

Plan for Meeting Writing Across the Curriculum Policy Department of Psychology

I. Statement of Goals

Two principal goals underlie the “writing across the curriculum” policy of the Department of Psychology at SUNY, Oswego. The first of these is to facilitate students’ mastery of professional scientific writing within the field, and the second is to assist them to learn to critically analyze information about human behavior presented in both the professional and the popular media. In order to achieve each of these goals, the faculty of the Department of Psychology have developed a dual sequence writing curriculum, the details of which are described in the following paragraphs. A summary of writing courses for the Psychology and Human Development majors is also provided.

Clear, elegant, and readable writing is central to the dissemination of research findings within the field of psychology. The most profound of discoveries concerning human or other animal behavior is of limited value if it cannot be communicated effectively to others. In order to facilitate effective communication among behavioral scientists, the American Psychological Association has developed a manual outlining a clear set of guidelines for the publication of scholarly articles within the field of psychology. Through the practice of writing research proposals, reports, and literature reviews under the guidelines of this manual, undergraduates in the Department of Psychology will truly be “writing to learn” a vital aspect of their major field of study. Through their experiences in Psy 280 (Analysis of Psychological Data), Psy 290 (Research Methods in Psychology), and Psy 40X (Experimental Psychology with Laboratory), Psychology majors will achieve mastery over the two broad areas of scientific writing style presented in the Manual. The first involves the basic mechanics of writing within the APA editorial style. These encompass elements ranging from proper spelling and punctuation to specific requirements of APA journal editors, such as those governing proper reference citations and the construction of tables and figures. The second area of APA writing style students will master is contained within the APA guidelines on the effective expression of ideas. Elements covered under this area include: 1) Writing style, (e.g., orderly presentation of ideas, smoothness and economy of expression, and precision and clarity); 2) Proper English grammar; and 3) APA guidelines to reduce bias in language, (i.e., language disparaging of or otherwise offensive to individuals of a particular gender, racial or ethnic identity, sexual orientation, or age group, as well as persons with disabilities). For our majors in Human Development these goals will be accomplished through their experiences in Psy 280 (Analysis of Psychological Data), Psy 290 (Research Methods in Psychology), and HDV 400 (Research Designs and Applications in Human Development).

In addition to the above described three-course sequence designed to promote the learning of scientific writing, the Department of Psychology will also offer a sequence which will facilitate critical analysis of both popular and scientific hypotheses regarding behavior. In Psy 30X (Experimental Psychology without Laboratory), Psy 4XX (Advanced Topics in Psychology), and Psy 475 (History and Systems in Psychology) students will write term papers in which they will dissect and investigate currently held hypotheses and beliefs about behavior backing up their assertions with research findings from the behavioral sciences. Human Development majors will receive this experience through HDV 120 (Fundamentals of Gerontology), GST 498 (Internship). Specifically, in HDV 120, students will write critical

analyses of review articles, essays, and position papers. GST 498 requires a series of multi-part papers critiquing the quality with which human development principles are integrated with program delivery in agency settings. A specialized writing template has been constructed for HDV majors in conjunction with the Office of Experienced-Based Education (see attached).

Summary of Writing Courses by Goal and Major

Goal 1: Facilitate students' mastery of professional scientific writing within the field.

PSY majors

PSY 280 - Analysis of Psychological Data
PSY 290 - Research Methods in Psychology
PSY 40x - Experimental Psychology with
 With Laboratory
Students choose one PSY 40x from
those listed below:
PSY 401 – Perception
PSY 402 – Learning
PSY 403 – Neuropsychology
PSY 404 – Motivation
PSY 405 – Cognition

HDV majors

PSY 280 - Analysis of Psychological Data
PSY 290 - Research Methods in Psychology
HDV 400 – Research Designs and Applications
 in Human Development

Goal 2: Critical analysis of popular and scientific hypotheses regarding behavior.

PSY majors

PSY 30x – Experimental Psychology
 Without Laboratory
Students choose one PSY 30x
from those listed below:
PSY 301 – Perception
PSY 302 – Learning
PSY 303 – Neuropsychology
PSY 304 – Motivation
PSY 305 – Cognition
PSY 475 – History and Current Systems
 in Psychology
PSY 4xx – Advanced Topics in Psychology
(Note that 4xx reflects all of our advanced topics courses listed in the Undergraduate
Catalog.)

HDV majors

HDV 120 – Fundamentals of Gerontology
GST 498 – Internship

II. Objectives

A. Behaviors: Students will perform a variety of writing behaviors designed to facilitate their acquisition of professional writing and critical analysis skills. In Psy 280, they will learn the statistical techniques which generate the “language” of psychology, and they will produce written narratives explaining their rationale for the use of a given statistical technique, report their results of their analyses, and offer their interpretation of these results. This will be done in APA format, and will constitute elements of the “Methods”, “Results”, and “Discussion” sections of a journal manuscript. In Psy 290, they will execute a number of small behavioral studies designed by themselves and/or their instructor, and write each of these up in the form of an APA manuscript. The Experimental Psychology and HDV 400 courses will require them to conduct more sophisticated research in the area of focus for the section in which they are enrolled, and to write up the results of this research in the APA manuscript format.

Courses specifically designed to promote critical analysis of theories, ideas, and beliefs about behavior will involve students in a variety of writing behaviors focused either on the research results of others (e.g., a literature review), or on ideas and beliefs put forward by persons from outside the behavioral sciences (e.g., term papers, reaction papers, etc. focused on popular beliefs promoted by the mass media).

B. Conditions: Conditions for meeting the professional writing goals are largely determined by the nature of the courses involved. They will be exposed to the requirements of the APA manual early in this sequence, and be given multiple opportunities to practice writing under its guidelines. Specific conditions for meeting the above behavioral goals will vary somewhat according to the instructor and the nature of the course. In each course a minimum of 25% of each student’s evaluation will be based upon their written work. For both sequences, student performance in the more introductory-level courses will involve more intensive assistance from the instructor in the form of specific guidance, multiple submissions, and opportunities for re-writes, with the expectation that this need will diminish as the students gain experience.

C. Criteria: General criteria for writing experiences in the Department of Psychology include guidance in and evaluation of student performance in each of the categories outlined below.

1. All basic mechanical elements of style as outlined by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. The categories outlined in the Manual are:

- a. Punctuation
- b. Spelling
- c. Capitalization
- d. Italics
- e. Abbreviations
- f. Headings and Series
- g. Quotations
- h. Numbers

- i. Metrication
- j. Statistical and Mathematical Copy

- k. Tables
- l. Figures
- m. Footnotes and Notes
- n. Appendixes
- o. Reference Citations in Text
- p. Reference List

2. All APA guidelines regarding the written expression of ideas. The categories outlined in the Manual under this heading are:

- a. Writing style (orderly presentation of ideas, smoothness of expression, economy of expression, precision and clarity, strategies to improve writing style)
- b. Grammar (verbs, agreement of subject and verb, pronouns, misplaced and dangling modifiers, relative pronouns and subordinate conjunctions, parallel construction, linguistic devices)
- c. Reduction of Bias in Language (description of individuals at the appropriate level of specificity, sensitivity to labels, acknowledgment of participation, guidelines and conventions for avoiding disparaging or offensive references to individuals based upon their gender, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic identity, disability, or age)

In addition to being evaluated in terms of the style criteria required by the APA, each student's work will be evaluated according to the quality of its content. For the professional writing products, this will involve assessment of the logic, organization and presentation of the Introduction and Discussion sections of submitted manuscripts as well as the depth of the literature review and the quality of interpretation of research results. For the critical analysis products, evaluation will center on the degree of depth, objectivity, critical thinking, and quality of empirical evidence presented in each student's arguments.