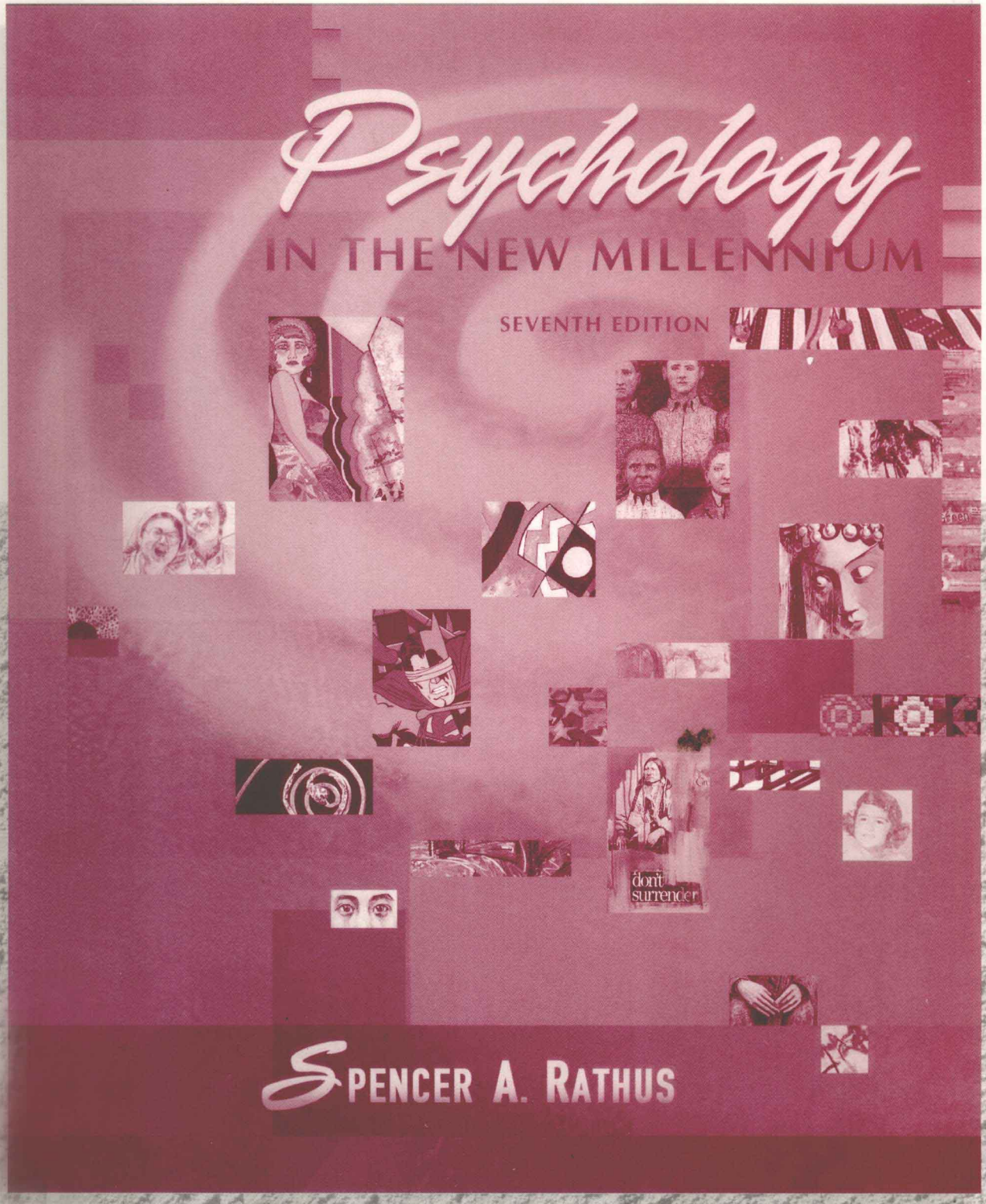
Thinking and Writing About



THINKING AND WRITING ABOUT *Psychology* IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

7th Edition

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Harcourt Brace College Publishers

Fort Worth • Philadelphia • San Diego
New York • Orlando • Austin • San Antonio
Toronto • Montreal • London • Sydney • Tokyo

Address for editorial correspondence:
Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 301 Commerce Street, Suite 3700, Fort Worth, TX 76180.

Address for orders:
Harcourt Brace & Company, 6277 Sea Harbor Drive, Orlando, FL 32887-6777,
1-800-782-4479 or 1-800-435-0001 (in Florida).

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 0-15-507171-8

8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 202 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Contents

This book is primarily intended to stimulate students to think and write about psychology. In doing so, however, this book will also help colleges, professors, and students meet two widespread pedagogical objectives:

1. Critical thinking,
2. Writing across the curriculum.

CRITICAL THINKING

> The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives.
>
> —Robert M. Hutchins

> A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.
>
> —William James

Most of us take a certain number of "truths" for granted. One is that authority figures like doctors and government leaders usually provide us with factual information and are generally equipped to make the decisions that affect our lives. But when two doctors disagree as to whether or not surgery is necessary to cure an illness, how can both be correct? We need to rely on ourselves to some degree and to seek the information we need to make our own decisions.

In the fifteenth century it was widely believed that the Earth was flat. In the sixteenth century it was widely believed that the sun revolved around the Earth. It seems that widely held beliefs are invariably replaced by other widely held beliefs in the fullness of time. It is the hallmark of an educated person to remain skeptical of accepted views and to regard even the most popular beliefs as working assumptions. In the twentieth century, most astronomers widely believe that the universe began with a "big bang" and has been expanding ever since. It is fascinating to speculate on what views will replace these beliefs tomorrow.

In order to help students evaluate claims, arguments, and widely held beliefs, most colleges today encourage *critical thinking*. Critical thinking has many meanings. On one level, it means taking nothing for granted. It means not believing things just because they are in print or because they were uttered by authority figures or celebrities. It means not necessarily believing that it is healthful to express all of your feelings, even if a friend in analysis urges you to do so. On another level, critical thinking refers to a process of thoughtfully analyzing and probing the questions, statements, and arguments of others. It means examining definitions of terms, examining the premises or assumptions behind arguments, and then scrutinizing the logic with which arguments are developed.

GOALS FOR AN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION IN PSYCHOLOGY

Psychologists are working with the Association of American Colleges to establish goals and guidelines for undergraduate education. A psychology task force recently listed nine outcomes or goals for undergraduate education in psychology (McGovern, 1989). The first was to foster a "knowledge base" consisting of important "theories, research findings, and issues in psychology." The second was to promote skills in "critical thinking and reasoning." These thinking skills involve:

Development of skepticism about explanations and conclusions
The ability to inquire about causes and effects
Refinement of curiosity about behavior
Knowledge of research methods
The ability to critically analyze arguments

The emphasis on critical thinking reflects the widespread belief that your college education is intended to do more than provide you with a data bank of useful knowledge. It is also meant to provide you with intellectual tools that allow you to learn from and analyze information independently. With these tools, you can continue to educate yourself for the rest of your life.

Colleges nurture academic freedom, so few professors require (or want) students to share and express their own beliefs. By and large, professors are more concerned that students learn how to question and critically examine psychological theory and research, the points of view of other people, and even their own convictions and values. This does not mean that professors insist that students change their beliefs, either. It does mean, however, that professors usually ask students to *support* the views they express in class and in their writing. If students' definitions of terms are muddy, if their premises are shaky, or if their arguments are illogical, professors may encourage other students to challenge them or may personally point out the fallacies in their arguments. Most professors want students to learn to recognize the premises of their arguments, to consider whether they really accept these premises, and to understand whether or not they draw logical conclusions from them.

Some Features of Critical Thinking

This section summarizes some of the principles of critical thinking discussed in Chapter 1 of the textbook.

1. **Be skeptical.**
2. **Examine definitions of terms.**
3. **Examine the assumptions or premises of arguments.**
4. **Be cautious in drawing conclusions from evidence.**
5. **Consider alternative interpretations of research evidence.**
6. **Do not oversimplify.**
7. **Do not overgeneralize.**
8. **Apply critical thinking to all areas of life.**

Recognizing Common Fallacies in Arguments

Another aspect of critical thinking is learning to recognize the fallacies in other people's claims and arguments. The following examples of fallacious arguments were discussed in Chapter 1 of the textbook.

1. **Arguments Directed to the Person (*Argumentum ad Hominem*)**
2. **Arguments Employing Force (*Argumentum ad Baculum*)**
3. **Appeals to Authority (*Argumentum ad Verecundiam*)**
4. **Appeals to Popularity (*Argumentum ad Populum*)**

As you complete the writing exercises in this book, be skeptical of claims and arguments. Critically examine the evidence presented rather than focusing on the authority, force, or appeal of the people making the argument.

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Books are the carriers of civilization.
—Barbara Tuchman

No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.
—Samuel Johnson

I love being a writer. What I can't stand is the paperwork.
—Peter De Vries

> Writing is the only thing that, when I do it, I don't feel I should be doing something else.
> —Gloria Steinem

"Writing across the curriculum" refers to writing in every subject. You naturally write in an English composition course, and you may be assigned brief or long papers in many other courses. The concept behind writing across the curriculum is that every subject presents an opportunity for expressing yourself in writing and enhancing your writing skills.

Why all this emphasis on writing? Throughout high school and college, many students have the feeling that compositions and papers are little more than part of the price they have to pay to get a diploma and, eventually, a decent job. They do not see writing as something that is valuable in itself, however.

The fact is that writing is essential, not only in college but also in most professional careers. Business executives need to be able to communicate their ideas through writing. Marketing plans, advertising copy, and proposals for new products must all be fleshed out in words and sentences. Very few lawyers put on courtroom shows like the fabled Perry Mason; most lawyers spend far more time writing contracts and persuasive letters. Technicians, engineers, and scientists have to be able to write precise reports. Think of all the writing that goes into directions for using a stove or a VCR. Consider the detailed writing that is found in armed forces weapons manuals. Engineers and scientists also write technical articles for journals; they review the research in their fields and report on their own research studies. They have to be able to write clearly enough so that other people can follow their directions and arrive at the same results accurately and safely. Doctors, psychologists, counselors, nurses, and dental hygienists must be able to write up reports describing the problems and progress of their patients and clients. Managers of fast-food restaurants write evaluations of employees. Everyone writes business letters of one kind or another—or is inconvenienced if he or she cannot.

Learning how to write also teaches you how to *think*. Part of writing certainly involves proper spelling and usage. In writing, however, you are also forced to organize your ideas and present them logically. Training and practice in writing are therefore also training and practice in thinking.

Writing skills are thus not for college only. Writing skills are not just the province of English teachers, poets, novelists, and journalists. They are for everyone who is receiving an education and contemplating a career.

Many college students fear writing assignments. Many students have not received enough training in high school to make them feel comfortable. Most college instructors of writing see their job as enhancing their students' creativity, critical thinking, and explanatory powers, but not teaching students basic sentence structure and punctuation. Professors in other disciplines often rely completely on short-answer tests to arrive at grades. (They may protest that their job is to teach their subject, not to suffer through their students' incoherent essays and papers.) High-school English teachers sometimes complain that basic skills were not taught in the elementary schools. Elementary school teachers, in turn, often criticize children's home environments for not helping incubate basic writing skills. Writing skills, in short, are valued in college and are essential afterward, but they are taught only by a minority of instructors in a few disciplines.

KINDS OF WRITING

There are many kinds of writing. Writing can be broken down into fiction (imaginary happenings, such as short stories, plays, and novels) and nonfiction (such as directions for assembling machines, essays, theme papers, and term papers). The writing of fiction is usually taught in creative writing courses, although fiction is sometimes assigned in freshman composition classes. Students need not be good at writing fiction to get by in college—unless they're making up excuses as to why they are late with their assignments! By and

large, however, college students are required to show or develop some skill at writing nonfiction.

The kinds of nonfiction required of college students are mostly essay answers on tests, theme papers, and term papers. Here we focus on theme papers and research papers, some of which are term papers. A theme is a relatively short paper and is the most common type of paper assigned in courses like freshman composition. There are different kinds of themes, including argumentative, descriptive, and expository.

The aim of the ***argumentative theme*** is to persuade the reader to adopt a certain point of view. Papers intended to convince the reader that Lady Macbeth was motivated by infertility or that the greenhouse effect will eventually cause persistent droughts in the Midwestern breadbasket are argumentative.

A ***descriptive theme*** paints in words persons, places, or ideas. The infamous "What I Did on My Summer Vacation" theme is basically descriptive. If you have poetic urges, it is usually best to give vent to them in descriptive themes. Expository themes are explanatory in nature. They are concrete and logically developed.

Expository themes apply to the instructions in your cookbook for concocting guacamole and to laboratory reports. Each discipline (art, biology, physics, psychology, etc.) has its own way of doing things, its own traditions, but they also have some things in common: Explanations are kept as brief and precise as possible. Usually, you explain what you set out to do, why you set out to do it, what you actually did, what you found out, and, sometimes, the implications of what you discovered.

TYPES OF PSYCHOLOGY PAPERS

The types of papers or articles that are printed in psychology journals are examples of expository themes. Three of the most common kinds of expository themes found in the psychological literature are reports of empirical research studies, reviews of the literature on various topics, and theoretical articles.

These papers are most often written in "APA format." ***APA*** stands for American Psychological Association, and the format referred to is the standard for articles that are published in APA journals. Most psychology journals that are not published by the APA also require the APA format.

The APA format is somewhat rigid, but its purpose is to help writers report information clearly and concisely, so that readers may avail themselves of the information without obstacles. Put it another way: the APA format is designed to prevent writers from "getting in the way" of reporting their research findings or theoretical concepts.

Reports of Empirical Studies

These are reports of original research. Such reports must be to the point (show economy in expression) and broken into standard sections. The usual sections or parts of reports of empirical research studies are:

■***Introduction*** The introduction sets the stage for your research by stating the problem, briefly reviewing previous research in the area, and showing how your research will test or answer some of the issues in the area.

■***Method*** The purpose of this section is to explain what you did so clearly that people reading the report could replicate (duplicate) your work. Describe the subjects or participants, how they were selected for the study, how many actually participated and how many withdrew through the course of the study; the procedures that were used, including the treatments and the equipment; and the methods of assessment that were employed to measure the dependent variables (outcomes). If the details of the treatment or the apparatus are lengthy, you may include them in an appendix at the end of the article or indicate, in a footnote,

how the reader may obtain more detailed information.

▪***Results*** This section reports your findings.

▪***Discussion*** The discussion section usually begins with a brief summary of the previous three sections (preferably one paragraph).

The section then relates the findings to previous research in the area, discusses the implications of the findings for psychological theory, and may suggest directions for future research.

Reviews of the Literature

Rather than report your own original research, literature reviews critically evaluate the previous research in a field of study. The purposes of a review article are to summarize what is known for the reader and to point out the strengths and shortcomings of prior research. Psychology textbooks, such as your introductory psychology textbook, may be considered reviews of the literature in various fields of psychology.

Literature reviews frequently summarize research chronologically—that is, they may be organized according to the sequence of the research in the field and show how new ideas developed out of the testing of older ideas. They may also be organized topically. One section, for example, may review research with human beings, and another section may review studies with lower animals. Or one section may review correlational studies, and another, experimental research.

Review articles also have introductions and discussion sections.

Theoretical Papers

These papers evaluate and advance psychological theory in the fields of psychology.

In an introductory section, the author will usually state the theoretical problem and summarize much theoretical thinking up to the present day. There may then be a discussion of the shortcomings of current theoretical knowledge. Such shortcomings may involve theoretical contradictions or defects.

It may be pointed out, for example, that some tenets of psychodynamic theory are unscientific because they cannot be *disproved*.

It may be pointed out that the behavior-therapy technique of systematic desensitization is not perfectly behavioral because it relies on mental imagery. Other shortcomings may involve inconsistencies between psychological theory and empirical evidence. The evidence, that is, may contradict the theory. The theory may suggest that increasing motivation enhances performance, but the evidence may show that increasing motivation helps up to a certain point, but then impairs performance. In a theoretical article, the concluding sections often suggest modifications to the theory that render the theory more logical or more consistent with empirical evidence.

Common Features

Psychology articles also include title pages, abstracts, and references. Your instructor may require that assigned papers also contain these elements, and that they be written in "APA format."

▪***Title Page*** The title page should include:

- **The title of the paper.** Keep the title as short as possible. The *Publication Manual* of the American Psychological Association suggests that phrases such as "A Study of" and "An Experimental Investigation of" are best omitted from the title.

- **The by-line.** The by-line consists of the author's name (or authors' names) and the institution at which the study was conducted (in your case, your college or university).

▪***Abstract*** An abstract is a brief summary of the paper's contents. The abstract should immediately inform the reader (or peruser) about the purposes, methods, and findings of the study, although it

must be limited to a maximum of 150 words. Because the abstract must pack in a great deal of information into a limited format, it can pose quite a challenge.

Abstracts are used by abstracting and information services to allow scientists who are searching the literature to determine whether or not your article is among the literature they need to review. When writing an abstract, ask yourself whether or not the information you are including would allow another individual to make such a decision.

■***References*** Psychological articles contain only the works that are cited in the article. They are not the same thing as a ***bibliography***, which may contain a list of all of the works on a subject (good luck!) or at least a list of all the works which have had an influence on your writing of the article.

The *Publication Manual* of the American Psychological Association notes the following rules for referencing:

- The text of the paper and the list of references must be in agreement. Every study and author in the paper must be referenced in the list, and vice versa.
- References are placed in alphabetical order.
- References to the same authorship are presented chronologically, with the earliest publications listed first.
- References in the text of the paper and in the reference list are written as shown in Table 1 on pages 7–8. Figure 1 on page 9 shows a partial list of references for a psychology article or paper as they would appear at the end of the paper.

Term Papers

Term papers differ from briefer theme papers mainly in length. The paper is called a ***term paper*** because it is supposed to take a good part of the term to write it, or because it is intended to reflect what you have learned during the term. A term paper in psychology is more likely to be a review of the literature on a subject than to be a report of empirical research.

GUIDELINES FOR GOOD WRITING

Just as no two people are exactly alike (even identical twins have their own private thoughts), no two people write exactly alike. Good writing takes many forms. Some people use slang very well; others fare better when they take a more formal approach. Some writers show strong organizational skills; others have a fine poetic touch and the ability to create vivid images through words. Yet, there are a number of guidelines that hold true for most of us most of the time.

Complete the Assignment

It may not matter how your intelligence and sophistication shine through or how your prose sparkles if you do not follow instructions and carry out the assignment. Make sure that you understand the instructions. If your professor asks for a reaction paper to an essay, make sure that you understand what the professor means by *reaction paper*. Don't hesitate to ask in class; if you are unclear about how to carry out the assignment, other students may be also. If, however, you are concerned that you might take up too much class time, or if you want still more information than can be covered in class, see your instructor during office hours.

If general discussion of the requirements does not create a clear picture for you, ask for examples. You can also ask the instructor to show you one or more models (pieces of writing) that fulfill the assignment.

Table 1: Examples of References in APA Format

Reference in Text	Reference in List of References
First citation for two to five authors: (Abramson, Garber, & Seligman, 1980) Subsequent citations for three or more authors: (Abramson et al., 1980)	Abramson, L. Y., Garber, J., & Seligman, M. E. P. (1980). Learned helplessness in humans: An attributional hypothesis. In G. Garber & M. E. P. Seligman (Eds.), Human helplessness: Theory and application. (pp. 3-34). New York: Academic Press. [Comments: authors' names are inverted; only initial word (and word following colon) of title of book or chapter of book is capitalized; names of editors are *not* inverted; name of book is underlined (or italicized).]
First and subsequent citations for two authors: (Agras, & Kirkley, 1986)	Agras, W. S., & Kirkley, B. G. (1986). Bulimia: Theories of etiology. In K. D. Brownell & J. P. Foreyt (Eds.), Handbook of eating disorders. (pp. 367-378). New York: Basic Books.
First and subsequent citations for two authors: (Ainsworth, & Bowlby, 1991)	Ainsworth, M. D. S., & Bowlby, J. (1991). An ethological approach to personality development. American Psychologist, 46, 333-341. [Comments: only initial word of title of journal or newspaper *article* is capitalized; name of journal is capitalized and underlined (or italicized); volume of journal is underlined (or italicized); page numbers stand alone (without "p." or "pp.").]
First and subsequent citations for one author: (Altman, 1991)	Altman, L. K. (1991, June 18). W.H.O. says 40 million will be infected with AIDS virus by 2000. The New York Times, p. C3. [Comments: newspaper article shows precise date; name of newspaper is capitalized and underlined (or italicized); no volume or issue number is used; page(s) of article is/are preceded by "p." or "pp."]
Citations for organization as author: (American Psychological Association, 1990)	American Psychological Association. (1990). Ethical principles of psychologists. American Psychologist, 45, 390-395.
First and subsequent citations for six or more authors: (Antoni, et al., 1991)	Listing for six or more authors: Antoni, M. H., et al. (1991). Cognitive-behavioral stress management intervention buffers distress responses and immunologic changes following notification of HIV-1 seropositivity. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 59, 906-915.
First and subsequent citations for single author: (Bandura, 1991)	Bandura, A. (1991). Human agency: The rhetoric and the reality. The American Psychologist, 46, 157-162.

Continued

Table 1, continued

Reference in Text	Reference in List of References
Citation for first article by same authorship in given year: (Baron, 1990a)	Baron, R. A. (1990a). Environmentally induced positive affect: Its impact on self-efficacy, task performance, negotiation, and conflict. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 20, 368-384. [Comment: letter *a* is used to denote reference to first article by the author(s) in a given year.]
Citation for second article by same authorship in given year: (Baron, 1990b)	Baron, R. A. (1990b). Countering the effects of destructive criticism: The relative efficacy of four interventions. Journal of Applied Psychology, 75, 235-245. [Comment: letter *b* is used to denote reference to second article by the author(s) in a given year.]
First citation for five or fewer authors: (Beck, Brown, Berchick, Stewart, & Steer, 1990).	Beck, A. T., Brown, G., Berchick, R. J., Stewart, B. L., & Steer, R. A. (1990). Relationship between hopelessness and ultimate suicide. American Journal of Psychiatry, 147, 190-195.
Subsequent citations for three or more authors: (Beck, et al., 1990).	
First and subsequent citations for two authors: (Beck, & Freeman, 1990)	Beck, A. T., & Freeman, A. (1990). Cognitive therapy of personality disorders. New York: Guilford. [Comment: book title is underlined or italicized; only first word of title is capitalized.]
(Beck, & Young, 1985)	Beck, A. T., & Young, J. E. (1985). Depression. In D. H. Barlow (Ed.), Clinical handbook of psychological disorders (pp. 206-244). New York: Guilford Press. [Comment: reference to a chapter in a book edited by one editor.]
(Behrens, 1990)	Behrens, D. (1990, September 21). Test-tube baby in tug-of-war. New York Newsday, pp. 3, 23. [Comment: reference to newspaper article found on nonconsecutive pages.]
(Blakeslee, 1992a)	Blakeslee, S. (1992a, January 7). Scientists unraveling chemistry of dreams. The New York Times, pp. C1, C10. [Comment: Why is the date listed as 1992a?]
(Blakeslee, 1992b)	Blakeslee, S. (1992b, January 22). An epidemic of genital warts raises concern but not alarm. The New York Times, p. C12.

Figure 1: A Partial List of References Written in the Format Recommended By the American Psychological Association

REFERENCES

Abraham, L. K. (1993). Mama might be better off dead: The failure of health care in urban America. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Abramson, L. Y., Garber, J., & Seligman, M. E. P. (1980). Learned helplessness in humans: An attributional hypothesis. In G. Garber & M. E. P. Seligman (Eds.), Human helplessness: Theory and application. (pp. 3-34). New York: Academic Press.

Ader, D. N., & Johnson, S. B. (1994). Sample description, reporting, and analysis of sex in psychological research: A look at APA and APA division journals in 1990. American Psychologist, 49, 216-218.

Agras, W. S., & Kirkley, B. G. (1986). Bulimia: Theories of etiology. In K. D. Brownell & J. P. Foreyt (Eds.), Handbook of eating disorders. (pp. 367-378). New York: Basic Books.

Ainsworth, M. D. S., & Bowlby, J. (1991). An ethological approach to personality development. American Psychologist, 46, 333-341.

Aldag, R. J., & Fuller, S. R. (1993). Beyond fiasco: A reappraisal of the groupthink phenomenon and a new model of group decision processes. Psychological Bulletin, 113, 533-552.

Altman, L. K. (1991, June 18). W.H.O. says 40 million will be infected with AIDS virus by 2000. The New York Times, p. C3.

American Psychological Association. (1990). Ethical principles of psychologists. American Psychologist, 45, 390-395.

Antoni, M. H., et al. (1991). Cognitive-behavioral stress management intervention buffers distress responses and immunologic changes following notification of HIV-1 seropositivity. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 59, 906-915.

Baron, R. A. (1990a). Environmentally induced positive affect: Its impact on self-efficacy, task performance, negotiation, and conflict. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 20, 368-384.

Baron, R. A. (1990b). Countering the effects of destructive criticism: The relative efficacy of four interventions. Journal of Applied Psychology, 75, 235-245.

Beck, A. T., Brown, G., Berchick, R. J., Stewart, B. L., & Steer, R. A. (1990). Relationship between hopelessness and ultimate suicide. American Journal of Psychiatry, 147, 190-195.

Beck, A. T., & Freeman, A. (1990). Cognitive therapy of personality disorders. New York: Guilford.

Beck, A. T., & Young, J. E. (1985). Depression. In D. H. Barlow (Ed.), Clinical handbook of psychological disorders (pp. 206-244). New York: Guilford Press.

Behrens, D. (1990, September 21). Test-tube baby in tug-of-war. New York Newsday, pp. 3, 23.

Blakeslee, S. (1992a, January 7). Scientists unraveling chemistry of dreams. The New York Times, pp. C1, C10.

Blakeslee, S. (1992b, January 22). An epidemic of genital warts raises concern but not alarm. The New York Times, p. C12.

Write for Your Audience

If you are writing a children's story, keep the vocabulary simple and the sentences short. If you are writing an argumentative theme to persuade pro-choice people that abortion is morally wrong, don't begin with, "Abortion is murder and people who support abortion are murderers." All you will accomplish is to alienate your audience. Instead, write something like, "Abortion is a complex and troubling issue to most of us, and people on all sides of the issue share deep, sincere convictions." In this way, you recognize your audience's earnestness and get them involved. You can develop your particular viewpoints later.

If you are writing a journal article for professional colleagues, follow APA guidelines to the letter. Be concise, clear, and organized.

Write Clearly and Simply

Most good writing is reasonably easy to read. Don't have the idea that intelligent writing has to be hard to follow, like a Henry James novel or a Shakespearean play. Unless your assignment is to write a Victorian novel or an Elizabethan play, don't try to manufacture an intricate style or several layers of meaning.

The APA *Publication Manual* advises you to present your ideas in a logical order, express them smoothly, and choose your words carefully. On page 13 are examples of writing that lacks clarity and simplicity, and of changes that make the examples clearer, simpler, and at least a bit better.

AWFUL	BETTER
Psychologists have engaged in complex correlational studies among peoples of diverse cultural subgroups to ascertain whether or not various variables related to the types of stimulation received in the home have effects on children's performance on intelligence tests and in the school.	Psychologists have correlated features of the home environment with the IQ scores and achievements of children from diverse ethnic groups.
Tyrants may arrive at the point where the recipients of their despotism are no longer swayed by their inhumanity.	People may lose their fear of tyrants.
In your writing, it is a good idea to keep your sentences as simple as you can reasonably do.	Keep sentences simple.
There are many different views and controversies surrounding the ethical nature of punishment and its effects on children's behavior in the school setting.	There is controversy concerning the ethics and efficacy of punishment in the school setting.

Be Willing to Make Mistakes

> Failure is the condiment that gives success its flavor.
>
> —Truman Capote

No college student is a perfect writer. Everyone makes mistakes. If you didn't make mistakes, you would not need an education.

The point is to learn from your errors. When some aspect of a writing exercise is marked as poor, or wrong, make sure that you understand why. If you do not, you may repeat the mistake.

Keep a Notebook or a Journal

Creative writers, journalism students, and English majors are encouraged to keep notebooks to jot down important thoughts as they occur.

Sometimes they record the events around them—the heavy sky that threatens to burst into a storm or the suspended animation of a frozen January hillside; at other times they record their inmost thoughts and feelings.

As a psychology student, you may wish to keep a journal in which you note people's behavior under various circumstances. How do you and other people respond to stress? To feeling that you are "in love"? To a film or a TV show. Jot down conditions that make it easier for your to learn academic material. Consider your motives for doing things and your responses to your successes and failures. You may also jot down potential psychological research studies that occur to you.

Determine the Length of a Paper Logically

Students are perpetually concerned about how long a paper should be. The correct answer is simple in principle, but it leaves many students dissatisfied. Generally speaking, the right number of words is the minimal number of words it takes to do the job. Let me note again that the APA *Publication Manual* urges frugality with words—"economy of expression." Put it another way: Everything else being equal, a briefer paper or research report is better than a longer paper.

If you're not sure how long a paper should be, ask the professor or check out previous papers that earned high grades. If the professor is not specific about numbers of words or pages, perhaps she or he can give you an impression of how long it should take to write the paper. Is it a paper that you ought to be able to write in one afternoon or evening? Perhaps that would be two to five pages long (typed, double-spaced). Is it a term paper that requires a few days of library work and a few more days of writing? If so, 20 to 30 typewritten, double-spaced pages (including footnotes and bibliography) might be in order.

In any case, if the instructor specifies the number of pages for an assignment, be sure to comply. Failure to do so, even by a few pages in one direction or another, can result in a lower grade.

Avoid Plagiarism

> I found your essay to be good and original. However, the part that was original was not good and the part that was good was not original.
>
> —Samuel Johnson

Plagiarism derives from the Latin *plagiarius*, which roughly translates as "kidnapper" in English. Plagiarism is literary theft—the stealing of another person's ideas or words and passing them off as your own.

Let's be honest. (Can we talk here?) Some students intentionally steal the work of others. They pass off a paper that was written by a fraternity brother eight years ago as their own, or they copy passages of books verbatim. Students are not the only plagiarists. New reports now and then carry charges of plagiarism by film script writers or politicians. I have even known architecture students to steal designs from magazines.

Other students plagiarize inadvertently, however. The penalties for plagiarism can be severe. Failing the paper is a minimal penalty; plagiarizers can also fail the course. Now and then, students are pressured to withdraw from college as a result of plagiarism. Stiff penalties seem appropriate for purposeful plagiarism. It is a pity to suffer them, however, for accidental plagiarism.

Professors may not be able to determine whether students have adapted or copied the papers of other students. It is relatively easy, however, for professors to discern passages that have been taken whole from books or articles. The passage may show a level of literary sophistication that exceeds that of the great majority of students. There may be a cogent recounting of facts that could be created only by an expert in the field. There may also be obvious inconsistencies in the paper: The student's own writing may struggle for clarity, while pilfered passages shine through.

The following guidelines will enable you to avoid the pitfalls and penalties of plagiarism.

1. When you mention other people's ideas or theories, attribute the ideas to their proper source. Write, for example,

   Abnormal behavior affects everyone in one way or another (Rathus & Nevid, 1997). If we confine our definition of abnormal behavior to traditional psychological disorders—anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, abuse of alcohol and other drugs, and the like—perhaps one in three of us have been affected (Robins et al., 1984). If we include sexual dysfunctions and difficulties adjusting to the demands of adult life, many more are added. If we extend our definition to include maladaptive or self-defeating behavior patterns like compulsive gambling and dependence on nicotine, a clear majority of us are affected (Rathus & Nevid, 1997).

2. When you use other people's words, either place them in quotation marks or indent the material. Let length be your guide. When a passage runs from a few words to about four lines, use quotation marks. If a passage runs to five or more lines, indent the material similarly to the way I indented the preceding material on abnormal behavior. Whether you use quotation marks or indent, note the source of the material, including the page or pages on which it is found.
3. You can usually use a brief string (say two or three words) of your source's writing without quotation marks. Use quotation marks, however, if one of the words is a technical term or shows a fine literary turn of phrase—something you might not have arrived at on your own.
4. Hold on to the outline (if you used one) and the working drafts of your paper. If you are falsely accused of plagiarism, you can trace the development of your ideas and your phrasing.

Pick a Topic

> You say there is nothing to write about. Then write to me that there is nothing to write about.
>
> —Pliny the Younger

> There are no dull subjects. There are only dull writers.
>
> —H. L. Mencken

Professors may assign concrete topics, such as a reaction to a piece of writing, or they may provide a list of topics from which you must choose. Sometimes professors purposefully leave topics wide open. Professors may also assign a paper on some aspect of a topic, which tends to leave the decision pretty much to the student.

There are no hard-and-fast rules to picking a topic. By and large, however, writers—including college students—tend to be at their best on subjects with which they are familiar. Let us consider some motives for picking topics and ways to make them manageable.