

## Writing-to-Learn (W2L) Assignments



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from Noun Project

These assignments are designed to help you learn about psychology, to help you learn to communicate what you know in writing, and to help you give and receive feedback on your written communication. See course goals for the many ways this assignment aligns with what I hope you will learn in this course.

**PROCESS OVERVIEW.** Five short assignments focus on accurately describing and applying key concepts from our course. For each assignment, you will be asked to write 300-500 words, and submit it to both peerScholar and Turnitin. Next, log in to peerScholar and complete up to 6 peer reviews of other students' work (as many as appear for you). Finally, when you log in to receive your scores, you will be asked to rate the quality of the feedback you receive from others. If you wish, you will then have the opportunity to review your work and revise it, but this step will not be graded.

**PREPARING YOU FOR PEER REVIEW.** I have designed two ways to prepare you for this task. Complete the **Peer Assessment Training Workshop** (available through Connect) early in September (for 1% of your course grade). Then, **the first assignment is meant to be a practice round.** If you miss any step of the process for Assignment 1, you will have 2% deducted from your course grade. Exception: if you are officially enrolled *on or after* the second Wednesday of classes, you can skip (just!) the first assignment with no penalty. See the syllabus for further details.

**IN YOUR OWN WORDS.** You do not need any other sources beyond our textbook and notes from class. All writing is to be completely your own, showcasing your own ideas as they connect to what you are learning in this course. Unless you are taking a direct quote from the textbook (which is not advisable as it makes it difficult to showcase your own understanding), you do not need to include citations. If you have questions about paraphrasing from the textbook, or other ways to make your writing your own, please bring your questions to one of your Leaders in Learning (Dr. Rawn or a TA). We will be using Turnitin.com to check submissions for overlap with other sources. See the syllabus for more information on academic honesty.

**PREPARING FOR LIFE... AND THE FINAL EXAM.** Coming up with your own examples and reading others' examples while you are doing the peer reviews will help you bridge our course with everyday life. It will also help you study for the midterm tests and the final exam. **At the final exam, come prepared to complete a live Writing-to-Learn Assignment.** You will be asked to write/adapt/rewrite any TWO of your best assignments (ensuring they are thorough, link to

other concepts and to your life experience), and memorize them to reproduce on the final. Standards will be high. You will not be given any concept lists on the final exam; you must come prepared.

**EVALUATION OVERVIEW.** You can earn up to 10% of your course grade for your participation in various aspects of the Writing-to-Learn assignments.

<b>Writing-to-Learn Assignments are worth a total of 10%</b>	<b>Max Points</b>
Online Peer Assessment Training (PAT) Workshop completion	1
Suspected Pseudoscience in the Media (Assignment 1)	-2 if any step incomplete
Submit all assignments to Turnitin.com on time, complete all assigned peer reviews on time, and rate feedback others gave your work	3
Grade for Assignments 2-5, as rated by peers (4 x 1%)	4
Quality of peer review comments you give to others across all assignments, as rated by peers	2
	<b>10</b>

Each assignment will be evaluated by your peers based on the criteria listed here. Each criterion is elaborated below.

<b>Your written work is evaluated based on the following criteria:</b>	
1. Selecting a concept from the appropriate key terms list	5
2. Describing the concept thoroughly and accurately	5
3. Drawing an interesting and useful connection between the concept and an experience or example beyond the course	5
4. Communicating ideas so they are easy to understand	5
<i>Recommendation for inclusion in the final exam study guide</i>	(ungraded)
	<b>20 points</b>

**CALCULATING PEER GRADES.** For Assignments 2-5, the average of all raters' scores of your work will be converted into a score out of 1% toward your course grade. The highest and lowest scores will be dropped. Here are some examples to help illustrate why this technique helps us focus in on the most accurate score for a given piece of written work. See page 5 for research evidence supporting the efficacy of using averaged peer review scores in this way.

<b>Scores received from peers</b>	<b>Final score /20</b>	<b>Convert to score /1</b>	<b><i>Dropping the highest and lowest scores helps determine the most accurate score</i></b>
7, 9, 9, 12, 13	$(9 + 9 + 12)/3 = 10$	.50	No change

4, 15, 16, 16, 18	$(15 + 16 + 16)/3 = 15.67$	.78	The extreme low score would have pulled the average down to .69
13, 13, 14, 14, 20	$(13 + 14 + 14)/3 = 13.67$	.68	The extreme high score would have pulled the average up to .74
7, 14, 17, 19	$(14 + 17)/2 = 15.5$	.78	The extreme low score would have pulled the average down to .72
9, 11, 15, 17	$(11 + 15)/2 = 13$	.65	No change

## ASSIGNMENT 1: PSEUDOSCIENCE IN THE MEDIA

Investigate the world around you. Find an example of a possible pseudoscientific claim. Common sources are news and blog headlines, or websites and other forms of advertisements. Be sure you can electronically link to your source. Then write about 300 words (500 maximum) demonstrating your deep analysis of why this source might be based on pseudoscience. Your writing should address both of the following two features:

### 1. Describing the concept.

**Which warning sign of pseudoscience will you be using?** After you've chosen your source (see below), choose one warning sign to emphasize. Discuss what the concept means and why it is a signal of potential pseudoscience.

Part 1 will be evaluated on a 0-5 scale, with these anchors:

- 5 points = Perfect mastery of the concept. Accurate (check the course materials), complete, detailed, and thorough.
- 4 points = Accurate, no key aspects about the concept are missing.
- 3 points = Expected value for most work. Some detail, no major errors.
- 2 points = Minimal detail, multiple small errors or one major one, key aspects about the concept are missing.
- 1 point = Minimal description taken word-for-word from the text (if word-for-word and not quoted, provide feedback that it should be quoted or paraphrased).
- 0 points = Missing.

### 2. Connecting beyond the course.

**Critique the possible pseudoscientific claim.** Justify why you think the warning sign you described above is relevant and important in this case. For example, is the website making extraordinary claims about how effective a product will be, without evidence to back it up? What kind of evidence do you want to see?

Part 2 will be evaluated on a 0-5 scale, with these anchors:

- 5 points = Perfect mastery. Chose an effective example to highlight the warning sign, and accurately explains the relevance of the warning sign in this case. Detailed and thorough discussion demonstrating clear mastery of the concept how to apply it.
- 4 points = Chose an effective example to highlight the warning sign. Accurate explanation of the relevance of the warning sign in this case. Some discussion shows understanding of the concept and how to apply it.
- 3 points = Expected value for most work. Overall idea of the example makes sense, but missing details. No major errors in application.
- 2 points = Example is not a strong illustration of the warning sign. Minimal detail, multiple small errors in application or one major one.
- 1 point = Example seems unrelated to the warning sign. Minimal attempt is made to make a connection, but it isn't clear how the warning sign relates to the example.
- 0 points = Missing.

### 3. Clarity of communication

To be evaluated on a 0-5 scale, with these anchors:

- 5 points = Perfect mastery. Entire work is clearly explained, writing flows easily between ideas. Ideas are re-stated or paraphrased in the author's own words (rather than direct quotes from the textbook).
- 4 points = High quality writing, with a couple of spelling/grammar issues or ideas that do not clearly flow. Ideas are re-stated or paraphrased in the author's own words (rather than direct quotes from the textbook).
- 3 points = Expected value for most work. Mostly clear and flows reasonably well.
- 2 points = Unclear in some parts making writing difficult to read sometimes. Uses direct quotes from the textbook (even if citing them correctly).
- 1 points = Very difficult to read and understand what is being said. Recommend seeking support at the Writing Centre.
- 0 points = The assignment was not completed.

### 4. Do you recommend that this entry be included in the final exam study guide?

**(Recommendation only. No points.)**

- Yes, this entry is the closest to perfect that it gets. It needs no adjustments to either section.
- Yes, with a couple of minor adjustments to the connection section (but the description section is solid as is), or to the writing style.
- Maybe, but it needs minor improvements to both sections, or just the description section (because it is *crucial* that the description is correct).

- Not recommended due to major improvements needed to the description section.
- Not recommended due to major improvements needed to both sections.
- The assignment was not completed.

#### 5. Provide a critical constructive comment on the paper.

- What is one thing about this paper which ought to be improved or clarified? Write a critical, constructive comment which gives effective guidance to the author on what part(s) would benefit from a revision and explain (make a specific suggestion about) how the revision might be done. (25 words min, 100 words max).
- *What is a Critical Constructive Comment: A critical constructive comment consists of one or more sentences which identifies a shortcoming (e.g., something that is not adequately explained, not logically connected or integrated with other parts of the report, poorly illustrated, not correctly interpreted, a poorly chosen reference) AND which suggests a specific option or means by which this shortcoming could be remedied.*

### ASSIGNMENTS 2-5: WRITE AND RATE CONCEPT CHECKS

This course is divided roughly into four chunks of two chapters (1 & 7, 2 & 3, 4 & 5, 6 & 8). Before each exam, choose one concept from the **key terms list at the end of one of the chapters** in that chunk. Not all key terms are great candidates for this assignment. Choose concepts carefully, ensuring you will be able to fully describe it and apply it.

All assignments follow a similar structure. Start by clearly stating the concept's name and its chapter. Then write about 300 words (500 maximum) demonstrating your deep mastery of what this concept means *and* how to apply/use/connect it to the world. Your writing will be evaluated by your peers based on the following rubric. Use it as a guide for your writing.

#### 1. Selected an appropriate concept.

The purpose of this assignment is to think deeply about one concept from *either* of the two chapters that will be tested on the upcoming test. When reading your peers' work, check the **key terms list** in the chapter to ensure that the concept is in fact listed.

To be evaluated on a 0-5 scale, with these anchors:

- 5 points = The concept is from the key terms list in one of the assigned chapters for this chunk of the course.
- 4 points = The concept is similar to (but not the same as) one of the concepts on the key terms list from one of the assigned chapters for this chunk of the course, but is modified.

- 3 points = The concept is from the key term list in a chapter *not currently assigned*.
- 2 points = The concept chosen is similar to (but not the same as) one of the concepts on the key terms list from a chapter *not currently assigned*.
- 1 point = The concept does not appear on any key concept list from any assigned chapter in this course.
- 0 points = The assignment was not completed.

## 2. Describing the concept.

**What have you learned about this concept? Describe the concept thoroughly, including its nuances, in your own words.** In your response, you might explore how this concept compares and contrasts with another concept to show its nuances. Or you might compare your current understanding of this concept with what you used to think was true, and how your thinking has changed.

To be evaluated on a 0-5 scale, with these anchors:

- 5 points = Perfect mastery of the concept. Accurate (check the course materials), complete, detailed, and thorough.
- 4 points = Accurate, no key aspects about the concept are missing.
- 3 points = Expected value for most work. Some detail, no major errors.
- 2 points = Minimal detail, multiple small errors or one major one, key aspects about the concept are missing.
- 1 point = Minimal description taken word-for-word from the text (if word-for-word and not quoted, provide feedback that it should be quoted or paraphrased).
- 0 points = Missing.

## 3. Connecting beyond the course.

**How does this concept connect in your life beyond the course? Apply the concept in a deep, meaningful way.** In your response, you might explore how what you know about this concept helps you understand a life experience you or a loved one has had. Or, you might describe how this concept relates to a world event, or to an event you have witnessed live, in a film or other artistic work. If you can, provide an electronic link to your source. *When choosing whether to include personal details, keep in mind that your peers will be reading your work, without your name attached.*

To be evaluated on a 0-5 scale, with these anchors:

- 5 points = Perfect mastery. Chose an effective example to highlight the concept, and accurately explains the relevance of the concept in this case. Detailed and thorough discussion demonstrating clear mastery of the concept how to apply it.

- 4 points = Chose an effective example to highlight the concept. Accurate explanation of the relevance of the concept in this case. Some discussion shows understanding of the concept and how to apply it.
- 3 points = Expected value for most work. Overall idea of the example makes sense, but missing details. No major errors in application.
- 2 points = Example is not a strong illustration of the concept. Minimal detail, multiple small errors in application or one major one.
- 1 point = Minimal attempt is made to make a connection but it isn't clear.
- 0 points = Missing.

#### 4. Clarity of communication

To be evaluated on a 0-5 scale, with these anchors:

- 5 points = Perfect mastery. Entire work is clearly explained, writing flows easily between ideas. Ideas are re-stated or paraphrased in the author's own words (rather than direct quotes from the textbook).
- 4 points = High quality writing, with a couple of spelling/grammar issues or ideas that do not clearly flow. Ideas are re-stated or paraphrased in the author's own words (rather than direct quotes from the textbook).
- 3 points = Expected value for most work. Mostly clear and flows reasonably well.
- 2 points = Unclear in some parts making writing difficult to read sometimes. Uses direct quotes from the textbook (even if citing them correctly).
- 1 points = Very difficult to read and understand what is being said. Recommend seeking support at the Writing Centre.
- 0 points = The assignment was not completed.

#### 5. Do you recommend that this essay be included in the final exam study guide?

**(Recommendation only. No points.)**

- Yes, this essay is the closest to perfect that it gets. It needs no adjustments to either section.
- Yes, with a couple of minor adjustments to the connection section (but the description section is solid as is), or to the writing style.
- Maybe, but it needs minor improvements to both sections, or just the description section (because it is *crucial* that the description is correct).
- Not recommended due to major improvements needed to the description section.
- Not recommended due to major improvements needed to both sections.
- The assignment was not completed.

**6. Provide a critical constructive comment on the paper.**

- What is one thing about this paper which ought to be improved or clarified? Write a critical, constructive comment which gives effective guidance to the author on what part(s) would benefit from a revision and explain (make a specific suggestion about) how the revision might be done. (25 words min, 100 words max).
- *What is a Critical Constructive Comment: A critical constructive comment consists of one or more sentences which identifies a shortcoming (e.g., something that is not adequately explained, not logically connected or integrated with other parts of the report, poorly illustrated, not correctly interpreted, a poorly chosen reference) AND which suggests a specific option or means by which this shortcoming could be remedied.*

**READ AND RATE THE PEER REVIEWS YOU RECEIVE ABOUT YOUR WORK**

- **Take a deep breath.** As you're reading the feedback, it might be helpful to think about your paragraphs as someone else's paragraphs. Scan the feedback once, and if you feel like you are having an emotional reaction to it, that's totally normal – and it means you would be wise to give yourself at least day or two to calm down and distance yourself from it. When you return, consider the feedback objectively. Every piece of writing has room for improvement, no matter how strong it is to start. Re-read the assignment expectations and your paragraphs. Use the pieces of feedback that are helpful for aligning your paragraphs with the expectations provided. Feel free to ignore other pieces of feedback. Whether you choose to use or ignore feedback, make sure the decision is in the service of making your work the best paragraphs they can be.
- **Using the prompt provided in peerScholar, indicate how helpful the feedback was.** If this comment was (un)helpful, explain what made it (un)helpful. Your reflections will help you and the author of these comments identify what makes effective comments, and will help you consider your own writing.

**References and Acknowledgements**

Write-and-Rate concept checks are based on an assignment empirically tested and reported by Nevid, Pastva, & McClelland (2012), and the peer review component was inspired by research evidence reported by Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans (1999) and Paré & Joordens (2008) that shows average peer grades are just as reliable as TA grades.

Dochy, F., Segers, M., & Sluijsmans, D. (1999). The use of self-, peer and co-assessment in higher education: A review. *Studies in Higher Education, 24*, 331-350.



Nevid, J. S., Pastva, A., & McClelland, N. (2012). Writing-to-Learn assignments in introductory psychology: Is there a learning benefit? *Teaching of Psychology, 39*, 272-275.

Paré, D. E., & Joordens, S. (2008). Peering into large lectures: Examining peer and expert mark agreement using peerScholar, an online peer assessment tool. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 24*, 526-540.

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