks. It was Jimmy's happiest day ever!

Story 5

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Audio: S05-1.wav

To Bob, the mountain looked particularly lush in the morning. He breathed deeply, drawing in the crisp air scented with the smell of pines. In the distance he saw the glistening peaks of the neighboring mountain range, still covered with snow. He was warmed by the golden sun that shone from the clear blue sky. He enjoyed hearing the constant chirping of the birds that hid in the deep green of the trees that surrounded him.

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Audio: S05-2.wav

Before he started jogging, he stretched, extending and rotating his joints in a smooth motion. In the beginning, he jogged at a very slow pace for 5 minutes and then he picked up the pace, running steadily up a hill, pumping his legs. When he reached the peak, he made a U-turn and jogged back to his starting point. After jogging for 45 minutes, Bob was completely exhausted. Suddenly, he stumbled, as if he had tripped on something.

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Audio: S05-3.wav

He had been pushed from behind by two men who held him down at knifepoint and robbed him of everything he had. When they were gone, Bob felt inconsolable. Not only had they taken his things, but they had taken his wedding ring, the ring he cherished as a symbol of eternal love for his wife. The fact that no other ring would be able to replace it made his heart ache. He remained sitting on the path, weighed down with sorrow.

Story 6

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Audio: S06-1.wav

Francesco looked far past the conductor, at the majestic arches of the stained-glass windows with images of nativity and saints, and an imposing pipe organ. The choir had been recently holding rehearsals at the Episcopal Church. The wonderful acoustics made Francesco feel that his voice sounded more resonant than ever. His eyes feasted on the large nave and long rows of wooden pews that had dark purple cushions on the seats, with wooden kneelers running lengthwise to the benches.

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Audio: S06-2.wav

Francesco opened his music sheets and glanced around at the other choir-members. Forty-two men were shuffling their music-sheets. He then looked back at the conductor who was putting his own sheets of music on the music stand. The conductor picked up his baton, raised it, and tapped it rapidly against the edge of the music stand. Then he swiftly raised both his arms in the air, and with one sweeping gesture, caused all voices to rise in unison.

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Audio: S06-3.wav

After the rehearsal, the conductor made a few remarks about practicing and attendance, before dismissing them. Francesco collected his sheets of music and put them in his bag. Then he joined other choir-members who were also getting ready to leave and chatted with them for a while. He left the church with a few of the men and headed to the parking lot. Francesco then said his goodbyes, got into his car, and drove home.

Story 7

Content / Condition: Control

Audio: S07-1.wav

The birthday party for Julie's best friend Miranda was today. Julie couldn't afford to buy Miranda a decent present because she had been let go from her job as a cashier in a store, and hadn't found work yet. Because she had been unemployed for a couple of months, she was quite poor. Instead of buying her something, she would bake her a flan – a caramel custard dessert. Everything she needed was already in her fridge.

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Audio: S07-2.wav

Julie first mixed a half-dozen eggs with a cup of sugar, turning the batter slowly with a spoon. With a peeler, she carefully removed the zest off a lemon and dropped it into a pot of milk that was heating, with some cinnamon sticks. Once the batter was ready, she poured it out gently into a baking dish and placed it in the oven. After an hour, she pulled on her oven-mitts and took the flan out of the oven.

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Audio: S07-3.wav

At Miranda's party, Julie blushed at the numerous compliments she got about her flan. Greg, Miranda's friend who owned a bakery, was so impressed that he offered Julie a job in his bakery on the spot. Julie was shocked by the offer at first – she loved baking and being paid for it was almost a fantasy. She accepted the job, feeling ecstatic. She felt gratitude and excitement about finally being able to work at something that she loved!

Story 8

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Audio: S08-1.wav

Super Bowl Sunday this year was the anniversary of the day Jonathan and his girlfriend Jennifer started dating. The day before the game, Jonathan was organizing a Super Bowl party. He called his friends up and invited them over to watch the game. But Jennifer insisted that their apartment was not large enough to host them all and they should celebrate their anniversary in peace. Despite her objections, he went ahead with his plans.

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Audio: S08-2.wav

The following day, five of Jonathan's friends walked into the apartment, carrying beer and pizza. They sat down on the couch and armchairs that Jonathan had pushed in front of the TV. They sat there, watching the game, on the edge of their seats, yelling and jumping up in the air with every good play. The beer would spill from their cans, and they kept clumsily overturning snacks sitting on the coffee table, but they kept at it.

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Audio: S08-3.wav

Once the game was over, and his friends gone, Jonathan started feeling remorseful. As he knocked on the bedroom door, apologetically, he found his heart was beating harder. Opening the door, he found that Jennifer was not there and all her stuff in the closets and her suitcases were gone. His heart sank. He realized that he had made a terrible mistake, but it was too late. He sat on the bed, crying and wanting her back.

Story 9

Content / Condition: Control

Audio: S09-1.wav

Two weeks of vacation time were almost gone before Alice got around to her home renovations. The walls of the apartment where she had been living for several years were in disrepair. Still, it was so easy to busy herself with other things – vacation time was always too short to do everything that needed to be done. But with only a few days left of her vacation she was finally going to get to work fixing up her place.

Content / Condition: Action

Audio: S09-2.wav

Walking through the local hardware store, Alice grabbed supplies and dropped them in her basket. Then, at home, she pushed the furniture into the center of each room and threw large plastic sheets over each piece. She then laid down tape along the edges of the walls to prevent smudges on the floorboards. Finally, she started painting – first slowly dabbing the corners with special brushes, then more rapidly rolling paint on large parts of the wall with her rollers.

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Audio: S09-3.wav

In the evening, Alice was about half-way done with painting. She left all the windows open to air the place out. She took a shower, got dressed, and went out to find some food. She ate at one of the local restaurants, only five minutes away from her home. When she got back home, the apartment still smelled of paint, and was chilly too. Alice called up her best friend Jane and asked to crash at her place.

Story 10

Content / Condition: Control

Audio: S10-1.wav

After Harry graduated from a community college that specialized in vocational training, he got a job from a local cable company, working as a service technician. On Harry's first day at his new job, his supervisor allocated 9 work orders to him, 4 of which had to be finished in the morning, and the remaining 5 to be done by the end of the day. Everything was ready, and he drove to the first customer.

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Audio: S10-2.wav

At the first customer, Harry took out the new cable box and wires from the packaging. He gently pulled the TV out from the wall to access the jacks he needed to connect the cable box. He had to disentangle the cords that had twisted together, and then run the cable line through to the TV while keeping it all organized. When he finally finished plugging everything in, he pushed the TV back into its place.

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Audio: S10-3.wav

Once the TV was turned on, and the customer was happily surfing the channels, Harry felt relieved. He couldn't get the smile off his face. When he returned to the office, he had an even nicer surprise – the customer had phoned his supervisor to commend him for a job well done, and now his boss did the same thing, in front of all of his co-workers! Harry felt his heart expand with newly found pride.

Story 11

Content / Condition: Control

Audio: S11-1.wav

Patrick went to dance lessons every Friday evening. Today, he was early for the start of his lesson. His usual dance partner Samantha couldn't come because she wasn't feeling well, and he was going to dance with the instructor, Isabella, instead. Patrick and Samantha were preparing for their first dance competition that was taking place in a nearby city in the summer. They would be competing with over 30 pairs of amateur dancers.

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Audio: S11-2.wav

Isabella finally opened the door of the studio, and Patrick went inside. The music was already on, and he walked up to Isabella. Patrick gently took Isabella's right hand in his, put his left hand on her waist, and they started dancing. They stepped lightly around the studio, Patrick occasionally missing a step, and stepping clumsily on her foot. Then they would begin again, trying more complicated turns and dips. They finally stopped once the music stopped playing.

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Audio: S11-3.wav

Driving back home, Patrick slowed down for a stop sign, only to feel the shock of his car suddenly lurching forward – he had been rear-ended! His body was tossed toward the windshield, then painfully restrained by the seatbelt. He heard a crack and felt a sharp pain come from one of his knees. Once the physical pain subsided, he felt anguish that it would be a very long while before he could dance again.

Story 12

Content / Condition: Control

Audio: S12-1.wav

Darryl had bought himself a bookshelf in a large department store. Because it was a weekend, the store had been crowded. It had taken Darryl a few hours before he found the bookshelf that fit the space in his living room, and priced within his budget. Since he did not have a car, he paid for it to be delivered. Now, this very morning, Darryl received the bookshelf and was ready to assemble it.

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Audio: S12-2.wav

Darryl dug clumsily through his toolbox until he found the box-cutter and cut open all of the boxes. He then spread out the diagram that indicated how to assemble the bookshelves and started screwing pieces of wood together. Some he nailed together using a hammer, while others he joined tightly with special brackets as shown in the diagram. Finally, he pushed his newly constructed bookshelf against the wall, where he wanted it to stand.

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Audio: S12-3.wav

The bookshelf was reasonably stable. All around the room were open boxes and clear plastic bags that came with the bookshelf. When he started to tidy up his living room, he noticed that there were still some nails, screws, and brackets left over from the assembly. According to the diagram, he wasn't missing some important pieces; it all seemed fine. He left it as it was. Sometimes companies pack a few extra pieces, just in case they are needed.

Story 13

Content / Condition: Perception

Audio: S13-1.wav

Lights – blue, green, red – flashed randomly across the dance floor. Mark stood at the bar with two of his colleagues whose conversation was barely audible, overpowered as it was by the pounding rhythms of the music. Mark's eyes were strangely drawn to the silver, glittering, disco ball that turned, slowly, reflecting light in all directions. Underneath it, the floor was packed with dancers. They were oblivious to how strange their gyrating bodies, stained with sweat, looked to the outsider.

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Audio: S13-2.wav

This disco was where Mark and his colleagues regularly came on Friday evenings. The music was too loud to talk, but that didn't matter to them. It was here that they relaxed from their busy workweek, and got away from the never-ending requests of their demanding clientele. This particular night, Mark was tired and had the feeling he should go home early. But time passed fast, and it was almost midnight before he left the club.

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Audio: S13-3.wav

Once outside the club, Mark realized he had missed a number of calls from his mother's phone. He checked her messages and found that his father had suffered a heart attack, dying. Mark felt breathless, as if someone had punched all the air out of his lungs. He sped to the hospital, but it was too late – by the time he arrived his father was dead. He clutched onto his mother as he cried, unable to suppress his regret and sadness.

Story 14

Content / Condition: Perception

Audio: S14-1.wav

Laura was spellbound, watching her favorite 3-D movie at Universal Studios on a gigantic silver screen. The screen seemed so impossibly large that her favorite movie star, who was playing the lead, looked enormous. The sound from the surround-sound system was incredibly crisp and loud. It was as if she heard all voices and soundtrack from the inside of her own head. Her senses were nearly overwhelmed by all the sights and sounds.

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Audio: S14-2.wav

Then everything went black, and an apologetic announcement was made about the projector, with the promise the movie would continue shortly. But time began to tick by without anything happening. Laura remained seated because the main actor in the film was worth the wait. He was not only handsome, but a great actor as well. After another half an hour, there was only one other person remaining in the theatre, a man sitting a few seats away from her.

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Audio: S14-3.wav

Laura turned to the man and when their eyes met she was shocked to find herself face-to-face with her favorite movie star! Brimming with excitement, Laura didn't waste any time. She introduced herself and asked him for an autograph, incredulous at her luck and despite feeling tingles in her stomach. He really was so nice and charming, in real life just like in the movies. Laura couldn't stop smiling. She could barely contain her joy!

Story 15

Content / Condition: Perception

Audio: S15-1.wav

Chad slowly ran his hand along his tidy workbench and felt it cold and smooth under his fingers. Behind him, he could clearly hear his colleagues' pipettes against glass flasks, the sounds of biochemists at work. He smelled the acrid smell of the compound he was working with. Chad surveyed the glass flasks that were lined up on the bench from the largest to the smallest and felt almost an aesthetic pleasure in their curves and lines.

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Audio: S15-2.wav

Chad's experiment was going slow – so slow, in fact, that it was almost at a standstill. It was common for things to take a long time in this line of research. The next step of his project was to find a way to purify a protein crucial for the repair of DNA. Today, he had begun to experiment with a new purification method that should yield a high concentration of that protein while keeping its structure intact.

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Audio: S15-3.wav

By the time Chad had finished his work for the day, he realized most of his colleagues had already left their benches. They must have said their good-byes while he was working on his experiment. He remained at the lab for another half an hour, preparing the compounds he would need on the following day. On the way home, he picked up some takeout from a fast food restaurant. He had his dinner at home while watching his favorite TV show.

Story 16

Content / Condition: Perception

Audio: S16-1.wav

Christina had taken two different bright red double-decker buses to find her way to the Westminster area of London. She breathed in deeply in awe of all the sights, the gothic lines of Westminster Abbey, as well as the majestic clock face of Big Ben. She walked along the Strand, peering into the muddy Thames River. Suddenly, she heard the melodic ringtone of her phone through her silver-purse. Digging out her phone, she flipped open its pink-shelled case.

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Audio: S16-2.wav

It was her boyfriend, and he said that he wouldn't be able to meet her for dinner because of work. She was in London for only two weeks, entirely on his account, and they were rarely together. To spend a bit more time with him, Christina abruptly decided to give him a surprise visit at work with some takeout so he wouldn't go hungry. When she arrived at the street to his office building, he was coming through the door.

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Audio: S16-3.wav

He had his arm around another woman! The feeling of being so deceived and humiliated was almost unbearable. She felt a lump in her throat, and stinging in her nose and eyes. She felt betrayed and wanted to be back home, among her friends to whom she could complain, whom she could ask for advice, on whose shoulders she could cry. Staying in London another few days, sharing the same apartment, the same bed, felt like torture.

Story 17

Content / Condition: Perception

Audio: S17-1.wav

Jared and Jessica were in Disneyland where they had met 3 years ago at a mutual friend's wedding. The Sleeping Beauty Castle looked to Jared exactly as it was in the Disney cartoon – blue roofs with pink walls and golden turrets. It was an early afternoon, and Disneyland was golden with sun. Main Street was filled with the sweet smell of candy and popcorn and the reassuring sounds of children's laughter. Jared felt the warmth of Jessica's hand in his own.

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Audio: S17-2.wav

There were so many different attractions in the park. They selected a nearby line and began to wait. The line was not moving quickly, but it didn't matter much. Jessica used the time to read some magazines she had brought with her. And Jared was waiting for the perfect moment to execute the plan that would change his life completely. After they visited several attractions, they were a bit tired and it was time to take a break.

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Audio: S17-3.wav

Jared felt great tenderness as he and Jessica settled onto a nearby bench. He took a small jewelry box out of his pocket. Jessica let out a little cry and her eyes filled with tears. Even before she opened the box, she nodded yes to Jared, and leaned over and kissed him, as if to confirm her nod. It was with immense relief and joy that Jared slipped a diamond engagement ring on Jessica's finger.

Story 18

Content / Condition: Perception

Audio: S18-1.wav

What else was there to do in LA but stare at the giant Hollywood sign and follow the whiff of the stars? At the palace-like Grauman's Chinese Theatre, Caitlin looked for handprints, footprints and autographs of celebrities on the concrete floor in front of the Theatre's golden doors. Along the Walk of Fame, she saw familiar names of movie stars inscribed on the pavement. Finally, she found herself in front of the arched doors of the Hollywood Wax Museum.

Content / Condition: Control

Audio: S18-2.wav

The admission for the Wax Museum was almost twenty dollars. It featured wax recreations of famous Hollywood actors, both early and recent, from Marilyn Monroe to Brad Pitt. The museum added approximately 5 new sculptures every year, which meant that the exhibit was always changing. Caitlin, however, felt her stomach

rumble. Time had passed quickly, it was already late afternoon and Caitlin still hadn't had lunch! She passed the Wax Museum and looked for a restaurant.

Content / Condition: Control

Audio: S18-3.wav

Caitlin found a restaurant on Hollywood Boulevard, just a few blocks from the Wax Museum. She sat inside and let the air-conditioned room cool her down. When she was finally settled down, she ordered a club sandwich and an orange juice, followed by a coffee. Afterwards, Caitlin sat at her table for a long time, lingering over her coffee, unwilling to leave the coolness of the restaurant for the heat of the California sun.