

**Topics in Cognition  
Psychology 458  
Spring, 2017**

**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: Tuesday/Thursdays 11:30 to 12:50.**

What is this course about?

The intent is to expose students to a relatively small number of issues that have concerned some “cognitive” psychologists in recent years (experimental cognitive psychology; cognitive neuropsychology; computational cognitive psychology). These issues have attracted a fair amount of attention over the years. The main idea here is to look closely at how investigators translate ideas into experiments, and consider whether we are persuaded by their data and arguments. The emphasis is on critical thinking about the experimental logic, design, and analysis in the papers.

**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 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 multiple papers as there are only 12 students in the class. The 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). Nevertheless, you, as the presenter, should have all the background information at your finger-tips, if asked. I would like the presenter to meet with me in advance of their presentation to discuss the paper, and for them to show me an outline (or even better, the developing power point of their talk). It is important to **display** the data from the experiment (not just give a verbal summary based on the data).

## **Participation (10%)**

I'm well aware that some students find speaking in class to be onerous. That is the reason the mark for participation is low. Note: Half of this 10% mark is given as an incentive—everyone gets it. The other half involves active participation. Part of a university education involves the formal presentation of self (this matters in all walks of life outside the university). Like everything else, skill develops with practice. Part of “participation” will involve me asking students what they think about exchanges that take place in class. In other words, I'm looking for students to take part in the discussions.

## **Quizzes (65%)**

These will be relatively short, multiple choice or short answer quizzes every week (not counting the first weeks we meet so as to give us a chance to get up and running. Hence, the first quiz occurs on week 2). The quizzes will be held at the beginning of class on Thursdays, and take up no more than 20 minutes.

**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>)*