

Syllabus - Psychology I

Instructor: Linda Elder

(Text: Coon, D. (1992) Introduction to Psychology. New York: West Publishing Company.)

Key Concept of Course

This course is designed to help you learn the logic of psychology. Everything we do this semester will in some way, either broadly or narrowly, relate to improving your understanding of and thinking critically about psychological principles, theories, practice, and application. The primary goal is for you to come to think as a psychologist would think.

This includes identifying and working through problems which psychologists address. The course will focus on the different types of psychologists, the different schools of psychological thought, the varying work that is done by psychologists. The course will also focus on psychological processes, both conscious and unconscious, which influence the behavior and thinking of human beings.

To think deeply about the field of psychology, one must think clearly about the questions which face psychologists, one must gather relevant and valid information which relates to those questions, one must accurately analyze the value of information gathered and one must understand the complexity of human nature.

General Course Plan

This course is designed much differently from most others you have been exposed to because you will be asked to think critically about the subject matter throughout the semester. All of our activities will focus on helping you to better understand the logic of psychology, and to come to think like a rational psychologist. You will be asked to continually engage your mind during class and while preparing for class.

The textbook will be used as a general resource for the course. You will learn to connect the logic of psychology to the logic of your own thinking so that the subject becomes relevant to you. While you will learn some "facts" about psychology, they will be learned in the context of learning about the logic of psychology, rather than being memorized for test time.

You will be asked to bring some assignment to each class period, and each class period will build upon work done in the previous class period. Each student will actively participate in class sessions, as you are asked to continually process information by

restating information, giving examples, offering alternate points of view, etc. You will also be involved in daily group work, self-assessment, and peer assessment.

The ultimate goal is for you to learn to think critically about your thinking, so that you are able to accurately assess your strengths and weaknesses and to take charge of your thinking.

Exams

There will be two exams. Each exam will be worth 100 points. Both exams will be essay in nature, where you will be required to think critically, using the knowledge you have learned, as you write answers to specific psychological questions.

Questions

For each class session, you will be required to write the answer to a question posed at the end of each class period. The question may result from the class discussion or may be prepared in advance by the instructor.

These questions will be discussed at the beginning of each class period in small groups. Your written answers/papers will often be assessed by your peers. At the beginning of each class period, your work will be stamped. Students who have not written the assignment will not be allowed to participate in the activity until they complete it. They will be asked to go to a designated table in the room to complete it.

Additional Assignments

Throughout the semester you will be given assignments to be completed outside of class. The number of points for each assignment varies, but the total number of possible points on the assignments is 100.

Written Assignment

Two written assignments must be turned in on the days indicated on the schedule. Prior to your doing this assignment, I will clarify for you, through sample articles, what is expected of you. These must be typed and double-spaced. Explicit instructions for the assignments are detailed below. This assignment stresses clarity and accuracy of thought. Use the following simple rules to improve your writing.

1. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
2. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
3. Never use the passive when you can use the active.
4. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday equivalent.

5. Ask someone to read a draft and find places where you have been unclear. If they say something is unclear, change it until they understand.

First Written Assignment

You are to choose a psychology related article in which you are interested. You may either choose one from a collection I will bring to class, or from a journal. If you choose an article not from my collection, I need to approve it. Read the article so that you thoroughly understand it. Then write a paper that includes:

1. The main issue or problem the author is focusing on in this article.
2. The main purpose of the article.
3. The information being used by the author and its relationship to the main issue.
4. The conclusion(s) being drawn by the author.
5. The implications of the conclusion(s).
6. The main concepts being used in the article which relate to the main issue.
7. The point of view of the author.
8. The author's assumptions.
9. Once you have clearly established the author's logic as detailed in one through eight above, add the following to your paper:
10. Discuss the significance of the issue that is the focus of the article. Why is it important? On what do you base your assertions regarding its significance?
11. What potential problems do you see in the author's reasoning? What potential problems are there with the author's use of information? Does the information used appear relevant, significant, valid, and sufficient for the conclusions being drawn? Do you have enough information to determine whether the information is relevant, significant, valid?
12. What point of view is ignored by this author, or has not been considered in dealing with the issue?

Student Assessment of Papers

On the day the paper is due, students will be assigned to groups of three or four. Each group will receive the same number of papers as they have members in their group, to be assessed (but they will receive none of their own papers). Each group will assess the papers they are assigned, providing commentary on each criteria point listed below. The paper will then be returned to the students, with comments.

Assessment Criteria

Papers of the highest quality in this assignment will include the following:

1. Questions outlined above are answered clearly and precisely, with detail and/or examples to support each point appropriately.

2. The main issue and purpose are clearly stated.
3. A clear connection between the information used and the author's main issue is drawn. The author's use of information is made clear.
4. The concepts being used are made clear.
5. The implications actually follow from the conclusions, or any fallacies in the author's reasoning about the implications are clearly described.
6. The point of view and the author's assumptions are clearly stated. The assumptions described are all inclusive. In other words, the student writer has clearly and completely stated all the assumptions on which the author has based his reasoning.
7. The importance of the issue is clearly stated and well thought through, and supported with implications which accurately follow from conclusions.
8. Problems regarding the author's reasoning are clearly and accurately stated. All potential problems with the author's reasoning are included.
9. Opposing points of view are accurately included.

Second Written Assignment

Once the papers are assessed in groups, they will be returned to the writers to be rewritten. You will rewrite the paper, taking into account the group assessment, and modifying the paper for ultimate clarity and precision. You will submit this paper to me, along with the original paper and its assessment, for grading. I will use the same assessment criteria for grading as used in the group assessment process.

Points Possible

Exams: 200
Written Assignments 100
Additional Assignments 100
Total 400

{This article is adapted from the resource: *Critical Thinking Basic Theory and Instructional Structures.*}