

PSYC 1500 Mythbusting: Distinguishing Fact and Fallacy in Psychology and Everyday Life
Fall, 2014; T & T, WH 116 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: psych1500@yahoo.com
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Texts readings will start in a few weeks

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. (Amazon used \$15)

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. (Amazon used \$20)

Overview

The purpose is to improve critical thinking performance in classes and everyday life. I use traditional, experiential, and action learning methods in conjunction with cooperative learning techniques to facilitate your development as you become a proficient mythbuster. The core objectives are: Critical Thinking, Teamwork, Communication Skills, and Personal 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 charter cop. Students stretch by trying new ideas and behaviors, being less than perfect, making mistakes or otherwise messing up, and then learning from it. MISTAKES AND ERRORS ARE NECESSARY AND VALUABLE because more is learned from mistakes than from being right.

Grading Points 301 possible points

All students can receive an A, but an F is likely if the log entries are not done or class is not attended regularly. I set the curve based on highest points attained, 90% of that for A, 80% for B, 70% for C, 60% for D and less than 60% for F. Letter grades before the end of the semester are quite tentative because so many points are assigned at the end of the semester. However, preliminary points will be calculated & emailed in mid-October.

Family Behavior – 135 are possible (not including any bonuses during the semester)

20 pts for writing, revising and using family charter

40 pts (20 ea for I and II) for your family's evaluation of your teamwork using UNT's Teamwork rubric

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)

30 pts for overall family behavior; involvement, contributions, responsibility, etc. as evaluated by family at the end of the semester

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)

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

Individual Behavior – 176 points are possible

30 pts attendance, ½ pt if late/excused absence, ¼ pt if email prior to unexcused absence—sent to UNT email

40 pts log entries (fewer points if they have not been submitted weekly)

40 pts (20 ea) Critical Thinking I and II papers

36 pts self-evaluation essay

30 pts (10 ea) effort i.e., attendance, arrive on time, follow all directions, turn in reflection log weekly, no unauthorized use of electronic devices, assignments on time, prepared for class, correct submission, etc.

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) 5 pts, for each role that is not done the required number of times 5 points will be deducted from individuals

3) 5 pts for each role done too many times compared to others in family (e.g., 6 times when others did it twice)

4) 5 pts for each missed class after the 3rd absence

5) 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>.

Dates

Sept. 5, 11:59pm first Log entries for family charter process, point of view, and ethical considerations (all 12 weeks of entries will be due on Fridays at 11:59pm)
Sept. 9, in class: Bring your printed results (hard copy) for Implicit Association Demo Tests for Weapons, for Religion, and for Sexuality <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/>
Sept. 16 (probably), readings #1 due, succeeding readings due weekly on Tuesdays in class
Sept. 25, Critical Thinking I paper, liberal column
Sept. 30, 11:59pm, Teamwork I evaluations due
Oct. 30, 11:59pm, Teamwork II evaluations due
Nov. 3, last day to drop with a W
Nov. 21, 11:59pm, completed, cumulative Reflection Log due
Nov. 21, last day to drop with a WF
Dec. 2, class time, overall family evaluations due – half points if late
Dec. 4, Self Evaluation of performance due at midnight – half points if late
Dec. 9, Critical Thinking II paper, conservative column
Dec. 9, at 1:30 or 5, final

Mandatory Attendance

Class attendance is **REQUIRED**. Intense involvement and practice are needed to break old habits, develop the skills, and get used to using critical thinking techniques. To be counted as present, you **MUST** sign the daily attendance/tardiness sheet. Beginning with the 4th absence, for each class missed 5 points will be deducted from the final total (e.g., 15 pts for 6 absences), regardless of whether absences were excused (e.g., medical note, university approved) or not. Plan to use the 3 “free” absences wisely for times it is necessary to miss class.

Family Behavior

I will create resource-based families you will remain with all semester. Family members should get to know each other, communicating during and outside class. Family members are expected to be responsible to and for each other. As in businesses, teamwork is expected; members must be able to rely on each other to contribute their best to family tasks. It is everyone’s responsibility to help each other improve her/his thinking skills. This cooperation and collaboration is emphasized by the number of points related to family behavior, including the 10 points associated with being an MVP (showing the most improvement, importance, or helpfulness).

Tasks presented to the class must reflect the collective, 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 major is not helpful for this course).

Members must take turns in each role, enacting each one at least 4 times (not in a row but spaced across the semester). During each class, each family should have an assigned role with everyone participating in the content. For the family 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) Charter Cop/Commentator. The purpose of this role is to improve the behavior & skills of each member and the family as a whole; 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 all the provisions in the charter
 - b) Enforce role congruent behavior, making sure everyone enacts her/his role throughout the class.
 - c) Help each family member by describing how they: 1) enacted their role well (e.g., good leader behaviors) and 2) what each could have done to improve role-related behavior (e.g., how to be a better leader). Critical feedback is necessary to help people improve.
 - d) Give verbal feedback to everyone about what they did well and how to improve in the roles.
 - e) Turn in the names, their roles, and your critical comments so I can judge CC/C’s role behavior
- 2) Devil’s Advocates (Arguers & Questioners). This role is related to the quality of the family’s performance. Devil’s Advocates brings up or advocates opposing or unpopular ideas so the family thoroughly examines different perspectives to improve task performance. For example, they can ask questions to improve the quality, depth and breadth of the discussion and task performance; mention alternative points of view, by making opposing arguments; and/or point out and question assumptions or leaps of logic. Questions can also be as simple as ‘why do you think that?’ To ensure as much as possible is taken into account, there will be 2 Devil’s Advocates every day. This may be the hardest role to master, but the most important in future life.

- 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) The remaining family members will be fully involved in the task, participating as much as others, but will have no formal role that day.

Peer evaluations

There will be 2 types of peer evaluations. Based on your families average rating of your performance, up to 40 points can be earned for Teamwork. The Overall evaluation will be used to assign 30 points and MVP points at the end of the semester.

1) Using UNT's Teamwork rubric, each family member will evaluate the performance of all other family members. Each student will get the average of the evaluation points assigned up to 20 points each time. These evaluations are due Sept. 30 and Oct 30.

2) Overall Evaluation. Every family member will evaluate the others in their own family on a variety of behaviors using the forms given out in class. Due Dec. 2 in class. You will be given forms to use. Your evaluations of other family members must show critical thinking skills and the ability to make objective judgments despite any bias you have about an individual. Critical thinking in these evaluations will earn up to 15 points. 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 you have done all peer evaluations for your family members.

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 are 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) *CHARTER COMPLIANCE & FAMILY PROCESS* (critical thinking about your family & charter). 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 vis a vis your charter. 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* (critical thinking about another person). This is about someone you know – the thinking, attitudes, beliefs, opinions of a specific person you know. Think seriously about a person's (relative or friend) behavior, attitude, belief or opinion that is different from your own. Do not use a general or abstract idea (e.g., vegans, Christians, atheists, racists, etc.) 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. I do not want to know what you think. Ignore or set aside your own point of view. The purpose is to understand the other 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) *ETHICAL REASONING* (critical thinking about right and wrong). You will consider (i.e., describe and analyze) your own ethical values and the social context of ethical problems. In this case, ethics consist of an individual or cultural moral principles, values and/or rules that are related to specific areas of conduct, prohibiting or requiring certain acts. Four topics will be covered, each having 3 entries (i.e., each topic will be addressed in your log for 3 weeks in a row). Entry 1 will take the perspective of one side of the issue; answering yes to the question. Entry 2 will take the opposing perspective; answering no. Entry 3 will weigh and evaluate the two sides and come to a conclusion for yourself.

Choose 3 questions from this list: Is religion necessary for morality? Is abortion moral? Is it right to prohibit same-sex marriage? Should recreational marijuana use be legal? Should the death penalty be abolished? The 4th will not be from the list – you will choose a topic. Issue 1 will be addressed in entries due Sept. 5 (yes), 12 (no) & 19 (conclusion). Issue 2 due Sept. 26, Oct. 3, & 10. Issue 3 due Oct. 17, 24, & 31. Issue 4 due Nov. 7, 14, & 20.

Papers

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.

Critical Thinking I and II. 20 pts each based on UNT's rubric for critical thinking. You will be given a list of columnists. For CT paper I (due Sept.25), evaluate a column in a major news outlet written by a person listed in the liberal column. For CT paper II (due Dec.9) evaluate a column in a major news outlet written by a person listed in the conservative column. The columns you choose must be published after August 15, 2014. You will turn in a copy of the column with your paper. Rather than writing a narrative essay as you often do for papers, there will be 5 sections corresponding to the rubric on the handout (Problem, Evidence, Context, Argument, and Conclusions. In each subsection you should strive to show you are thinking at the Advanced Level as indicated on the Rubric. 20 points are possible corresponding to each level of thinking (Beginning to Advanced) for each section (Problem to Conclusion).

Self-Evaluation: Performance Essay: 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 EVALUATOR? 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.

20 points for essay content & following formatting directions plus 16 points assigned based on UNT's rubric for effective communication principles. This results in 36 possible points.

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.

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.