



E-mail: mofsowitz@monroecc.edu

Office Hours: see “find me” page on my web site

Web site: <http://sites.monroecc.edu/mofsowitz/>

Office location: 5-402

INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

Textbooks:

A customized online book from the *NOBA Project*, accessed through the “Course Content” folder in our online class. This book is free, and downloadable. Please purchase the following secondary text:

50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology (2010; Lilienfeld, Lynn, Ruscio, & Beyerstein).

Introduction to Psychological Science (3 credit hours):

An introductory survey of the major concepts in the scientific study of human behavior, human development, motivation, learning, personality, individual differences, and social behavior. Dual emphasis is placed upon understanding, integration, and application to real life as well as theoretical and methodological issues. (SUNY-SS)

This is the *honors* section of our introductory course in psychology, and expectations regarding student readiness, workload, and participation are increased accordingly. All honors courses qualify as “writing intensive,” and sufficient formal and informal writing assignments are built into the course to satisfy writing intensive requirements; these are described in more detail below.

Some problems with expectations about psychology: Students often think psychology is going to examine problem cases: the distressed, maladjusted, decidedly unusual, insane, and so forth, along with some pop themes like maximizing self-potential and maintaining mental health and chemical balance in the brain. In reality, however, we focus on a scientific exploration of the human *experience* in terms of general principles of mind and behavior. For example, we don't share wisdom about “what makes someone become a serial killer?” but we investigate things like “how is it possible to see in color?” or “how does a person know what’s going on around them?” And to answer questions like these we have to learn *the language and the methods* of psychology: the ways psychologists describe things, and the ways they get at answers. Psychology, after all, is a *science*; it attempts to objectively figure out how and why we act and think. It relies on predictions and conclusions emphasizing evidence gathered through methods designed to eliminate error. We have to learn the language of psychology to avoid problems commonly created by unclear or imprecise wording. We learn psychology’s concepts to gain precision when describing behavior and mental processes. And we learn the methods of science to escape the constraints and unguarded errors of uncritical beliefs and opinions and peer pressure and gut feelings and culture. Interest in insanities, other mental disorders, therapies, etc. remains a part of psychology, but only a part.

Students also tend to think psychology is easy; after all, it sounds fun, which it is, but if it were easy we'd know more about psychology than we know about physics. (I'm not the first to say that.) In other words, explaining atomic energy or predicting the trajectory of a rocket as it passes Jupiter is “easy”; explaining happiness or predicting a person’s behavior as she enters a situation is tough. But both use the same principles: those of science. Students are often surprised about how scientific their psychology courses are.

And almost everyone comes to their first psychology class with assumptions and beliefs about how people function, what’s good for teaching people new things, where personality differences come from, etc. We might cling to these assumptions and beliefs because they've gotten us through years of life and they may have come from persons we respect (parents, friends, teachers, clergy, therapists, Dr. Phil...). In other words, we just *know* they can't be wrong. But in psychology we look at the human creature from a sober, critical-thinking scientific viewpoint, and what we see often challenges many of our thoughts, even those we're most certain of. So come to class prepared to be exposed to explanations of mind and behavior that may seem counterintuitive, and be prepared to confront scientific evidence that contradicts, and probably shatters, some of your (incorrect) beliefs. This may seem simple in print, but heed the warning: without an open mind, willing to learn what *psychologists* have verified about behavior and mental processes, you probably won't do as well in class as you could.

General purpose and objectives:

The broad objectives of this course are twofold: one, to introduce you to the work of psychologists, and two, to contribute to the larger puzzle that is your general education. It's expected that you will understand each of the topics described in the outline of lectures and assignments (page 4 of this syllabus) well enough to explain and in some cases apply or analyze them in writing. Within each topic there are many concepts, findings, and theories that you are expected to recognize and comprehend, though they are too numerous to list here. You should also be able to comprehend and evaluate, with a *skeptical* eye, the various discussions going on around us – in the media and in private – that have to do with reasons and tendencies of human behaviors and the functioning of the human mind. Successful completion of this course will prepare you for further study in psychology.

The departmental course learning outcomes for PSY 101 state that successful students should:

- differentiate between the numerous areas of specialization within the broader field of psychology;
- identify the major research methods used in psychology;
- apply the basic principles of scientific thinking to the various subfields of psychology;
- identify the important concepts in the various sub-disciplines of psychology (which could include biological, behavioral, clinical, cognitive, developmental, or social psychology);
- identify the important theories in the various sub-disciplines of psychology (which could include biological, behavioral, clinical, cognitive, developmental, or social psychology); and
- identify applications of scientific psychology in real-world situations.

A secondary objective, as always, is to contribute to your general education: developing the attitudes and behaviors (especially those expressed through written communication) that are necessary to survive and thrive in college and beyond, and to become successful college-educated people.

GRADES

There will be **four short-essay styled tests** and your combined test grade is worth **50%** of the final course grade (in other words, each test is worth 12.5% of the total course grade). We'll have **two formal term papers** each worth **15%** of the total course grade, and a **variety of pass-fail homework** assignments worth **15% total** (combined). Attendance *and active involvement* in class is worth **5%** of your total grade. There is no final exam. You'll need a total score of 93 for an A (which represents excellent work), 90 for an A–, 87 for B+, 83 for B, 80 for B–, 70 for C–, and so on when all is completed.

Don't *not* submit an assignment: the score of zero has a terrible effect on overall grades.

(Anyone using documented testing accommodations must inform me one week before the quiz.)

The term papers will be detailed in class. You'll have a variety of options to choose from. I think of term papers as a form of independent learning, and not as some tedious formality, so I expect you to use the term paper assignment as an opportunity to learn something about psychology outside of our regular class work.

Guidelines: The formal term papers should each be 1250–1750 words in length. Term papers will be due in parts; I will write comments about thought content, clarity, and English (grammar, syntax, spelling, organization, etc.) on your paper's introduction, which will be due first. Thereafter it will only get a grade. *All assignments (including homework) should be typed.* Computers are available for your use at MCC Learning Centers. Term papers should be double-spaced, neatly ordered, and stapled together. See the tips for writing at the end of this syllabus.

Homework assignments will primarily be graded for content and clarity, and on a pass-fail basis, though I use two levels of passing (high: symbolized by P+, equivalent to an A; and regular: symbolized by P, equivalent to a C+). English writing errors will be treated leniently on homework assignments, but not ignored, and your work must be neat and must successfully communicate your thoughts. Homework assignments may be single-spaced. I might refer you to the tutoring center (for writing) based on your writing skills as exhibited on homework, and I expect you to go there for tutoring if I do.

Tests in this course will *sample* your knowledge and understanding of the material studied in the sections covered by each test (e.g., test 4 will only cover material subsequent to test 3, but will have only a few questions rather than a thorough quizzing of all topics; anything studied or assigned is “fair game” for a test, though I might decide, in class, to eliminate some material from tests). In-class tests will be graded only for content and clarity, and will receive a letter grade. English writing errors will not count on in-class tests unless they affect your intended meaning or if I cannot decipher your meaning.

Assignments turned in late will be devalued and are ineligible for rewriting (for a grade change). However, due-date extensions can be given for consecutive *legitimate excused* absences, such as jury duty, military deployment, MCC sport team travel, or hospitalization. It is always better to prepare assignments ahead of their deadlines, just in case, and it is also always better in my classes to hand in an assignment late rather than not at all (if it comes down to it, an F is a much stronger grade than a zero). You may rewrite *homework* assignments for an improved grade, due one week after they're returned.

Quirks about the way I grade: A checkmark (✓) is a good sign. It means “yes,” or “right,” or “good.” If I actually write “good,” I really mean it; I use superlatives (“great paper,” “excellent”) rarely. On the whole, when I grade your written work, I point out the weaknesses and errors in the optimistic hope that you'll learn to correct them in the future. It also expresses my assumption that your self-esteem is not so fragile that it'll crush under the weight of a short series of corrections from a college teacher. Expect to have your mistakes corrected; it's good for you. But it doesn't represent what I think of you as a person; if you behave politely in class I respect you thoroughly, no matter how good or bad your writing or test-taking skills. The comments and grades only refer to the quality of the work you submitted, not to the quality of you as a person.

Learn from your mistakes: You'll make plenty; most people do. Pay attention to them. (Don't ignore them as most people do.) Your test scores and test or assignment feedback let you know about your mistakes. Perhaps as you get more experience in school, you'll make fewer of them. If you attend to the mistakes, you'll probably improve your reading, your studying, and your knowledge. If you ignore them, you'll feel better for a little while. But you're not in school to protect your self-esteem; you're here to improve your reading, studying, knowledge, etc. (which will give you *reason* to feel good). So do your best to attend to those mistakes and to figure out how to learn from them.

Note-taking advice:

Take notes. Take lots of notes. Even when you seem to be following a clear discussion that you completely understand, write down something to help you remember it and details that were in the discussion. I don't have PowerPoint sets to hand out or notes that are made for students. Active note-taking is an important part of the learning/remembering process. Don't write my exact words, though: write the gist of the ideas (and if it triggers thoughts of your own, write those down as well). Rewrite your notes at some point. Take notes from your readings, too. It would be very nice if you'd be willing to share notes with students who miss class (it's easy to share a photo of your notes by text, etc.).

MICHAEL S. OFSOWITZ

Born and raised here in the Rochester area. Studied psychology and sociology at The University of North Carolina-Charlotte, before going to Tulane University (New Orleans) for graduate study in social psychology. I joined Monroe Community College in the fall of 2002, and spent 13 of the preceding years teaching to (mostly) Americans in Germany (in military environments) with the University of Maryland. I teach psychology (intro, social psych, behavior mod, superstitions, research methods) and have also taught sociology (intro, social problems, social psych, self, American society). I'm widowed, have one child (a son), enjoy French and Middle Eastern food, cooking, forests, racquetball, softball, pickleball, literary fiction, and comedy, and I also speak German. I'm a full professor here at MCC. Feel free to call me anything polite (Mike, Michael, Mr. Ofsowitz, professor, even “teach”). I have a web site at <http://sites.monroecc.edu/mofsowitz>.

Office Hours:

Come see me whenever you feel like it. I'm easy to visit. My office hours are posted on my web site and on my office door, and I may be there more often than the times posted. Don't let your frustrations or confusions get the upper hand; if you're having problems in class, come talk with me in my office. Of course, you don't have to have problems to seek me out: there are no prerequisites to office visits. If necessary, we can arrange a personal Zoom session online.

OUTLINE OF LECTURES AND ASSIGNMENTS:

(The dates below represent the start of each week only. You should read all material **prior** to the class scheduled so that you'll be prepared to participate in class discussions. We won't discuss everything from the readings in class, but you'll be held responsible for it all. By reading beforehand you'll also be able to ask about confusing material during class. You should re-read the assignments after class, taking notes while you do, so that it'll really sink in. "NOBA" refers to the custom e-textbook, and "MYTHS" to the "50 Great Myths..." book.)

<u>Week of</u>	<u>Topics</u>
Aug 28:	Class starts. Start the first topic readings. (1) Introduction to psychology and science. NOBA 1-3, Myths Preface and Introduction
Sep 06:	<i>Labor Day Break (Mon)</i> And a bit of the history of psychology. Begin reading topic 2.
Sep 11:	(2) Biologically-based predispositions: Evolution, adaptations, genes, and their influence on behavior. NOBA 4, Myths #32 TEST 1 (end of the week, through evolution).
Sep 18:	(3) Biology of psychology: neurons and the brain. NOBA 5-7, Myths #1 & 2
Sep 25:	(4) The principles of learning and conditioning. NOBA 8, Myths #30
Oct 02:	Conditioning and learning, cont. (5) Back to science: research methods in psychology. NOBA 9 & 10, Myths # 5, 6, 18, 21, 23, & 42 (examples of poor research). also see https://sites.monroecc.edu/mofsowitz/psychology/correlationcausation/
Oct 09:	Research methods, cont. TEST 2 (through methods).
Oct 16:	(6) How the world outside gets inside: sensory systems and perception. NOBA 11 & 12, Myths #3, 4, 5, 22
Oct 23:	(7) Cognition: memory, memory errors, and heuristics. NOBA 13-18, Myths #11-14
Oct 30:	(8) Social psychology. NOBA 19-21, Myths #27-29
Nov 06:	Social psychology, cont. TEST 3 (through social psych)
Nov 13:	(9) What is personality? Is it real or imagined? NOBA 22-25, Myths #31, 33-36
Nov 20:	(10) Abnormal behavior and therapies. <i>Thanksgiving Break (Wed-Fri)</i> NOBA 26-32, Myths #37-41 & 47-50 (Withdrawal deadline)
Nov 27:	Abnormal behavior and therapies, cont.
Dec 04:	(11) Developmental psychology. NOBA 33-36, Myths #7-10 (+ Postscript)
Dec 11:	Developmental psychology. TEST 4. Last day of class is Dec 15. Term paper 2 due.

A note on attendance, absences, and make-ups:

Your attendance grade will be calculated as a percentage of classes attended, with two absences allowed without penalty, and my assessment of your readiness and willingness to participate in class discussions. I take attendance at the *start* of each class. *If you're in class but sleeping, or playing with your phone, you are not really there, and I may count you absent.* If you miss class, find out from other students what went on. Ask them for copies of their notes. Be willing to help your fellow students, too; share your notes. I'm available to clarify any problems you might have understanding course material or assignments whether or not you were absent, but I won't review entire classes. Due to the nature of the course, *any* absence may lead to lower grades (e.g., on tests). **If you miss class on a test/quiz day you *must* have a valid excuse and contact me without delay.** Make-up tests must be completed within one week from the original test date, unless valid excuses (medical emergency, COVID, jury duty, military deployment) keep you from returning to the classroom. (Such absences require documentation.) *If you feel ill, don't come to campus.* If you're going to miss class, send me an E-mail.

Incomplete (grade of I):

The grade of I, or incomplete, is available for special, rare cases where a student is unable to finish the course by the scheduled end of the term. To receive an I, a student having problems finishing the course as scheduled must fulfill the following requirements: 1) complete 60% of the graded assignments before the course ends; 2) attend 60% of the class by the end of the course; 3) provide evidence of a valid reason for not finishing the graded assignments by the end of the course; and 4) request an incomplete in writing, prior to the last day of the course, including the reason for the extension and a date by which the work for the course will be completed (which should not exceed one week from the expiration of the reason for the I). Granting the grade of I, and setting a date for its completion remain at the total discretion of the instructor. For students who are unable to finish the course as scheduled, alternatives to the grade of I include the W (withdrawal, see below) and the F (failure).

Plagiarism and cheating:

Plagiarism is academic dishonesty. In other words, it's a big word for cheating. If you're caught plagiarizing, or cheating in some other form, you may wind up failing the assignment and being reported to the college. The Psychology Department's policy on plagiarism, available in the "courses" folder of the M-drive, describes the conditions that define plagiarism for this course. The most common form of plagiarism is using someone else's work as if it were your own. That is, by copying the *work* of another person and presenting that work as if *you* wrote it, you are plagiarizing. To avoid plagiarism you should learn how to paraphrase and how to use *quotation marks*. If you put someone else's *ideas* into *your own words* (and not just a rearrangement of the original words) you don't need the quotation marks but you still need to cite your source. Citing your source is necessary, but often not sufficient to avoid plagiarism.

Under no circumstances may you ever use the work of a fellow student in any of *your* written work. You must write your own product. Use of artificial intelligence (AI) to generate text is strictly prohibited. Submission of text generated by AI, even if you slightly modify it, will be considered a violation of academic integrity (i.e., cheating).

I highly recommend that you get an English manual of some sort to help you avoid some of the common mistakes that result in accusations of plagiarism. *Diana Hacker's Pocket Style Manual* is one such guidebook. I also have a web page at <https://sites.monroec.edu/mofsowitz/apa-style/plagiarism/> that will be of help.

Respect:

- **Don't make unnecessary noise in the classroom, or use a phone for play during class. Really. Nothing bugs me more than to see you playing with your cell phone while I'm teaching, and nothing bugs your classmates more than you making noise while they're trying to listen to something else.**
- Try to be patient with fellow students and assume they have good intentions. Listen to what they're saying.
- Don't dominate discussions: allow time for others, who might be shier than you, to respond.
- We're playing with ideas in class, so don't assume people believe what they're talking about.
- Take a joke, but don't insult anyone (or at least insult everyone equally and in good taste).
- Treat the classroom as a confidential situation, and don't gossip about it.
- Speak in the first person; recognize that your opinions are your own and that you don't speak for others.
- Be nice (respect others), try to learn something (respect college), and take responsibility for your future (respect yourself). If need be, at least fake it, and consider it a professional responsibility.

Learning Centers:

The Writing Center no longer exists, but its services have been integrated into the Tutoring and Academic Assistance Center (TAAC, at Brighton, Learning Commons at Downtown; see their website for details:

<https://www.monroec.edu/depts/academic-foundations/tutoring/>) If your writing is at all weak, I *highly* recommend that you make use of the tutoring services. It's there to help you. Watch the feedback I give you on homework assignments: I might refer you to tutoring (for writing), and I expect you to seek it out if I do. If you have broader reading, study habit, or language problems, the TAAC is also the place to go.

Recordings:

Audio: only with explicit written permission from your professor. Photo/video: not permitted. Do not post any recordings on the web.

Withdrawals:

To withdraw from this course, you'll have to complete the withdrawal electronically. You will then receive a grade of "W" for the course.

You should not assume that failing to attend class will result in an automatic withdrawal from a course. Your non-attendance may result in a grade of F and thus jeopardize your GPA (and possibly future financial aid). The withdrawal *deadline* (your last chance to withdraw) is published in the MCC academic calendar – it is usually a few weeks prior to the end of the semester. There are no faculty-initiated withdrawals at MCC for the academic semester Fall, 2020, however frequent absences may trigger warnings from the college.

All the rest of the fine print information is on that formal, messy "course information sheet" that was designed by campus admin.

Syllabus continues next page...

SOME TIPS FOR WRITING ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS

1. Always *think* before writing. Don't write a paper without thinking first. Jot down your ideas, then sort through them; discard those of little value, and arrange the others in some logical order, using an outline for organization.
2. Avoid *plagiarism* at all costs. When you copy words, an idea, or other information from another source, you *must* give credit to the original source. Failure to give credit for ideas, information, or words is called plagiarism, and may lead to failure on the assignment, or if intentional and repeated, failure in the course. (When you use the exact same words as you find in another source, such as a textbook, use quotation marks ["..."] in your paper around the copied selection when the selection is three successive words or more. If you alter the exact wording only a little, you can be in big trouble, so either copy exactly and quote, or paraphrase cleanly.) See tip five, below, for sources showing you how to give credit where credit is due, and also the "[Plagiarism](#)" page on my web site (under "Writing"). Seriously.
3. Begin your essay with a clear introduction. Your introduction should do two things: 1) it should introduce *the reader* to the topic while clarifying key concepts you bring in; and 2) it should show *the reader* what your intentions are for the remainder of the paper while transitioning to the main body. End the essay with a conclusion that summarizes the paper, and draws it to a natural, clean close.
4. Be clear about what you are writing. Clarity demands that you understand what you are talking about and that you communicate it to a reader who is not reading your mind, but is reading your writing. A terse style, or one using terminology carelessly, does not make for clear writing. Also, try avoiding wordy phrases. If necessary, work on your use of punctuation, past and present tense problems, the active voice, and other aspects of the English essay (see point 5).
5. Use an English handbook to learn what you need to learn about basic writing mechanics. In addition to the rules, they show plenty of examples. Diana Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual* is a good source, as are the *Harbrace College Handbook*, Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, the *American Psychological Association (APA) Publication Manual*, the *Chicago Manual of Style* and other such sources (including <http://www.refdesk.com/factgram.html>). Use a dictionary *and* spell-check for spelling and a thesaurus to improve your vocabulary. Visit the Writing Learning Center for tutoring.
6. Avoid sexist and other biased language. Be polite to groups of people. Avoid using "he or she" or "s/he." Use of first person "I" is fine, and third-person singular "they" is also fine when clear.
7. Cite your sources and show your bibliography in proper APA format (see point 5, and my web site).
8. *Proofread* what you've written. Once you're down to your final draft (which should be your *third* or *tenth* time editing your paper, not second), give it a final, careful proof. If needed, make corrections on the final draft in pencil before you turn it in. If you find too many errors, rewrite once more.
9. Double-space term papers. This means using a 2-line spread for a 12-point font. (Use an 11 or 12-point font. A 12-point Garamond is usually a good choice.) Do *not* add empty spaces between paragraphs as in a business letter. *Indent* the start of each *paragraph* half an inch. Leave margins around the entire text of the paper (about 1"). Do *not* align the text to the right margin of the paper (don't "right-justify" or "full justify").
10. Number all the pages in the upper-right corner, flush with the right margin. APA style no longer requires a "running head" on each page, but I do, all uppercase, and starting on the left margin. It is a shortened title.
11. In my classes only: you don't need a title page. Instead, you can start your paper with the title, and then have your name on the next line. Staple the pages together yourself (don't ask me to do it for you). No plastic folders! Paper (e.g., manila) folders are acceptable. (For electronically-submitted papers, include a title page.)
12. **Follow the guidelines above!**