

Guidelines for the Term Paper

The term paper is an important part of the course. It is worth approximately 25% of the points for the course, and, without completing the paper, it will be difficult to pass. Above and beyond that, though, in today's society, it is very important to be able to communicate your ideas both verbally and in writing. By writing a term paper, you will gain experience in written communication.

I believe that it is important to develop critical thinking skills. Many times, we have a tendency to simply believe what we read as veridical. That trend is escalating with the explosion of the world wide web phenomenon. This paper is an exercise in critical thinking in psychology. I want you to discuss the psychological aspects of a current event. The event will have to have occurred **during this semester** in order for it to be considered current.

What I want you to do is to first briefly describe the event in the first paragraph. You will need to reference the newspaper or magazine article which describes the event in this paragraph. In the second paragraph, tell me what psychological aspects you are going to discuss. These aspects can be only tangentially related to the event. Finally, spend the rest of the paper discussing the aspects. You do not have to tie this in to the beginning of the paper. In this part, you will need to reference at least three (3) peer-reviewed articles from journals. You will need to have at least five (5) references total in the paper. The bulk of the assignment is teaching you how to read journal articles and correctly paraphrase important information that is presented in journal articles.

As an example, if I were to use the Y2K scare as my event, I could choose one of

the following topics to write on: anxiety, reactions to stress, defense mechanisms, and cognitive psychology (tying in with computers). Once I chose my topic, I would find three articles from journals in the library and write my paper by paraphrasing the articles.

You will need to turn in three components to fully complete the paper assignment. You will need to turn in an article describing your current event plus some of the references for the psychological factors you will evaluate, a rough draft of the paper, and a final draft of the paper. **The current event is due the class period following Exam 2** (I will hold the final say as to the appropriateness of the current event; you may be asked to change events). Simply turning in the article and photocopies of the **first page** of one of the three journal articles you would like to use will be worth up to **4 points**. **The rough draft of the paper will be due the class period following Exam 3**. Simply turning in the rough draft and the **front page** of the three journal articles you used will be worth up to **7 points**. The final draft of the paper will be due the last regular class period (not the Final Exam class period). The final draft of the paper will be worth up to **39 points** and will be graded on both content (**25 points**) and grammar (**14 points**). Both the Rough Draft and the Final Draft must be typed. I will not accept handwritten documents (and you will receive 0 points for them).

The content will be evaluated in 5 areas (worth five [5] points each): *Included Information*, *Excluded Information*, *References*, *Information Technicality*, and *Holistic Appearance*.

Included Information
evaluates the information you
put in the paper to determine if

it is correct. So, be sure to have your facts straight (and references to back them up) before you write the paper. It also takes into account whether you included enough references (you need to have 5 total).

Excluded Information evaluates whether key pieces of information are left out of the paper. It is equally as problematic to leave skip over important pieces of information as it is to include information that is wrong.

References refers to your ability to use APA Style referencing. Many people have difficulties citing their references. These problems include not referencing other people's work or simply copying other people's words (both of these cases are generally called *plagiarism* and are considered academic fraud, which will need to be dealt with as is laid out in the Student Handbook), using an incorrect citation method (such as citing in MLA style when the paper must be in APA style), or confusing the references you have included in the work.

Information Technicality refers to whether the technical level of the paper is at the appropriate level for the course. In this case, the paper will be graded on how close it comes to the standards of a first-year course.

Holistic Appearance deals with the overall professional appearance of your paper--the extent to which you use appropriate language, headers, etc. It also deals with your ability to use APA style appropriately and your ability to follow instructions.

The grammar of the paper will also be graded. Remember that it is not only important for you to have good ideas, but you must also communicate them appropriately. I have seen too many good ideas shot down because the person could not communicate them in an effective written manner (and, yes, this is important in getting a real job; I know of no white collar job [and I would hope that all of you are shooting for a job at least at the white collar level] that does not require some form of written communication among employees). The grading for grammar will be as follows: .5 will be deducted from 14 for every grammar error (up to 28 errors--you cannot get a minus number on your grammar grade).

The paper itself should be 5-10 pages long, including references and a title page (I have created four web pages which detail how the title page, body of the paper, first paragraph of the paper, and reference page should look). I will count off for extremely short (less than 5 pages) or extremely long (more than 10 pages) papers.

The paper should be done in American Psychological Association (APA) Style. There are several places where you can get reference material to help you learn APA Style. In my office I have the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th Ed), which is the publication the APA puts out to help people learn APA style. You may borrow the book for up to 2 hours at a time, keeping it within Tate Page Hall. The library has a copy of this book as well.

In addition, there are several web pages dedicated to helping with APA Style. You could do a search for APA Style and find them, if you want. Or, come see

me and I will show you how to find
such.