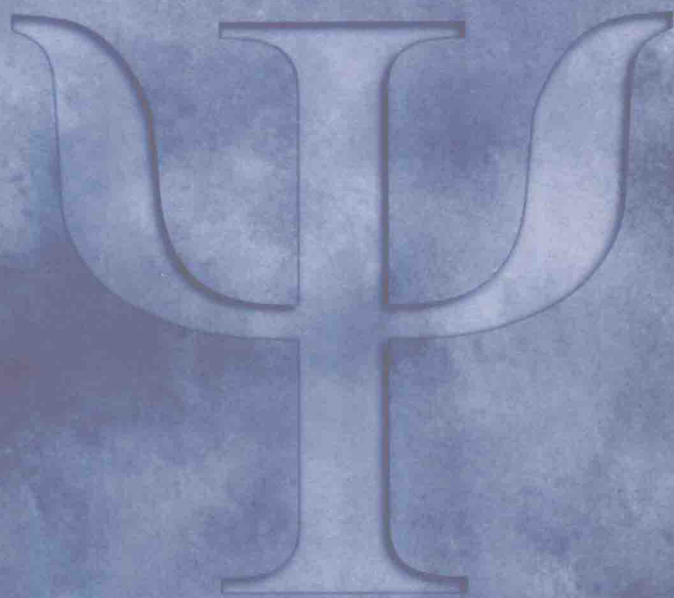


THE PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT WRITER'S MANUAL



JILL M. SCOTT • RUSSELL E. KOCH
GREGORY M. SCOTT • STEPHEN M. GARRISON

The Psychology Student Writer's Manual

Jill M. Scott

Psychologist

Russell E. Koch

Psychologist, University of Oklahoma

Gregory M. Scott

University of Central Oklahoma

Stephen M. Garrison

University of Central Oklahoma



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*The Psychology Student
Writer's Manual*

To
Wyn Chris Molly
Tim
Heather
Melissa

Foreword

Communicating is a remarkable process. As the authors point out, when you communicate, you place “your thoughts in your readers’ minds in exactly the way you want them to be there.” You literally shape the thinking of other people! By any measure, that is a truly extraordinary accomplishment.

But communicating in writing is also an extraordinary challenge: The risk of misunderstanding is relatively high. When we talk together, face-to-face, we can add all kinds of nonverbal cues to clarify our meaning—perhaps a smile to tell our listener that we’re being friendly or just joking, perhaps a frown to show that we are puzzled or confused. Similarly, our listener can provide nonverbal cues that tell us whether our message is being received as we intended it: A raised eyebrow might signal surprise or skepticism; a shake of the head might signal disagreement. We use these cues to clarify and modify our message until we are reasonably sure we have been understood. But none of that feedback is available when we write a message. We have to be especially careful to ensure that our words convey exactly what we mean to say and that they leave no room for ambiguity or misunderstanding. As the authors point out, when writing we need to “communicate clearly and powerfully.”

Poor writing does more than contribute to misunderstanding: It also undermines our credibility. For example, I read the following message posted on one of my Web sites:

In some states and local communities you may encounter a property tax problem, and last some state require the PWC to be registered, AUX is not exempt like state law enforcement agencies. Unit is responsible for safe guarding, maintenance, etc. Also upon turn in (back to the dealer) any damage above fair-wear. Owner/user of loaners must be prepared to fund any costs . . .

I had to spend considerable time decoding that message in order to understand what the writer was trying to say. Not only was it difficult to decipher the meaning, but I was left wondering whether the writer really knew what he was talking about!

In contrast, clear, concise, powerful writing not only communicates your message well, it also helps you to organize your own thoughts. The authors point out that there is a common misconception that our writing simply transfers pre-existing thoughts onto paper. In fact, the process of writing leads to changes in thinking. We discover, in the process of writing, what we think. Writing, thus, is a search for meaning, a “way of ordering your existence.”

Writing is also an excellent way of learning. Psychologists have long held that the best way to learn something is to teach it, and writing is a form of teaching. If you can write about something clearly and concisely, then in all likelihood you understand it well.

The ability to write well is also a highly marketable skill in the workplace. As a former Dean, I frequently met with employers who were visiting our campus to interview students. Their message was clear and consistent: “Give us graduates who can write and speak clearly and concisely. We’ll teach them everything else they need to know to work with our company.”

The Psychology Student Writer’s Manual does a marvelous job of helping you to think and to write more clearly and more forcefully. In that respect, it is arguably one of the most important books you will ever read. Use it wisely and well.

Charles G. Morris
Department of Psychology
University of Michigan

*The Psychology Student
Writer's Manual*

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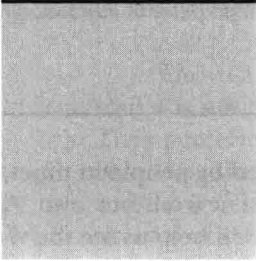
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Introduction: The Discipline of Psychology

Is psychology new to you?

If you are about to write your first paper in psychology, this introduction is for you. It will help you understand what psychology is and what psychologists are trying to achieve when they write, knowledge that will save you time and effort. You may want to read other books about psychology before you begin to write, but some of the most important information you will need is right here, in this brief overview of the discipline.

Are you an experienced student of psychology who needs to review trends in the discipline?

If you have already studied psychology in some detail, you may want to skip this introduction and read Chapters 1–7, which discuss writing and research in general, and then the chapter in Parts 3, 4, or 5 that provides the directions for the specific type of paper you have been assigned. You may find, however, that the introduction helps to refresh your memory and establish your current writing efforts more firmly within the broader framework of the discipline. Wherever you may be in your progress toward mastering the methods and contributing to the rich tradition of psychology, you are encouraged to read this introductory section.

A Brief History

Our modern concepts of psychology have been shaped by people in times, places, and cultures that seem, on the surface, very different from our own. A brief look at some of these writers and their achievements will help us see the vital social connections that link us to all times, places, and cultures. It also will provide us with a sense of the depth and breadth of the study of the field, so that when we write about psychology we do so creatively and knowledgeably. The story of psychology is the story of the human race. Acquaintance with psychology's history provides a context for understanding how the discipline relates to other sciences, how it plays a significant role in culture and politics, and how various theoretical conflicts within the field emerged.

Psychology probably began when the first people, experiencing dreams, visions, and imagination, tried to find a way to understand their thoughts and their behavior. In ancient times "psychologists" would have been the priests, shamans, wizards, or diviners sought out by the community for their powers to give meaning to dreams and visions. Psychology is a combination of two Greek words, *psuke*, meaning "soul," and *logos*, meaning "word." Psychology, literally, is "words about the soul." The existence of dreams, visions, and imagination could have spawned the concept of the soul, which appears in ancient literature for at least a thousand years before the concept of the mind was clearly defined. Inscriptions known as the Book of the Dead, found on Egyptian tombs dating from 2200 B.C.E., depict the soul in association with the heart and instruct readers on how to keep the soul safe as it travels after death. The philosopher Thales of Miletus (624–546 B.C.E.), in an early attempt to understand sensation, proposed that the soul gives motion to the body. Socrates (470–399 B.C.E.) believed that reason was a process by which we may know our own souls and the ultimate truth.

Plato (427–347 B.C.E.), Socrates' most famous student, began to define intelligence when he inquired about whether memories are present at birth and speculated that they are linked through a process of association. In clear and powerful ethical theories, he described the mind as the human capacity to reason. For Plato, reason is an ability to perceive forms, which we would call abstract ideas. He believed that a higher realm of existence, beyond what we know in this world, can be perceived by reason. In this higher realm there exists a series of forms, perfect representations of each thing here on earth. In other words, in the higher world there are forms of men, women, trees, cats, tables, and coats that are more perfect and more real than any particular man, woman, tree, cat, table, or coat on earth.

Plato also formulated basic scientific concepts that help us to distinguish the instincts and traits with which we are born from the behaviors we are taught as we grow up. His writings on the mind initiated scientific inquiries that later led to distinctions between retention and retrieval of memories. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), Plato's most famous student, spoke of the human mind and behavior as being governed by natural laws, as are the stars and seas, and helped to define concepts of memory, perception, and intelligence. For both Plato and Aristotle, however, the mind was not clearly distinguishable from the soul.

Early Christian and medieval thinkers developed the idea that the human soul was not as closely connected to the human body as Aristotle had thought. They perceived humans as central to God's creation and the soul as immortal. Saint Augustine (354–430) recorded observations about his own development as a child and in so doing produced a rudimentary child psychology. Through a process of self-reflection and self-observation, he identified three distinct qualities of the soul: understanding, will, and memory. His work provided a foundation for later research efforts that have become known as the introspective tradition in psychology. During the medieval period, psychology was mostly confined to religion. Theologians interpreted psychological phenomena in theological terms, and priests provided counseling.

Beginning with the Reformation, scientists, philosophers, and clergy studied many topics, including love, sleep, temperament, facial expression, the circulatory system, optics, and learning, that are now considered to fall within the domain of psychology. As formalized thinking grew more sophisticated, theorists demystified bodily functions and emotions.

Historians of psychology credit German scientist Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) with founding the modern science of psychology as an academic *discipline* in 1879, when he began research efforts that resulted in the creation of the first psychology research laboratory, the first psychology research journals, and the first psychology textbooks. Wundt's student Stanley Hall (1844–1924) established the American Psychological Association, and his research in life-span development provided a foundation for the discipline of child psychology. Another of Wundt's American students, Edward Titchener (1867–1927), founded the school of *structuralist psychology* when he identified and described three basic components of the mind: feelings, images, and sensations. Structuralists study the mind by combining objective data from recorded sensory responses with subjective information obtained from emotional responses, dreams, and memories. Structuralist studies are now included within the discipline known as *cognitive psychology*, which attempts to describe how humans think and make decisions.

In contrast to the structuralists, William James (1842–1910) was more interested in the purposes of consciousness than he was in the mind's structure. His approach to the study of psychology was known as *functionalism*, which explores relationships between conscious experience and behavioral observations. Functionalism concerns itself with answering *why* something is in the consciousness, not just *what* is in the consciousness. Learning and motivation studies have developed from methods originating with functionalism.

John Watson (1878–1958) founded American *behaviorism*. Unlike functionalists, Watson focused only on physical responses that may be observed and measured. He denied the reliability of self-perceptions and proposed that psychologists should not be concerned with consciousness at all. B. F. Skinner (1904–1990) developed Watson's ideas further through applications of behavioral reinforcement, a technique wherein behavior is shaped toward a desired goal by rewarding subjects for exhibiting certain behaviors. Behaviorism is currently applied in programs known as behavior modification, biofeedback training, assertiveness training, and self-monitoring. In combination with cognition studies, behaviorism has spawned what is known as the *cognitive-behavioral approach*.

Another approach to understanding human behavior is called *Gestalt psychology*, named by its three founders, Max Wertheimer (1880–1943), Kurt Koffka (1886–1941), and Wolfgang Köhler (1887–1967). These German researchers believed humans see a unified whole that gives meaning to and is more than its individual parts. They rejected the behaviorists' belief that understanding can be drawn only from observable behavior and that learning takes place only mechanically. They also rejected the structuralist idea that perceptions can be explained as discrete items, separate from the whole. Gestalt psychologists believe instead that people achieve sudden understanding through *insight*, which occurs when pieces of information coalesce to create a meaningful whole.

The *psychoanalytic school*, founded by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), departed from previous approaches by emphasizing how unconscious conflicts and motives can direct human behavior. Freud believed that childhood experiences and sexual drives were the cause of emotional conflicts. Defense mechanisms, such as the repression of painful memories, provide humans the tools to mediate unconscious desires and conscious moral strictures. Freud's student Carl Jung (1875–1961) developed a competing school of psychoanalysis based on a concept of a "collective unconsciousness" in which all people exhibit in their dreams the same patterns of archetypal images (visions that have symbolic meaning), such as snakes (representing challenge) and water (representing the subconscious mind).

What Do Psychologists Study and Why?

Psychology examines the nature of human experience and behavior, and explains what we feel, think, and do. Almost everyone goes through such processes as becoming angry, falling in love, learning, fearing, perceiving, sensing, remembering, forgetting, being dependent, and responding to group pressure, but most people do not fully understand the origins or implications of these experiences. Psychologists are convinced that Socrates was right when he said that the unexamined life is not worth living. For psychologists the unexamined psychological life is certainly impoverished, and so we examine psychology in large and small ways through techniques developed by thousands of "scientists of the mind."

How Do We Study Psychology?

Psychologists observe and study humans by description, correlation, and experimentation. They describe human behavior through a variety of observation methods we will explain later in this book, such as experiments and case studies. Experimental studies test hypotheses (educated guesses about the nature of relationships) to determine a cause-and-effect relationship between behavioral variables, such as the extent to which anxiety causes overeating. Experimental studies form the core of the science of psychology, since the ability to determine cause and effect allows scientists to make predictions and generalizations that are necessary to develop prognoses and treatments.

Psychology is both a science and an art. In its attempts to discover general principles, locate causal factors, and explore ways in which variables are correlated or experiences described, the field of psychology is a science. In its attempts

to apply general principles clinically to the specific needs of individuals, the field of psychology is an art.

An Eclectic Discipline: Psychology Today

In some ways, the goal of psychological inquiry in the twentieth century is the same as it has been from the discipline's earliest days: to understand human behavior and motivation. As we enter the twenty-first century, however, that inquiry has a complexity unimagined even 40 years ago. The tools of inquiry and methodologies have become ever more sophisticated, most recently through evolving computer capabilities. The research questions, however, remain essentially the same. Still fascinated with human nature, psychologists want to account for individual differences and similarities. They want to know what determines patterns of interaction, development, action, and knowing. The burgeoning number of subdisciplines in psychology reflects the explosion of information being gathered about the human condition.

Psychology in the United States is organized by the American Psychological Association, the American Psychological Society, and numerous regional and state associations that hold annual meetings at which papers are presented and discussions are held. "Program divisions" are groups within these associations organized to study a specific topic, such as individual differences, environmental issues, or geriatrics. Examining a recent list of program divisions will give some idea of the diversity of topics explored within the discipline of psychology. The 1998 annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, held in San Francisco from August 14 to August 18, featured hundreds of papers, roundtable discussions, workshops and seminars, and poster presentations from people organized within the following 50 program divisions:

Division 1 General Psychology

Division 2 The Society for the Teaching of Psychology

Division 3 Experimental Psychology

[No Division 4]

Division 5 Evaluation, Measurement, and Statistics

Division 6 Behavioral Neuroscience and Comparative Psychology

Division 7 Developmental Psychology

Division 8 Society for Personality and Social Psychology

Division 9 Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues

Division 10 Psychology and the Arts

[No Division 11]

Division 12 Clinical Psychology

Division 13 Consulting Psychology

Division 14 The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology

Division 15 Educational Psychology

Division 16 School Psychology

Division 17 Counseling Psychology

Division 18 Psychologists in Public Service
Division 19 Military Psychology
Division 20 Adult Development and Aging
Division 21 Applied Experimental and Engineering Psychologists
Division 22 Rehabilitation Psychology
Division 23 Society for Consumer Psychology
Division 24 Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology
Division 25 Experimental Analysis of Behavior
Division 26 History of Psychology
Division 27 Society for Community Research and Action: Division of Community Psychology
Division 28 Psychopharmacology and Substance Abuse
Division 29 Psychotherapy
Division 30 Psychological Hypnosis
Division 31 State Psychological Association Affairs
Division 32 Humanistic Psychology
Division 33 Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities
Division 34 Population and Environmental Psychology
Division 35 Psychology of Women
Division 36 Psychology of Religion
Division 37 Child, Youth, and Family Services
Division 38 Health Psychology
Division 39 Psychoanalysis
Division 40 Clinical Neuropsychology
Division 41 The American Psychology-Law Society
Division 42 Psychologists in Independent Practice
Division 43 Family Psychology
Division 44 Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian and Gay Issues
Division 45 Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues
Division 46 Media Psychology
Division 47 Exercise and Sport Psychology
Division 48 Peace Psychology
Division 49 Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy
Division 50 Addictions
Division 51 The Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity
Division 52 International Psychology

The Power of Language

The discipline of psychology makes progress only because researchers express their findings in writing for other psychologists and students of psychology to read. To become an effective psychologist, you must be able to communicate not only verbally but in writing. The purpose of this book is to develop your ability to communicate *clearly* and *powerfully*. The most influential psychologists, such as Sigmund Freud and his student Carl Jung, not only developed powerful concepts but also articulated them clearly in their writings.