

**Topics in Cognition  
Psychology 458  
Spring 2008**

**Instructor:** Derek Besner

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**Office Hours:** If you want to set up a meeting or ask questions outside of class, then I welcome you e-mailing me ([dbesner@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:dbesner@uwaterloo.ca)) or coming to my office (I'm happy to see students in my office at most times, or, failing that, to set up a time to meet). You can always email me with questions (including most nights and weekends). I try and answer all questions over email within several hours.

**Course meet time and place: Wednesdays, 12:30-2:30 PAS 3026 (Alice Bast room)**

What is this course about?

The intent is to expose students to a fair number of issues that have concerned some cognitive psychologists in recent years. These issues can be considered “hot” in several senses. One is that they have attracted a lot of attention recently (or it seems likely that they will do so). Another reason they are hot is because the results are often not immediately “intuitive” and in some cases they tend to make people who are products of Western civilization uncomfortable because they challenge our ideas about memory, consciousness and control. The main idea is to have intellectual “fun”.

**Marking scheme**

Formal marking, in today's climate, tends to undermine learning for the sake of learning (intellectual curiosity). Students tend to be very anxious about their marks and how they will affect their future choices (e.g., graduate school). In an attempt to balance the formal need for marking with the goal of stimulating “interest” in the papers themselves I've come up with the following scheme.

**Presentations (25%)**

Each student will present at least one and likely more papers. This presentation should be clear, comprehensive and yet concise (but please, let's not get bogged down in the details of things like the F ratios). It is a good idea for the presenter to meet with me well in advance of their presentation to discuss the paper, and for them to show me an outline (or even better, the power point of their talk), but I do not require students to do this.

**Participation (10%)**

I'm well aware that some students are shy and find speaking in class to be onerous. That is the reason the mark for participation is low. That said, part of a university education involves the formal presentation of self (and this matters in all walks of life outside the university). Like everything else, skill develops with practice.

**Quizzes (40%)**

These will be **short**, multiple choice or short answer quizzes every second week (not counting the first week of presentations). They will be held at the beginning of class and take up no more than 15 minutes.

### **Commentaries (20%)**

There are 4 of these. You will summarize or provide a commentary on any **one** of the week's topics. The maximum length is one double spaced page, and the paper must be typed. The font size can be no larger than 12 point. Spelling and grammar count (just as they do in the real world--like it or not, people make judgments about you based on your writing, along with your attention to detail, and care in presentation).

### **Proposal (5%)**

Lastly, you are to generate an experiment (i.e., describe it in writing in no more than a single double spaced page) that will address **one** of any of the topics we discuss in the course. The proposed experiment should be designed to throw some new light on the topic. The rationale should be clearly presented, along with specific details of what the experiment will consist of, and what outcomes will support what account.

Note: The commentaries and proposal can be handed in no later than the last day of class (but of course, there is nothing preventing you from submitting these earlier).

**Reading material.** References for these papers will be provided in due course.

### **Computer information**

All undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts may obtain a free computer account on Waterloo Polaris. The account gives students free access to applications such as word processing, statistical and graphics packages, spreadsheets, and electronic mail, as well as the Internet. Students are charged for printing and can put money for printing on to their Arts Computing Resources Account at PAS 1080 using their WATCARD. Instructions for obtaining a Polaris account are available from the Arts Computing Office. Course materials will be available on ACE. If there is a discrepancy between the hard copy outline and the outline posted on ACE, the outline on ACE will be deemed the official version.

### **Students with Disabilities**

*"Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term."*

### **Academic Offences**

*"Note on avoidance of academic offenses: All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offense, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. When the commission of an offense is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline) which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (p.1:11). If you need help in learning how to avoid offenses such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean."*

*In addition, I would like to direct your attention to the following link to the Arts Faculty Web page, "How to Avoid Plagiarism and Other Written Offences: A Guide for Students and Instructors" (<http://watarts.uwaterloo.ca/~sager/plagiarism.html>)*