

## Introductory Psychology Writing Assignment

### Assignment Overview

All Introductory Psychology students are required to complete an Introductory Psychology Writing Assignment. There are many beliefs about psychology that are commonly held by the general public, despite the fact that they are not generally supported by scientific research. Often, people evaluate how likely these claims are to be true based upon their personal experience, anecdotes or stories, and how well the claims match their intuitions about human behavior, thoughts, and feelings. Scientists test the accuracy of these claims by systematically collecting and analyzing these observations (i.e., data) to make determinations about what is true.

In this assignment, you are going to be a psychological detective. Listed below are five common beliefs that have been questioned by many psychologists. You will **pick ONE of the questionable claims** listed below. Your job is to find **two empirical research articles** that scientifically test some aspect of your chosen claim, and to use that evidence to evaluate the claim's support (or lack thereof). For each of the claims, some suggested keywords to begin your search are provided (you likely will need to search other terms, as well), along with a sample empirical research article addressing this claim. You **may not use this article** as one of your two sources.

Challenged psychological beliefs:

1. Are children raised by gay parents are likely to experience negative life outcomes?

Some Suggested Keywords for PsycInfo: ("gay parent\*" OR "homosexual parent\*") AND ("outcome\*" OR "well-being" OR "disorder\*" OR "health")

Sample empirical research article addressing this topic:

Farr, R. H., & Patterson, C. J. (2013). Coparenting among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples: Associations with adopted children's outcomes. *Child Development, 84*(4), 1226-1240.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org.aurarialibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/cdev.12046>

2. Most autistic individuals exhibit savant abilities.

Some Suggested Keywords: ("autism" OR "autistic" ) AND savant\*

Sample empirical research article:

Scheuffgen, K., Happé, F., Anderson, M., & Frith, U. (2000). High "intelligence," low "IQ"? speed of processing and measured IQ in children with autism. *Development and Psychopathology, 12*(1), 83-90.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org.aurarialibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1017/S095457940000105X>

3. Eyewitness testimony is an accurate and trustworthy form of evidence in the justice system.

Some Suggested Keywords: ("eyewitness" OR "witness testimony") AND ("accurate" OR "accuracy")

Sample empirical research article:

Wells, G. L., Ferguson, T. J., & Lindsay, R. C. (1981). The tractability of eyewitness confidence and its implications for triers of fact. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 66*(6), 688-696.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org.aurarialibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/0021-9010.66.6.688>

4. Thinking positive thoughts reduces the chances of suffering from serious illnesses, such as cancer.

Some Suggested Keywords: ("positive thinking" OR "optimism" ) AND ("health outcomes" OR "cancer")

Sample empirical research article:

De Moor, J. S., De Moor, C. A., Basen-Engquist, K., Kudelka, A., Bevers, M. W., & Cohen, L. (2006). Optimism, distress, health-related quality of life, and change in cancer antigen 125 among patients with ovarian cancer undergoing chemotherapy. *Psychosomatic Medicine, 68*(4), 555-562.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org.aurarialibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1097/01.psy.0000222379.71389>

5. Students perform better when under pressure, such as when they procrastinate until last minute.

Some Suggested Keywords: "procrastinat\*" AND "performance"

Sample empirical research article:

Michinov, N., Brunot, S., Le Bohec, O., Juhel, J., & Delaval, M. (2011). Procrastination, participation, and performance in online learning environments. *Computers & Education, 56*(1), 243-252.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org.aurarialibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2010.07.025>

## Assignment Details

### **Writing Guidelines**

- Try to avoid sharing personal experiences and/or personal opinions.
- Paraphrase. **DO NOT use quotes.**
- Please **be careful not to plagiarize**. To receive credit for this paper, you must review the articles in your own words.
  - Make sure that you clearly cite your sources.
- You are expected to write effectively and thoughtfully. You're encouraged to use the Writing Center's free services to help you achieve these goals: <https://msudenver.edu/writectr/>

### **Formatting Guidelines**

- The paper should be 3-4 pages (not including title page and references) in length and should be typed.
- The entire paper should be double-spaced with 12-point font size.
- All margins should be one inch.

## Paper Outline

### **I. Include an APA-formatted title page.**

### **II. Introduce the topic and explain the purpose of the paper**

- Identify which claim you are investigating.
- Explain why the topic is important and interesting.

### **II. Summarize the two empirical research articles that you read.**

- Briefly (no more than a few sentences) describe how you located your sources.
  - Selecting your articles: *BE SURE THAT YOU SELECT EMPIRICAL STUDY ARTICLES FROM SCHOLARLY JOURNALS*. Empirical study articles present research conducted by the authors (i.e. not literature reviews or editorials). To ensure that you're selecting empirical study articles, check the abstract for references to participants, procedure, and results. If the abstract does not clearly indicate that this article is empirical search, you can check the text of the article for a "Methods" section. Your instructor will explain how to find empirical articles in scholarly journals.
  - Your instructor will specify how you should make paper submissions. You should submit online through Launchpad. In addition, you should submit the two full-text articles you're citing in your paper. Your instructor will provide instructions for how these sources should be submitted.
- Evaluate the sources—do these sources appear credible/trustworthy (i.e. How was the research funded; What was the review process for publication)? Why or why not? (Note: You will need to read the entire article in order to do this – not just the abstract.)
- Describe what the researchers did in their study.
  - State who was in the study (participants).
    - Include the number of men, women, ages, ethnicities, etc.
    - State how the participants were asked to be in the study (recruited)
  - State what the participants were asked to do.
    - In addition to naming the questionnaires or tasks, also explain what the questionnaires are measuring and what the tasks are. Describe them well enough so that the reader has an idea of what kinds of questions the participants answered or what kinds of tasks they completed.
- In what ways were the results consistent with the hypotheses/predictions? Any surprising findings? Do not worry about trying to understand the statistics; the author will explain the statistics in the "Discussion" section of the article.
- What did you perceive as being the strengths of these studies? What were their limitations?

### III. Addressing the Claim

- Draw a conclusion about your claim. Does the claim seem accurate or inaccurate?
  - Be sure to support your answer.
- When were your articles published? Would you expect the findings to still hold true? Why?
- Which groups of people do these articles help you better understand? Do these articles help you understand all people, or only certain subgroups (i.e. are there populations for whom you think you'd find different results than those found in the articles – generations, nationalities, race, etc.?). You're NOT being asked who would be interested in this research, but to whom the findings apply.

### IV. Reference Page

- You need a complete reference for the article that you reviewed. Be sure that your references are in the most current APA style. (Your instructor will cover this style, or you can go to <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/> and visit the "Research and Citation" section.)

### CITATIONS:

- Representing someone else's research and/or words as your own is considered plagiarism. **Plagiarism is a serious offense, and can result in failing the course.** In order to avoid plagiarism, you must give credit to the author(s) whose work you are citing. APA (American Psychological Association) format is used for citations made within the text. Below are examples of sentences and how they should be cited.
- Citations include the author's last name and the year of publication.
- **One author:** Cite the author's last name and the year the article was published. Example: In a recent study of reaction times (Rogers, 2012)...or Rogers (2012) compared reaction times...
- **Multiple authors:** When a work has two authors, always cite both names every time the reference occurs in the text. Example: (Smith & Smith, 2009). When a work has three or more authors, include only the surname of the first author followed by et al. Example: (Wasserstein et al., 2012).
- **Citation of a work discussed in another source:** If a work is cited in your article, and you did not read the original work cited, you should use the following citation format: (Siedenberg, 2011 as cited in Coltheart, 2013)...
- **Important:** Any portion of your paper that contains information from the article needs to be cited. Since you will reference the article you read for this assignment multiple times, you will end up citing that article in your paper multiple times. If you are in doubt about whether you should cite it then cite it! Better to be safe than sorry.

**REFERENCES:** You will probably have only two references on your reference page. List them in alphabetical order. The reference page should be on a separate page. The following APA format should be used for your reference page:

#### References

Geenen, N. Y. R., Hohelüchter, M., Langholf, V., & Walther, E. (2014). The beneficial effects of prosocial spending on happiness: Work hard, make money, and spend it on others? *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 9(3), 204-208. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.891154>