

**OTRP** online

Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology

Cognitive Psychology  
Psychology 325  
Fall, 2005  
SUNY Geneseo

Dr. Margaret Matlin  
Department of Psychology

## Course Syllabus

### Course Description

This course examines cognitive processes, sometimes called "higher mental processes." Cognitive psychology includes topics such as perception, memory, language, and thinking. The course requires a fairly sophisticated background in psychology. As the Undergraduate Bulletin states, you must have completed both PSYC 250 and PSYC 251 as prerequisites. Therefore, the course is one of the more advanced-level courses in our psychology department.

As the course instructor, I have several goals that I hope each of you will be able to accomplish during the course of this semester:

1. An appreciation of the basic information in cognitive psychology, including both research and theory, as well as an understanding of the complexity of cognitive processes;
2. An understanding of research methods in cognitive psychology, together with the ability to evaluate critically the research in this area;
3. An ability to write a review of the literature on a topic of your choice, related to cognitive psychology; this paper must demonstrate an understanding of the research, an ability to synthesize information, and a mastery of writing style; and
4. An ability to apply your knowledge to your own cognitive processes (for example, when you study for exams and when you solve problems) and to professional areas such as education, communicative disorders, law, clinical psychology, and social relationships.

Your textbook is one I have written, and a thorough understanding of the material in the textbook is essential for the course. You will not be able to obtain this from a superficial reading of the chapters. You should master the terminology and concepts in the textbook, because this is a 300-level course. The lectures and class discussion will assume that you are familiar with this information so that we can emphasize other topics

during our class time together. However, if any part of the textbook is not clear, please let me know and we will discuss that topic in class!

Because the textbook covers the background information, we will typically not review the same material in class. Instead, we will use class time for supplemental lectures, discussions, demonstrations, active-learning exercises, videos, and so forth. In previous semesters, we have had some lively discussions on topics such as memory-improvement techniques, bilingualism, creativity, and making decisions about important life events. I am hopeful that this semester's class will be equally committed to making this course an active-learning experience!

### **READING MATERIAL:**

The textbook will be:

Matlin M. W. (2005). *Cognition* (6th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

[Use only the current edition, with the orange-colored seashell on a black background. The previous 5th edition—with a blue seashell—will not be suitable. The 6th edition has 13 chapters (rather than 12) and more than 700 new references.]

**OFFICE HOURS:** Monday, 3:00-3:50 p.m., Tuesday, 11:30-12:30 p.m. and Thursday, 11:30-12:30 p.m.. On several occasions, I will provide alternative office hours. We will also have extra office hours to allow additional time for students to discuss writing your paper. See me if the regular office hours are not convenient, and we can work out another time to meet! My office is in Sturges, Room 121C (Main floor, right-hand side). If you would like to leave a brief message on my voice mail, the number is (585) 245-5214. My e-mail address is <matlin@geneseo.edu>. Please be sure to include the phrase "Cognitive Psychology" in the subject portion of your e-mail, and proofread your letter to me, so that I can be clear about your message. Also, before contacting me, check to make sure that the answer to your question is not in the course material that has already been distributed. This way, I can quickly provide the assistance you need!

**PAPER:** You must write a 9-11 page literature-review paper in order to pass the course. The paper's topic can be any subject of interest to you that is related to cognitive psychology. You may want to choose a topic that will be relevant to your future professional work. A description of the paper will be distributed separately. I welcome the opportunity to discuss your paper with you, though you are not required to see me.

Because of several unfortunate incidents in the past, papers will be strictly monitored for plagiarism. You must also be particularly careful about citing your sources in APA style throughout your paper. (Also, please keep copies of all your drafts and of the articles you photocopied from journals. Do not discard any of this material

until after you have received your semester grade in the course.) The purpose of this paper is to give you the opportunity to understand one topic in depth and to provide practice in understanding, organizing, and reporting material related to cognitive psychology.

By September 29, you must turn in a preview for your paper that includes a paper title, a paragraph describing the scope of the paper, and two reference citations in APA style. The paper itself will be due on October 27.

**EXAMINATIONS:** There will be two examinations, on September 22 and November 8. Each examination will have 2-3 short essays, in addition to about 35 multiple-choice questions. , Your comprehensive final on December 20 will have two short essays plus about 65 multiple-choice questions.

**GRADING:** In determining your grade in the course, I add up the total points obtained. The two examinations and the paper will each be worth 50-55 points, and the comprehensive final exam will be worth about 75 points. Grades will be assigned according to percentages, with people near the boundaries receiving pluses and minuses. Here is the grade distribution:

A = 88 - 100%  
B = 78 - 87%  
C = 68 - 77%  
D = 58 - 67%  
E = below 58%

I don't allow extra credit in this course. Papers not turned in at the beginning of class on the due date, Thursday, October 27, will lose one point for each late day. (Late points will also be subtracted for the paper preview, if it is not turned in on time.) The last day by which your paper absolutely must be turned in—to pass the course—is Thursday, November 10. Please be sure that you understand this policy.

**NOTICE ABOUT DISABILITY SERVICES:** SUNY Geneseo will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented physical, emotional, or learning disabilities. Students should contact Tabitha Buggie-Hunt, who is the Director of the Office of Disability Services (Erwin 105D) and also contact me to discuss needed accommodations. Please make these arrangements as soon as possible. Also, more information about services is available at <<http://disability.geneseo.edu>>.

**VERY IMPORTANT:** Every semester, a student approaches me to request that I raise his or her grade (because she or he will be placed on probation, because she or he won't make it into graduate school...or whatever). Try your hardest, starting from the very first exam, and come to my office to discuss learning strategies. However, don't ask me to raise your grade. ***I have never raised a student's grade for reasons like these; changing your grade would not be fair to your classmates.*** Also, if your performance on the first exam is poor, please come see me immediately so that we can work together to think of some effective study strategies for you. After all, memory and memory improvement constitute a major portion of our course content!

### **SCHEDULE OF TOPICS**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>READ CHAPTER</b>
Tuesday, August 30 & Thursday, September 1	Introduction	1
Tuesday, September 6 & Thursday, September 8	Perceptual Processes: Pattern Perception	2
Tuesday, September 13	Perceptual Processes: Attention	3
Thursday, September 15 & Tuesday, September 20	Working Memory	4
<b>THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22 EXAM #1 on Chapters 1 through 4</b>		
Tuesday, September 27 Thursday, September 29	Long-Term Memory	5
<b>Thursday, September 29 - Paper preview is due at the beginning of class</b>		
Tuesday, October 4 & Thursday, October 6	Strategies & Metacognition	6
<b>Tuesday, October 11</b>	<b>Fall Break: No classes</b>	
Thursday, October 13 & Tuesday, October 18	Imagery	7
Thursday, October 20, Tuesday, October 25, Thursday, October 27	General Knowledge	8

**Tuesday, November 1 - Paper is due at the beginning of class**

Tuesday, November 1 & Thursday, November 3	Language: Introduction and Language Comprehension	9
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**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8 EXAM #2 on Chapter 5 through 9**

Thursday, November 10 & Tuesday, November 15	Language Production and Bilingualism	10
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Thursday, November 17 & Tuesday, November 22	Problem Solving and Creativity	11
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**Thursday, November 24                      Thanksgiving Break**

Tuesday, November 29 & Thursday, December 1	Deductive Reasoning and Decision Making	12
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Tuesday, December 6 & Thursday, December 8	Cognitive Development Throughout the Lifespan	13
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**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 8:30 AM TO 11:00 AM: COMPREHENSIVE FINAL EXAM on all lectures and Chapters 1-13 (Note: Exam starts at 8:30 AM, rather than 8:00 AM.)**

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### **Instructions for the Literature-Review Paper**

Our course in Cognitive Psychology requires a literature-review paper, which will be due on \_\_\_\_\_. A literature review critically examines the academic research that has been conducted on one specific topic. Your paper must be between 9 and 11 pages in length. Please do not write a longer paper, because part of the skill required for this assignment is selecting an appropriately focused topic and discussing it succinctly. I won't accept papers that are shorter than 9 pages or longer than 11 pages of text (not counting the title page, the abstract, and the references). Please number your pages and use standard margins and font. These precautions will help me write more effective feedback when I am reading your paper!

As specified in the course syllabus, you'll turn in your paper-topic preview in advance, so that you and I can both be certain that your topic is suitable for this course. Also, do not change your paper topic without consulting me and providing me with a new, written paper preview. (I won't accept a paper unless I have approved your preview for that paper. In other words, you will receive a score of zero--out of 55 points--if you turn in a paper, and I did not approve the preview.) I include these precautions so that you can prepare the best possible paper for this course!

Your paper must cite at least five references. The most customary kinds of references are journal articles or professional books. You may consult a textbook to provide an overview of an area, but this will not "count" toward your five minimum references. Also, articles from *Psychology Today* and similar publications are written for the general public, rather than a professional audience, and so they should not be used. Material from the Internet is also not appropriate for this paper, nor is a summary from *Dissertation Abstracts International (DAI)*. You must cite three or more references that have been published in 2000 or more recently. Research in cognitive psychology is so active that your paper must reflect the current findings about your chosen topic.

The paper must include a title page, abstract (about half a page), the text itself, and the list of references. Note that you will not be conducting any actual empirical research for this paper. Your paper also will not be a research proposal.

I want to encourage you to find an area that is personally interesting to you. It is difficult to write a paper, so make certain that you have found an exciting topic before you spend numerous hours on the task. Your topic may be an applied area of cognition, a theoretical area, or an empirical area. You will probably find that you must narrow your topic considerably in order to discuss the research in sufficient detail, within the page limits. Please feel free to select a topic related to your professional interests, as long as it is related to cognitive psychology!

The paper must be typed, and it must be in APA format. Consult the sheets that I will distribute about the Psychology Department's Writing Guidelines. They are also available on the web <<http://www.geneseo.edu~psych/guidelines.htm>>. Inspect these guidelines while you are writing your paper. After you have finished writing the complete draft of your paper, then print a hard copy of your paper. (It's much easier to spot typos, stylistic errors, and disorganized segments when you are looking at the hard copy of your paper, rather than the version on your computer screen.)

Now, inspect the guidelines once more before you proofread your paper. **IMPORTANT:** Hand-write the phrase "I have reviewed the Psychology Department's Writing Guidelines" on the title page of your paper, so that I know you believe that your paper is stylistically appropriate.

Please be certain that every resource cited in the body of the paper is included in the references, and that every item from the reference list is indeed mentioned in the body of the paper. You must also avoid secondary sources (e.g. reading an article by Martin and then summarizing Martin's discussion of an article by Wang and Jones). Instead, locate and read Wang and Jones's original article.

The paper is worth 55 points. One point will be subtracted from your score if the hard copy of your paper is handed in after class on the due date, rather than before, and for each additional day that it is late. Because you have been given sufficient warning, I cannot accept excuses for late papers (e.g., "My printer is not working," "My resources from Interlibrary Loan didn't arrive" or other excuses of a similar nature). Also, I don't accept the electronic version of papers. I can give you better feedback on a hard-copy paper.

Please make two copies of the paper before handing one in to me. I will keep a copy. Also, this precaution protects you in case of a lost paper. After I have graded your paper, you will provide me either with one unmarked copy or with a photocopy of your graded paper. You should keep the original graded paper to use as a guide for your own future writing. Most students report that the feedback helps them develop a more professional writing style, as well as an ability to synthesize information.

I will grade your paper in terms of the amount of thought and effort it seems to reflect. In particular, I will pay attention to the following dimensions:

1. Organization. Do not simply discuss your references in sequence; instead, try to integrate them and discuss how the studies are interrelated.
2. Style and clarity of expression. Describe the research methods and results in clear English; you must demonstrate that you understand each study. Be sure to follow the Psychology Department Writing Guidelines, because stylistic aspects of your paper will be relevant when I assign grades.

3. Critical analysis. Point out why a study is inadequate or improper, or else discuss certain strengths of the study's methodology.
4. Application of concepts. Try to demonstrate (where possible) that you can apply concepts that you have learned from the course lectures, discussion, and textbook.
5. Synthesis. Try to figure out the general trend in the research and try to explain why somewhat similar studies may produce different results.

You should examine several student papers from previous semesters on electronic reserve (ERES), and you should review them carefully. (Password = PSYCH325) All of these papers earned A grades, and I have written comments on them that should help you write more effectively!