

PSYC 1500 Mythbusting: Distinguishing Fact and Fallacy in Psychology and Everyday Life  
Fall, 2013; T & T, WH 114 at 3:30 (section .001) and at 5 (section .002)  
Blackboard will NOT be used.

Instructor: Dr. Linda L. Marshall, Professor  
Office hours: by appointment

Assignments Email: PSYC1500@mail.com  
other questions: Linda.Marshall@unt.edu

### **Texts**

Levy, D. A. (2010). *Tools of Critical Thinking: Metathoughts for Psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Waveland Press.  
Required and bring it to class once the readings start. Referred to as L in the reading list. (Amazon used \$15)

Ruscio, J. (2006). *Critical Thinking in Psychology: Separating Sense from Nonsense* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Wadsworth, Belmont, CA. Required reading and bring it to class once the readings start. Referred to as R in the reading list. (Amazon used \$20)

Chabris, C. & Simons, D. (2009). *The Invisible Gorilla and Other Ways Our Intuitions Deceive Us*. Broadway Paperbacks. (Amazon used \$7)

Recommended: Schulz, K. (2011). *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error*. Ecco Publishing. (Amazon used \$4.50)

### **Overview**

The purpose is to improve critical thinking performance in classes and everyday life. Traditional, experiential, and action learning methods will help you become a proficient mythbuster. The core objectives are: Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, Teamwork, and Personal and Social Responsibility.

Knowledge of and practice with critical thinking will expand cognitive comfort zones. Course content is on metacognition (thinking about thinking). Normal biases are useful, yet may perpetuate myths. Mythbusters use tactics and strategies to counter their own cognitive biases and biases in the ways information is presented.

Behavioral comfort zones are expanded by learning and practicing skills for being a leader, devil's advocate, spokesperson/scribe, and rule enforcer. Students stretch 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 more is learned from mistakes than from being right.

### **Important Details: Email and Formatting Instructions**

I often communicate via email (not Blackboard) so students should regularly check their email. Assignments will be turned in to [PSYC1500@mail.com](mailto:PSYC1500@mail.com) as a Word attachment at 11:59 p.m. The email subject line and Word filename must have your last name and indicate the content (e.g., Jones essay 1, Marshall log wk 3).

The rule of thumb for college is students should spend two hours outside class for each hour inside class. Plan to spend an average of 9 hours each week.

Format: Written assignments must have ½ inch margins, single spacing and a 10 to 12 point font. Other language use structures (formatting) must make the assignment easy to read (e.g., paragraphing, subheadings for log entries). Failure to follow formatting instructions will result in points lost.

Zero Tolerance: Use of cell phones and electronic devices is prohibited in class without prior explicit permission. The first violation is being counted as absent. Five (5) points will be deducted for subsequent use.

### **Grading Points** 308 possible points for requirements (+ SETE at 3%-6% of points setting grading curve)

All students can receive an A, but an F is likely if either the log entries are not done or class is not attended regularly.

### **Family Behavior** – 115 (+3% of highest points achieved) are possible

20 pts for revising and using family charter

30 pts for overall family behavior; involvement, contributions, responsibility, etc. as evaluated by family

10 pts for being 1 of 3 MVPs; rated as highest on helping others, improvement, or rated as most important

(A student can get only one of MVP award and only if s/he evaluated her/his entire family)

20 pts for balanced role rotation in the family - each member having each of the 4 roles at least 4 times

(5 pts are earned for performing each role 4 times; 0 points for any role not done 4 times by everyone;

0 points if have outliers--not well balanced across members)

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

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

3% of highest attained points if entire family completes SETE

### Individual Behavior – 159 (+3%) points are possible

54 pts attendance, ½ pt if late/excused absence, ¼ pt if email prior to unexcused absence—sent to UNT email  
1-2 pts will for quality of response (thoughtfulness, depth) to the question of the day at the end of class  
40 pts for essays (20 pts for each essay)  
15 pts for improvement, pre- to post-evaluation  
10 pts for turning log entries in every week  
40 pts for log entries (fewer points if they have not been submitted weekly)  
3% of highest points for completing SETE evaluations

### Point Deductions

- 1) Late assignments will receive no more than half of the points possible and will not be accepted more than 3 days after the due date.
- 2) All family members lose 5 pts if someone uses an electronic device in class without explicit permission
- 3) 5 pts, for each role that is not done the required number of times 5 points will be deducted from individuals
- 4) 5 pts from individuals for each role done too many times compared to others in family (e.g., 6 times when others did it twice)
- 5) 5 pts for each missed class after the 3rd absence
- 6) assignment points will be reduced for not following instructions on format, submission, and content

### Extra Credit

10 pts for research via SONA at <http://www.psyc.unt.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate-research>.  
3% of highest points if entire family completes SETE evaluations

### Dates

Jan. 31, reflection Log entries for family process, point of view, and pro/con due and on all subsequent Fridays  
Feb. 4, Invisible Gorilla  
Feb. 11, in class: Bring your printed results (hard copy) for Implicit Association Demo Tests for Weapons, for Arab-Muslim, and for Disability <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/>  
Feb. 18, readings #1 due, succeeding readings due weekly on Tuesdays in class  
Feb. 25, 11:59 pm Essay 1, Evaluation of Family's Charter Compliance  
Mar. 25, last day to drop  
Apr. 25, (Friday night, 11:59pm) final cumulative Reflection Log due  
Apr. 29, class time, family evaluations due – half points if late  
May 1, Essay 2 (self-evaluation of performance) due at midnight – half points if late  
May 6, at 1:30 or 5, post-course evaluation – cannot be made up

### Mandatory Attendance

Class attendance is **REQUIRED**. (See <http://www.unt.edu/catalog/undergrad/enrollment.htm> for the UNT attendance policy.) Intense involvement and class practice is needed to break old habits, develop the skills, and create the habit of using critical thinking techniques. Attendance and tardiness will be tracked using the daily sign-up sheet.

Beginning with the 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

Bonus points 0-2 points will be possible by turning in a legible response to the daily question (e.g., What did you think about thinking that you don't usually think about thinking? What did you learn from a mistake or error?) One point for a superficial or obvious response or two points for a thoughtful response.

### Pre-Post Assessment

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.

### Family Behavior

Family members are expected to be responsible to and for each other. As in businesses, members must be able to rely on each other to contribute their best to family tasks. It is everyone's responsibility to help every other 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. No person's ideas or talk time should take precedence over any other person's contributions. Contributions should be based on quality and usefulness of the ideas (e.g., being a psych

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 must take turns in each role, enacting each one at least 4 times. During each class, each family should have an assigned role with everyone participating in the content. To earn role rotation points, all members must do each role the same number of times (to the extent possible). To enact the roles, you MUST suppress your "natural" tendencies.

- 1) Rule Enforcer & Critical Commentator. The purpose of this role is to improve the behavior of each family member and the family as a whole. It is the only role that is more process than content focused. S/he is required to interrupt family discussions to fulfill her/his role requirements which are to:
  - a) Enforce role congruent behavior, making sure everyone enacts her/his role throughout the class.
  - b) Help each family member improve by describing what each could do to improve role-related behavior (e.g., how to be a better leader). Because nobody is perfect, this "negative" feedback will help each person improve. If this is not done, *2 points will be deducted* from your final class score.
  - c) Enforce the no electronic device rule. Failure will result in a loss of 5 points for every family member.
  - d) Give verbal feedback to everyone about specific ways they can improve. This is to help them.
  - e) Give everyone (including yourself) points for role performance and following class rules  
1=poor, 2=ok, 3=good, 4=great, 5=perfect
- e) Turn in the names, their roles, and your critical comments so I can judge RE/CC's role behavior
- 2) Devil's advocate. This role is related to the quality of the family's performance. S/he brings up and advocates for opposing or unpopular ideas to cause the family to engage in a thorough examination of possible solutions to the task at hand. Or s/he can ask questions to improve the quality, depth and breadth of the discussion and task performance. S/he mentions alternative points of view, including making opposing arguments and asks questions to make everyone to think. The purpose is to prevent groupthink and to ensure the family considers the task as broadly as possible.
- 3) Leader. This role is related to the thoroughness of participation by ensuring that all family members are involved, listened to, and contribute to completion of the task. S/he ensures that the final product results from a consensus and reflects input from everyone, without having been dominated by one or two people. S/he ensures nobody dominates the discussion, nobody is ignored and the family stays on task.
- 4) Spokesperson & Scribe. This role is related to clarity of the family's product (i.e., results of task completion). S/he will take notes and report family's results to the class as accurately and objectively as possible, without imposing her/his own individual point of view if it diverges from the family's results. Sometimes it's helpful to summarize to the family before reporting to the class.
- 5) Participants. These family members will be fully involved in the task, participating as much as others, but will have no formal role that day.

**Reflection Homework Log** – cumulative log turned in every week on Fridays at 11:59 p.m.

The primary purpose of log entries is to encourage the reflection necessary to recognize, analyze and understand multiple perspectives to add breadth and depth to course experiences and material as well as to everyday life.

Log entries are NOT mere descriptions and not like a diary or journal. Each type of entry ensures practice in different types of critical thinking. Your log will be organized by type of entry and chronologically within each type of entry with one entry of each kind every week. Points earned will be based on the number and breadth of entries, clarity, depth of thinking, improvement over time, and responsiveness. The amount and quality of thought evident in each entry is critical.

1) ***FAMILY PROCESS***: The purpose is to become aware of how we influence each other and are influenced by others in group work and in conversation. Every week evaluate how your family functioned. What ways was your charter followed and not followed? Note whether anyone dominated the discussion, how it was done and others' reactions. Whether anyone did not participate or contributed the best ideas, etc. Note how well everyone stayed on topic until task completion and what caused the family to stay on or go off track (as all families do sometimes). What behaviors or comments encouraged and discouraged participation?

2) ***OTHER PERSON'S POINT OF VIEW***: This is about someone else's thinking – her/his attitudes, beliefs, opinions. Think seriously about relative or friend's behavior, attitude, belief or opinion that is different from your own. Make it about a specific situation behavior or belief – not a belief system or major personality trait. Be specific and concrete. First describe what the person's behavior/attitude/belief/ opinion is. Then possible underlying reasons for it from her/his perspective. What you think or why you think it is irrelevant – that is, your opinion does not matter so I do not want to know what you think in these entries. Ignore or set aside your own point of view. The purpose is to understand that person's point of view better and with more depth. Consider: Where might her/his thoughts/beliefs/behaviors come from? What purposes might they serve for her/him? How do they fit with other things about her/him?

3) ***PRO & CON***: In a sentence or two each, describe 3 objective reasons underlying support for one side

of an issue and 3 equally compelling objective reasons underlying the opposite position. The arguments must be such that your actual position is not clear if using a social or cultural issue. Alternatively, the arguments must be of equal quality if you use the entry to make a consequential (i.e., nontrivial, not on a minor issue) and important personal decision.

**Essays** 20 points each (includes points for following detail instructions)

NOTE: Points are assigned based on quality and depth of thinking evident, not on reporting desirable behavior. 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.

*Essay 1, Evaluation of Charter & Compliance:* 750-1000 words. Major strength and major weakness. Describe parts of the charter are not working well; how are they actually working vs how are they supposed to work; what needs to be done to fix each challenge. Describe which parts are working very well; how are they actually working vs how they were supposed to work (i.e., how your family adapted them); why they work so well. How well does the work of the family balance out among members – anyone overloaded or underloaded? What needs to be changed in your charter to improve the effectiveness of your family? (Effectiveness is defined as depth and quality of thinking and discussions.) What does the family need to do improve the climate, for example, what can you do to change the behavior of someone who is too quiet or too intent on getting her/his own way?

*Essay 2, Self-Evaluation: Performance:* 1000-1300 words. Use critical thinking to evaluate the quality of your performance in all aspects of the class. Include major accomplishment & major failure, 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/scribe, and Rule Enforcer. 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 improvement. Use good writing principles (e.g., sentencings, paragraphing). 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.

**Peer evaluation** 15 pts

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 objective 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). You cannot get any MVP points unless the peer evaluations are completed.

**REMEMBER:** To improve you must make mistakes and false starts and learn from critical feedback.

**THE SMALL PRINT**

Plans and dates may be modified during the semester.

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 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 cumulative, with knowledge and skills from one day building on and using previously obtained knowledge and skills. Consequently, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get an I. Moreover, students must rely on each other for their own improvement. In any rare situation where an I is assigned, the student must complete the entire course.

*Plagiarism and Cheating.* Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. This includes, but is not limited to using someone's work 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. To seek accommodation, you must register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify eligibility. If verified, the ODA will provide 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. New letters of accommodation are needed every semester and students must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Faculty 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.