Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Answer Key: When Peer Review Bites Back: Advancing the Scientific Method for Seniors

Navigate 10 high-stakes inquiries into epistemological rigor, statistical nuances, and the ethics governing modern laboratory investigations.

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1. A researcher utilizes Bayesian inference instead of frequentist p-values to evaluate the probability of a hypothesis. Which of the following best describes the advantage of this approach in complex data analysis?

Answer: B) It allows for the incorporation of prior knowledge or previous experimental data into the current statistical model.

Bayesian inference is an advanced statistical method that updates the probability for a hypothesis as more evidence or information becomes available, differing from traditional frequentist methods by utilizing 'prior' distributions.

2. In a double-blind longitudinal study, the 'observer effect' is entirely eliminated because the participants are unaware of whether they are receiving the treatment or the placebo.

Answer: B) False

While double-blind studies mitigate bias, the 'observer effect' (or Hawthorn Effect) refers to individuals modifying their behavior because they know they are being watched, which can occur regardless of treatment assignment.

3. When a scientist selects only the data that supports their specific hypothesis while ignoring outlying data that contradicts it, they are engaging in a practice known as ____.

Answer: C) Cherry-picking

Cherry-picking is a logical fallacy and a violation of scientific integrity where suppressed evidence is used to point to a conclusion that the full body of evidence does not support.

4. During the 'Conclusion' phase, a 12th-grade physics student finds that their results are statistically insignificant. According to the NGSS framework for evaluating evidence, what is the most scientifically rigorous next step?

Answer: C) Analyze the experimental design for systemic errors and suggest a refined methodological approach for future peer review.

High-level inquiry emphasizes that 'negative' results are still findings; the focus should shift to evaluating the methodology and identifying potential confounding variables or systematic bias.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

5. The primary difference between a scientific theory and a scientific law is that a theory eventually becomes a law once it has been tested enough times by different researchers.

Answer: B) False

Theories and laws are different types of knowledge: Laws describe 'what' happens (often mathematically), while theories provide the complex explanation of 'why' it happens. One does not evolve into the other.

6. To ensure the reliability of a complex biochemical assay, researchers must account for ____ variables, which are outside factors that could unintentionally influence the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Answer: B) Confounding

Confounding variables are extraneous factors that correlate with both the dependent and independent variables, potentially leading to false conclusions about causality.

7. Which epistemological concept suggests that for a hypothesis to be considered scientific, there must be a theoretical observation that could prove it wrong?

Answer: C) Falsifiability

Proposed by Karl Popper, falsifiability is a cornerstone of the scientific method; if a claim cannot be tested and potentially refuted, it falls outside the realm of empirical science.

8. In the context of the Reproducibility Crisis, a 'meta-analysis' is a statistical technique that combines results from multiple independent studies to determine the overall effect size of a phenomenon.

Answer: A) True

Meta-analysis provides a higher level of evidence than individual studies by synthesizing data across various research attempts to identify broader trends and reliability.

9. The principle of ____ states that when competing hypotheses are equal in explanatory power, the simplest one with the fewest assumptions is usually the correct one.

Answer: A) Parsimony

Parsimony, often associated with Occam's Razor, is a heuristic used in science to guide the development of models that do not overcomplicate the natural world unnecessarily.

10. When designing a trial for a new CRISPR-based gene therapy, why is 'Informed Consent' categorized as a step in the ethical scientific protocol rather than just a legal requirement?

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Answer: B) It protects the integrity of the human subject and ensures the beneficence of the experimental design.

Modern scientific inquiry, especially in biology and medicine, integrates ethics into the methodology to ensure that the pursuit of knowledge does not violate human rights or safety (as outlined in the Belmont Report).