

Psychology Department Writing Plan for Psychology Majors

The Psychology Department writing plan for the revised (beginning Fall 2014) psychology major has a developmental focus and encourages multiple revisions and detailed feedback for the various required writing assignments. Students are able to express their knowledge of the discipline in scientifically grounded language in the American Psychological Association (APA) style format required for majors upon completion of the writing plan sequence.

I. Goals: These goals are adopted from the American Psychological Association (APA); subgoals are organized in a developmentally appropriate sequence. As students proceed through the Writing Plan, the goals are progressively more advanced.

APA GOAL 2: Research Methods in Psychology: Understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.

- Accurately describe results of statistical analyses using APA format.
- Demonstrate understanding of the grammar and logic of hypothesis testing.
- Understand the purpose and requirements of the American Psychological Association writing guidelines.
- Locate appropriate sources of scientific literature.
- Critically compare and connect two or more sources.
- Produce written summaries of empirical results in the appropriate APA style for the explicit purpose of constructing and motivating novel research.
- Clear and logical statement of thesis or argument.
- Report appropriately detailed methodology and results for research they have conducted in written form using APA principles and also in presentation form.

APA GOAL 1: Knowledge Base in Psychology: Students should demonstrate fundamental knowledge and comprehension of the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, historical trends, and empirical findings to discuss how psychological principles apply to behavioral problems.

- Understand and utilize critical feedback from peers and instructors to improve quality of writing through multiple revisions.
- Read, interpret, and critically evaluate research from current and historical sources, including (but not limited to) journals, books, meta-analyses, case studies, and reviews.
- Evaluate methodological structure, rigor and limitations of both experimental and analytical work.
- Conveys critical analysis of subfield of psychology through preparing literature reviews of primary sources.
- Clear and correct use of theoretical bases underlying a research proposal. This includes recognition of assumptions and appreciating the distinction between opinions and theoretical constructions.
- Contextualization of the thesis in both historical and contemporary thinking in psychological science.
- Evaluate the relevance and consequences of results to broader psychological theories.
- Clear use of measurement, design and statistical concepts. Correct interpretation of statistical findings.

APA GOAL 4: Communication: Students should demonstrate competence in writing and in oral and interpersonal communication skills.

- Correct use of APA format for all proposal aspects (e.g., citations, references, headings, figures, etc.).
- Demonstration of effective writing skills, grammar/mechanics, organization in an appropriately formal style.
- Present results of research in a professional style using visual forms.

II. Objectives: In the writing plan, there will be (a) behavior specific writing experiences, (b) conditions, and (c) criteria for majors. In the sections below, each of these objectives is described in greater detail.

Behavior Specific Writing Experiences. Writing experiences for psychology majors will include all of the following kinds of writing assignments:

- Craft statements of hypotheses using formal notation and in sentence form.
- Narrative results sections (following statistical analysis of data) detailing statistical techniques used and rationale and interpretation of results in APA format.
- Literature reviews (of varying depths).
- Methods sections (detailing the design of the study and instruments used) in APA format.
- Discussion sections (linking the findings to the literature) in APA format.
- Completion of Human Subject's applications.
- Quality drafts of empirical paper sections showing integration of feedback from instructors.
- Completion of an APA style manuscript for PSY 290 project (abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, references, figures, etc.).
- Formal visual presentation (poster format) of the empirical study conducted by the student. In advanced classes, oral presentations will be required along with the poster.
- Create, refine and analyze conceptual relationships in a subfield of psychology (in developing and then carrying out a research plan).
- Describe evidence to support (and refute) a hypothesis.
- Convey understanding of and respect for ethical principles of conducting research.
- Concise and clear descriptions of various methodological approaches used by psychologists.
- Summaries and critiques of empirical articles.
- Formal visual presentation of the empirical study conducted by the student.
- Completion of a proposal for a research project (appropriate to the specific Capstone course selected).

Conditions: Generic Writing Experiences. All writing courses will emphasize multiple drafts with detailed faculty feedback with the expectation that students will integrate instructor feedback. Students will be encouraged to consult resources for writing such as Rules for Writers and the current APA style guide.

Criteria for Writing Experiences. Student writing will be evaluated in developmentally appropriate ways that will include the following criteria; see the attached Common Writing Standards for Depth and Seminar Courses as well as the Rubric for Evaluating Advanced Writing in Psychology for further articulation of these standards:

- Clear statement and development of thesis or argument.
- Use of sound logical reasoning.
- Application of evidence to support conclusions.

- Correct description of research methodology and statistical findings.
- APA format for citations, references, headings, figures and tables.
- Appropriately formal writing style.
- Writing mechanics and effective organization.
- Grammar and spelling.

Course Sequence and Respective Roles in the Writing Plan. Psychology majors will complete at least five required writing courses developmentally sequenced from Introductory to Writing to Learn to Advanced levels. At the Introductory level, majors will take PSY 280 Analysis of Psychological Data and PSY 290 Research Methods. At the Writing to Learn level, they will take 400-level depth and seminar courses. Finally at the Advanced level, they will take a capstone course from the following list: PSY 490H Capstone Honors in Psychology, PSY 491 Capstone Laboratory Research, PSY 496 Capstone Senior Thesis, or PSY 498 Capstone Internship in Psychology. All capstone courses require a senior thesis. Each of these courses are described below in detail:

A. Introductory. PSY 280 and PSY 290 are required courses for all psychology majors and are used to introduce students to basic writing techniques, building on the foundation of General Education courses. While these courses do utilize topics and content specific to certain areas of psychology, the emphasis is on building basic analytic and writing skills for use in later courses. Students are encouraged to take PSY 280 and PSY 290 as soon as possible in order to provide groundwork for other Writing to Learn courses as well as Advanced Writing courses.

- *PSY 280 Analysis of Psychological Data.* Students of psychology are required to prepare comprehensive results sections following statistical analysis of empirical data. In PSY 280, students learn a variety of parametric (and non-parametric) procedures for analyzing data. Narrative ‘Results’ sections detail the techniques used, their rationale, results and interpretation of findings in a probabilistic framework. This forms the foundation of a journal manuscript, along with the ‘Methods’ and ‘Discussion’ components. Strict adherence to APA format is required and well as clear and concise expression.
- *PSY 290 Research Methods in Psychology.* This course also consists of small sections (19 seats) and focuses on the development of an individual research project in the context of understanding psychology as a research-driven, scientific discipline. Students will be required to develop a research topic by finding and evaluating existing sources [Goal #1] and then propose a method for empirically studying that topic in the format required by the Institutional Review Board [Goal #2]. Students then actually conduct the proposed research, analyze the results, and report those results using the appropriate format [Goals #1, 2 and 4]. Throughout the process, they will incrementally construct a 10-15 page APA formatted paper [Goal #4] which integrates their analysis of the relevant literature [Goals #2, 4] with their own analysis and discussion of their results [Goal #2]. Students will produce multiple drafts and receive detailed feedback from both professors and peers at each stage of the writing process [Goal # 4]. Finally, students will be required to present their results to an audience in a short talk and possibly an additional optional poster format [Goals # 2, and 4].

B. Writing to Learn. Psychology majors are required to take two depth courses (401-475 level), which cover advanced topics in specific breadth areas in more depth in a small class size setting (19 seats).

- *PSY 401-475.* All of these courses will emphasize multiple WAC goals. For example, all courses require written assignments that are designed to emphasize specific skills acquired in the PSY 280/290 sequence by applying them to specific, constrained areas within psychology. Students need to be able to locate sources relevant to both broad perspectives in psychology as well as more narrow and focused topics. Additionally, they must be able to critically compare and evaluate those sources in writing. To this end, these courses employ an incremental, hierarchically structured writing assignment that requires students to first choose a relevant topic, then find a minimum number of highly relevant and specific sources from the literature [Goal #1]. Students are then required to critically review and summarize each source, including evaluation of methods [Goal #2], identification of major results and their broader significance [Goal #1], and development of connections to other sources [Goal #1]. Finally, students will write an APA-formatted paper [Goal #4] that synthesizes the reviewed literature, adding additional analysis from a specific perspective [Goal #1]. The hierarchical structure of these assignments allows students to receive feedback on each component and builds on the research-oriented writing skills established in PSY 280/290 and required for success in the advanced writing courses.

C. Advanced. All majors are required to take one of several options for a Capstone in Psychology, all of which focus on a substantial written project.

- *PSY 49X Capstone Courses.* A capstone course is intended to be culmination of students' learning, including their writing. There are several capstone options available, reflecting the diversity of psychology as a discipline. These options include: *PSY 490H Capstone Honors Research Seminar* (honors version, may reflect any of the following options); *PSY 491 Capstone Laboratory Research* (research project focused version); *PSY 496 Capstone Senior Thesis* (seminar/theoretically oriented version); and *PSY 498 Capstone Internship in Psychology* (applied/experiential version). Despite the differences, all four share a core set of writing goals and guidelines, centering on an APA formatted 20-25 page final paper [Goals #1, 2 and 4]. All four courses take advantage of small class sizes to emphasize one-on-one guidance through the professional writing process [Goal #4]. Each course interacts with the existing literature in different ways, but all four will require extensive critical reading and integration of multiple sources under a coherent thesis [Goals #1, 2, and 4]. Individual Capstone courses may require additional written assignments, for example, written assessments of clients in the form of case studies in PSY 498 or summaries of results in PSY 491, and will generally emphasize other WAC goals in addition to the goals listed here.

III. Courses: Students who successfully complete the following courses will be exposed to a rigorous and rich set of writing experiences that provide a solid basis for professional development in fields of psychology.

- PSY 280 Analysis of Psychological Data. Students learn basic statistical methods (descriptive and inferential) and their applications to research in Psychology.
- PSY 290 Research Methods. Students learn common methods and principles of research in psychology, and they design, conduct and present an empirical project.
- PSY 401-475 Depth and Seminar Courses. Students learn and write about advanced theories, principles, and methodologies in small 19-seat courses. Two courses are required.
- PSY49X Capstone Courses. Students will choose one of the following options. All courses required an APA style empirical senior thesis: (PSY 490H Capstone Honors Research Seminar, or PSY 491 Capstone Laboratory Research, or PSY 496 Capstone Senior Thesis in Psychology, or PSY 498) Capstone Internship in Psychology.

Common Writing Standards for Depth and Seminar Courses

Applies to all PSY 401-475 courses

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Depth and seminar courses serve as a primary component of the Writing Across the Curriculum plan. All of these courses require written assignments that are designed to emphasize specific skills acquired in the PSY 280/290 sequence (as well as specific prerequisite breadth courses) by applying them to specific, constrained areas within psychology.

Students need to be able to locate sources relevant to both broad perspectives in psychology as well as more narrow and focused topics. Additionally, they must be able to critically compare and evaluate those sources in writing. To this end, depth and seminar courses employ incremental, hierarchically structured writing assignments that requires students to first choose a relevant topic, then find a minimum number of highly relevant and specific sources from the literature. Students are then required to critically review and summarize each source, including evaluation of methods, identification of major results and their broader significance, and development of connections to other sources.

To this end, in all depth and seminar courses, students are required to write an APA-formatted literature review or research proposal that synthesizes the reviewed literature, adding additional analysis from a specific perspective. Papers should be approximately 10-15 written pages, undergo multiple revisions with instructor guidance and critiques, and possibly undergo peer review. This paper is the required summative evaluation activity for all students in every depth and seminar course.

Additional writing assignments (2-4 recommended) should also be consistent with the expectation that students have both the course knowledge and research writing and methods experience gleaned from 280/290 coursework. Instructors should adhere to the principles espoused in the major writing plan when designing and grading these assignments.

The hierarchical structure of these assignments allows students to receive feedback on each component and builds on the research-oriented writing skills established in PSY 280/290 and required for success in the capstone.

In order to promote consistency, the following are general guidelines for how each depth and seminar course should implement writing assignments.

Goals

APA style. At this stage, the primary purpose of writing assignments is to reinforce the use of APA style and promote good writing habits, which will be further refined and focused in the capstone. At least moderate instruction time should be devoted to APA style, though resources (e.g., Purdue OWL, Writing Center) should be highlighted.

Exposure to current literature. Consistent with the purpose of the depth and seminar courses in the major as a whole, the written assignments should involve primary readings from the current scientific literature in that area. It is recommended that instructors select a set of readings in order to facilitate grading and ensure that the material is accessible to most students. Students should be able to summarize studies in their own words (consistent with APA style) as well as extract the main ideas and theories.

Application of theory. Depth and seminar courses represent a transition from introductory courses to specific areas in psychology. Students are expected to engage in higher level critical thinking, and this should be reflected in the written assignments. As such, assignments should go beyond simple summary of articles, and should ask students to apply theories or concepts from the course to primary source materials in a critical, analytic manner.

Feedback

Instructors are expected to provide detailed feedback on student writing through multiple revisions. Peer-review and similar strategies can also be used to allow students practice with both providing and receiving feedback. Students can also be directed to writing resources made available by the University.

Grading

Attached is the rubric should be followed to grade students' writing in depth and seminar courses:

Rubric for Evaluating Advanced Writing in Psychology

1. Theoretical bases; thesis; logic, evidence, conclusions

Clear and correct use of theoretical bases. Recognizes assumptions. Appreciates distinctions between opinions and theoretical constructions. Clear statement of thesis or argument. Ideas go beyond the conventional or merely descriptive. Uses sound logical reasoning; and correct application of evidence to support conclusions.

2. Contextualization of the thesis in both historical and contemporary thinking in psychological science.

Capstone paper should include historical progression of ideas as well as contemporary thought in a given area. Writing reflects relationships between thesis and current scholarship.

3. Use of measurement, design and statistical concepts.

Clear and correct use of methodological concepts. Correct use and interpretation of statistical findings.

4. Use of APA Style.

APA format used correctly for citations, references, headings, figures and tables. Appropriately formal style.

5. Writing skills, grammar/mechanics, organization.

Overall flow of paper is good. Paragraphs arranged into a coherent whole. Paragraph transitions clearly lead the reader from idea to idea. Correct forms of grammar and spelling.

SCALE – Assign Weights and Scores for each area

Component of Evaluation	Weak	Marginal	Good	Excellent
1. Theoretical base; thesis	4	6	8	10
2. Scholarly context	4	6	8	10
3. Methods, design, statistics	4	6	8	10
4. APA style	4	6	8	10
5. Writing skills	4	6	8	10
TOTAL:				

Exceeding standards: scores above 40

Meeting standards: scores between 30-39

Approaching standards: scores between 21-29

Not meeting standards: scores less than 20