

**Course Information:** Introductory (100 Level), Intermediate (200/300 Level), and Upper-Level (300/400 Level) Content Courses in Psychology – Cornell College

**Type:** Annotated bibliography  
Article critique  
Paper

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**Level:** 100, 200/300, 300/400

The following assignments are designed to build psychology literacy and writing skills through a sequence of writing assignments appropriate for introductory, intermediate, and upper-level content courses in psychology. The 100 Level assignment would be appropriate for a standard introductory survey of psychology as a discipline, requiring students to pick a particular topic area and critique a research article focused upon the selected topic. The 200/300 Level assignment allows for students to explore in further depth an aspect of a specific content area (e.g., cognitive psychology, social psychology, learning and behavior, abnormal psychology, etc.). The 300/400 Level assignment involves students’ developing a research proposal, a project that would be appropriate for content-specific courses as well as senior seminar, research methods, and capstone courses.

**Block Plan Context:**

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**Important Features of the Assignments:**

- The assignments are **sequenced** to build **research and writing skills**.
- Students engage in **critical thinking** about research and psychology, including **integrating and synthesizing** multiple studies, theories, or perspectives, **generating original research ideas** based on previous research findings, and applying research findings to novel domains.
- The librarian’s **expertise** is consulted on each assignment. The complexity of information literacy skills taught builds with each assignment.
- The assignments expose students to **discipline-specific** information resources. They introduce students to the special requirements of writing as psychologists and prepare them for future research in the discipline.
- **Staging** of individual assignments keeps students on-task and focused, provides several intervention points to address problems/issues, highlights the recursive nature of the **research and writing process**, and **discourages plagiarism**.

**Description of Assignments:**

The descriptions of the different assignments as detailed to the students are listed below.

## **100 Level: Short Research Summary and Evaluation (Article Critique)**

The goal of this project is to help you become more familiar with library resources in psychology and with the types of articles you're likely to find in psychology journals. Psychology journal articles typically fall into one of three types: (a) reports of new research related to some theory, (b) review articles that summarize and tie together a number of earlier studies, and (c) theoretical papers that focus primarily on presenting a new theory. For this assignment, you will identify a primary research article, which represents an article of the first type. You will then write a summary and evaluation of the research article.

During the first week of the term, the social sciences librarian will conduct a hands-on workshop on the use of PsycINFO (the major research database in psychology), PsycARTICLES (full-text on-line articles in psychology), and interlibrary loan options. Articles that are not in our library may be available via a full-text database or may be ordered through interlibrary loan. On the first Friday of the block, each student will submit the abstracts of 2 articles for review and approval. (Note: We sometimes require students to use specific criteria for identifying an article, such as locating an article that focuses on some aspect of diversity.)

### Writing a Summary and Evaluation

The paper should begin with an introduction of the topic and focus of the article as well as your goals. Next, your summary of the article should address most of the following questions: What is the major question addressed by this research? The authors may be testing a particular theory; if so, describe the theory. Who was studied? How was the research conducted? Write (briefly and in your own words) about the research methods the authors used. What were the results? Rather than describing specific statistics, describe in general terms what the authors found. How did the researchers interpret their results? Were hypotheses supported? If not, what new hypotheses did the researchers identify as potential explanations for the results? What did the researchers propose as a good next step in the research process? Do not get bogged down in technical details, but describe in words the general issues that may be relevant to the study you're describing.

The final portion of the paper should include evaluative comments about the study. The questions you may address include the following: In general, how effectively was the study conducted? More specifically, how representative was the sample, and how reliable and valid were the measures? What confounding variables may have influenced the findings? Was there good correspondence between the evidence and their conclusions? Are there any limitations to the work that the authors didn't mention? How generalizable are the findings, and what type of research is likely to build on these findings?

### Format and Timeline

Papers should be typed, double-spaced, and follow the general format of research reports, with the exception that research summary and evaluation papers outlined should not include section headings (e.g., participants, method). Papers should be approximately 3-4 pages in length and

include a title page, the summary and review section, and a reference page. The article you summarized should be attached after the reference page.

This paper can be completed over a two-week interval, with week 1 devoted to identifying and reading articles, and week 2 devoted to writing the review. Thus, the professor may require two assignments of this type or require a second short paper, such as a short research report based on a class project.

### **200/300 Level: Short Research Review (Annotated Bibliography/Topical Review or Two Papers)**

This paper is to expand students' skills for summarizing, evaluating, and integrating research findings. Depending on the specific course, the number of papers a professor is requiring, and the nature of research published in the specific area (e.g., complexity, typical number of research articles per article), the assignment might require the integration of 2-3 sources or 6-7 sources.

#### Short Research Review: Option One (Annotated Bibliography/Topical Review)

*Phase One:* During the first week of the term, the social sciences librarian will conduct a workshop on the use of PsycINFO (the major research database in psychology), PsycARTICLES (full-text on-line articles in psychology), and interlibrary loan options. To help with the identification of articles that are closely related to each other in terms of topic and content, the library session will emphasize advanced searching tools and the use of PsycINFO citation features.

To facilitate your research, you should identify one published article as the centerpiece of your review paper. However, you may need to consult multiple abstracts and articles (approximately 4 sources) to locate an article that is most appropriate for this purpose.

In addition to a computer search, you should examine the literature review section of your central article (or multiples articles) to identify other closely related articles that may be most appropriate for this integrative review. Computer searches on PsycINFO are very useful, but the sources they identify may not necessarily be closely related to each other. Examining literature reviews and reference sections of a central article (or several potential central articles) can help ensure that your search for closely related articles is complete.

*Phase Two:* Annotated Bibliography. (Due: End of week two)

The annotated bibliography is a road map for your paper. The bibliography must begin with a short paragraph describing the general problem or question that the research covers.

The bibliography should list the full reference for each source (in APA format), accompanied by a short paragraph describing the studies. The summary should provide a brief description of the participants, methods, result, and conclusions. Each new entry in the annotated bibliography should also state how the research is related to previous entries in the bibliography.

A good annotated bibliography traces how thinking on a topic has developed through various

pieces of research. Chronological organization may be especially helpful to ensure that early questions about a topic are discussed first, followed by the progression of research on the topic. Alternatively, you may choose to feature the article that addresses the most fundamental question first, even if it was not published first. In this case, later entries will show how other research is related to fundamental questions.

*Phase Three:* Topical review (Due: End of week three)

To guide your writing, consult class handouts on writing a summary and critique of a specific article and writing a research review. Your topical review should be double spaced and include a title page, citations, and reference list.

### Short Research Review: Option Two (Two Papers)

The assignment consists of two papers. For paper 1, you will write a description and evaluation of a specific, central research article. The second paper includes a revision of the content of paper 1. It also includes the summary, evaluation, and integration of two additional articles on the same topic. Thus, the final product will be a brief review based on three research articles.

*Phase One:* Identical to phase one listed above.

Due at the end of week one: Abstracts of four articles, including the identification of a “central” article.

*Phase Two:* This paper should begin with the definition and description of the psychological concept explored in your brief review paper. Second, you will also describe the study, including the participants, the methods, the results, and a discussion of the study’s conclusions, strengths, and limitations. (See instructions for the brief research summary and evaluation for more detail.)

Due: Two copies, Thursday of week two. For Friday, your paper will be read by two members of a small group (approximately 3-4 members per group). On Friday of week 2, group members will discuss the papers, provide written and verbal feedback to each other (criteria for feedback will be provided), and will then submit both copies to the instructor, who will return papers with additional summary comments on Tuesday of week 3.

*Phase Three:* Paper 1 will become the foundation for a second paper. You will summarize three research articles (revised and edited version of the introduction and summary/evaluation of article 1 and two additional research articles). After summarizing and providing a brief evaluation of each article, you will conclude by comparing and integrating/synthesizing the articles.

Sections of the final paper should include: (a) the definition and description of the psychological construct being studied (see paper 1), (b) summaries and commentary about three articles (paper 1 and two additional articles), and (c) an integration and synthesis section. For the final, integration section, consider the following questions: How do specific studies build on the findings of previous studies or examine related hypotheses? What overall conclusions appear appropriate when considering the findings of these three articles? How are the articles similar and different with regard to methodology, sample studied, measures used by researchers, etc.? If the results contradict each other, why is this the case? What are the implications of this line of

research? What recommendations for future research seem appropriate?

### **300/400 Level Content Courses: Research Proposal (Paper)**

Your major paper for this class will be a research proposal. Research proposals should be approximately 8-10 double-spaced pages in length, and include at least six references. In your paper, you should describe at least four original pieces of research as a foundation for your research proposal. Although you may use research reviews as sources for your paper, these materials cannot be counted as one of the four original research articles. (Reminder: Original research articles always include methods, results, and discussion sections.)

#### Deciding on a Topic and Searching the Literature

As you begin to explore a topic for this research paper, you are likely to benefit from browsing in the current journals section of the library.

Various on-line databases, especially PsycINFO, will be helpful to you as you identify three closely related studies that form a foundation for your study. However, another helpful method is to find a recent article (either through browsing or by conducting an on-line literature search) that describes a study on the topic of interest to you. A recent original research study will cite the related research that preceded and informed the study. By using the citations and reference list, you may be able to find additional studies that are relevant to your topic. I advise you to avoid relying only on computerized databases to identify appropriate sources.

#### Content of the Research Proposal

Your research proposal should begin with a review of the published research and theory on a particular topic or psychological disorder. To frame your own research proposal, you will describe the questions that previous researchers and theorists have asked and the research that has been conducted to find answers to these questions. For this review, you should cover a set of closely related works on a single relatively narrow topic or question. Describe each study in a paragraph or so, and include at least a brief description of all relevant aspects of the research design, results, and conclusion. Use transitional sentences and paragraphs to interrelate and evaluate research studies and to explain how one question in this area leads to others.

The latter portion of your paper should describe your proposal for addressing a significant new question of interest. What new research can you design that might help understand or explain an issue of interest? New research ideas come in many types. For example, new research may examine a well-studied approach with a new participant population. It is possible, for example, that cognitive behavioral therapy is associated with different outcomes when used with children than with older adults. If you choose a new subject population, explain why this population might be especially relevant to the question you are asking. **DO NOT** simply say that you will collect a larger, more randomly selected, or more diverse sample from the population. Getting a better sample always improves research -- this proposal is to add something substantive to what we know about a particular psychological problem, not just to improve research generally.

Past research provides excellent guidance for research proposals. Do not come up with your own research design before you have reviewed the literature in an area. The best research is informed by the work of previous researchers.

### Structure of the Research Proposal

Your research proposal should include the following sections:

Title and Title Page. The title of your paper should be descriptive of the area of research that you are reviewing. If you are writing about a particular memory phenomenon, name it in the title. If you are writing about a particular participant population, name them in the title. Your title might, for example, be something like, “Research on PTSD in domestic violence survivors.”

Introduction. Begin this section on the second page of your paper, with the title at the top of the page. (Do not use the heading “Introduction,” even though that is what this section is.)

This section should review theories and research on the issue you have chosen. Describe what is currently known about the phenomena of interest, what theories have been proposed concerning the phenomena, and what findings are well-supported. What have previous researchers found? Each study description should be about a paragraph in length.

At the end of the introduction, describe the hypothesis for the study you propose. Based on the earlier research, what do you propose to study next? Very briefly outline how you propose to study this question and what you expect to find. At this point, shift to a verb tense that refers to the future (e.g., “Participants will be asked to complete...”), and stay with this tense as long as you are describing proposed research, results, and conclusions.

Method. In the method section, you should describe the technical details of your proposed study. Carefully model the methods you propose on those in previous research. Describe the participants and methods for the study as well as the procedures you would follow as a researcher. A general principle for method sections is that every detail that might affect the results of the study should be described. Be sure to include a clear description of the measurements you would take to test your hypothesis or compare one group of participants to another.

Results. Describe the results you expect to be most likely given past research or theorizing on the topic. If you expressed a hypothesis for this study earlier in your paper, note what results would be consistent with the hypothesis. Describe, in general terms, the results you would obtain if your hypothesis or predominant theories are correct. You need not include specific numbers, but identify how participants or groups are most likely to perform.

In most areas of research, there is more than one theory or explanation that is relevant to a particular study. How might you explain your hypothesized findings from alternative theoretical perspectives? In this section of the proposal, you should also write about other possible and plausible outcomes for the study. What if your results don’t support your hypothesis? Describe possible alternative outcomes and what they might indicate about the issue you are studying.

Discussion. Your paper should end with a general discussion of the topic of your paper. How important is this issue to the field as a whole? Why is it important? Where does research in this area seem to be going? Do we know a great deal about the topic or not? What principles have already been established? What is yet to be known? Are there practical applications of this work?