

PsyA01 - Introduction to Psychology, Part 1

Syllabus for Fall 2014

Contact Information



[Steve Joordens](#)

[@stevejoordens](#)

Instructor: Also on Facebook, but please no course related posts to my page
My band? The Freakin Lolas (also on Facebook)

Course

E-mail: psya01@utsc.utoronto.ca
(use only this e-mail address)

Office

Hours:

Room

Number: Mondays, 10:30 - 11:30 am
or by appointment
Science Wing Room 415

General Course Information

The study of human behaviour, and the processes and structures giving rise to it, is actually extremely broad. It ranges from issues such as basic brain structure and communication, to issues such as the way the behaviour of those around us affects our own behaviour. In general, the goal of our two Introduction to Psychology courses is to give you an introduction to research and ideas across the entire field of psychology.

This is Part 1 of that introduction and, in it, we will focus on topics such as the history of psychology, the brain and nervous system, sensation, perception, memory and consciousness.

The course is what is often described as a survey course, meaning we will try to give you a general sense of some different approaches to the study of Psychology highlighting some of the most interesting findings within each approach. Subsequent B level courses then focus on some of these approaches in more detail, and the hope is that after taking this Introductory course you will be in a good position to (a) know which sub-areas of Psychology you find most interesting, and (b) begin your studies of these sub-areas with a good general

knowledge of that sub-area and how it related to other approaches within Psychology.

Teaching Approach: Content AND Skills

I began teaching here at UTSC in 1995 and throughout my time here I have developed some strong ideas about how courses should be taught ... about the sorts of experiences you should expect from a professor like me. This course is, to some extent, the embodiment of my teaching philosophy. It is my attempt to provide what I think is the best possible educational experience, despite our large class size.

Let me note right here that this may be the longest syllabus of any class you take! I have thought deeply about how to create a good course, and virtually every aspect of this course reflects principles derived from research within Educational Psychology. One such principle is the following. Research has shown that students enjoy an educational experience more, and engage with it more effectively, when they understand WHY they are being asked to do the things they are being asked to do. So I'd rather err on the side of giving you more explanation than less.

That said, at a general level, I will try to do two things in the course. First, I will describe all of the critical concepts, terms, figures, theories and data that define the content area of Introductory Psychology. That is, I will "transmit the content" of this course and assuming you are receptive to that content, you will learn about the study of psychology and the directions you could take to follow up if that is your interest.

Second, throughout the course I will also give you practice thinking critically and creatively, reflecting on the knowledge you have (and don't have), and expressing your ideas in effective ways. These are what I call "cognitive skills" and they are relevant to virtually everything you do in life. Like all other skills they also develop with practice. So part of my job is to give you that practice.

Paralleling this then, some aspects of this course will include what could be called "passive" or "self-directed" learning. Thus, there will be lectures for you to watch, and a text for you to read. I've tried to choose a relevant and interesting textbook, and I will try my hardest to give interesting, fun, and relevant lectures. But ultimately it will be up to you to engage with these learning opportunities in ways that allow you to learn the content well.

Other aspects of this course will include "active" learning. That is, you will often be pushed to think, or create, or consider ... more generally to "use" the information you are learning in some active way. These active learning

opportunities give your cognitive processes exercise just as a gym gives you muscles exercise, and working with content allows you to learn it more deeply.

In fact, I have actually scaled back the number of lectures and the amount of textbook reading (compared to previous years), in order to increase the amount of active learning activities. My goal is to find the right balance, one that you will find engaging, enjoyable, and one that will promote deep learning of psychology content and continued development of your core cognitive processes.

The remainder of this syllabus will provide more details about the specifics of this course, and how they map onto this general content versus skills framework.

Lectures & Text

Lectures

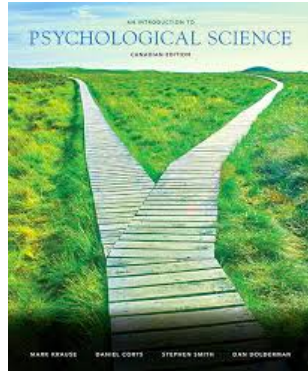
We present the lectures for this course using what we term the WebOption approach. The WebOption approach combines traditional and web-based presentation of lectures in an effort to provide students with additional flexibility in terms of how and when they watch lectures. In the fall of each year PsyA01 is offered both in a traditional classroom setting (L01) and in a so-called “fully online” (L99) section. As the lectures are given in the traditional section they are taped, then made available to the “fully online” section via streaming video, usually on the same day. We then use these streaming videos again in the Summer term (L99) thereby allowing us to offer this course two terms of the year.

Note this is a continuation of the PsyA01 course. It uses the same text, and the same approach to teaching with both traditional and web-based sections available. However, in contrast to this course, the traditional section is only available in the Fall for PsyA01. Once again, only the web-based approach is available in the summer.

One last important note about my lectures ... while my lectures will be inspired by your readings in the textbook and will often involve me discussing the same concepts, I will discuss them in different contexts and may even bring in some information not in your textbook. You will be tested on both the textbook content AND the lecture content so please make sure you watch all lectures and consider them deeply. No matter what you may hear from others, it is not sufficient to just read the text, or just watch the lectures; I expect you to know both.

The Textbook

The textbook we will be using for this course is called Psychological Science (Canadian Edition) and is authored by Krause, Corts, Smith and Dolderman.



Note that this is a Canadian version of the text we used last year BUT it is a significantly different book and I DO NOT recommend using last year's version. Doing so will cost you marks on your final exam so I believe it is worth purchasing the new one. It was not my choice to change texts, there simply was no Canadian version previously and now that there is this is all that is available to us. Plus it is improved, so it is a better text.

In PsyA01 we will cover chapters 1 through 8 of the text in the order in which they appear.

Evaluation

OK, to start, what's with this "fully online" section anyway? Well, we have restructured the course significantly in anticipation of people taking this course from anywhere across the province or even the world. However, even those people would have to write a traditional "sit down" final exam ... as will all of you. So by "fully online" what we mean is that, prior to the final exam, all other assessments will be performed online ... and this is true even for those students in the L01 section.

Let me first give you the breakdown of the assessments that will go into your mark, and then I will explain each of these in more detail below.

- 4% First mTuner activity
- 6% Second mTuner activity
- 8% Third mTuner activity
- 10% Fourth mTuner activity

- 7% Digital Labcoat activity

- 12% The peerScholar activity

- 50% Cumulative Final Exam

3% Experimental Participation

Note that the deadlines for these activities are non-negotiable, and if you miss one because of an error on your part you lose the associate marks .. period. The deadlines will be clearly posted on the course blackboard page, so make sure you check the dates, make note of them, put reminders in your smartphones, and do anything else you need to do to insure that you don't lose marks for no good reason.

The Digital Labcoat activity (7% overall)

Psychology is a science; it uses research and data analysis to inform theories and to test hypotheses. The Digital Labcoat activity is intended to provide you with direct experience thinking like a scientist, while also exposing you to many of the basic realities of the scientific process. In PsyA01 we will use this tool to help enhance your understanding of the concepts related to the scientific method that you learn early in the textbook.

It will involve several steps and if you go through these steps in a conscientious way you can earn quite a few marks in a relatively easy way. Here are the things we'll ask you to do. A while into the course we'll ask you to fill out a questionnaire that asks you all sorts of questions. This is the data we'll use for in our assignment, so when you are testing hypothesis, you will be learning about yourself and your classmates! Makes it more fun. Second, using the Digital Labcoat tool, we'll ask you to generate and test some hypotheses in quest of some kind of interesting aspect of the data. Once you find something you think is kinda cool you can submit it into the "most interesting finding" competition. In the third step we will ask you to look at the findings others have submitted and to try "replicating" 10 of them to see if they replicate or not. Finally, in the fourth step, you will be shown the top 10 "interesting findings" (maybe including yours!) and you can do one of two things; either provide a novel theoretical account of one of the findings (that is, how would you explain that finding?), or you can vote on the theoretical accounts provided by others (which seems most true to you). All of this will be explained in greater detail on a separate link of the course page (look for a Digital Labcoat link on the left margin) ... but the general idea is to get you

thinking like a scientist before we jump into the really juicy parts of the course.

The mTuner activities (28% overall, 4% for the first, 6% for the second, 8% for the third, and 10% for the fourth)

OK, maybe we could have called these tests or quizzes or something like that, but we didn't, we called them mTuner (mind tuner, or memory tuner) activities! We did that for a reason. When you take your car in for a tune-up, or when you tune a guitar, you first check to see how things are working in general, and then you fix up anything that isn't working as you hope it would. So the engine (or guitar) is better after you tune it than it was before. That is the spirit of mTuner! Yes these activities will assess your understanding of the course material covered so far, but they will do so in a way that identifies gaps in your knowledge, or misconceptions you might have, and fixes them. In so doing they combine assessment with education in a way that has been shown to provide powerful learning. Let me explain ...

First, there will be four of these activities, one after each pair of chapters covered (we'll cover 2 chapters every 3 weeks). Each will be an enhanced multiple-choice test as I will describe.

You'll get 40 questions each time. In the first activity, these questions will only come from the first 2 chapters we cover (9 and 10) and the associated lectures. For the second they will MOSTLY come from chapters 11 and 12, but will also include some from 9 & 10. For the third they will MOSTLY come from 13 and 14 but contain some from 9, 10, 11 & 12. For the fourth they will MOSTLY focus on chapters 15 & 16 but will include questions from all chapters. So we'll be trying to keep the older material in mind as you learn new stuff, ultimately building your knowledge base, tuning it up as we go along.

Each question will work as follows. You will first see the question and will be asked to simply type out what you think the answer is. That will get your brain warmed up and ready to learn. Then you will see four alternatives and will be asked to choose the right one. If you do, 2 point will be added to your "score". If you choose wrong you will also be given a second chance. Specifically, we will

show you a paragraph from the textbook (or video from a lecture) that is related to the question. You will be given some time to look it over, and then can return to the question and make a second choice. If you get it right this time you get 1 point.

Even if you do get it wrong on both attempts we will show you the right answer, and explain to you why it is right, before we move on to the next question. That's the tune-up idea. Research has shown that if students are not told a given answer is incorrect, they will continue to remember the incorrect answer as being correct. We don't want to let that happen. So yes we're testing what you know, but we're also trying to "fix" any misconceptions you might have, or "fill" any knowledge gaps, by making sure you know and understand the right answer after doing a question. Sometimes the best time to learn is when you are being assessed.

So really these activities are more about preparing you for the final exam (i.e., tuning your knowledge base) than they are about testing you (though admittedly they do both). If you put some reasonable effort into these activities you will generally do well and you should learn a lot as you do.

One thing I want to emphasize. The copying and sharing of questions and answers with other classmates is considered an ACADEMIC OFFENSE. I know this happens and it annoys me. It defeats the learning experience I am trying to create with these activities. If you share mTuner questions or answers and we're able to prove it, I will prosecute. There is collaborative learning and there is cheating ... copying and sharing the questions and answers is, in my mind, pure cheating and will be treated as such.

The peerScholar Activity (12%)

Each peerScholar activity has three steps. First you will be asked to write a short composition (4 to 6 paragraph) that presents an "argument" related to some issue specified by me (I sometimes like to feed off of current events, so I won't decide the issue until part way into the term). In the second step you will be required to rate and provide feedback on six compositions submitted by a randomly selected (and anonymously presented) subset of your peers in the class, and six peers will rate and comment on your

piece at the same time. In the third step you will then be allowed to revise your composition in light of the feedback you received, with TAs ultimately grading you on the final composition, the quality of the comments you gave to your peers, and the appropriateness of your revisions in light of the comments you received.

A great deal of research has shown that by allowing students access to their peers' work they gain a much clearer sense of what makes a composition poor versus good, especially if they are asked to directly assess the work they see. This is referred to as constructivist learning because you "figure out" what makes something good rather than just being told some rules to look for. So these assignments develop critical thought and clear verbal expression, and they also teach you how to both give and react appropriately to feedback. More cognitive exercise!

All of this is done online. Again, a much more detailed description will be presented in the peerScholar link in the left margin of our class blackboard page.

Cumulative Final Exam (50%)

Cumulative? What? That's right, there are no real midterms in this class, just one big exam waiting for you at the end. Well, the truth is it's not that big ... it is composed of 50 multiple-choice questions presented in a traditional (as opposed to the mTuner) manner. So you will come in to an exam room, sit down with your peers, and write the final exam using scantrons while being supervised. This is really the only thing you cannot do online in this course, you must write the exam at UTSC as layed out by the registrar. The registrar does not schedule these exams until the last few weeks of the term.

But yes, the exam is on the entire course ... that means EVERYTHING presenting in the textbook and EVERYTHING I discuss in lectures. I will try very hard to be fair, focusing on what I view as the relevant issues rather than the picky details. But if it is in the text or in my lectures it is fair game.

As we have more details about the scheduling and specifics of the exam, we will post them on the main course webpage.

YOU MUST PASS THIS FINAL EXAM TO PASS THE COURSE. If you do not pass the final exam but would have passed the course otherwise, you will receive a 45% grade in the course.

Experimental Participation (3%)

With respect to experimental participation, many senior undergraduates, graduate students and faculty conduct research aimed at better understanding psychological processes. You will read about such research throughout the course, but to make what you read more concrete another component of the class involves you serving as a participant in ongoing research. Being a participant will give you the chance to interact directly with a researcher in the context of some specific experiment, and our hope is that you will come to a better understanding of psychological research through this experience. In a sense, this is the lab component of this course. You earn 0.5% for every 30 minutes of participation up to a maximum of 3%.

You use a system called TAPS to find and schedule experiments, and I will explain that system to you in around the second or third week of classes. But essentially, once it's ready to go you can start scheduling experiments. New experiments will be regularly posted ... so basically you earn your credits slowly over the term as suitable experiments (i.e., one's that you want to do and that fit your schedule) become available.

An alternative assignment has also been created for those who prefer not to participate in research studies. The due date for the alternative assignment will be the same as the last day to participate in research (this is typically during the final exam period). An announcement will be made on the course Blackboard page once this date has been set. Please follow the [The Academic Pool Scheduler \(TAPS\)](#) link on the course Blackboard page to find out more about the structure of TAPS and how to participate. Please address any questions you have about TAPS on the discussion board in the TAPS thread.

Important Notes Concerning Evaluation

Re-weighting. Everything described above is considered a compulsory part of the class. So I expect all students to do all of

these activities. I believe the evaluation is most fair when all students complete all components with no special consideration being applied. That said, sometimes things happen. Maybe some of you will suffer a documentable illness, or maybe some of our technology will run into issues (we are using some new programs to administer our activities). Given this, if some given students is unable to complete an activity for a reason I deem appropriate I reserve the right to transfer the weight of that activity to the final exam for that student.

Research Activity. As mentioned, this course includes many innovative new tools that I believe will enhance your learning. However, science is based on data, not beliefs, and as one interested in educational technologies I will be conducting research designed to assess the effectiveness of these tools. Thus I may, on occasion, ask you to fill out a questionnaire, or I may wish to perform various analyses comparing how students do on various components of the class. If you do not want your data used in any research, please let me know and I will take steps to exclude your data from any analyses I perform.

Academic Integrity: The University highly values scholarship and academic achievement and takes very seriously any suspected or known cases of cheating and plagiarism. Students are highly encouraged to read the guide on [How Not To Plagiarize](#) and to take advantage of [writing resources](#) on campus. In addition, our campus has a general [code of conduct](#) that all students are expected to follow when interacting with peers, staff of faculty. The keyword here is respect, a good educational context is one in which all parties respect one another's perspective and opinions.

Personal Integrity: As I hope this syllabus shows, I take my responsibility to provide you with the best education very seriously. Part of that responsibility is to be fair with respect to how I assess your work. Part of that means judging all of my students using the same yardstick. What I have laid out above is that yardstick, the things I will ask you to do to show me what you have learned. So with this in mind please respect the following two values I hold close; (1) I firmly believe that marks are to be earned, not given ... so please never ask me to give you a mark unless you feel you have earned it, and (2) I feel it is unfair to offer any student an opportunity that I don't offer to the entire class ... so please do not ask for any sort of special treatment. Instead, take the course seriously, understand the expectations laid out here, and just do your best.

You're Not Alone!

There are almost 2000 students in this class, quite a transition from high school! However, I sincerely hope that you do not feel like we don't care about you ... we do! However, we obviously cannot look over your shoulder and know when you may or may not need help with something. THAT part we must leave up to you. But when you DO need help, I certainly hope we are there for you. We have set up a number of mechanisms to help you with any questions or issues you might have ... please take the time to follow the right path and you should get help soon. If we work together we can make the class feel welcoming and responsive to you, and manageable for us. Here's how ...

If you have a question related to the content of the course ...

The Discussion Forum: Your First Stop

Content-Related Questions. Each chapter has one TA devoted to it. That TA will read the chapter carefully, and will be in charge of monitoring the discussion forum thread for that chapter. So if you do have a question related to content, go to the thread for the relevant chapter, make sure your question has not yet been asked (and answered!) and, if not, post your question. The TA for that chapter should answer your question soon (for all to see) ... or maybe a classmate will answer it for you first! If you see a question that you feel you can answer, please do so ... it's a way for you to make others in the class feel welcome and valued. If the TA for a given chapter feels an student-provided answer could be improved, they will chime in with anything additional they feel is relevant. I will also monitor all chapters of the discussion forum and will chime in on occasion as I see fit.

Administrative Questions. Hanan Domloge (SW427D) provides administrative support for this course, and different TAs are helping with specific activities. If you have administrative questions about the course in general, or any of the activities in specific (e.g., when things are due, what to do when something is late, what website to log into, etc.) then again, the discussion forum is the place to start. There will be threads associated with each activity, and a thread associated with the course in general. If you have a question that isn't already answered in its appropriate thread please post your question there and the appropriate person will respond as soon as possible.

Office Hours!

Do you feel that classes at UofT are so big that you can't ever just speak with your profs? Silliness ... I have office hours and often nobody comes by! Do you have a question about the course, about psychology, or about university in general? Come by. My office hours are listed above and you should always feel welcome.

Note that sometimes I will have to reschedule, or even cancel, office hours ... I will always try to give you notice if that will be the case. And if my office hours do not work for you, let me know and we can find a different time to meet.

Should you e-mail me? Sure, but please do not send any e-mails to my personal account, send them to psya01@utsc.utoronto.ca. But please, before you e-mail me, try posting your question or issue on the discussion forum because often that gets it to the right person most efficiently.

Let me also emphasize that students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the AccessAbility Services Office as soon as possible. The UTSC AccessAbility Services staff (located in S302) are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations (416) 287-7560 or ability@utsc.utoronto.ca. The sooner you let us know your needs the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.
