

PSY 281: PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

MW 3-4:20; Hopkins 210

Instructor:

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Office Hours:

T 1-2; Th 2:30-3:30; F 3-4; or by appointment

Course Description:

The focus of the class will be learning diagnostic criteria for use in psychology and related helping fields, although anyone with an interest in abnormal psychology is encouraged to enroll. The course will start by considering the possible definitions of “abnormal” and tracing historical ways of thinking about mental illness, up to and including our present standards as defined in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition* (also known as the DSM). The majority of the course will be covering the spectrum of diagnoses in the DSM, including criteria, prevalence, cultural and special population considerations and how disorders are portrayed in the media.

The format of this course is lecture/discussion. Most class sessions will include a lecture component along with discussions, activities, and/or demonstrations. Class sessions are designed to expand upon and enrich the content in the textbook, not simply present the same information in an alternative format. The course is designed to help students reach the following learning objectives:

- Define the term “abnormal” using historical and current perspectives.
- Articulate the origins of mental health issues from multiple theoretical perspectives.
- Assess the ethical and legal rights and responsibilities of psychologists and clients.
- Gain familiarity with the various mental disorders in terms of DSM criteria.
- Critically review the portrayal of mental illness in popular media.
- Conduct brief literature reviews about a disorder using library and online resources.

Required Materials:

Comer, R. (2014). *Fundamentals of Abnormal Psychology* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Worth.

- You may purchase either the textbook or the electronic version, whichever you prefer.

Additional readings will be posted via Moodle.

Assignments:

Exams (225 points)

There will be 3 exams given throughout the semester, each worth 75 points. Exams will consist of multiple choice and short answer items, typically focusing on definitions of important terms, development of critical thinking skills, and application of course concepts to real life situations. Exam items will cover material from lecture, assigned readings, and in-class activities.

Perceptions of Mental Health Paper (50 points)

This assignment will explore beliefs about mental illness. You will interview 3 people and reflect on your own answers to a series of questions about awareness and stereotypes of mental illness. Try to find people of heterogeneous backgrounds to get a range of potential perspectives. It is

important you protect the confidentiality of those you talk to, so do NOT report the names or any identifying information about the interviewees.

Assignment Details:

- Conduct three interviews about perspectives on mental illness.
- The list of questions below is a suggestion only. You can ask whatever you like as long as it's respectful and informative. **Do NOT ask people directly about their own mental health issues or the mental health issues of their family.** If interviewees choose to volunteer that information it's fine, but respect their right to privacy. You can come up with your own questions in addition to the ones listed below.
- You can choose the questions but ask the same set of questions to each person.
- Summarize the results of your interviews and include **your own opinions on the questions you asked** (so you will have a total of 4 viewpoints represented in your paper). Make sure you reflect on responses throughout the paper (not just at the end in the summary)
- Compare and contrast the different viewpoints.
- This should be organized and written as a paper, with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. You may organize the body of your paper by either topic/question or by interviewee, whichever works best for you is fine with me so long as the organizational style you choose is clear and consistent.
- Your paper must be no less than 6 and no more than 10 pages long. Use 12 pt., Times New Roman font, and 1 inch margins.
- You are not required to use outside sources, but if you do make sure to cite them properly.

Question Ideas

- What do you know about mental illness?
- What do you think of the profession of psychology?
- Think of a time when you saw someone engaging in behavior that you would describe as "abnormal." Describe it and say why you considered it to be abnormal – by what criterion is your example different from normal behavior?
- Why are people so uncomfortable with mental illness?
- Why is it so difficult to talk with someone who has severe mental illness?
- Why are people with mental disorders often blamed for their mental illness?
- How much control do you think people with mental illness have over their behavior? Does that differ by the type of disorder?
- What are your perspectives on disorders (**only two specific disorders maximum**) – Depression? Bi-polar? ADHD? PTSD? Suicidal ideation? Obsessive-compulsive disorder? Schizophrenia? Eating disorders?
- What about having someone in one of your courses (or place of work) with outward symptoms of a disorder? Should they be there even if some of their symptoms were at times a little disruptive to the flow of class? What about a lot disruptive?
- What is your opinion on prescribing medication to people with mental illness?
- Is mental illness curable?
- What are the best ways to help people with mental illness?
- How should society treat people with mental illness? Should we hospitalize? Would your opinion change at all if science could prove that mental illness has a biological cause?

- How would you feel about having a group home for people with mental illness in your neighborhood?

Grading Rubric

Category	Points Earned / Maximum
Selection of relevant questions	/ 4
Summary of 3 interviews	/ 15
Inclusion of own answers	/ 8
Comparison/contrast	/ 15
Followed formatting/length instructions	/ 3
Surface finishing	/ 5
Total	/ 50

Case Study 1: Mental Illness in the Movies (60 points)

For this assignment you will watch a movie where one of the primary characters has a psychological disorder (i.e., a diagnosable disorder in the DSM). I will provide a list of potential movies for you on Moodle, though this list is non-exhaustive. If you want to use a different movie, it needs to be approved by me first. For this assignment you cannot choose a movie where amnesia, autism, or cognitive deficits (e.g., intellectual deficit disorder, traumatic brain injury, mental retardation) is the primary diagnosis, as this is difficult to code in the DSM and often handled by neurologists.

You will write a case study about the character you select. Make sure to clearly identify which character you have selected and include the following information:

- **Presenting concern** (Why is this person coming to see you?)
- **Onset, duration, and severity of symptoms** (When did this problem start? How long has it been a problem? How disruptive to functioning are the symptoms?)
- **Risk assessment** (Suicidal/homicidal thoughts or plans, previous suicide attempts, previous hospitalization for mental health issues)
- **Demographic information** (age, race, sex, religious identification, etc.)
- **Personal history** (Any information about this person's past which seems relevant to current functioning)
- **Family history** (Who makes up current family? Who makes up family of origin? Comment on quality of relationships. Any history of mental illness or substance use in the family?)
- **Social history** (Ability to make/keep friendships or romantic relationships)
- **Substance use history** (Current and previous use of alcohol/drugs)
- **Medical history** (Anything which might be relevant to current functioning, including current medications)
- **Occupational history** (Ability to achieve and maintain employment)
- **Legal history** (History of involvement with the legal system? Criminal/civil charges pending or dropped?)

- **Provide diagnosis** (Make sure there is enough evidence in the sections above to justify this diagnosis – i.e., if you diagnose panic disorder I need to be able to pick out at least 4 symptoms of a panic attack in your description).
- **Conceptualization** (Describe your hypothesis as to how the condition developed using one of the theoretical models discussed in class or your textbook)
- **Suggested treatment** (What would you recommend? Medication? Therapy? If therapy, would it be inpatient or outpatient? What model of therapy?)

You will likely not be able to completely fill out each section, but this is common in intake reports because you only have 50 minutes to talk with the person. Fill out as much as you can based on what is presented in the movie. Sections in which no information is presented in the movie (for example, the character may not discuss their family of origin or their legal history) should say “Not assessed at this time” or “Unknown.”

In addition to the information gathered above, you will also write a section where you compare and contrast the depiction of the disorder in the movie with the diagnostic criteria, and describe the potential effects of this depiction. This portion of your paper must be at least 2 pages

You should write the report as if the character has come in to see you for therapy. Use the bulleted list above as side headings for your paper. Use 12 pt., Times New Roman font, and 1 inch margins. Your paper may be no more than 10 pages.

Grading Rubric

Category	Points
Presenting Concerns	/ 5
Risk Assessment	/ 5
Client History	/ 10
Diagnosis	/ 15
Conceptualization/Treatment Recommendation	/ 5
Analysis of Movie’s Portrayal	/ 15
Surface Finishing	/ 5
Total	/ 60

Case Study 2: Clinical Vignette (75 points)

For this second case study you will be given information about a client from multiple sources and put together a report with your diagnostic impressions and recommendations. Some of this information will be incomplete and other pieces may conflict, so you will need to think carefully and articulate your reasoning for the decisions you make. Details of this assignment will be provided in class and posted to Moodle.

Grading Rubric

Domain	Points
Diagnosis 1	/ 5
Rationale 1	/ 15
Diagnosis 2	/ 5

Rationale 2	/ 15
Diagnosis 3	/ 5
Rationale 3	/ 15
Treatment suggestions	/ 10
Surface Finishing	/ 5
Total	/ 75

Final Presentation – Ethical Dilemma (65 points)

For your final presentation, you will be assigned to small groups and given an ethical dilemma. Using the ethical problem solving model presented in class, your group will go through each of the steps to determine your solution to the dilemma. The presentation will document all of your actions related to this process. Details of this assignment will be provided in class and posted to Moodle.

Grading Rubric

Domain	Points
Content	/ 50
<i>Identify the problem</i>	/ 5
<i>Identify potential issues involved and prioritize</i>	/ 6
<i>Review relevant ethical standards</i>	/ 8
<i>Consult applicable laws and regulations</i>	/ 2
<i>Obtain consultation and document everything</i>	/ 8
<i>Consider possible and probable courses of action</i>	/ 8
<i>Enumerate consequences of various decisions</i>	/ 8
<i>Decide on best course of action</i>	/ 5
Presentation	/ 12
<i>Includes PowerPoint</i>	/ 2
<i>Presenters do not simply read the slides</i>	/ 2
<i>Each group member presents roughly the same amount of material</i>	/ 2
<i>Includes references</i>	/ 2
<i>Follows time guidelines</i>	/ 4
Provided paper handout of slides for instructor	/ 3
Total	/ 65

Grading:

There are 475 possible points in this course. Grades will be assigned on a scale no more stringent than the following percentages:

Letter	%	Letter	%
A	> 93%	C	73%
A-	90%	C-	70%
B+	87%	D+	67%
B	83%	D	63%
B-	80%	D-	60%
C+	77%	F	< 60%

Tentative Course Schedule:

Date		Class Topic	Readings/Assignments
Week 1			
2/2	M	Intro/Syllabus; "Abnormal"	Chpt. 1
2/4	W	Psychology Then & Now	
Week 2			
2/9	M	Major Theoretical Schools I	Chpt. 2
2/11	W	Major Theoretical Schools II	
Week 3			
2/16	M	Assessment and Diagnosis	Chpt. 3
2/18	W	Treatment	
Week 4			
2/23	M	Exam 1	
2/25	W	Depression	Chpt. 6
Week 5			
3/2	M	Bipolar	Perceptions of Mental Health Paper Due
3/4	W	Suicide	Chpt. 7
Week 6			
3/9-13		<i>No Class – Spring Break</i>	
Week 7			
3/16	M	Anxiety Disorders	Chpt. 4
3/18	W	Obsessive Disorders	
Week 8			
3/23	M	Stress & Trauma Disorders	Chpt. 5
3/25	W	Dissociative Disorders	
Week 9			
3/30	M	Exam 2	
4/1	W	Schizophrenia	Chpt. 12
Week 10			
4/6	M	Neurodevelopmental Disorders	Chpt. 14; Case Study 1 Due
4/8	W	Childhood Disorders/ADHD	
Week 11			
4/13	M	Substance Use Disorders	Chpt. 10
4/15	W	Addictive Disorders	
Week 12			
4/20	M	Eating Disorders	Chpt. 9
4/22	W	Somatoform Disorders	Chpt. 8
Week 13			
4/27	M	Personality Disorders	Chpt. 13
4/29	W	Exam 3	
Week 14			
5/4	M	Ethical Issues	Chpt. 16; APA Ethics Code
5/6	W	Alternative Diagnostic Systems	Case Study 2 Paper Due
Final Presentation – Monday 5/11/15 – 12-2pm			

Comment on Course Content:

This course covers material related to mental illness, a sensitive topic. Each week there will almost certainly be someone in the class who either is currently or has formerly been diagnosed with the disorder we are covering or has loved ones who are currently or formerly diagnosed. For this reason please remember to be extra careful of how you ask questions, make comments, etc., in class. I encourage everyone to voice their thoughts and be curious about the subject matter, but do so in a respectful manner. I would also ask those individuals who are currently dealing with mental illness to refrain from discussing your own symptomology or treatment in class. This not only protects your privacy, but also will not pressure other students to reveal aspects of themselves beyond their comfort level and will allow for the carefully constructed examples prepared for class to be used. If you want to discuss a specific situation, please make an appointment with me. It is likely I will not be able to make any definitive statements about someone else's mental health, but I will be happy to hear your concerns and make referrals to resources.

All students should also be aware it is perfectly normal to start seeing signs of mental illness everywhere while taking this course, including in yourself. I remember diagnosing myself with at least 6 disorders when I took a similar course as an undergraduate. Go over the criteria carefully, review the definition of disorder in the DSM and consider the affects of confronting someone about mental illness before taking action. If you have serious concerns about yourself or someone else, please talk to myself or a mental health professional. Here is a list of several resources for mental health issues:

Austin College Counseling Services:

<http://www.austincollege.edu/campus-life/counseling-services/>
903-813-2247

Suicide Crisis Line

<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

Applied Psychological Group of Texoma

<http://www.apgtexoma.com/>
903-893-0298

Psychology Today's Therapist Finder

http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/prof_search.php

Technology

This course will be web-enhanced through the use of Moodle. Readings, lecture slides, some handouts, and links to other resources will be provided through this system. Unless otherwise specified, you will turn your assignments in via Moodle. You can access Moodle through the following link: <https://moodle.austincollege.edu/login/index.php>. Questions concerning content/postings should be directed to the instructor, while questions regarding access/technical issues should be directed to the Austin College IT Help Desk (903-813-2063; helpdesk@austincollege.edu). A PDF viewer is required to view the content posted to the Moodle site. Free Adobe software is available for download via <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>. This course will also make use of WordPress® a free online blogging tool, as described above.

Policies:*Academic Integrity*

Scholastic misconduct is broadly defined as any act that violates the rights of another student in academic work or that involves misrepresentation of your own work. Scholastic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to): cheating on assignments or examinations; plagiarizing, which means misrepresenting as you own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same paper, or substantially similar papers, to meet the requirements of more than one course without the approval and consent of all instructors concerned (including papers you have submitted in previous semesters); providing others with copies of your assignments; depriving another student of necessary course materials; or interfering with another student's work.

Plagiarism is a serious offense which will not be tolerated. Most of the time, however, plagiarism happens because students are rushing through assignments and do not leave themselves with sufficient time to properly attribute information taken from other sources. For this class you may cite your sources using either APA or MLA style. If you plan to be a psychology major or minor, I encourage you to get used to APA style, as you will be using this throughout your coursework. Note that for either style, you need to include citations each time you use information from a source. It is incorrect to use information throughout a paragraph and only include a citation at the end. Also, if you use 5 or more consecutive words from a source, you must include quotation marks and include the page number (or paragraph number if you are using an online source) in your citation.

You will be required to submit an electronic copy of all major assignments which will be compared with the TurnItIn database. Penalties for scholastic misconduct in any portion of the academic work for a course shall be made at the discretion of the instructor and may range from point deductions on the assignment to failing the class. All academic misconduct (no matter how small) will be reported to the Academic Integrity Council, which may impose sanctions up to and including expulsion. Austin College's full academic integrity policy is available in the *Environment* (Austin College Student Handbook; the most recent edition is posted on Moodle) in the Student Conduct section. If you have any questions about whether something is plagiarism or not, please talk with me about it BEFORE you turn in an assignment.

Accommodations

Austin College seeks to provide reasonable accommodations for all individuals with disabilities and will comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines. If you have a documented disability for which you would like accommodations, please inform me by the second week of class. It is your responsibility to remind me of your accommodations at least a week before I distribute each assignment or exam. To arrange for accommodations, you will need to register as soon as possible at the Academic Skills Center with Laura Márquez, the Director of the Academic Skills Center, (903-813-2454, Suite 211 of the Wright Campus Center). For information on this process, go to <http://www.austincollege.edu/campus-life/academic-skills-center/>. This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request.

Attendance

Attendance is required and critically important to your success in this class. Topics not covered in the textbook will be discussed in class and some exam questions will come directly from classroom learning activities. Students who miss more than three classes without documentation may be dropped from the course at the instructor's discretion. If you know you are going to miss

class for a medical, religious, or Austin College sanctioned academic/athletic reason, let me know in advance and potential alternative assignments may be given at the discretion of the instructor. PowerPoint slides will be posted to the Moodle site, but will be outlines which require additional information from lectures or activities. If you miss class it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate. Full lecture slides will not be distributed. If you must arrive late or leave early, please sit near the door and do so in the least disruptive manner possible.

Changes to the Syllabus

All aspects of this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Students will be informed in writing of any changes to the syllabus via a post to Moodle.

Communication

Outside of class, I will communicate with you most frequently via your *Austin College email address*. **It is your responsibility to monitor this address and you are responsible for the information delivered to this address.** I highly recommend you check your email at least daily. I will also post messages to Moodle, so you are encouraged to check Moodle regularly. The best way to contact me is through email. I will always attempt to respond to email promptly, which means within 24 hours. **I typically do not check my email after 8pm**, so if you email me at night, do not expect a response until the next morning. I check Moodle daily and will respond to questions posted in the forum within 24 hours.

Extra Credit

Extra credit opportunities may be given at the discretion of the instructor. Possible examples of extra credit opportunities include: participation in psychological research, attendance at events, or further research into a topic of interest. The maximum amount of extra credit possible for this class is 7 points (~1.5% of your final grade).

- Students can earn extra credit points by participating in research authorized by the psychology department. These research opportunities are current studies being conducted by your peers and/or the psychology faculty, and are opportunities to contribute to the knowledge of the field as well as your classmates' education. Participation is a serious commitment that requires honest and thoughtful responses. If you give false, misleading, or thoughtless (i.e., choosing "4" on every item on the scale) data, it not only compromises the work of your peers and faculty but can potentially cripple research that took months or years to set up. The researchers can see how much time it took you to complete the study (even the online surveys) and have to throw out data that is clearly carelessly entered. If you do not have enough time to complete the research appropriately (as described in the informed consent statement), do it at another time.

All students will be added to the email list to receive notifications of research opportunities for extra credit. If you do not want to receive these emails, you will be given the opportunity to opt out. For every 30 minutes of research participation, students will receive 1 point of extra credit. **MAKE SURE to keep a list of the studies you participate in** so you can be sure you have received all your extra credit slips. At a minimum, write down the name of the study, date of participation, and contact information for the researcher. If you write a 2 page (double-spaced, 12 pt., Times New Roman) reflection paper about your experience participating in the study, you will earn 1 additional point.

- Research Participation Response Paper Requirements:
 - Describe the study you participated in as well as you can. In other words, what were you asked to do?
 - Describe how you felt during the study. Was it fun? Uncomfortable? Confusing? Surprising?
 - Tie the research to something we discussed in class or is discussed in your readings. If you're not sure what the research was investigating, say so but try to guess what it was about.
 - How would you improve the study? Evaluate the research design to the extent possible (i.e., you may not know the reliability of the instruments being used but you can say you thought the questions were worded poorly).
- Additional extra credit assignments may arise during the semester as opportunities to attend campus or community events become available. The amount of points received for attending such events will vary by the time commitment (the points will be posted along with the information about the event). The length of the response paper required will also vary, but will be a minimum of 2 pages.
 - Event Attendance Response Paper Requirements:
 - Describe the event (e.g., where, when, why)
 - Who was the target audience?
 - What did you learn?
 - How does this relate to something we have discussed in class or some other aspect of psychology?
 - If you had been in charge of the event, what would you do plan next as a follow-up? How might the event coordinators continue to build momentum, conduct additional research, etc.?
- Students can also write a 3 page paper on an approved psychology topic for 1.5 points of extra credit. These papers must be proposed no later than 4/17 and turned in no later than 5/1.

Incompletes

An "incomplete" only may be given as a grade for the course when a student has a **passing grade the course** and has an unforeseen and uncontrollable event occur that prevents him or her from earning a significant number of points in the course. Thus, incompletes are rarely given and each situation will be considered on a case-by-case basis. To have an incomplete changed to a different grade all missing work must be completed by the end of the following term.

Late Work

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date listed in the syllabus. Assignments turned in after class but on the same day will be penalized 5%, with 10% additional penalty for every additional calendar day the assignment is late (thus if the assignment is due on Tuesday but turned in on Thursday the maximum score you could receive is 75%). No assignments will be accepted more than 7 days after the original due date. Extensions may be given at the discretion of the instructor, but **no extensions will be given during the 24 hours before an assignment is due**. It is your responsibility to budget your time so you are not working on assignments at the last minute. Specific arrangements must be made with the instructor as to how late work will be turned in (e.g., email vs. hard copy) or it will not be accepted.

Make-Up Exams

If circumstances prevent you from being in class on the day of an exam, please notify me as soon as you can (BEFORE the exam) in order to arrange to complete a make-up exam. Make-up exams will be scheduled prior to the exam date if possible. Please note **I will require documentation** (e.g., a doctor's note) explaining your absence from class in nearly all cases. Make-up exams may be different than the original exam and **must be completed within 1 week of the original exam date**.

Role of Instructor

I will provide learning opportunities designed to provide students with information about psychology and foster critical thinking. Every effort will be made to accommodate different learning styles and students will be encouraged to provide feedback both formally and informally. I pledge to carefully consider constructive feedback about teaching methods and incorporate suggestions to the extent feasible. I am responsible for treating students in a respectful, professional manner and creating a classroom atmosphere where students treat each other as such. I will be accessible outside of class and encourages you to meet with me either during office hours or individual appointments to discuss concerns (e.g., about the class, workload, assignments, etc.), conflicts or problems that affect course performance, concepts which need further clarification, additional resources related to course material, or careers in psychology.

Role of Student

Students will come to class prepared to learn and open to new ideas. Assignments (including readings) will be completed before class begins and to the best of each student's ability. Classroom discussions will be conducted in a respectful manner, where all opinions are valued regardless of whether you agree or disagree with the content. Students who cannot maintain respectful communication will be asked to leave the classroom. Students will take responsibility for their own learning throughout the class. Students will consult available resources (e.g., the syllabus, Moodle, email messages) before asking administrative questions.

Statement on Classroom Conduct

All students have the right to a civil, productive, and stimulating learning environment. In turn, instructors have a responsibility to nurture and maintain such an environment. Lively, even heated, discussion is not disruptive behavior. Both instructors and students have a fundamental obligation to respect the rights of each other and an equally fundamental obligation to respect the instructional setting as a place for civil, courteous behavior.

Statement on Diversity

We will all bring unique perspectives to this course and I hope those who feel comfortable will share insights and alternative interpretations throughout the semester. Cultural perspectives will be explicitly included in many of our discussions and will likely come up in many others. I welcome feedback on ways to increase the diversity of perspectives being provided in class and methods for creating a more inclusive atmosphere through my teaching.

Writing Tips

Your ability to write will greatly impact your grades in this course. I expect you to make strides in your writing in terms of mechanics, style, and ability to write concisely. Writing skills make up a substantial portion of your grade on written materials, so make sure to take this seriously.

What follows below is a non-exhaustive list of things which will result in point reductions on written assignments.

Professionalism

- Your name, the date, and the assignment title must be included on the first page.
- Pages must be numbered (if assignment is more than 1 page).
- Proof read your papers! Writing is about communicating to the reader so you need to make sure you are getting your point across. If you typically have issues with grammar and/or spelling, make sure you have your papers done early enough to have someone proof them for you. The Academic Skills Center has writing tutors available and I strongly encourage you to make use of them.

Use of Quotes

- Quotes should be included very infrequently. You should not use more than 2 quotes in any paper you write for me. Most of your papers will likely not contain any quotes. This is both an APA style issue and a pedagogical issue. I want to see that you can paraphrase and explain what happened in your own words.
- If you do use quotes, you still have to explain what the authors are saying.
- Remember, if you use 5 or more consecutive words from another source, you must use quotation marks and include the page number (or paragraph number if it is an online source) in your citation.

APA Style tips

- The *Publication Manual* has more in it than just how to cite sources!
- The goal of scientific writing is to be concise and precise. You will not get bonus points for inserting “fluff” into your papers. In fact, your grades will suffer if you are including a bunch of filler instead of substance.
- Avoid sexist language. Do not refer to people generally or groups of mixed genders as masculine. You do not have to write “his or her” every time either. You can switch between he and she as long as they are approximately balanced throughout the paper as a whole. As a side note, many people identify outside the dichotomy of male and female, so genderless pronouns such as “zhe” or “hir” are likely to be more common in the future. These pronouns are not in common usage yet, so check with other professors to see if they accept them, but in my classes these are acceptable.
- For longer papers (>3-4 pages) it is often helpful to include headings and subheadings to organize your writing.

Additional tips

- Never, ever use the word “prove” in your writing. Research studies do NOT prove anything. Research can support, suggest, indicate, demonstrate, corroborate, show, etc.
- The writing assignments you do for me are considered formal writing. Therefore, there should not be any contractions (e.g., you’re, can’t, don’t) in your papers. The exception is when I ask you to write reflection papers and your online discussion posts. These are less formal and may include contractions.
- I am not impressed by your vocabulary. I am impressed by your ability to communicate clearly. Do not use big words if you do not know what they mean.

- Know your target audience. Avoid jargon unless you are sure the entire audience will know what it means. Unless specifically told otherwise you can assume the target audience is me.
- If you are critiquing a research article, you need to be able to articulate why the issue you are pointing out is important. Do not just say they needed a bigger sample. What would be gained by having a bigger sample? How does a small sample limit the ability to interpret the results?

Common Writing Mistakes

- The word “that” is the most overused word in the English language, and is often included in sentences unnecessarily. When you come to a sentence which includes “that” while proofreading your paper, read the sentence again without “that.” You will often find it still makes sense. If so, remove the unnecessary “that.” Here is a non-exhaustive list of words commonly followed by “that” which typically do not need to be: state, say, mention, believe, feel, think, agree, found, indicate, conclude, imply, and realize.
- Do not start a sentence with the word “however.” In this context the word does not mean what you intend it to mean. At the start of a sentence, “however” means “in whatever manner,” not “nevertheless.” This is true even when there is a comma after the “however.” This can always be fixed by simply moving the “however” a few words into the sentence or using “nevertheless” to start the sentence. For example, “However, the research does not support this idea” becomes “The research, however, does not support this idea.”
- Periods and commas always belong inside quotation marks. Do not put the period after the quotation mark.
- Be aware of the verb tense you are using. Students often shift tenses back and forth throughout papers, paragraphs, and even sentences. Some tense shifts are appropriate, but many times are due to sloppy editing. Make sure you are consistent and intentional with your tenses.
- Do not use “they” when you are referring to a single person. This is usually done in an effort to avoid choosing he versus she (see above).
- The word “pique” means interesting or stimulating. The word “peak” means comes to a point or summit. The word “peek” means a brief look. Attention is “piqued” not “peaked.”
- The word “feel” should only be used if you are describing an emotion or the sensation of touch. “Feel” should NOT be used to suggest intuition, judgment, agreement, or beliefs. These are examples of thoughts or cognitions. It is incorrect to write “I feel I deserve a better grade.” This is a judgment and should be stated “I think I deserve a better grade.”
- The software used to create presentations is “PowerPoint” not “power point.”
- The word “therefor” is used to describe an exchange, such as “I traded my sandwich and received a salad therefor.” The word “therefore” refers to a statement based on the preceding information, such as “I did not like the salad, therefore I regretted the trade.”