



## GETTING PSYCHED ABOUT WRITING IN PSYCHOLOGY

Don't worry. Writing a paper for psychology won't send you to the psychologist. Psychology papers may be composed of specific elements relating to psychology, but still follow general guidelines. Keeping this in mind will allow you to write more effective psychology papers.

When writing a psychology paper, it is crucial to focus on the TASK rather than the TOPIC. For example, let's say that your assignment is the following: Describe how Freud's theory applies to children today. Do not simply restate the theory. Explain how you see the theory being applied.

### TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

**Abstract:** a brief, comprehensive summary of your paper

**Essay:** interprets information rather than rewriting the source material, which can:

- ~ Explain the significance of a theory
- ~ Discuss the implications of a theory
- ~ Compare/contrast the ideas of a theory

**Research Paper:** presents information concerning a topic by referring to multiple sources for support

### QUOTING VS. PARAPHRASING

Writers often directly quote a passage because they are unsure of its exact meaning. While providing direct quotations in order to support your point is necessary, never quote in place of understanding.

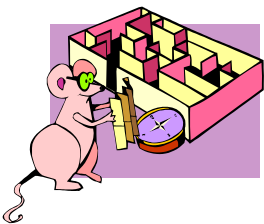
**Original sentence:**

*"Gender is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations."*

**Poor Paraphrase:** Gender has psychological or cultural, not biological implications.

**Effective Paraphrase:** The word *gender* refers to behavior or culture, not biology.

DO NOT use insignificant information as quotes. It may seem that the use of numerous direct quotations will make the paper appear more valid; however, the objective of your paper is to prove your understanding of the topic.



**Insignificant Quote:** "Kapek reported that the rats avoided the maze and as of this writing, none responds to conditioning."

**Significant Quote:** In a recent interview, Kapek was quoted as saying, "The results of my study suggest that rats do not respond to conditioning, and therefore, the correlation between rats and humans has been greatly weakened."

Can you see the difference? The first quote only relates to a general observation of an experiment, whereas the second quote relates to a specific, significant conclusion of the study.

If you don't understand part of your reading, speak with your professor, confer with a classmate, visit Academic Support, or come to the Writing Center. Providing knowledge in your own words helps to show your comprehension of the subject matter.

### ESSAY STRUCTURE

All essays have the following basic structure in common:

- 1) Introduction -- provides a thesis and a quick look at what will be in the paper.
- 2) Body of the paper -- proves and supports the thesis presented in the introduction.
- 3) Conclusion -- sums up the paper and can also offer a look at the future, suggestions for improvement, or a final definite opinion.

Missing one of these elements creates an incomplete essay.

### DOCUMENTATION STYLE

All psychology papers are written in APA format which can be found in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Following are the correct ways to cite some of the most commonly used sources on the alphabetized reference page found at the end of your paper:

#### Periodical:

Buss, D.M., & Schmitt, D.P. (1993). Sexual strategies theory: An evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review*, 100, 201-232.

#### Nonperiodicals (Books):

Saxe, G.B. (1991). *Cultural and cognitive development: Studies in mathematical understanding*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

#### Internet:

Canarie, Inc. (1997, September 27). *Towards a Canadian health IWAY: Vision, opportunities and future steps*. Retrieved November 8, 2000, from <http://www.canarie.ca/press/publications/pdf/health/healthvision.doc>

When writing a psychology paper, use the author-date method of citation to cite within the text:

Example of a summary/paraphrase:

When they learned of an ape's ability to use sign language, both linguists and animal behaviorists were taken by surprise (Davis, 1978).

Example of a direct quotation:

Miele (1993) found that "the 'placebo effect,' which had been verified in previous studies, disappeared when behaviors were studied in this manner" (p. 276).

