**PSY 201: Writing for Psychology**

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**1. What goals are we trying to accomplish for this course?**

*Course description:* This course emphasizes the development of reading, writing, and critical thinking skills in psychology. This course provides students with the skills necessary to interpret popular literature in the field of psychology and to write about psychological topics in an accurate, clear and concise manner. Students will also be introduced to the basics of APA style and the parts of an APA research article and taught to effectively search for psychological literature.

By the end of this course students should be able to:

1. Interpret and critique psychological literature in writing.

2. Conduct a database search of published articles on an assigned question.

3. Summarize the findings of a literature search.

4. Apply the basic elements of APA-style and formatting to your writing assignments.

5. Identify the parts of an APA-style research report.

This course is important because writing well is an important and rare skill. The ability to write clearly, efficiently, and intelligently will help students no matter what career path they take.

* Need to remind students throughout the semester of how they can transfer the skills that they have learned from this course to their other courses!

**2. What do we do?**

Course introduction

* Syllabus, class schedule
* Explain why we need a course like this

Avoiding plagiarism and introducing the APA style

* Activities related to paraphrasing and using proper in text citations
* Cannot use quotations
* Using SafeAssign
* Nailing the APA format (create an APA template from scratch)

Gladwell’s outlier project

* Why Gladwell?
  + Easier reading that generates students’ interests
  + Helps students learn to convey their ideas in a clear, concise, and coherent manner
* Five chapter summaries
  + What is the thesis?
  + What evidence can you give to support the thesis?
  + Conclusion
  + Using good topic sentences and transitions
  + 300 word limit
  + Summaries 1, 2, and 5 are based on individual work. Summaries 3 and 4 are collaborative.
* Students’ outlier paper
  + Using Gladwell’s ideas to examine the life of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to explain how he/she became an outlier
    - What is the thesis?
    - What are the main points?
      * Supportive evidence from Gladwell?
      * Supportive evidence from the reading of your outlier?
    - What conclusions can you draw?
  + APA style
  + Citing properly
* Revision of the outlier paper
  + Students will meet with the instructor individually to go over their graded paper. Then students will revise their paper and submit to Blackboard.

Literature review project

* It’s all about the process!
* Different types of the literature (e.g., empirical research study, meta-analysis, literature review, etc.)
* PsycINFO
  + How to conduct a search
  + Start broad (e.g., academic achievement) 🡪 identify different lines of research (e.g., technology & A.C.; student engagement & A.C.)🡪 refine your search (e.g., specific population?) 🡪 do this until the students have a specific research question that they can write about (and have 6-8 good empirical research articles that they can use)
* Read three assigned empirical articles chosen by the instructor (this year it is on parental influences on children’s academic achievement) and complete related assignments. During class we will discuss how to reorganize ideas for a literature review paper.
* Discuss the structure of a literature review paper – it should be evaluative not just descriptive

In-class peer review sessions

* Five peer review opportunities (3 for summaries, 1 for outlier paper, 1 for literature review paper)

Mini-assignments

* 10 of them throughout the semester to make sure students are on track

**3. My Reflections**

Challenges ☹

* Most of us (instructors) have not taken a class like this before. It is a steep learning curve for the instructor.
* Not a content-based course. Unless you make the goals very explicit, students have a hard time seeing what they are learning and why they need a course like this.
* It takes time to see students’ progress.
* A lot of students came in NOT being too excited about writing.
* There are a lot of written assignments and the grading is very heavy.

Rewards ☺

* I am teaching things beyond writing: critical thinking, planning, organizing, researching, outlining, revising, giving feedback, etc. Ultimately I am teaching students about the whole writing process.
* The step-by-step coaching is very rewarding.
* You get to meet students where they are and be able to provide feedback so all of them can improve over time regardless of their preparedness for writing. The “Aha! That makes so much sense!” is very rewarding.
* You know that this course will prepare them well for later research and clinical sequences.

I am ending this session with two stories:

* I shared with my students that English is my second language and I struggled with my writing during college. A student wrote in his feedback: “Learning from someone whose English is her second language is very meaningful for me because finally someone can understand the struggles that I have with my writing.” (There were no ESL students in my class. These are all native speakers as far as I know.)
* When I asked my students to write down what they have learned so far in this course about writing, a student wrote: “It is okay to make mistakes.”