

Callie Matteson & Ashley Vitti
Just a Minute

Our project idea came from the reply, “Just a minute!” when we asked for help from one of our parents, who was already busy. They always seemed to take a lot more time than “just a minute”. What does a minute, or 3 or 5, mean to people and how well do they estimate times?

We decided to ask people from three age groups (middle school, high school and adult) to estimate the passage of 1, 3 and 5 minutes while answering a long questionnaire. The facts taken from the answers were age, gender and whether or not they considered themselves multi-taskers. The rest of the questions were simply to occupy the subjects and keep them from mentally counting seconds. Every person had three trials for each of the time intervals (1, 3 & 5 min.).

Our results include the following:

1. 85% of people underestimated the passage of 1 minute.
2. 66% of people overestimated the passage of 3 & 5 minutes.
3. Except in high school, males were better at time estimation than females.
4. Increasing age resulted in improved time estimation for both genders.
5. Female multi-taskers and male single-taskers were best at estimating 1, 3 & 5 minutes.
6. Adult female multi-taskers and adult male single-taskers were the best overall time estimators.

We conclude that age is the most important factor in correct time estimation with adults doing the best. Multi-taskers were generally the best time estimators. Older people seem to have a better reference for time passage.

Further research could include putting the adults into 10 year groupings. We could also look for interesting connections in the rest of our questionnaire.