

PSYC 1500 Mythbusting: Distinguishing Fact and Fallacy in Psychology and Everyday Life  
Spring, 2015; 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: [psyc1500@unt.edu](mailto:psyc1500@unt.edu)  
Other communication: [Linda.Marshall@unt.edu](mailto:Linda.Marshall@unt.edu)

### **Texts**

Epley, N. (2014). *Mindwise: How we understand what others think, believe, feel and want*. Borzoi Book published by Alfred A. Knopf.

Levy, D. A. (2009). *Tools of Critical Thinking: Metathoughts for Psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Waveland Press.

### **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 development as a proficient mythbuster. Current events are often the stimulus for critical thinking practice. 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 as well as by objectively evaluating the work and involvement of your peers. 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.

### **Submitting Assignments**

I am very, very picky about details. The email subject line to [psyc1500@unt.edu](mailto:psyc1500@unt.edu) will list the assignment and your last name (e.g., Marshall, log #2; Marshall critical thinking 1). The Word filename will be your last name and the specific assignment (i.e., it will be the same as the identification in the subject line of your email. Set up custom margins of ½ inch all 4 sides. The font must be 10-12 points. Single spacing (not double or even 1.15).

Points will be assigned based on the quality and depth of thinking evident in the writing. 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.

To ensure attention, all other questions or issues, request for meetings, information about attendance, etc. should be sent to my faculty email: [linda.marshall@unt.edu](mailto:linda.marshall@unt.edu).

### **Grading Points** 385 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 and emailed mid-semester.

Several types of points I assign will be informed by the evaluations of your peers. Within family evaluations will be peer ratings of Teamwork behavior, MVP decisions, and overall family ratings. This will be for up to about 66% (2/3) of the possible family points. The points you earn for making these evaluations will depend on the objective and critical thinking evident in your evaluations.

#### **Family Behavior** – 115 are possible (not including any bonuses during the semester)

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 (5 pts ea) peer ratings of each member's contributions; show critical thinking and absence of response biases

**Individual Behavior** – 270 points are possible

- 30 pts attendance, ½ pt if late/excused absence, ¼ pt if email prior to unexcused absence
- 36 pts IAT evaluation, 16 pts on quality related to Communication Rubric & 20 pts on quality of evaluation
- 12 pts for having turned in log entries every week (1 pt each week)
- 40 pts log entries at the end of the semester (fewer points if they have not been submitted weekly)
- 40 pts (20 ea) Critical Thinking I and II papers
- 36 pts essay on Epley chapter presentation (16 pts for Communication Rubric & 20 pts for essay quality)
- 36 pts self-evaluation essay (16 pts based on Communication Rubric and 20 pts for essay quality)
- 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.
- 10 pts evaluation of team process and presentation of Epley chapter

**Point Deductions**

- 1) Late assignments 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
- 6) 5 pts for wearing earbuds, earphones or headphones
- 7) 1 pt for checking email, facebook, etc. during class, and 1 pt off for the Charter Cop if I catch it instead of the CC stopping it. Increase to 5 pts each time after the 3<sup>rd</sup> instance.

**Extra Credit**

10 pts for research via SONA at <http://www.psyc.unt.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate-research>.

**Dates** - See the Excel file with the course calendar. (Some due dates may change.)

**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 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

**CELL PHONES:** Obviously, it is both rude and very disruptive when respond to something or someone on you cell. Responding in class and/or leaving the room to respond gives the clear message that whatever that is, it is much more important to you than the insignificant (meaningless) context and people and in class.

**RULE:** When you leave class, leave your cell phone on your desk.

**Implicit Associations Test Essay**

This assignment is to experience the difficulty of being objective, open-minded and flexible in your thinking. At the website, <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html> choose the test for religion and the test for race. Completion of the tests, results of the tests, and your essay evaluating the experience will likely take you outside your comfort zone. The 500-750 word essay should address issues including: What were the results? What did you learn about yourself? How do the results compare with what you think you know about yourself (e.g., what was surprising, what was as you would expect)? What effect do the results have on the way you think about yourself and why? What does the experience imply about the culture?

**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 points related to family behavior. The 3 MVPs will have earned 10 points by showing the most improvement, importance, or helpfulness as judged by family members.

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. If you do not have an identified role that day, you must actively participate and contribute to the task as a family member.

- 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. The CC/C’s critique has nothing to do with anyone’s grade. The only purpose is for improvement. 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 and do NOT allow personal cell phone use
    - 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. The feedback is for improvement only and has no association with any possible grade.
    - e) Turn in the names, their roles, and your critical comments so I can judge CC/C’s role behavior
  - 2) 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 and quality of the product. S/he ensures the final product results from a consensus and reflects input from everyone. S/he ensures nobody dominates the discussion, nobody is ignored and the family stays on task.
  - 3) 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. The scribe/speaker does **NOT** give her/his view. S/he is required to accurately reflect the group discussion and decisions. What the speaker thinks personally is completely irrelevant to what s/he says to the class.
  - \*4) Devil’s Advocate (Arguer & Questioner). This role is related to the quality of the family’s performance. Devil’s Advocates brings up questions or advocates opposing or unpopular ideas so the family thoroughly examines different perspectives to improve task performance. Their questions and comments should 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.
- \*The Devil’s Advocate will be assigned to a different family such that everyone will perform this role with each of the other families at least once. Adapted from Wikipedia: A devil’s advocate is someone who, given a certain argument [i.e., someone’s opinion or perspective], takes a position they do not necessarily agree with (or simply an alternative position from the accepted norm), for the sake of debate or to explore the thought, opinion or perspective more deeply or thoroughly. The purpose of this process is to test the quality of the original thought, opinion or perspective and identify weaknesses in its structure. This information is then used to either improve or abandon the original, opposing position.

### **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. You will be given forms for these ratings.

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. Up to 5 points will correspond to the degree to which critical thinking and objective analysis are evident. In addition to helping the raters learn to make discriminations, judge the quality of work, and balance different types of contributions a primary purpose is to help each person improve as a team member.

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. 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 5 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 (in 1 Word file) submitted each 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. 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.

**Organization & Directions:** You will submit the same log Word file each week with the new entries added. It will have 3 sections (one for each type of entry) with a new entry of each kind added every week. At the end of the semester, the Family section will have 12 entries, followed by 12 POV entries, ending with the 12 entries evaluating each of 4 ethical issues. I give feedback using the review function in Word so to see the feedback first move your log file from me to your desktop before opening it. My comments will be in color and underlined. You will keep using this same Word file for the rest of the log entries.

1) **CHARTER COMPLIANCE & FAMILY PROCESS** (critical thinking about your family functioning & charter). The purpose is to become aware of how we influence each other and are influenced by others in group work and in conversation. Analyze and evaluate how your family functioned and how it could improve 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? What increases and decreases in-depth thinking to improve (or detract from) the quality of the product? Address process, not content. try thinking about what was similar and different between the 2 days and work on identifying what caused those things as well as whether they should be altered (&, if so, how could that be done). Don't make the entries about you (i.e., not how you think, feel, or interpret what happened).

2) **POV-OTHER PERSON'S POINT OF VIEW** (helping someone think about something in a different, more critical thinking way). The purpose is to improve your own ability to think critically. One way to do this is to be a devil's advocate about a particular thing a friend or acquaintance thinks. This will be easier if you take a thought, attitude, belief or behavior that person exhibits that is different from your own. Do not try to convince the person you are 'right.' That is, do not tell the person reasons why s/he should think something else or tell what s/he should think. Ask the person questions or point out assumptions s/he may not be aware of, or suggest several alternative possibilities or meanings to get her/him to actually think about and consider a different point of view. In these entries, give the topic and context, what the person thought; what you said to help her/his critical thinking, and the effect it had. Then what you could have done differently to improve your skills.

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. The reader should not be able to tell what you actually think until the third (conclusion) entry on an issue.

Choose 3 issues from this list: Is religion 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 4<sup>th</sup> will not be from the list – you will choose a topic. Issue 1 will be addressed in entries due Feb 6 (reasons to agree), 13 (reasons to disagree) & 20 (evaluate reasons and make a conclusion). Issue 2 due Feb 27, Mar 6 & 13. Issue 3 due Mar 27, Apr 3 & 10. Issue 4 (not from list) due Apr 17, 24, & May 1.

### **Critical Thinking I and II (CT I & II Papers)**

The opinion editorial (op-ed) columns you will analyze will have been published after Dec. 1, 2015. An op-ed column is an essay giving the author's opinion supported by facts and examples. Do not use a blog or anything that does not have the support of a major reliable news source. Acceptable sources are papers like the Washington Post, NY Times, Wall Street Journal or similar sources (e.g., Huffington Post, Newsweek, Time, Daily Beast, Weekly Standard). You will be given a list of acceptable op-ed authors.

The papers are not essays like a typical class paper. There will be 5 labeled subsections corresponding to

the 5 sections of the Critical Thinking Rubric (Introduction, Evidence, Context, Argument, Conclusion). Within each section describe how effective the author was. For example, to earn 4 points for the Evidence section of your paper a) describe the evidence that is presented by the author and b) analyze and evaluate the accuracy, relevance and completeness of that evidence. Only 1 point would be earned for Evidence if you simply report her/his evidence and accept or reject it with no or minimal justification evident in your writing. Be sure to include the URL and the actual column you evaluated.

### **Essay on Epley Chapter Presentation**

Everyone will work with others to present the information from one of the chapters in Epley's book to the class. Each team will work together outside of class to decide what to present and how to present it. They will also devise a task for families to do during that class that illustrates something important from the chapter. To encourage creativity and risk taking, the presentation itself will NOT be graded. For example, if the task doesn't work as expected or completely flops, it will not be held against you in any way. If the class asks 10,000 questions because nothing said is clear to them it will be the same – not affecting any grade. Each team will be expected to go beyond the book (e.g., giving examples not used in the book).

Critically analyze the teamwork and the presentation. What will be graded is the 500-750 word essay due the next night after your presentation (e.g., if you present on a Thursday, it will be due at 11:59pm on Friday). This essay will critically evaluate the processes your team used to create the presentation. For example, how did you decide which things to present and who would do what to prepare and to present. How was the work divided and why was it divided that way? What could/should have been done so the preparation went more smoothly or effectively? In retrospect, what should you have done differently during preparation and with the class? What worked better or worse than expected?

Up to 20 points will be given for the critical analysis shown in the essay. Up to 16 points will be assigned using the Communication Rubric. So 36 points are possible.

### **Self-Evaluation of Performance**

This essay will be 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, how you affected them and challenges to your behavioral and cognitive comfort zones. Address your effort, involvement, and accomplishments in all aspects of the course, including performance in the roles of charter cop, leader, spokesperson/scribe, and devil's advocate. (Describe your performance in the roles not what the roles were supposed to entail.) 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.