

## Activity 14.1

### The Symptom Validity Test

The Symptom Validity Test (SVT) is an instrument that can be used to determine whether an individual who claims they have no memory of a crime is faking these symptoms. The SVT consists of forced-choice questions about the crime that the defendant is asked to complete. Individuals who are faking amnesia perform on the SVT at *levels significantly below chance* (i.e. get significantly less than 50% correct). This is because individuals who attempt to feign no knowledge of a crime they have been involved in overcompensate by tending to choose the *wrong* answer.

Try this test with a friend. Ask them to read the paragraphs below written in bold italic very *carefully* – say you may ask them some questions about them later on (do not let them see the questions). Then ask them the following 20 questions about the crime, allowing them to choose between the two possible answers to each. If they are actively feigning ignorance they will probably score well below 50% correct!

***From this moment on you are involved in a petty crime. You will steal some money from an envelope. You are on the university campus and you go to the School of Life Sciences. You go into the café in corridor 1C2. There is no one else in the café. You close the door shut behind you, and notice that the walls have just been freshly painted in a bright yellow colour. You see the white cash till behind the bar. It is closed. You push the 'sale' key and the till opens. There are only coins in the till, but you see a large sealed brown envelope. You take the envelope out of the till and open it. Inside is £200 in ten pound notes. You take the money and put the envelope into the bin beside the water dispenser. At that moment the man working behind the café bar comes into the room. You ask for a cappuccino coffee, drink it very quickly but to avoid looking suspicious you sit down at a table and stay there reading a newspaper for 15 minutes before leaving.***

***You are suspected of stealing the money from the till. There are some other suspects and the police are aiming to find the real perpetrator. Under no circumstances do you want to confess to the crime! Try to convince the police in an intelligent way that you have nothing to do with the crime, so that you will be considered innocent. Act as if you have never been in the café and that you have no knowledge of the theft. The police ask you a series of questions.***

## Questions

1. Was there a water dispenser in the café?  
1) Yes                      2) No
2. What was the colour of the café walls?  
1) Bright blue            2) Bright yellow
3. The café was in:  
1) The School of Life Sciences   2) The Business School
4. When the thief entered the café the cash till was:  
1) Open                      2) Closed
5. The thief pressed which key to open the till?  
1) The 'Cash' key   2) The 'Sale' key
6. The cash that was stolen was in a:  
1) Brown envelope            2) White envelope
7. The cash till was:  
1) Brown                      2) White
8. The till only contained:  
1) Notes                      2) Coins
9. The thief took how much from the envelope?  
1) £50                        2) £200
10. The stolen money was made up of:  
1) £20 notes                2) £10 notes
11. The suspected thief had what drink before they left?  
1) A cappuccino coffee            2) An espresso coffee
12. The person who worked behind the café bar was:  
1) a man    2) a woman
13. What did the thief do with the envelope that contained the money?  
1) Put it back into the till after removing the money   2) Put it in the bin in the café
14. How long did the suspected thief remain in the café after stealing the money?  
1) 15 minutes                2) 10 minutes
15. On which corridor was the café?  
1) 2B4                        2) 1C2
16. What was striking about the walls of the café?  
1) They were covered in posters            2) They had just been freshly painted

17. The bin in the café was next to:  
1) a soft drinks dispenser      2) a water dispenser
18. The envelope in the cash till was:  
1) sealed    2) unsealed
19. The suspected thief drank their coffee:  
1) standing at the bar    2) sitting at a table
20. While drinking their coffee, the suspected thief:  
1) read a magazine      2) read a newspaper

Source: Jellic, M., Merckelbach, H. & van Bergen, C. (2004) [Symptom validity testing of feigned amnesia for a mock crime](#). *Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology* 19, 525-531. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press

You can read a Special issue of the *Journal of Experimental Psychopathology* devoted to "Malingering Research & Symptom Validity Testing" [here](#).