

Paper assignment: Applying Psychological Science Paper

This document pertains to our first paper assignment, the Applying Psychological Science Paper (APSP). As a reminder from the syllabus, APSP #1 is due on Monday, October 7th, end of the day (11:59 pm).

The paper assignment has two major parts:

- (a) to address an **applied challenge**, that is, some challenge faced in the “real world,” outside of university departments of psychology, by
- (b) making use of information in a **scientific paper** that presents some scientific evidence that can be used to address the challenge.

In this document is a list of applied challenges and associated scientific papers from which to choose. You should choose **one of these** as the topic for your paper. If you choose a topic that is NOT on this list you will not earn credit for this assignment.

Once you choose a topic, your assignment is:

- (1) to **describe the theory and research presented in the scientific paper** that is listed for your topic
- (2) to **explain how that theory and research addresses the applied challenge**, in other words, to explain how the psychological science (the theory and research in the paper) might help to solve the problem faced by the person with the applied challenge.

The paper you write should be 3.5 - 4 pages in length, double-spaced. That would be the length in font size 12, 1-inch-margins; this would equate to about 1100 words of writing. In these 3.5-4 pages, you should be accomplishing the two asks above: (1) describe the theory and research presented in the scientific paper you read (answer questions such as: what is the main idea of the paper? What are the main research findings supporting this idea? **What methods did the researcher use to support their findings?**), and (2) explain how that theory and research can be applied to the applied problem (explain what the person facing the applied challenge might do differently if they knew about the theory and research in the paper). You should spend about an equal amount of space on each of the two tasks; your paper should have about 1.5-2 pages describing the theory and research that is presented in the relevant scientific paper, and about 1.5-2 pages explaining how the scientific information might be used to solve the applied problem.

Notes on the Readings: You do not have to do any additional outside reading for the paper, that is, you don't have to read anything except for the one paper listed as the

relevant scientific paper for your topic. (The list is below.) Also note that you can get your paper, absolutely for free, in either of two ways. If you're on campus, you merely need enter the title of the paper into an internet browser. Google Scholar almost always finds the paper, and if you're on campus the UIC computer system will add a "Find It @ UIC" link. Alternatively, from any computer you can access the paper through the UIC library system list of electronic journals. Please contact your TA if you are not familiar with this UIC library access system.

Notes on writing style: For this paper, you should have little or no direct quotes from the paper. Unlike a writing style in the humanities (e.g., an English class in which you are writing about a work of fiction), here in the social sciences there is rarely any need at all to quote directly, word-for-word, from a paper you are reading. The text in your paper should be text written entirely by you.

Notes on plagiarism: Anytime you are using someone else's words you need to give the author credit by citing them. Otherwise, this is plagiarism. By citing the author, you are adding credibility to your argument and avoiding plagiarism. An example of an in-text citation looks like this: where you first list the ideas of an author followed with an in-line citation: Psychology is the scientific study of person, the mind, and the brain (Cervone, 2014).

Below are the topics from which to choose in writing your first paper, APSP#1. Below that you can find instructions for submitting the paper.

Environmental Attitudes and Behavior

Suppose you work for an environmental organization, that is, a nonprofit organization devoted to protecting the environment from being degraded by pollution. You decide to launch an ad campaign in which you remind people that too many people are polluting the environment, and this has to stop. Unfortunately, your ad campaign doesn't work. There is as much pollution after you show the ads as before. So you launch a new campaign in which you tell people that far, far, too many people, in huge numbers, are polluting the environment, and this absolutely has to stop! Unfortunately, this campaign backfires. There is even more pollution after you show the ads than there was before. You've got one last chance to devise a new ad campaign. What are you going to do?

Relevant scientific paper:

Cialdini, R. (2003). Crafting normative messages to protect the environment. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12, 105-109.

Neighborhoods and Child Development

Suppose you are a newly elected member of the United States Congress, and your Congressional district is relatively poor, that is, lower than average in terms of socioeconomic status and the resources available to citizens. You think that the poverty of your Congressional district is harming the lives of children and youth. So your first act as a Congressperson is to give a speech arguing for more resources to improve

neighborhoods in your district. But some other Congressperson immediately gets up and says “Neighborhoods don’t make any difference at all. The reason people who live in poor neighborhoods aren’t doing well has nothing to do with the neighborhoods at all. What’s really happening is that some people inherit lots of smarts, and they’re smart enough to move out of the bad neighborhoods, so the people left behind in the bad neighborhoods are the less smart people, who naturally do less well in life. Neighborhoods don’t matter at all.” What are you going to say in response? What scientific evidence indicates that neighborhoods actually do matter?

Relevant scientific paper:

Leventhal, T., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2003). Children and youth in neighborhood contexts. Beyond traits in the study of personality coherence. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12, 27-31.

Personality and Prediction of Behavior

Suppose you are in the personnel department of a large company. One of your job duties is to predict job performance based on measures of personality. The idea is that, when people apply for jobs, you give them a personality test. You then hope to be able to use their test scores to predict on-the-job performance outcomes, such as “who will be a reliable, hard-working employee?”, “who will be an outgoing, sociable individual who boosts morale?”, “who will have a capacity for leadership?” But here’s a specific problem. Based on your past experience, it seems as if individual people vary from one situation to another. Instead of being sociable all the time (for example), a person is sociable in one situation and not another. People show leadership in some work settings, but fail to do so in others. Traditional personality measures tell you what a person is like on average, but it seems as if people vary from one situation to another, so that the “average score” doesn’t tell you enough information. What are you to do?

Relevant scientific paper:

Cervone, D., & Shoda, Y. (1999). Beyond traits in the study of personality coherence. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 8, 27-32.

Stuck with Low Self-Esteem?

Suppose you have a friend who complains of low self-esteem. The individual often feels like a failure, and says the he or she doesn’t have much to be proud of. Furthermore, the person says to you “and this is never going to change; I’ll have low self-esteem forever.” You, being a nice person, say “No, it can change; you’ll probably feel better about yourself eventually.” Your friend then says “I don’t believe you; what do you know?”

What *do* you know? Is there any scientific evidence that would support your argument (“No, it can change; you’ll probably feel better about yourself eventually.”) What would you say to your friend, in light of this scientific evidence?

Relevant scientific paper:

Orth, U., & Robins, R. W. (2014). The development of self-esteem. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23, 381-387.

The Law and Interrogations

Suppose you are a lawyer. You are working for a client who has been charged with a crime. Making matters worse, your client has confessed to the crime. But now says he is innocent. Making matters even worse, he was *videotaped* while confessing. Yet he now insists he is innocent, and explains to you that his confession was not a real confession. The police forced him to confess. His confession was coerced. Your job is to go to court and explain that the videotape of the confession is not iron-clad proof that your client is guilty. He still might be innocent. You also want to argue that the videotape of his confession should not be shown in court because showing it would be unfair to him. These are the arguments you have to make. How are you going to make them? Is there any help from psychological science?

Relevant scientific paper:

Lassiter, G. D. (2002). Illusory causation in the courtroom. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11, 204-208.

Submitting Your Paper

You will need to submit your paper to the Blackboard web site. Specifically, we will establish a “Safeassignment” location on the website at which you will submit the paper. Safeassignment is a university-administered system that cross-checks papers against material on the internet and material submitted elsewhere at UIC, to safeguard against plagiarism. **If you copy words from other sources, this is plagiarism. If you copy words from other students, even students from past semesters, this is plagiarism. If you copy words from an assignment you’ve written in past semesters, this is plagiarism (self-plagiarism). If you do any of these things, this system will flag your paper as plagiarized, and you will earn 0 points for this paper, and your name will be submitted to the Dean of Students where you may face disciplinary actions from the University. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense.** Please use your own words entirely when you write this paper. Please do not cheat on this assignment in any way.