

## Written Research Report Essentials: Applying Psychology to Everyday Live

**Learning Objectives:** This writing assignment is intended to help you achieve a number of the learning objectives we have for this course, including the following:

1. Recognize, recall, interpret and apply findings and phenomena from specific areas of psychology.
2. Critically evaluate evidence about behavior and the mind that occurs in the context of daily life.
3. Apply your understanding of psychological concepts, theories, facts and methods for the purpose of gaining insights about yourself, others, and events which are likely to occur in the context of daily life.
4. Effectively communicate your understanding of psychology in written form.
5. Find peer reviewed empirical research in the library and use it to support your insight into (understanding of) everyday behavior.
6. Plan your work, schedule your assignments, and organize your UBC life, in order to meet unmovable deadlines.

**The Assignment:** To fulfill this course requirement, you will need to write a report, 750 words long (plus/minus 50 words), which highlights your thinking and writing skills. Your report must address one of the 3 topics which are listed later in this document, each of them focusing on something (an issue or problem) which occurs in, or is directly relevant to, the context of our everyday life. The report must be written in APA format (described later in this document) and must be submitted to both TurnItIn.com and PeerScholar by the due time/date which is 11.59 pm on October 26 2012. [Note: None of the deadlines will be moved.]

Whichever topic you choose, your report should be arranged into roughly three parts. In Part 1 (between 100 to 200 words), your task is to identify and describe what you consider the most critical issue or issues (or problems, or questions) which are raised by the topic and which are most directly relevant to psychology. In Part 2 (350 to 600 words), you are expected to use information from the course text in order to illuminate (gain insight into, increase understanding of) one or more of these critical issues, or to increase your understanding of the issues. Also in Part 2, you further illuminate one or more of these issues by means of empirical research which has been published in a peer reviewed psychology journal in the past 10 years (i.e., after 2001). You are expected to make use of and refer to at least two (maximum of 5) sections in the text, and at least one (with a maximum of 3) peer reviewed psychology journal article(s). In Part 3 (between 100 and 200 words), your task is to draw conclusions, make connections between Part 1 and 2, perhaps acknowledge limitations that are relevant to Part 2, and perhaps propose research that would need to be carried out to address new questions which occurred to you.

Writing a research report requires you to make a series of choices: picking one of the assigned topics, focusing on one or more of the issues or problems that are raised by the chosen topic, selecting text materials/sources that are directly relevant to those issues or problems, and selecting one or more empirical reports that serve to increase understanding of those same issues or problems. Your most important task is to demonstrate that you are able to analyze an everyday 'problem', that you are able to make appropriate connections between this problem and psychological concepts, phenomena, theories, terminology and methods, and that you are able to express your understanding and insights effectively in written form. Higher grades will be awarded to papers that show a thorough, deep understanding of one or a few issues or problems, rather than a superficial grasp of a large number of concepts or theories.

The 750 word limit is an important part of this assignment. If you submit a longer paper, the graders (a collection of your peers) have the option to stop reading after the limit set for the report. Writing a short report is challenging; it requires you to be concise and to focus on the most important facts or concepts. Developing this type of writing takes practice, lots of it, and typically, a high quality final version requires several drafts. For this reason, plan ahead, and plan to write more than one draft. If you have difficulty writing well in English, please consult the Writing Centre staff for assistance (you will find them through the UBC Learning Commons).

**Format of Research Report:** In order to earn full mark for your written report, it must adhere precisely to the following formatting rules. They are designed to ensure that every report looks the same, thus enabling the graders to focus on the content rather than the appearance of the report. Your written report must:

- Have 1.5 line spacing; all parts of the report must have 1.5 line spacing
- Make use of 12 point Arial Narrow font
- Adhere to the 750 (plus/minus 50) word limit
- Include (in printed form) a precise word count at the end of the paper. Note: when you do the word count, do not include the references.
- The report must include a title on the first page
- Your student number must appear immediately below the title on the first page
- The very last line of your report (after the references) must be a word count of your report
- Your name must NOT appear anywhere in your report
- Your report does NOT require an abstract or summary
- Make sure you check the format of your report in the PeerScholar editor; if you cut and paste, make sure the version in PeerScholar is consistent with the requirements listed here.

**Research Report Topics:** Carefully read the specific requirements for each of the three topics which follow, make sure you understand what you are required to do for each topic (consult other students and/or the TA if necessary), and then chose the topic that most appeals to you.

**TOPIC 1: Should it be legal to text while driving?** For this topic, your task is to use published research related to learning, perception and attention to argue either in favor or against the claim that texting while driving is dangerous to the ‘texter’ as well other road users.

**TOPIC 2: What makes it easy to remember the news?** For this topic, your task is to use published research related to perception, attention and memory to explain why memory for what is in the news tends to be very good.

**TOPIC 3: How to get rid of the knuckle cracking habit?** For this topic, your task is to describe a method that would be effective in getting rid of the knuckle cracking habit. The method you describe must be based on published research related to learning.

**Evaluation:** The written research report counts for 15% of your course grade. To earn these points, the graders will be instructed to allocate points as follows:

- 2% for Part 1, for papers that include a clear analysis of the psychological issues or problems which are raised by the topic, as well as a clear statement of the reason for selecting those issues or problems or methods that will be addressed in greater depth in Part 2 of the paper.
- 8% for Part 2, for papers that clearly link the target problems to specific psychological concepts, theories, research or methods summarized in the text and in published empirical articles. To earn full marks, graders will consider:
- whether the author uses evidence, concepts, theories or methods from at least two places in the textbook and from at least one empirical article,
  - whether this evidence, concepts, theories or methods are used in a convincing way to increase understanding of the target problems.
- 2% for Part 3, for papers that come to a clear conclusion which connects Part 2 with Part 1, and which discusses any reasonable limitation of the evidence, concepts, theories or methods, or of the arguments advanced in Part 2.
- 3% for writing style, proper referencing and adherence to the assignment specifications. Full marks will be given to reports that:
- make appropriate use of paraphrasing, while giving credit for ideas/insights borrowed from others,

- showcase careful word selection, concise grammatical writing, and a logical flow of ideas,
- use the proper format for in-text citations and for the reference list,
- adhere to the word limit and other requirements set for the assignment.

### A Brief Primer on APA style

The APA style consists of rules and conventions for formatting term papers, journal articles, books, etc., in the behavioral and social sciences. This brief guide tells you how to cite references in the APA style, both within the text of a paper and in a reference list, and gives examples of commonly used types of references. If you have questions about the APA style, or wish to check how to make a citation or whether your format is correct, there is nothing better than the original source which gives lots of examples and illustrations: <http://www.apastyle.org/>

#### When do you add an in-text citation or a reference?

- When you paraphrase someone else's idea (e.g., text, class notes, journal article), you must add the source at the end of that idea. For example, if you referred to an idea from the text, include the following citation at the end of the sentence (Weiten & McCann, 2013, Chapter 7).
- If/when you have taken a direct quote from any source, including the text. If you take a direct quote (paraphrasing is better!) from any source (e.g., text, class notes, journal article), you must include quotation marks and add the exact source, such as the page number at the end of the sentence. For example, it is important to remember that "learning how to learn is the ultimate survival tool" (Bjork & Bjork, 2011, p. 63).

#### How to add an in text citation and reference list using APA Style, which is the psychology standard:

- After the sentence which includes the quote or idea which you have borrowed, add a citation that refers the reader to the reference list. An example in-text citation is at the end of this sentence (Weiten & McCann, 2013, Chapter 7).
- In the reference list (which appears on a separate page of your report, titled "References"), references should be listed in alphabetical order. Follow the appropriate format, as below.
- If you are citing something you learned in class that does not appear in the readings, add the following citation at the end of that sentence (Graf, 2012, in-class communication, October 3 2012), and then add it to your reference list.
- Note that the first time you cite an article or a book, you must include all authors' last names at the end of the sentence in which you refer to their idea, like this (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy, Woolf, Cramer, & Schmaltz, 2011). The next time you paraphrase an idea from that same work, you only need to use the abbreviated version, like this (Lilienfeld, et al., 2011). Note that "et al." is not italicized in APA style.

#### Example reference entries in APA style

When you create a reference list in APA style, it should appear with the header "References" centered at the top. The reference list is not included in your word count. Below are a couple of examples to help you properly list the references you might be using in your paper. The first example is for a journal article, and follows the format for any journal article. The second example is your textbook, and follows the format for any book. These references should be in alphabetical order by first author. Note the positions of the spaces and periods and commas. If you're not sure, come to any of our office hours and we'll help you with it, or consult [www.apastyle.org](http://www.apastyle.org) for further tips.

Dar Nimrod, I., Rawn, C. D., Lehman, D. R., & Schwartz, B. (2009). *The maximization paradox: The costs of seeking alternatives*. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 46, 631-635.

Weiten, W. & McCann, D. (2013). *Psychology: Themes and Variations*. Third Canadian Edition. Toronto, Canada; Nelson Education Ltd.

*I do not "take off" points. You earn them. The difference is not merely rhetorical, nor is it trivial. In other words, you start with zero points and earn your way to a grade.*

~ Art Carden