

## Introduction to Psychology — Dana C. Leighton

### Reaction Paper Assignment Instructions

One of the goals of this class is to help you become a more critical thinker. Critical thinking involves being a “questioning scholar.” A questioning scholar reads and gathers information, but more importantly, asks questions about what he or she has read or gathered.

For most of your high school (and many college) courses, you have been asked to read and accept what you were reading as fact. Or, your courses may have asked you to solve a mathematical problem, for which there is one definitive correct answer.

Psychology (and most of the social sciences) departs from this model, and asks you to do more than “regurgitate” information. We will expect you to ask questions *about* what you have read or information you have gathered. We will also ask you to connect seemingly separate pieces of information, and to formulate your own ideas and reasoned opinions about how they are connected. You should think also about what is *not* studied, written about, or mentioned, and possible reasons *why* it is not.

This course requires you to demonstrate your critical thinking in a number of short reaction papers. Since the papers are short, you will have to write clearly and concisely, so you pack as much information into the papers as is possible without going over the page limit.

#### When will we receive our assignments?

The reaction papers are due as indicated in the syllabus. A minimum of one week in advance of the due date, I will distribute the reaction paper assignment. It will include a question or controversy in psychology which has multiple perspectives or viewpoints. I will often summarize the viewpoints, and indicate whether they are mentioned in your readings.

I may also give you a research article, and ask you to summarize it and provide a critical analysis of whether the experiment was convincing or not, and what problems may have been introduced into the research. Or, I may give you a newspaper or magazine article, and ask you to critically review it from a psychological perspective. Possibly, you may be asked to reconcile two very different research findings.

#### What is a Reaction Paper?

A reaction paper is exactly what it sounds like – your reaction to a reading or a problem posed or ideas from your text. What is important here is *not* reiterating what the readings or text tell you, but rather, to use what you have read or studied to formulate *your own new and original* idea or way to approach the issues raised in the assignment. This is *not* a research paper!

#### The Successful Reaction Paper.

To write a successful reaction paper, you will need to think about the question or issue I raise for you. *OH NO MR. BILL! NOT THINKING!* Yes, *thinking!* You will have to carefully re-read the text, reserve readings, and possibly any handouts that I have provided that might pertain to the writing assignment. When you re-read them, read them with the assignment in mind, and any questions the readings may raise in regard

to the assignment. If what you read is obviously missing a point of view that you think it should cover, make a note of that. Your notes will form the basis for your paper's argument.

The reaction papers should conform to the following guidelines.

- Maximum 3 pages
- Typed or word processed – *not* hand written
- Double-spaced
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Use 12–14 point font size

- Include a brief introductory thesis statement
- Include a development of your reaction's argument
- Include a concluding statement which summarizes your reaction and / or suggests ideas for future studies
- Include a provocative title (make me *want* to read it!)

### How will the reaction papers be graded?

I will be evaluating the reaction papers primarily on the basis of the quality of your argument and the critical thought and logical support that you give it. It is not enough to have an opinion about what you read; it is much more important that you support your opinion with a solid logical argument. Use paraphrases or quotes from your readings or the text to help support it.

Note, however, that when you use paraphrases or quotes from another author (including your textbook), you ***MUST*** cite that author as the source of the idea you are writing. You may use any recognized citation formatting style (e.g. MLA, APA, Chicago, etc) to cite anyone else's works. Just be sure you don't misrepresent another author's words or thoughts as your own, or to fail to use quotation marks when you are quoting a source directly. These behaviors, among others, constitute academic dishonesty and your paper will receive a zero grade, and you may receive a failing grade in the course.

Grammar, spelling, and other mechanics will count for 20% of your paper grade. The remaining 80% will be on the quality of your critical thought and your skill at constructing a logically sound argument.

If you have been out of school for a long time, or you feel uncertain about your ability to write clearly and make a good argument, I ***strongly*** suggest you seek help on writing skills from the writing center on campus. The staff there can review your assignment, and help you with logical construction, mechanics, or a critical eye. Also use friends who have written similar assignments in the past.

### I will help you improve your papers.

I will read early drafts, if my schedule permits, and give you constructive feedback. When I grade the papers, I will also provide you a lot of suggestions for improving your writing, especially on the first paper.

### How will we submit our papers?

This is a little complicated. In order for me to most objectively read and evaluate

your papers, I need to read them **without** knowing who you are. Otherwise, my marking may be influenced by your previous performance or your personality.

In order to maintain your anonymity, you will submit your papers to me in a *letter-sized manila* (beige) file folder. Place your name on the *back* of the folder, in *pencil*. Do *not* put your name on the *front* of the paper; instead write your name on the *back* of the **last page** of your paper, lightly, **in pencil**.

You will keep your previously submitted papers in this folder, and submit them *all* with your most recent submission. This will allow me to see your progress over the course of the papers, and to provide specific suggestions for your next paper.