

PeerScholar Extra Credit Assignment

This extra-credit assignment allows you to earn a bonus 2% to your course mark. You are eligible for this assignment ONLY IF you are enrolled in the L60 section, OR if you are enrolled in the L01 section AND have emailed psyb10@psych.utoronto.ca to register for the assignment.

There are three parts to the assignment. ALL PARTS MUST BE COMPLETED TO EARN THE BONUS 2%.

1. **Create: due by midnight November 20.** You will write an original essay applying social psychology to a popular topic.
2. **Assess: due by midnight November 24.** You will anonymously evaluate the essays of three of your peers.
3. **Reflect/revise: due by midnight December 1.** You will revise your essay in light of the peer evaluations you have received.

Again, THERE IS NO PARTIAL CREDIT. If you complete all three parts of the assignment, you earn the bonus. If you do not, you earn no bonus.

PART 1: CREATE

Using Social Psychology in a Popular Essay

In this phase you will write a short essay (maximum 500 words) in which you use social psychological theory and research to explain a topic or phenomenon that ordinary people might care about. You can choose the topic; the only requirement is that it be a topic of general interest (“Why is it so hard to save for retirement?” would qualify; “What kind of chameleon makes the best pet?” would not). The social psychology can come from the lecture, book, or both.

Being able to explain a complicated topic in clear, everyday language is an essential skill in many professions. Therefore, your **assumed audience** in this assignment is the **general public**—for example, readers of publications such as the New York Times or The Economist. This means that you cannot assume that your readers know much about psychology. You may assume that your readers know common facts (e.g., New York is a big city in the United States, you can take a plane to get there, in 2001 it was struck by terrorist attacks, there are many skyscrapers, etc.) but you may not assume that they know more obscure details about history, politics, fashion, movies, literature, etc. You also should not assume that they necessarily find social psychology interesting.

This latter point is important. The assignment is to **use a theory to explain a phenomenon**—not to use a phenomenon to illustrate a theory. Teachers use phenomena as examples to demonstrate a theory. They can assume that students are interested in the theory. You are writing for a general audience and you cannot make that assumption. Instead, you should try to raise the interest of the reader for your topic, by using social psychology to explain something interesting and non-obvious about a topic. That is, you should try to capture the interest of the reader about some topic (the financial crisis, terrorism, why it is so hard to stick to a diet, why political parties

win or lose elections) and then use social psychology to explain that topic or give some new insight about it.

Because this is a popular essay, **APA-style citations are not necessary.**

To get you started, here are some recent examples of good essays using social psychology to explain interesting phenomena. Both are from the New York Times:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/opinion/believing-what-you-dont-believe.html>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/27/opinion/sunday/the-curious-politics-of-the-nudge.html>

Submitting Your Work. Once you are ready to submit, click "peerScholar" on the sideboard on Blackboard. A link will appear that says "Click here to launch peerScholar" – click the word "here." Once you're in, click on the green "Create" portion of the assignment bar, and read and follow the instructions. Click on "Save & Next" (button is at the bottom right of this interface) to advance to the screen where you can write, or copy and paste, your work.

PART 2: ASSESS

In this phase, you will anonymously review the essays of three of your peers. The primary purposes of this phase are (a) to give you experience with deep thinking skills and (b) to have all of you help each other improve.

When you give feedback to your peers, make sure your tone is supportive and the feedback you provide is as useful as possible. Assessing your peers in a useful and constructive manner is a big part of the overall assignment so it's important you all put some serious effort into this.

Instructions

1. From within peerScholar, click on the "Rubric" button once again to remind yourself of the task and the evaluation criteria.
2. Click "Save and Next" to see a screen that includes three peer assignments. You can move between peers by clicking on the tabs labeled "Peer1," "Peer2," etc.
3. Read each peer composition, and assign each composition a rating from 1-10 according to the posted rubric. This rating is meant to communicate to the peer your sense of how good the work is.
4. For each peer, **highlight something the peer is doing well** in the "Positive Feedback" box. This will reward them and encourage them to continue doing this (positive reinforcement!)
5. Most importantly, provide a useful constructive comment (in the "Constructive Feedback" box). Your constructive feedback should have two parts: First, you should **identify the single most significant issue** that, if fixed, would maximally improve the work. Focus on the one thing you think is most in need of improvement and communicate that "problem" clearly. Second, present at least one possible path for improvement. **Give direction on how to improve the problem** you have identified.
6. For minor issues like spelling and grammar, use inline comments to highlight problems.

PART 3: REFLECT/REVISE

Here, you will revise your original composition in light of the feedback you received from your peers. The primary purpose of this phase is to have you think deeply about the comments of your peers and, ultimately, to use the comments you feel were useful to improve your essay.

Instructions

1. Navigate between the tabs for each peer. Read the positive comment, and then the constructive comment, thinking deeply about the suggested improvements. Specifically, imagine changing your work in the manner the peer suggests. Do you feel that would improve it or not? Based on your assessment, use the pull down menu to **categorize that peer's feedback as either not useful, useful, or very useful.**
2. Revise: Once you've read all of your feedback, **edit your original composition**, incorporating the suggestions that you thought were useful.
3. Reflect: In the next step, **justify the changes you made to your work, and especially the changes you DID NOT make**. This is the place where you can show the TA that you thought about the comments deeply, and tried to incorporate them well. If you chose not to incorporate some of the suggested feedback, you need to explain why you did not find this feedback useful.