

PSYC 1500 Mythbusting: Distinguishing Fact and Fallacy in Psychology and Everyday Life
Spring, 2013; T & T, GAB 201 at 3:30 and at 5

Instructor: Dr. Linda L. Marshall, Professor
Office hours: 2:30, T & T and by appointment

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Class Email: psyc1500@yahoo.com

Texts

Levy, D. A. (2010). *Tools of Critical Thinking: Metathoughts for Psychology* (2nd ed). Waveland Press.
Required and bring it to class once the readings start. Referred to as L in the reading list.

Ruscio, J. (2006). *Critical Thinking in Psychology: Separating Sense from Nonsense* (2nd ed). Wadsworth, Belmont, CA. Required reading and bring it to class once the readings start. Referred to as R in the reading list.

Chabris, C. & Simons, D. (2009). *The Invisible Gorilla and Other Ways Our Intuitions Deceive Us*. Broadway Paperbacks, NY.

Overview

The purpose is to improve critical thinking performance in all classes and as individuals. Traditional, experiential, and action learning methods will help you become a proficient mythbuster.

The goal is to expand students' comfort zones. Cognitive comfort zones will be expanded through knowledge of and practice with critical thinking. Course content is on metacognition (thinking about thinking). Students discover how biases can be useful and can lead us to accept myths. Mythbusters use tactics and strategies to counter their own cognitive biases and biases in the ways information is presented.

Behavioral comfort zones will be expanded by learning and practicing skills for being a leader, devil's advocate, spokesperson, and critical commentator/coach. Students will stretch themselves by trying new ideas and behaviors, being less than perfect, making mistakes or otherwise messing up, and then learning from it. Mistakes are necessary and valuable because people learn more from mistakes than from being right.

Important Details: Email and Formatting Instructions

I often communicate via email so students should regularly check their UNT email. Assignments will be turned in via email to psyc1500@yahoo.com as a Word attachment at 11:59 p.m. The Word filename must include your last name in the title and an indication of the content (e.g., Marshall essay 1, Marshall log entries wk 3).

This course is writing intensive and labor intensive. The rule of thumb for college courses, is students should spend two hours outside class for each hour inside class. Plan to spend an average of 9 hours each week.

Log entries and essays must have ½ to ¾ inch margins, single spacing and a 10 to 12 point font. Other formatting must making the assignment easy to read (e.g., paragraphing, subheadings for log entries). Failure to follow formatting instructions will result in points lost.

Points are deducted for lateness (half of total possible), excessive absences and use of electronic devices.

Grading Points, 215+ possible points for requirements

Final grades can only be sent via students' UNT Eaglemail account for legal reasons. So check that account at the end of the semester for the explanation of your grade. Grading will be on a curve. Although all students can receive an A, an F is likely if either the log entries are not done or class is not attended regularly.

Individual Behavior – 130+ points are possible

30 pts attendance, 1 for class presence, ½ if late/excused absence, ¼ if email prior to unexcused absence

30 pts, 10 pts for each essay

20 pts for improvement, pre- to post-evaluation

10 pts for turning log entries in every week

40 pts for log entries which is only possible if they have been submitted weekly

3% of highest points for completing SONA evaluations

Family Behavior – 85 points are possible

30 pts for overall family behavior; involvement, contributions, responsibility

20-15-10-5 pts for most to least family improvement pre-post evaluation

15 pts for rotation of roles within the family, with each member having each of the 4 roles at least 3 times

10 pts peer evaluation of each member's contributions showing critical thinking and absence of response biases

10 pts for being the one judged to have helped others the most, improved the most, was most important

(each family will have 3 different people for these awards—can get only one of these awards)

minus 5 pts for family each day a family member uses an electronic device in class without explicit permission

Bonus points may be given for presentations, outstanding individual and/or family behavior, attendance, etc. Extra Credit: 1) 10 pts for research via SONA at <http://www.psyc.unt.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate-research>. 2) 3% of highest points if entire family completes SONA evaluations

Dates

Jan 18, log entries for alternative perspective and class reactions due and on all subsequent Fridays

Jan 24, class time: Implicit Associations Test Demo for Age and for Religion completed for class discussion
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/>

Jan 29, Invisible Gorilla

Feb 5, class time readings start with #1 due with succeeding readings due weekly on Tuesdays

Feb 8, weekly application log entries due and on all subsequent Fridays

Feb 15, essay evaluating published conservative column (not a blog entry) due – half points if late

Mar 8, essay evaluating published liberal column (not a blog entry) due – half points if late

Mar 26, last day for student initiated drops

Apr 19, application log due – half points if late

Apr 26, alternative perspective & class reaction log due – half points if late

Apr 30, class time, family evaluations due – half points if late

May 3, self-evaluation final essay due – half points if late

May 7, at 1:30 or 5, post-course evaluation – cannot be made up – 20 points lost if missed

Mandatory Attendance

You are ***REQUIRED*** to attend class because intense involvement and class practice is necessary to break old habits and effectively develop the skills and habit of using critical thinking techniques. Explanations must be emailed to me ahead of time whenever possible, whether or not the absence will be officially excused by a medical or university approved memo.

YOU MUST sign your own name on the sign-up sheet each and every day to document attendance and to receive an attendance point. Beginning with the 4th absence, for every class missed 5 points will be deducted from the student's final total (e.g., with 6 absences, 15 points would be deducted). This holds regardless of whether the absences were excused (e.g., medical note, university approved) or not excused.

Pre-Post Assessment – January 17 and May 7

Change across the semester in interpretation, recognition, deduction, interpretation, and the evaluation of arguments will indicate individual and family improvement and ways the course should be adjusted. Your family configuration will help you determine how best to help each other in these areas.

Homework Logs – turned in every week on Fridays at 11:59 p.m.

Log entries are NOT merely descriptions. The purpose is to ensure you practice critical thinking by applying what you learn. You will keep 2 logs, both organized chronologically by week. The number of points earned will be based on the number of entries, breadth of entries (i.e., number of different areas/topics), writing clarity (i.e., degree to which any reader can understand the points made), depth of thinking, improvement in thinking and communication, and responsiveness. The amount and quality of thought evident in each entry is critical.

1) Reaction Log with 3 types of entries every week, beginning Jan. 18.

a) **CLASS**: Once every week write about something that happened in class – something that strikes you as interesting, odd, frustrating, surprising, annoying, stupid, makes you think, etc. Describe what it was and give your thoughts about it. Do not just report on class or say what happened or describe it. Give your reaction and evaluate the implications of that which struck you and of your reaction. Show critical thinking. The purpose is not to prove you were in class. Rather it is to drive home a point related to critical thinking.

b) **POINT OF VIEW**: Once every week seriously consider the viewpoint of a relative or friend who has a different attitude, belief or opinion. Describe a) what it is, b) what you usually think or how you usually react when this comes up, c) describe her/his point of view and possible underlying reasons for it, and d) how you react to thinking about this.

c) **ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE**: Once every week you must purposefully attempt to take a perspective opposite to your “normal” reaction. Describe what you thought first, why you decided to use this , perspective. That is, describe both the (original and alternative) content of your thoughts and the process you used to take an alternate perspective on the information. (This exercise must be contemporaneous with the semester. Previous experiences will not count.)

2) **APPLICATIONS** Log, beginning Feb. 8.

Two entries each week will be based on a construct for that week listed in the reading list. The specific

constructs to apply each week are named in the reading schedule *in brackets*. Name the construct. Describe the information or event to which you applied the construct/principle. Be sure to describe the source, the principle, and your conclusion. One purpose of application entries is to force you to learn the strategies and constructs out of context, leading to the ability to think in new ways.

Analytic Essays

Grading criteria include critical analysis as well as details involved in the format and appearance of the essay (e.g., no typos, margins as required, consistency of space after periods); technical details involved in appropriate writing (e.g., sentences, paragraphs); the clarity and thoughtfulness of the content; the depth and thoroughness of the content; and how responsive it is to the assignment.

1 & 2) Two 500 to 750 word assignments will be: Find a column in a newspaper or news magazine by a conservative (liberal) columnist from the list of names I email to you. Not a blogger and not a TV or radio “personality.” You will include the internet link to the column so I can read it and evaluate your understanding. Find and identify: a) The grain of truth and your alternate source for that truth, b) misleading statements or lies and how you know they are misleading or lies, c) Show which tactics and strategies referring each to class or the text, d) List the sources you used to check for accuracy of the column’s content and justify why you judged each source to be likely to have accurate information.

3) Self-Evaluation in lieu of a final. This will be a minimum of 1000 words. Use critical thinking to evaluate the quality of your performance in all aspects of the class. Include attention to strengths, weaknesses, and change during the semester. Address all course requirements, including how you were affected by others in your family and how you affected them. Address your effort, involvement, and accomplishments in all aspects of the course, including performance in the roles of leader, devil’s advocate, spokesperson, and critical commentator/coach. Include any issue that caused you to perform at a less than optimal level. Detailed and specific information with examples is necessary. Be sure to discuss ways your thinking improved and GIVE evidence for that improvement. You may use this as a chance to influence your grade, but I will be most influenced by the quality of your critical thinking as shown in your essay. You might want to keep notes during the semester to help prepare for this.

Family Behavior

Family members are expected to be responsible to and for each other. They must be able to rely on each other to contribute their best critical thinking to the family’s tasks. It is everyone’s responsibility to help every family member improve her/his critical thinking skills. This cooperation and collaboration requirement is emphasized by being able to earn up to 20 points for family improvement on interpretation, recognition, deduction, interpretation, and the evaluation of arguments.

To be a responsible family member, you must work to ensure everyone participates in every task and that each person learns to participate in a variety of ways. Tasks presented to the class must reflect the combined contributions of everyone. To help ensure full participation the entire family and to emphasize everyone’s responsibility to and for each other, all family members will lose 5 points if any family member uses a cell phone or other electronic device without my explicit permission for a specific task-related purpose.

I will create resource-based families that you will remain with all semester. Family members should get to know each other well, communicating during and outside of class. Members are required to take turns in different roles, enacting each one at least 3 times. During each class, each family should have an assigned:

- 1) devil’s advocate will bring up alternative points of view, including making opposing arguments;
- 2) leader will ensure that every family member participates and the final product results from a consensus;
- 3) spokesperson will take notes and report family’s results to the class;
- 4) critical commentator a) makes sure each family member enacts their role during the discussion, b) helps family improve by describing what each person did well and what s/he could do to improve in the role and how s/he could do it, and c) turn in the list of roles and critical comments; and
- 5) participant will be fully involved in the task but have no formal role that day.

Peer evaluation

Every family member will evaluate the others in their own family on a variety of behaviors. Your evaluations must show critical thinking skills and the ability to make judgments despite any bias you have about an individual. Response biases must not be evident (e.g., little variation in specific ratings for a specific individual or little variation in ratings across individuals).

REMEMBER:

- 1) In class and in all writing everyone is expected to strive to improve the quality of their thinking. Taking an easy way by using superficial thinking is not acceptable.

- 2) You will lose 5 points for every absence starting with the 4th absence.
- 3) Each time a student uses an electronic device without permission all family members will lose 5 points.
- 4) Always follow all instructions and details to prevent points from being deducted.
- 5) Mistakes are good.

LEGAL STUFF

Plans and dates may be modified during the semester.

See <http://www.unt.edu/catalog/undergrad/enrollment.htm> for the UNT attendance policy. You document your attendance on the sign in sheet. You must sign your name each and every day to receive an attendance point.

You are expected to remain in the classroom during each class period. If you leave during class, I will assume an illness or emergency. You will not return to class that day.

If used in class without specific and explicit permission, electronic devices and ear buds, etc. may be taken away. Texting is not allowed. Use of an electronic device will result in every family member losing 5 points for that day.

If you absolutely must have your telephone on due to a possible emergency, you must have prior permission from me.

Incompletes. This course is more cumulative than most. Knowledge and skills gained in the course build on and use knowledge and skills addressed in previous classes and assignments. Moreover, students will be relying on each other for their own improvement. Consequently, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get an I. In any rare situation where an I is assigned, the student must complete the entire course again. It will not be possible to “make up” an assignment out of the context of the entire course.

Plagiarism and Cheating. Academic misconduct is very serious and will not be tolerated. This includes, but is not limited to looking at another person’s exam, citing another person’s ideas or using words without proper acknowledgement. Plagiarism and/or any form of cheating will be grounds for an F in the course and possible sanctions by the university. All students should be familiar with UNT’s policies on academic misconduct.

ODA. UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Students must obtain a new letter of accommodation every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. See the ODA website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda> and/or contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.