



E-mail: [mofsowitz@monroecc.edu](mailto:mofsowitz@monroecc.edu) Office Hours: [contact me by email](#), or see “find me” on my website

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

Office location: 5-402

## RESEARCH METHODS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

**Textbook:** *Research Methods in Psychology* (B. Morling, 4<sup>th</sup> edition)

(3 credit hours; prerequisite PSY 101 and PSY 108, both with a minimum grade of C; and MTH 162 or MTH 161): “Through a combination of lecture and hands-on research projects, this course examines the philosophy and methodology of science and how they are applied to social questions. Students plan and conduct research projects and write papers describing their research following APA style. Topics to be explored include experimental and non-experimental research methods, the development of testable hypotheses, the use of electronic databases to explore and review the scientific literature, and ethical issues.”

This course spends its time investigating the ways we can verify quantitative (measurable) discoveries in psychology (claims about how mind and behavior work) to decide what is true and what is not. False beliefs about human behavior and mental processes (and the rest of the natural world) are widespread. Much (perhaps most) of our personal knowledge is gained intuitively, without carefully examining evidence or testing claims. We need to *learn* how to examine evidence and test claims; it doesn’t come naturally. Research methods are (in the wise words of Scott Lilienfeld) the “toolbox of skills designed to prevent us from fooling ourselves.” What is in that toolbox? What are the skills? That is the topic of PSY-220.

The course presumes students are familiar with scientific psychology (e.g., with developmental or social or cognitive or biological psychology) and have a basic understanding of the function of statistics.

Additionally, the online course presumes students have frequent access to a computer. (The Psychology Department strongly discourages reliance on a phone or tablet for MCC online courses.) **Note:** This is not a self-paced course built around completion of assignments. This course is built around lively discussions. Online education makes it possible for us to gather and contribute to these discussions at different hours of the day and different days of the week, but we still have to gather together and do it with regularity. Instead of being in class Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 11am to noon, you might be on a Monday, Thursday, and Friday schedule from 10-11pm, or a Thursday, Friday, Saturday schedule with a different hour each day. Any regular schedule with multiple log-ins per week should work out fine for your in-class work and class discussions, but you cannot just fit the course in on the chance that some day during the week you might be free enough to complete some work and then log off until the next week.

The departmental **Course Learning Outcomes** state that successful students should be able to:

- \* Define the basic concepts of research methodology in the social sciences and apply them to specific examples.
- \* Identify which research methods are appropriate to use in different situations.
- \* Evaluate ethical issues as they relate to psychological research.
- \* Design original psychological research using appropriate methodology.
- \* Conduct original psychological research using appropriate methodology.
- \* Write an original research report following APA style.

### Additional objectives:

- \* In general, you should finish this course with an understanding of the nature of knowledge about psychological topics, and the role played by science in separating potentially correct knowledge from incorrect knowledge, legitimate methods of verification from erroneous methods; also, you should understand the amount of work involved in properly testing discoveries and drawing conclusions about reality.

\* A secondary objective, as always, is to contribute to your general education: developing an ability to distinguish details in challenging topics, and acquiring the attitudes and behaviors (especially those expressed through written communication) that are necessary to survive and thrive in college and beyond, and to become college-educated people.

## GRADES

There will be a series of ungraded pre-chapter quizzes and a few graded post-topic tests. There will also be homework assignments to complete throughout the semester (these will typically be writing assignments, ranging from hypothesis or survey item generation to sections (introduction, methods...) of a formal paper. There will be one formal, final research paper. Additionally, you will be graded for participation in the online forums; you are required to contribute each week by attempting to answer questions, asking questions, or otherwise elaborating on discussions. Thoughtfulness and effort count. **Post-topic tests: 45%** of course grade; **homework: 20%**; **online participation: 20%**; **final paper: 15%**. You'll need a total grade 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 on any assignment has a terrible effect on overall grades.

(Anyone using documented testing accommodations must inform me.)

**The pre-chapter quizzes** will be multiple choice, and are required to gain access to the discussion forum for that chapter. Skim the text chapter prior to attempting a pre-chapter quiz and use the index during the quiz. **Post-topic tests** will mostly be short essay/answer; these will be timed quizzes, but open book. We'll have four of these tests during the semester.

**Participation:** Be a participant. I expect you to make an initial posting by Wednesday night every week. I ask questions, and in the discussions I raise follow-up questions; please try to respond to these. In my own replies I may write something that you don't understand: feel free to ask me to clarify (I will be an active participant in class forums). Otherwise, I am not micromanaging the number of posts you need to contribute. Your participation grade will represent your attempts to contribute meaningfully to discussions. You will also get credit for *asking or answering questions* in the forums.

**The term paper and written homework assignments will be detailed in class.**

*Guidelines:* The final APA paper should be 1000 – 1500 words in length. The term paper should be double-spaced, neatly ordered, etc. **Homework should be single spaced**, unless otherwise instructed. See the tips for writing at the end of this syllabus, and because APA style is a prerequisite for this course, you will be expected to follow conventions of APA style where appropriate. You may submit assignments through BrightSpace as Word or Open Office documents, and some homework assignments may be submitted as plain text. I prefer Word (for ease of grading). BrightSpace can also handle pdf.

*The homework assignments:* generally, these are essay prompts that ask you (or force you, if you are less willing) to think about or work on some application of research methodology. They may also just require completion of some task (such as writing some survey questions, or collecting some references for use in a research paper). The goal is to pursue actual research. Usually there are no specific right or wrong answers. There is, however, a proper logic and a proper use of terminology and proper use of APA style, all of which suggests a developing curiosity and literacy of research methodology. Normally, you naturally get better with practice. Homework assignments will be graded for these indications of learning research methodology, for general depth or complexity of thought, and for clarity through standard grammar.

If you're not satisfied with the grade on a homework assignment, you may rewrite it. Rewrites are due within one week after you get your graded assignment back.

Assignments turned in late will be devalued for each two days, and are ineligible for rewriting. However, due-date extensions can be given for consecutive *excused* absences. Never skip an assignment completely: a zero is a terrible grade. They are much better handed in late (even very late) than never.

### 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 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, literary fiction, and comedy. I'm a full professor here at MCC. Feel free to call me anything polite (Mike, Michael, Mr. Ofsowitz, professor, or "teach"; ... just about anything but "sir"). I have a web site at <http://sites.monroecc.edu/mofsowitz>.

### Quirks about the way I grade:

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.

### THIS IS NOT CLINICAL

Most of the core courses in psychology at the college and university level are investigating the ordered, "healthy," "normal," human experience. They are pursuing answers to big questions like, "how does human mind and behavior function?" "what do humans do?" and "what do humans experience?" (i.e, what makes us tick as we do in the many similar ways as one-another, and in the many different –but still functional– ways from one-another?). They are *not* investigating pathologies and mental problems or treatments (with the exception of the *clinical* courses, of course). This course in research methodology emphasizes investigations into the many questions pertaining to ordinary human experience. It is difficult enough to do this properly; investigating clinical issues (psychopathology) scientifically is even more difficult (for reasons that should come clear during the semester), and therefore we will not focus on clinical psychology in class.

## OUTLINE OF LECTURES AND ASSIGNMENTS

*(The dates below typically represent a week of class. "Chapter" refers to assigned readings in the Morling textbook. Additional readings may be assigned during class. You should read all material prior to the class scheduled so that you'll be prepared to participate in class discussions. There is a pre-chapter quiz that you must complete before participating. You should re-read the chapter assignments after we finish our discussions so that it'll really sink in.)*

Powerpoints: the Powerpoints that I post in class originate from the textbook publisher, and though I have looked them over and made some small changes, they are mostly content from the publisher and not from me. They are not sufficient to avoid purchasing (or otherwise possessing) the textbook.

All readings are associated with the 4<sup>th</sup> edition textbook (but 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. has the same chapters and numbers).

<u>Week of</u>	<u>Topic (&amp; reading)</u>
Aug 28:	Introduction to the course design and content
Sep 05:	<b>No class Monday.</b> Why we need research methods in psychology ( <b>chapter 1 + extra, online</b> )
Sep 11:	The plural of anecdote is not data ( <b>chapter 2</b> )
Sep 18:	Finding what we know; citing sources ( <b>chapter 2 + extra, online</b> )
Sep 25:	Variables, three major claims about them; causation ( <b>chapter 3</b> )
Oct 02:	Ethics constrain research ( <b>chapter 4</b> )
Oct 09:	How to measure variables ( <b>chapter 5</b> )
Oct 16:	Designing and using surveys; conducting observations ( <b>chapter 6</b> )
Oct 23:	Representative and other legitimate samples ( <b>chapter 7</b> )
Oct 30:	Correlations: basic association claims ( <b>chapter 8 + extra, online</b> )
Nov 06:	<b>No classes Tuesday.</b> The validities of correlations <b>mid-week:</b> Experiments: basic tests of causation ( <b>chapter 10</b> )
Nov 13:	Within-groups experiments; tests of validity <b>mid-week:</b> Experimental control and loss of control ( <b>chapter 11</b> )
Nov 20:	Experiments with two (or more) independent variables ( <b>chapter 12</b> ) <b>Thanksgiving break (Wednesday-Sunday)</b> ( <i>Withdrawal deadline</i> )
Nov 27:	Experiments with two independent variables (continued).
Dec 04:	Quasi-experiments and designs with small n ( <b>chapter 13</b> )
Dec 11:	Replications, meta-analyses, generalizations ( <b>chapter 14</b> ) <b>Last day of class is Dec 15</b>

**QUIZZES:** (1) after chapter 3, (2) after chapter 6, (3) after chapter 10, (4) after chapter 14.

## The fine print

### The prerequisites:

Both statistics (MTH 162 or 161) and APA Style (PSY 108) are prerequisites for this course. Students who were granted waivers will still be held accountable for the prerequisite experience. This may be most notable in expectations related to APA style, which is not taught in the Research Methods class. Links to sources reviewing APA style will be made available. There is an APA review module in class and also a “statistics review” in the textbook that you should review – like APA style, statistics is not *taught* in the Research Methods class.

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

Online attendance is tricky. I count you as present for the week if you submit a posting to one of the forums. Each of our tests will be available for a couple of days, but once you start you must finish within an imposed time limit. Make-up tests must be completed within one week from the original due date, unless valid excuses (medical emergency, business travel, military deployment) keep you from returning to class. (Such absences require documentation.) If you'll be away from class for more than a few days, email me.

### 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 classes, 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* (including MCC's custom version) is one such guidebook. I also have a web page on plagiarism on my web site: <https://sites.monroec.edu/mofsowitz/apa-style/plagiarism/>

### Respect:

- Try to be patient with fellow students and assume they have good intentions. Read what they're saying.
- Don't dominate discussions: allow time for others, who might be shier than you, to respond.
- Take a joke, but don't insult anyone (or at least insult everyone equally and in good taste). Well, I joke a lot in classrooms, but online I'm probably not going to be very funny, but feel free to write humorously.
- 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.

**Office Hours:**

Normally, I say, come see me whenever you feel like it. I'm easy to visit. But many of you are not local. Still, don't let your frustrations or confusions get the upper hand; if you're having problems in class, email me. 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 (but I don't have zoom at my office, so I have to do this from home).

**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. Most of my teaching is in the discussions. Active note-taking is an important part of the learning/remembering process. Don't write my exact words, or the textbook author's: write the gist of the ideas (and if it triggers thoughts of your own, write those down as well). Rewrite your notes (and ask me about anything you're still confused about). Take notes from your readings, too.

**Learning Centers:**

You might need help with writing; the Tutoring and Academic Assistance Center (TAAC, 11-261 at Brighton, Learning Commons at Downtown) can help; I assume they are now online at [TracCloud](#). 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 and I expect you to seek it out if I do. If you have broader reading, study habit, or language problems, the TAAC (or that TracCloud link) is also the place to go. The TAAC will probably be of no help for course content.

**UR designation**

This course is designated as Undergraduate Research (UR). UR courses offer students the opportunity to explore undergraduate research, scholarly inquiry, and/or creative activity pertaining to a particular field. For more information, contact Maria Brandt at [mbrandt@monroecc.edu](mailto:mbrandt@monroecc.edu).

**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, however frequent absences may trigger automated warnings from the college.

**The mandated Course Information Sheet:**

This syllabus is something I designed and wrote. The other one is designed by MCC staff and required for whatever reason. The stipulations are the same; this one is more informative. That one is filled with more MCC policies.

## 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; they are not sacred, so 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" link on my web site. 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. **At a minimum, follow the guidelines above!**