

Summer Assignment: Advanced Placement Psychology

Teacher: *Mr. Straw*

straths@bcsd.neric.org

Welcome to AP Psychology! Psychology is the **scientific** study of **behavior** and the **physiological** and **cognitive processes** that **underlie behavior**. Psychology is a social science. In fact, just as chemistry and physics serve as the disciplines in the natural sciences that investigate the most fundamental features of things in the natural world, psychology serves the same purpose in the social sciences by investigating the most fundamental feature of the human social world, the behavior of the individual. There are **a number of basic principles that share near universal agreement** within the field, while at the same time there are **a number of major theories** about behavior that have withstood the test of critical review and thus occupy the Pantheon of **Theoretical Perspectives** in mainstream psychology. The main task of the summer assignment is to develop a good basic understanding of these basic **themes and variations** by doing the necessary research to write an 8-10 page paper that supports the following thesis:

“The discipline of psychology is both unified and diverse”

The Themes

1. **Psychology is a science**
2. **Behavior is determined by multiple causes**
3. **Heredity and Experience interact to influence behavior**
4. **The individual’s perception/experience is highly subjective**
5. **A person’s behavior is shaped by social/cultural heritage**

The Theoretical Perspectives

1. **Psychodynamic (Psychoanalytic)**
2. **Behavioral**
3. **Humanistic**
4. **Cognitive**
5. **Biological**
6. **Evolutionary**

(Over Please)

General Directions

There are three main questions this assignment is designed to answer:

1. *What exactly is psychology?*
2. *What holds psychology together as a discipline?*
3. *What are the major areas of disagreement within psychology?*

If you do this assignment in the spirit in which it is intended, you should, in the process of answering these questions, develop a good basic understanding of the science of psychology. In the introduction of your paper you should make three things clear to the reader: what psychology is (*look at some different definitions and choose a wording that resonates best with you*), that there are areas of agreement and disagreement within the field and that you intend to support the thesis you have been mandated to support.

Generally your body should consist of two parts, the **themes and the perspectives**. You do not need to make any connection between them other than the obvious, that there are things within the field that practitioners agree upon and things they don't.

The Themes: Areas of Agreement

1. **Psychology is a science**: This is an *extremely important feature of psychology* and you need to demonstrate that you understand the significance of this both in terms of the scientific *methodology of investigation* and the scientific *standard of the acceptance of conclusions*. (At some point make clear the distinction between the natural and social sciences.)
2. **Behavior is determined by multiple causes**: This theme is designed to guard against overly simplistic explanations of behavior and to make it clear that *behavior is the result of many interacting factors, both past and present*.
3. **Heredity and Experience interact to influence behavior**: This theme is certainly related to the second theme, but is important enough to mention separately. These are the two broad categories of factors that influence behavior. (You may choose to combine themes two and three or to do them separately.) Make sure to discuss the **nature vs. nurture controversy** and the **interaction** that occurs between genes and the environment.
4. **The individual's perception/experience is highly subjective**: Make sure to not only explain *what this means* but why it is so *significant in terms of our attempts to arrive at conclusions that have general/universal application*.
5. **A person's behavior is shaped by social/cultural heritage**: This theme is intended to highlight the impact of both social and cultural influences on behavior. Make sure to explain, generally, the impact that society and culture can have on behavior. (You will need to be clear on the *difference* between society and culture)

The Theoretical Perspectives

There are six, generally well accepted, theoretical perspectives within the discipline of psychology. It should be noted that none of these perspective is exclusive in terms of providing a comprehensive explanation for human behavior. Each perspective is recognized as making a significant contribution. **What distinguishes them from each other is the primary lens one looks through in attempting to investigate and explain behavior.**

1. **Psychodynamic**: Aka the “**Psychoanalytic School**”, this perspective played a very significant role in the growth and development of psychology. Make sure to sufficiently demonstrate your basic understanding of the role played by the unconscious mind, the forces at play in the unconscious mind that play a significant role in human motives and the emphasis placed on early childhood experiences. Finally, address the “*unscientific*” criticism.
2. **Behavioral**: This perspective also played a significant role in the growth and development of psychology. In fact this perspective dominated the field during much of the middle of the 20th century. Make sure to sufficiently demonstrate your basic understanding of the important emphasis that is placed on behavior, the role played by the environment, especially rewards and punishment, and the almost exclusive status enjoyed by the behaviorists during the 20th century until the cognitive revolution occurred.
3. **Humanistic**: The humanistic perspective arrived on the scene as a direct challenge to both the psychoanalytic and behavioral theories. Make sure to demonstrate your basic understanding of how it is fundamentally different from the other two views, the central role played by self-actualization, human goodness and the drive towards growth and development. Also make sure to address the “*unscientific*” criticism made against the humanists by its detractors.
4. **Cognitive**: The cognitive perspective, a product of the cognitive revolution, has played an important role in the history of psychology and in many ways represents a return to the roots of the discipline. Make sure to demonstrate your basic understanding of the central role played by mental processes in investigating and explaining behavior. Also address both its disappearance and reappearance within the field as well.
5. **Biological**: Aka “**Physiological Psychology**”, this perspective has grown significantly over the last few decades. You need to demonstrate both a basic understanding of the perspective and why it has grown so much during the past few decades.
6. **Evolutionary**: The evolutionary perspective is different than the other perspectives in that *it is more a way of thinking about psychology*. It provides psychologists with a tool for investigating the innate tendencies within humans towards behavior and *has resulted in the rethinking* of many well accepted theories. In that sense it can be applied to any topic or perspective in psychology. Make sure to demonstrate a basic understanding of how the application of the principles of evolution to the study of behavior, as well as to the study of the structure and functioning of the mind, has altered the field of psychology

(Over Please)

Specific Directions

1. **8 to 10 Pages.** It is hard to imagine accomplishing all you have to do in 8 pages. In fact the major challenge, I would think, will be to do it all in only 10 pages.
2. Your paper should subscribe to the **MLA Guidelines** which are available on line or in the ***BCHS Stylesheet*** which can be accessed through the BCHS web page. This of course includes **parenthetical documentation** and a **works cited page**.
3. Use **any resource** as long as you **identify it and it is credible**
4. Use information from your sources but **take ownership of the information** in a way that reflects **your understandings, written in your voice and used for your purposes**.
5. Cite any information that is **not common knowledge** (within the discipline) or that **played a significant role in the development of your personal understanding**. Different sources explain the same thing in different ways. Access multiple sources until you find one whose conceptual explanations and substantive, concrete examples withstand the test of your personal experiences; or in other words, make sense to you.
6. Include an **effective introduction, organized and sufficient support** and an **effective conclusion**.
7. Attempt to write a **scholarly paper!**
8. **The paper is due as you arrive in class on the first day of school.**

I am very much looking forward to collaborating with you next year in AP Psychology! If there is anything in this assignment that is unclear to you or you would like additional explanation on anything, do not hesitate to e-mail me at your earliest convenience. ***If you wait until the last moment, however, I will be less receptive to your needs.***