

Elephant Experiments

Imagine wild elephants portraying similar cognitive abilities as humans and other advanced social species. Although at first the idea may seem preposterous, the articles “Elephants Can Lend a Helping Trunk,” “Elephants Know When They Need a Helping Trunk in a Cooperative Task,” and “Elephants Console Each Other” all explore the progressive social and behavioral capabilities of Asian elephants. While these writings investigate similar aspects of pachyderm behavior and cognition, each author’s purpose and focus is different.

In “Elephants Can Lend a Helping Trunk,” author V. Morrell looks to convey that Asian elephants demonstrate teamwork skills and work at length to achieve a job. A recent study in Thailand showed that “pachyderms understand that they will fail at a task without a partner’s assistance,” as the author stated in paragraph two. To test the elephants, scientists set up an experiment that forces the elephants to work together as a team to pull a rope attached to a table. Once the pachyderms pull the rope, they would get two bowls of corn. To increase the challenge even more, researchers released the elephants at different times. This forced the elephants to wait for their partner before pulling. Data showed that elephants were even quicker learners than chimpanzees, who are thought to be one of the most intelligent species. All and all, the article explains the growing body of evidence that supports elephants showing some impressive cognitive ability.

While the previous article was a factual piece discussing the Asian elephants’ ability to work together, “Elephants Know When They Need Help in a Cooperative Task” examines the experiment used. Author J. M. Plotnik informs readers about the experimental apparatus, or

procedure, that was set up. Then, Plotnik continues to use technical terms in describing the equipment and other items used. Although this article was just a more in depth view of "Elephants Can Lend a Helping Trunk," the main focuses were quite different. For instance, Plotnik's article gave a detailed description with complex language. Morrell's article, on the other hand, gave an overview with some descriptive language. In addition, "Elephants Know When They Need Help in a Cooperative Task" had a choppy format, similar to a lab report. "Elephants can lend a Helping Trunk" was more narrative like with interesting details and theories. Lastly, each article had a much different reading level; Plotnik's article was exceptionally complicated and above eighth grade level, while Morrell's was easier, as well as stimulating for the reader.

In the past two articles, elephant cognition and teamwork was discussed and examined. "Elephants Console Each Other," by V. Morrell, however, assessed a study that proved Asian elephants' advanced characteristic of consolation. In paragraph one of the article, Morrell states, "Elephants, both Asian and African, have long been considered empathetic animals. They help baby elephants stuck in mud holes, use their trunks to lift other elephants that are injured or dying, and even reportedly distressed individual elephants with a gentle touch of their trunk." Indeed, the studies in Thailand have shown that elephants emotionally respond to their situations, even when factors like weather and time come into play. Although this article did support the other two in saying that elephants are highly intelligent creatures, it does not fully correspond with the previous articles. Rather than focusing on team work and cognition, "Elephants Console Each Other" gives a detailed look at their emotional and behavioral thinking.

The three articles on pachyderms may seem similar if not identical on the surface. However, merely scanning over the page will not give the reader insight on each writing piece.

Further investigation and analysis show the differences in material, purpose, and difficulty. Therefore, it is necessary to read further into each article and pull out the facts and figures needed to draw conclusions and make predictions.