

ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

You are required to complete **one** writing assignment. All writing assignments are 2000 words (+/- 100 words, strict). In this assignment you will turn in a draft, receive feedback, revise your paper, and then turn it in again for final grading. **Due dates are flexible and you will select yours in the second week of the course** (more details on Canvas). This assignment is worth 30% of your grade.

You can choose between one of the four options below.

1. **Critical review of an empirical publication.** In this assignment you select one of the suggested papers below to write about. In your assignment you will a) summarize the paper's theory/hypothesis, method, and findings; b) situate and link the paper with other work we have covered in the course; c) critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the paper's argument(s).
2. **Personal reflection on some social psychological influences contributing to who you are today.** In your assignment you will trace some of your characteristics, attitudes, or emotions to specific or repeated experiences. You will then contrast those influences with what you might have experienced in a different social location. Finally, find empirical articles to support your argument.
3. **Empirical investigation or analysis.** In this assignment you can either use qualitative or quantitative methods. For a qualitative project you can choose between doing a) non-participant observation or b) participant observation. For a quantitative project you can either do an a) original analysis or b) replicate a published finding. In either case you have to use a publicly available dataset.
4. **A blog post.** In this assignment you will pick a course "unit" (week of readings) and write an accessible summary and critique. The emphasis here is on taking complex concepts, frameworks, arguments and making them interesting and accessible to a non-academic audience.

Below you can find further details about a) format and guidelines and b) each of the four options.

Your essay/blog post should include the following:

- (1) **Title**
- (2) **A brief introductory paragraph**, in which you provide an overview of your essay. Here you summarize your topic, question/hypothesis and argument.
- (3) **Main paragraphs**, in which you should:
 - Summarize what other scholars have said about your topic AND define key concepts used in your argument.
 - Describe your data and method (only for option #3)
 - Present your main findings/argument/critique.
- (4) **A concluding paragraph**, in which you discuss how your findings/arguments relate to what other scholars have said.
- (5) **A reference list.**
- (6) **Field notes, code and data** (only for option #3). If these are handwritten, take a picture of them and attach at the very end of the document. This will not count toward your word count.

Format and Guidelines (applies to all assignments)

1. Word processor format (e.g. .odt/.docx)
2. 2000 words (+/- 100 words, strict)
3. 12 pt font
4. Double spaced
5. Page numbers
6. In-text citations (examples below)
 - a. Between 1999 and 2004, there were 21 confirmed sightings of “observers” (Dunham and Bishop, 2011).
 - b. Dunham and Bishop (2011) report 21 confirmed sightings of “observers” between 1999 and 2004.
7. APA or ASA style reference list
8. Footnotes if needed (no endnotes)

#1 Critical Review of an Empirical Publication

In this assignment you select one of the suggested papers below (you can find other articles but must get approval from the instructor). In your assignment you will a) summarize the papers theory/hypothesis, method, and findings; b) situate and link the paper with other work and/or themes we have covered in the course; c) critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the papers argument(s).

Select one of the following empirical papers to review:

1. Frost, Jacqui. (2019). “**Certainty, Uncertainty, or Indifference? Examining Variation in the Identity Narratives of Nonreligious Americans.**” *American Sociological Review*, 84(5): 828-850. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419871957>
2. Grogger, Jeffrey and Greg Ridgeway. (2006). “**Testing for Racial Profiling in Traffic Stops From Behind a Veil of Darkness.**” *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 101(475), 878-887. <https://doi.org/10.1198/016214506000000168>
3. Heinrich, Joseph, Robert Boyd, Samuel Bowles, Colin Camerer, Ernst Fehr, Herbert Gintis and Richard McElreath. (2001). “**In Search of Homo Economicus: Behavioral Experiments in 15 Small-Scale Societies.**” *American Economic Review*, 91(2), 73-78. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.91.2.73>
4. Kahan, Dan M., Ellen Peters, Maggie Wittlin, Paul Slovic, Lisa Larrimore Ouellette, Donald Braman and Gregory Mandel. (2012). “**The Polarizing Impact of Science Literacy and Numeracy on Perceived Climate Change Risks.**” *Nature Climate Change*, 2, 732– 735. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate1547>
5. Vaisey, Stephen. (2007). “**Structure, Culture, and Community: The Search for Belonging in 50 Urban Communes.**” *American Sociological Review*, 72(6): 851-873. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240707200601>

Learning Outcomes and Expectations

In writing this review you will improve your skills in (i) succinctly summarizing a peer-reviewed empirical article; (ii) situating it its findings within a broader social psychological literature; and (iii) critiquing the theory, argument and/or methodological approach.

#2 Personal Reflection

In your assignment you will trace some of your characteristics, attitudes, or emotions to specific or repeated experiences. You will then contrast those influences with what you might have experienced in a different social location. Finally, find empirical articles to support your argument.

Think through your experiences as a child growing up: participating in certain activities (e.g., sports, clubs, etc.), undergoing certain experiences (e.g., divorce, loss of a loved one, etc.), or relationships with certain people (e.g., siblings, coaches, etc.). Focus on one of these experiences and draw a connection with who you are today. For example, you might draw a connection between being a competitive gymnast as a child and having a diligent work ethic as an adult.

Contrast and compare your influences to others. In particular, pay attention to the advantages and disadvantages of your social location compared to others.

Find empirical articles (at least two) that support the connection(s) you've drawn. For example, you might find articles that link participation in competitive sports as a child with having a diligent work ethic as an adult. Looking at empirical articles might lead you in a different direction than you originally planned (i.e., to focus on a different experience or different outcome), and that's okay!

Learning Outcomes and Expectations

In writing a personal reflection you will learn (i) to be self-reflective of the *social* influences on yourself; (ii) gain a deeper understanding of your advantages and disadvantages, compared to others, as a result of your social location; (iii) how to move beyond an understanding of the world that centers on your own experience; and (iv) about the complexities of the social-self, i.e. how people become who they are.

#3 Empirical Investigation or Analysis

In this assignment you can either use qualitative or quantitative methods. For a qualitative project you can choose between doing a) non-participant observation or b) participant observation. For a quantitative project you can either do an a) original analysis or b) replicate a published finding. In either case you have to use a publicly available dataset.

Non-Participant Observation

For this option, you must conduct at least 2 hours of observational fieldwork. You can split your observations into parts (e.g., you can conduct two separate hour-long observation sessions). In this assignment, you are a neutral observer, i.e. you do not interact with the people you are studying..

Participant Observation

For this option, you must conduct at least 2 hours of observational fieldwork. You can split your observations into parts (e.g., you can conduct two separate hour-long observation sessions). In this assignment you are a participating observer, i.e. you do interact with the people you are studying.

IMPORTANT NOTES REGARDING QUALITATIVE OPTIONS:

- **Do ***NOT*** do anything illegal or that will get you into trouble.**
- **You should do your best to take field notes during your fieldwork. If that is not feasible, aim to take notes immediately after your work in the field. You need to turn in these notes as part of the assignment.**
- **You will ultimately need to have IRB approval if you want to consider publishing your data. Talk to your instructor or TA if you are considering this.**

Original Quantitative Analysis

For this option, you will select a research question/hypothesis and use quantitative data to answer/test it. The data must be publicly available. Selecting the appropriate method and data for your question/hypothesis is key. You are free to use whatever statistical software available to you (e.g. R or Stata) but must turn in your code and data with your essay.

Replication

For this option, you will select a published empirical article and attempt to replicate it. Many recent publications require authors to make their code and data publicly available. This assignment has two parts. First, to attempt an exact replication (does not have to replicate in full, minimum one key finding). Second, you have to come up with your own research question/hypothesis and adjust the original analysis such that it answers/tests your own. Finally, discuss the different outcomes.

Learning Outcomes and Expectations

In conducting and writing about your own research, you will gain experience and learn (i) to develop a research question/hypothesis; (ii) conduct qualitative or quantitative analysis; (iii) to select the appropriate method and data to answer a research question, i.e. link theory and method.

#4 A Blog Post (for a general audience)

In this assignment you will pick a course “unit” and write an accessible summary and critique. The emphasis here is taking complex concepts, frameworks, arguments and making them interesting and accessible to a non-academic audience.

The main purpose of an academic blog post is to make complex ideas and arguments accessible to a broader audience. The format and style of a blog post is more flexible and informal than academic publications. Another key feature of quality blog posts is to make it interesting. Why is this topic important? Lastly, you are expected to not only summarize, but present your own argument that is informed by and builds on academic findings, concepts, and debates (from the course readings).

For this assignment, you will select one of the “units” in this course to summarize and critically engage. You must also incorporate some or all of the “optional” readings into your blog post.

Learning Outcomes and Expectations

In writing your blog post, you will learn (i) how to develop an original argument about a social psychological phenomena or theory; and (ii) how to write about scholarly findings and ideas in a way that is accessible to a public (non-academic) audience.

Examples:

- <https://contexts.org/blog>