The Psychology of Free

Teacher's Key | Level B1 | EnglishBridges.com

Sections follow the student handout. Delete a section here when you delete it from the handout. The handout uses the short (quick) version of the reading.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

1. tempting
2. grab
3. rational
4. downside
5. owe
6. generous
7. boost
8. sign up / signup / sign-up
9. subscription
10. charge
11. cancel
12. require
13. advertisers
14. fraction

Word Partners

Part A. 1 c 2 a 3 d 4 h 5 f 6 b 7 e 8 g

Phrases: a tempting offer; grab a seat; a rational decision; owe someone a favor; boost sales; cancel a subscription; a fraction of the price; resist the urge.

Part B. 1 temptation 2 rationally 3 generosity 4 requirement 5 cancellation / cancelation 6 advertisements / adverts / ads / advertising

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1. *What is the young man in the shopping mall doing, and why do people join the line?*
He is giving away free keychains. People join the line because the offer looks tempting, even though they do not need a keychain.

2. *In the first chocolate test, what did the two chocolates cost, and which one did most buyers choose?*
The truffle cost 15 cents and the cheap chocolate cost 1 cent. About three in four buyers chose the truffle.

3. *What changed in the second test, and what happened?*
Both prices went down by one cent, so the cheap chocolate became free. About seven in ten buyers then chose the free chocolate.

4. *What is the zero price effect? Explain it in your own words.*
When something costs nothing, we react much more strongly than to a very low price. We stop thinking about the downside.

5. *What happened to Amazon's sales in France, according to the story?*
Delivery in France cost about 20 cents, and sales did not rise. When delivery became free, sales went up.

6. *Why do free gifts make many people want to give something back? Give the example from the restaurant.*
Many people feel that they owe something to a person who gives them a gift. In one restaurant study, customers who got a small piece of chocolate with the bill left bigger tips.

7. *How does a free trial make money for a company?*
People sign up and give their card details. Many forget to cancel, so when the trial ends, the company charges them every month.

8. *What have Germany and the UK done about subscriptions?*
   Since 2022, German subscription websites must have a clear cancel button. A 2024 UK law will require reminders before a free trial ends.
9. *Which piece of advice at the end do you think is the most useful? Give a reason.*
   Open answer. A strong answer names one tip (ask if you would want it for a small price, set a reminder, think about what you give instead) and gives a personal reason.
10. *True, False, or Not Given: "In the second chocolate test, the price difference between the two chocolates became bigger." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    False. Both prices went down by one cent, so the difference stayed the same.
11. *Yes, No, or Not Given: "The writer believes that all free offers are bad for people." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    No. The writer says free things are not always bad: free samples and free trials can be useful.
12. *Author's purpose: Why does the writer tell the story about Amazon in France? Is it (a) to show that a very small price can stop people from buying, (b) to compare shops in France and the United States, or (c) to explain why delivery is expensive?*
    (a) To show that a very small price can stop people from buying. Sales in France did not rise while delivery cost about 20 cents.

True or False

1. **F.** You do not need a keychain. You already have three at home.
2. **T.** A fancy truffle cost 15 cents.
3. **F.** About seven in ten buyers took the free chocolate.
4. **T.** Sales did not rise until the French site switched to free delivery.
5. **F.** They left bigger tips.
6. **T.** Tasting events can boost sales for several weeks.
7. **F.** You type in your card details.
8. **T.** This has been the rule since 2022.
9. **F.** Only a tiny fraction of players spend real money.
10. **T.** Set a reminder a day or two before a free trial ends.

Language Focus: Phrasal Verbs (give away, sign up, end up, slow down)

Model answers. Accept any answer that uses the form correctly and makes sense.

1. When I go shopping, I often end up buying snacks I do not need.
2. The last thing I signed up for was a free trial of a music app.
3. Something I gave away recently was a box of old books.
4. When I feel stressed, I slow down by going for a short walk.
5. If a friend picks up the bill at dinner, I usually pay next time.
6. When I was a child, I signed up for a swimming club.
7. I usually give them away to my cousins.
8. Yes. I went to buy milk, but I ended up buying a new jacket.
9. I slow down by turning off my phone and reading.
10. We take turns. Last time, my friend picked up the bill.

Accept any natural ending that keeps the phrasal verb and its pattern (end up + -ing, sign up for + noun).

Notes on the Evidence

Chocolate test: Shampanier, Mazar, and Ariely, "Zero as a Special Price," Marketing Science 26(6), 742-757 (2007). The figures in the reading come from the paper's real-purchase study at MIT (Experiment 2, 398 people): with a Lindt truffle at

15 cents and a Hershey's Kiss at 1 cent, 73 percent of those who chose a chocolate took the truffle; at 14 cents and free, 69 percent took the Kiss. These are shares of buyers, not of everyone who passed the stand. A cafeteria version (Experiment 3) found the same pattern. Dan Ariely, a co-author, has faced data-integrity questions about a different, unrelated study; the reading does not name the researchers.

Amazon France: this is a story Ariely tells in Predictably Irrational (2008), widely repeated online (for example, CustomerThink). Amazon has not published the sales data, so the reading presents it as "a well-known story" and hedges with "according to the story." The reading gives the French delivery charge as about 20 cents (one franc), as in the story.

Reciprocity and samples: the restaurant study is Strohmetz, Rind, Fisher, and Lynn, Journal of Applied Social Psychology 32(2), 300-309 (2002); a small piece of chocolate with the bill raised tips. The often-quoted percentages (for one, two, and "extra" candies) were not checked against the full paper, so the reading gives none. The in-store sampling finding is from Dotson, Chandukala, and Liu (Journal of Retailing), as reported by BYU in December 2017: sampling raised sales at once and for weeks afterward.

Free trials and games: no single trustworthy figure was found for how many people forget to cancel free trials. A September 2026 US survey by Dimers (2,000 people) was reported with figures that do not fit together (about 4 in 5 versus one quarter), so the reading says only that many people admit it. Game figure: Swrve's 2016 Mobile Monetization Report found that 1.9 percent of free-to-play players made a purchase in February 2016, and 0.19 percent of players produced 48 percent of in-game revenue (Adweek, March 2016). The figure is old; newer industry reports may differ.

Rules (as of October 26, 2026): Germany's cancellation button rule (Section 312k of the Civil Code) has applied since July 2022 (Bird and Bird). The UK Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 includes subscription rules with reminder notices for free and discounted trials; according to TLT (August 2026) the start date has been brought forward to January 2027 and the detailed rules were still unpublished. Update "will require" once the rules are in force. The US FTC "click to cancel" rule was struck down by a federal appeals court in July 2025 and is not mentioned in the reading.