

PSCH 4301: Personality Psychology

[May 28, 2025 – Version 1.01 – Subject to Revision]

I. Essential Course Information

A. The Course Description

Personality psychology is the study of human personality, its development, and the individual differences in personality traits and their consequences in people's lives. This course is based around a theoretical/historical approach to the study of personality and is intended as a first course in the subject.

B. Our Meeting Time and Location

This course is a web-based course. Regular discussions are available from 12 pm Wednesdays to 11:59 pm Saturdays. Regular weekly exams are available from 12 pm Wednesdays to 11:59 pm Saturdays.

C. Your Instructor

Professor Wesley D. Wynne
Email: wwynne@sulross.edu

Office: Uvalde C107
Phone: 830-279-3044

How to contact: from your Sul Ross email account, send your email to the address above. Provide your name in each email, and state which course you are taking. Thursdays and Fridays from 1 pm to 5 pm are office hours for student appointments and advising.

D. Your Course Materials

Required Texts

- *Personality Psychology (8th Ed.)*, by Larsen & Buss. ISBN: 9781264531868.

E. The Student Learning Objectives for this Course

- The objectives of this course are to:
- develop an understanding of the major contemporary and historical theories of personality;
- learn the essentials of the methodology of personality assessment;
- examine some of the most important areas in the current research and future directions in the study of personality;
- improve critical thinking and develop effective communication skills using written and oral assignments

II. Your Assignments

A. Online Discussions (20%)

Each week, you will participate in a series of discussions on Blackboard. Take part in these discussions regularly. Aside from the introductory discussion, the discussions will be available each week only from 12 pm Mondays to 11:59 pm on Saturdays.

*For every discussion forum, you should contribute at least **two** posts: one should be a post of your own thoughts about something in the chapters covered for the week, and a **second** post in which you respond insightfully to a post that another student has made.*

All posts to the discussion boards should be thoughtful and literate. Thoughtful contributions will receive credit; overly brief or trite contributions will not.

B. Weekly Exams (60%)

Weekly exams will cover material from the textbook chapters, as well as material from any additional readings and discussions posted at the same time. Exams will be posted and available at 12 pm each Wednesday and must be completed by 11:59 pm on Saturday. Every student enrolled in this course is expected to take each exam that is given. However, one absence from *any* weekly exam will be allowed without penalty, no excuses necessary. Students who miss more than one exam may be dropped from the course with an automatic F for non-participation.

C. The Final Exam (20%)

The final exam will cover all material in the course and must be taken on July 2 between 12 pm and 11:59 pm.

III. Assignment Calendar, Attendance Policy, and General Assignment Information

A. The Calendar

<u>Date</u>	<u>Assignments and Topics</u>
May 28	Course Introduction; Read Ch. 1: Intro to Personality Psychology
June 2	Read Ch. 2: Personality Assessment & Research
June 4	Ch. 1 & 2 Exam (due June 7); Read Ch. 9: Psychoanalytic 1
June 9	Read Ch. 10: Psychoanalytic 2
June 11	Ch. 9 & 10 Exam (due June 14); Read Ch. 14: Approaches to Self
June 16	Read Ch. 15: Personality & Social Interaction
June 18	Ch. 14 & 15 Exam (due June 21); Read Ch. 17: Culture
*June 20	<i>Last possible day to drop this class with a W</i>
June 23	Read Ch. 18 : Stress, Coping, Adjustment
June 25	Ch. 17 & 18 Exam (due June 28); Read Ch. 19: Disorders
June 30	Study for Final
*July 2	<u><i>Final Exam (must be taken on July 2)</i></u>

Notice: The schedule of topics above is subject to change for pedagogical reasons at the discretion of the instructor.

B. The Attendance Policy

Sul Ross State University allows students to be automatically dropped with an F from courses if they acquire excessive absences, defined as nine hours of absence from a course. (This translates to 3 absences from an evening course, 6 absences from a daytime course, and 3 absences from a summer course). The professor may enforce this policy strictly whenever a pattern of negligent behavior is observed.

In web courses, three hours of absence will be defined as one calendar week of non-participation in a summer or fall course, or four continuous days of non-participation in a summer course, as measured by completion of exams, participation in discussions, and submission of other assignments on Blackboard.

Students who without authorization arrive late or leave class early for any reason without approval may be counted absent for the entire session. Attendance may be taken at any time during a class meeting and more than once during a class meeting. Students who are not present for any roll call may be counted absent from the entire class.

Students in VMR classes (classes using Teams, Zoom, et cetera) must log in with a working camera and a working microphone on their device. The camera must be turned on and the student's eyes and face must appear in the frame. Anyone whose camera is turned off or whose face is not in frame whenever roll is taken will not be counted present and may be removed from VMR class meetings and not allowed back in for the remainder of the meeting.

C. General Assignment Information

Assignments must be submitted through Blackboard unless otherwise authorized. Assignments that are emailed without prior authorization will not be considered submitted.

If you have a problem that prevents you from submitting an assignment on time, contact the professor immediately once you determine that you cannot resolve the problem and submit the assignment as instructed. Waiting until after the deadline to contact the professor may result in forfeiture of the grade for the assignment.

Exam dates will not be changed except in exceptional circumstances. Deadlines for other assignments, such as papers and presentations, may in certain circumstances be postponed to a later date, but not advanced to an earlier date. (In other words, students may in some instances be granted additional time to submit assignments.)

If it is not possible to administer a final exam (for example, due to an internet outage, power outage, emergency school closure, or other extraordinary circumstances), final

grades for this course will be calculated solely from the assignments submitted prior to the final exam.

☼ Other than any exceptions described herein, all major assignments in this course *must be completed and submitted to pass this course*, regardless of a student's grades on other assignments. Students who do not submit *all major written assignments* by their deadlines are liable to receive an F as a final grade for this course.

☼ Do not wait to complete and submit major assignments on their due dates. Due dates are deadlines. They are the final opportunities to submit your work; they are not the ideal opportunities to submit your work. So don't wait until the last possible day to submit something important. The reason is simple: things can go wrong. Emergencies arise. Electrical service can be interrupted. Computer equipment can malfunction. You or someone in your family can suddenly get sick. So fight the temptation to procrastinate. Try to submit a good version of each major assignment a day or two before the deadline. You can go back and upload revisions until the last minute if nothing goes wrong. But don't run the risk of a last-minute disaster. If and when late work is accepted in this class, it will be penalized 25 points per calendar day.

D. Extra Credit Information

Extra credit assignments may be offered in this class. Certain extra credit opportunities might involve an invitation to participate in an event at a physical location or being online at a particular time. If your other responsibilities or your own location make it inconvenient for you to participate in a particular extra credit assignment, don't fret. No extra credit opportunity will disadvantage students who, for whatever reason, do not participate. Extra credit does not affect the curve at all; it is just added on top of grades already earned. It's just something extra.

IV. Grading

A. The Calculation of Grades

Grades for each assignment, and for the course itself, are calculated as follows: A: 90% or above; B: 80%-89%; C: 70%-79%; D: 60%-69%; F: 0%-59%.

On assignments with curved grades, the top score(s) will be converted to a 100. All other grades on the assignment will be expressed as a percentage of the top scores. For example, if the top score on an exam is a 20 out of 25 items, the 20 will be converted to a 100. If you answer 15 of the 25 questions correctly, your grade will be a 15/20, which is equal to a 75 (in other words, a C).

The times and dates when assignments are due and when evaluations are given will not be altered to fit a student's schedule. All students will be expected to alter their schedules to fit class responsibilities.

In the interest of more thorough coverage of certain topics, the professor may decide to omit some of the assigned material from coverage on an exam. Each student is responsible for learning about any announced omissions.

B. The Basis of Final Grades

Grades in this course are based on performance alone. Grading is not based on how hard someone has worked to earn a particular grade, or whether someone needs this course to graduate, or on personal & family needs, or on personal conceptions of fairness or justice. All grades, including the final course grade, will be based on a student's academic performance in this course, according to the criteria described in this syllabus.

C. The Reporting of Final Grades

For non-graduating students, final course grades will be posted at noon on the Monday after commencement (and for graduating seniors, at noon on the Friday before commencement). Final exam week is a hectic time for students and the faculty alike, so please respect the privacy of all your professors during and after this period. Please do not inquire concerning grades between the start of the final exams period and when grades are reported. If the professor needs information from you during this time, he will be the one to initiate contact.

Unsolicited voicemails and emails from any non-graduating student during the final exams period might have to go unanswered. Please understand that any issues of grading that truly must be resolved may still be resolved *after* final grades are reported. Access to assignment grades and other course content will also be available to you on Blackboard until the week after commencement.

V. Upholding Academic Integrity

A. The Honor Code

As members of an academic community, no student should tolerate cheating. According to the traditional academic honor code, it is the responsibility of every student to report obvious cheating or any suspicious behavior that may compromise the integrity of the grading process. The confidentiality and anonymity of students who report such incidents will be respected.

B. Policies on Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty and the penalties pertaining to it are described in the SRSU student handbook. The penalties for serious academic dishonesty are severe: a student who submits a plagiarized paper or cheats on an exam may receive an F for the assignment, and in cases of repeated or flagrant violations, for the entire course.

A plagiarized written assignment may be awarded a zero on academic grounds alone, yet the offending student may face additional disciplinary penalties for academic dishonesty. Plagiarism, as every college student should know, involves taking the work

of others and claiming it as your own. It will not be tolerated in this class. If you are unsure about what plagiarism is, find out online at www.plagiarism.org. You and you alone are responsible for understanding and avoiding academic dishonesty in all your assignments.

Students may not print, photograph, copy, or in any other way reproduce material from any exam, and no student may share, receive, or knowingly read such material.

Students may not use books, notes, cell phones or any other informational materials or electronic devices during testing, unless authorized by the professor. While taking an exam, students should not use any electronic device other than the device on which an exam is being taken.

Students may not share books, notes, make phone calls, send texts, or engage in any other form of communication with each other during exams. Nor may students communicate about material included on an exam with a classmate or in the presence of a classmate who has not yet completed that exam.

In a testing classroom or lab, students should not sit next to other students who are taking the same test unless no other seats are available. Students should not talk while exams are being administered. During Blackboard exams, students should not open, view, or interact with any website other than the Blackboard website.

☞ The consequence of violating any of these directives can be severe. Doing so may result in the forfeiture of an assignment grade and other penalties, up to and including dismissal from the course with a grade of F.

VI. Courtesy and Good Conduct in Class

Out of courtesy to others, always remember to follow the conventional classroom rules, such as: do not distract others from learning; always show up to class on time; do not leave class early. (If you must leave early or show up late in special circumstances, please notify the professor ahead of time.) And absolutely do not get up to get food, take calls, or for other trivial reasons. Breaks are always provided, so wait until a break.

Students in VMR classes (classes using Teams, Zoom, et cetera) must log in with a working camera and a working microphone on their device. The camera must be turned on and the student's eyes and face must appear in the frame. Anyone whose camera is turned off or whose face is not in frame whenever roll is taken will not be counted present and may be removed from VMR class meetings and not allowed back in for the remainder of the meeting.

Visual and auditory disruptions and distractions must be kept to a minimum for the benefit of everyone. For this reason, no eating or drinking on camera is allowed except during breaks. No one may be logged into VMR class meetings from an automobile,

whether stationary or in transit, whether driving or as a passenger. This is a matter of public safety.

Sul Ross has a policy on appropriate attire. The policy refers to “the responsibility to dress in a manner which will not detract from the academic atmosphere of the library, classrooms, and other facilities.” Even when logging into a class from home, students should always present themselves in a socially appropriate and dignified manner. Any student whose attire or behavior detracts from the academic atmosphere to an extent that it becomes seriously or repeatedly distracting or disruptive will be notified by the professor and expected to resolve the problem.

VII. Cultivating a Vibrant Academic Environment

A. Tolerance, Open Expression, and Academic Freedom

Psychology is a field of inquiry that touches upon many controversial issues, including sexuality, evolution, gender, race, ethnicity, individual differences, parenting, divorce, crime and public policy, drug use, religion, and multicultural issues, among others. Professors and students often have strong opinions and make forceful arguments concerning these phenomena. It is often educationally productive to address and debate these matters in the context of classroom instruction and course assignments. Social taboos discouraging open discussion are inappropriate in this context and must be laid aside in the interest of intellectual inquiry.

Your grade will not be influenced in any way by expressing points of view that disagree with the professor's, either in what you say or in what you write in assignments. In class, when time permits, students are encouraged to express their opinions and arguments when they are relevant to the subject material. The professor is free to do likewise.

Students who experience excessive anxiety or discomfort during the discussion of a sensitive topic (e.g., domestic abuse) may leave the classroom if the need arises, and they should never feel embarrassed for doing so. This can be an adaptive response to an emotionally difficult situation.

In contrast, some individuals in our society seem to be offended in principle by the mere exposure to concepts, opinions, and arguments with which they disagree. The response of such individuals is sometimes to try and shut down discussion, to claim they feel “unsafe,” or to become hostile or vindictive toward others. Such persons are not encouraged to take psychology courses at Rio Grande College until they have resolved the issues preventing them from engaging in serious intellectual discourse.

B. Dr. Wynne's Teaching Philosophy

A college degree signifies accomplishment; it will increase a person's prestige and can help its holder acquire a job. However, once the job is taken, success depends on what has been learned—a college degree by itself is merely a sheet of paper. If a student

takes full advantage of the opportunity of education, the sheet of paper signifies skills and knowledge that will improve one's value as a worker and as a member of the community. If not, the student might find himself or herself with a sheet of paper only, without additional skills, useful knowledge, or value to employers. RGC psychology courses are designed to provide students with knowledge and skills that will help them in their careers, in their relationships, and in their capacity to be responsible members of a community.

The early 20th Century American writer Albert Jay Nock had this to say about his college experience:

We were made to understand that the burden of education was on us and no one else, least of all our instructors; they were not there to help us carry it or to praise our efforts, but to see that we shouldered it in proper style and got on with it.

I believe that through encouragement and deserved praise, college professors can and should ease the burden of education for their students. Yet students who enroll at Sul Ross must remember they are expected to perform upper-division college-level work. No course in the psychology curriculum is remedial. As Albert Jay Nock understood, a professor's responsibility is to lead students to knowledge; it is, however, each student's responsibility to learn.

The typical American psychology undergraduate curriculum and textbook are designed to prepare students to become psychological researchers or practitioners. Yet few students here who major in psychology plan to become psychologists. Instead, many intend to become counselors, and many others expect that their major in psychology will help them in a variety of ways. I believe that while exposure to research methods and technical esoterica does have a rightful place in the undergraduate program, most of my students are much better served by a phenomenological educational orientation that places real-life applications of psychological theories and discoveries above a focus on technical training. Therefore, I strongly encourage students to relate and apply what is taught in my psychology classes to their own emotional lives, family lives, workplaces, and communities.

VIII. Ensuring Accessibility for Everyone

A. Special Accommodations

Our institution complies with state and federal laws concerning people with disabilities. If a student needs accessibility services, it is the student's responsibility to initiate a request. This may be done by contacting Mary Schwartz Grisham or Ronnie Harris at SRSU's office of Counseling and Accessibility Services. The phone number there is 432-837-8203 and the email address is counseling@sulross.edu.

Our school is contracting with an organization called TimelyCare. This organization provides counseling services. All students will have access to nine free counseling sessions this fall. For more information, visit <https://timelycare.com/srsu/>. Sul Ross also offers counseling directly at the Alpine campus in Ferguson Hall Room 112, and through telehealth zoom sessions for RGC and remote students.

B. Distance Education

Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, library resources, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should submit online assignments through Blackboard or SRSU email, which require secure login information to verify students' identities and to protect students' information. [If the course requires students to take proctored exams or to purchase additional software or equipment, those requirements are described herein above.] The procedures for filing a student complaint are included in the student handbook. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students enrolled in online courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website.

C. Purchasing Course Materials

By law, this university is required to inform you of the following in accordance with Section 51.9705 of the Texas Education Code: "A student of this institution is not under any obligation to purchase a textbook from a university-affiliated bookstore. The same textbook may also be available from an independent retailer, including an online retailer." In fact, bargains on textbooks are often found on the websites of many Internet booksellers. Major online vendors typically accept major credit cards, checks, and money orders.

It is the student's responsibility to acquire course materials in time for their use in class. Many weeks before the start of each semester, textbooks are made available for browsing and purchase at the website for the Sul Ross Bookstore (www.sulross.edu/bookstore). It is important that students have their course materials by the start of each semester. This is especially important for the summer semester, when classes proceed more rapidly than in the fall or spring.

IX. Our Psychology Program's Learning Objectives and Skills

A. Student Learning Objectives for the Psychology Program

This course is an element of the Sul Ross psychology program. It is expected that the graduating student in this program will demonstrate the capacity to:

1. Recognize the central concepts in the department's main areas of focus: abnormal psychology; social & personality psychology, and developmental psychology.
2. Recognize and apply basic psychological research methods.

3. Communicate effectively in written assignments and oral presentations concerning psychological subject matter.

B. Marketable Skills for the Psychology Program

1. Students will demonstrate competency in public speaking and communicating scientific information to diverse audiences (speaking effectively).
2. Students will demonstrate empathic or active listening and conversational skills, and/or write clearly about their affective stance, respectfully attuned to the needs of their audiences (describing feelings).
3. Students will demonstrate the aptitude to locate, organize and evaluate the credibility of information from multiple sources (identifying resources).
4. Students will demonstrate the ability to examine the underlying issues of scientific problems, attending to the pertinent details and creating action plans, recognizing ambiguity and complexity as essential components (analyzing).

X. Syllabus Updates and Substantive Changes

This syllabus was constructed to be as accurate and clear as possible. However, there is always a chance that errors or ambiguities might require the publication of updates after the semester begins. It is also possible that unforeseen circumstances might necessitate substantive changes to this syllabus. If substantive changes are made, they will be implemented in the interest of fairness for all students and in a way to minimize any inconvenience or difficulty for everyone.

Attachment 1: General Guidelines for Written Assignments in Psychology

In this course, *always* follow *all* these specifications, unless instructed otherwise:

1. Refer to pp. 61-67 of your *APA Publication Manual (7th Ed.)* to format your paper.
2. Double space *everything* and use 12-point Times New Roman. That is exactly what you are reading here. It is widely available and easy to read on a screen or on paper.
3. Use one-inch margins all around on every page.
4. Number all your pages *automatically* in the upper right-hand corner.
5. Always include a cover page. The cover page should be centered, and it should include (listed on separate lines): your paper's title; your name; the program and school (Psychology Program, Sul Ross State University); the title of your course; your professor's full name (Dr. Wesley D. Wynne), and the assignment due date.
6. Always develop a title that is original and descriptive, never something bland and uncreative like "Psychology Reflection Paper," "Journal #1," "Exam 3," et cetera.
7. Do not include an abstract in your paper. Abstracts are for scientific journals.
8. Include a references page; make sure that every element in each of your references is arranged and formatted correctly in APA style (not in MLA or some other style).
9. Grammar-check, spell-check, and proofread your paper before submitting it.
10. Keep a back-up of your paper on your own computer.
11. Remember that your cover page and your references page do not count toward the page count of the paper. For example, a five-page reflection paper should have a title page, five *full* pages of text, and a references page.
12. Do not plagiarize at all. Plagiarizing (copying someone else's work and passing it off without credit as your own) will not be tolerated. You will fail for it.

Attachment 2: Summaries, Reflection Papers, and Journals

A **summary** of something is essentially a retelling of key points. A summary paper should be clear, concise, hierarchical and as comprehensive as possible, given the length limitations of the assignment. Let's examine each of these terms. "Clear" means easy to read and understand. We attain clarity by being specific in what we say, using the simplest language possible to convey the right meaning, and obeying the rules of grammar, usage, and style that we depend on for effective communication. "Concise" means saying as much as possible in as few words as possible. "Hierarchical" in this context means focusing on what's most important and leaving out what is less important. "Comprehensive" means covering all the major elements of something. For example, a comprehensive summary of a book that has twenty chapters will summarize the main aspects of all twenty chapters, not merely ten or fifteen of them. A comprehensive summary of a textbook chapter with seven major topic headings will cover all seven of those major topics, and pull out the main points for each topic, leaving out minor points. Writing summaries of complex material such as chapters can be a useful aid in learning. complete the main points of a book or the plot of a film.

Reflections papers are, first of all, not summaries. A summary is descriptive, but it doesn't reveal much at all about you, the author, other than how effective you are at writing a summary. In contrast, a reflection paper is an assignment where you write about your own reflections in response to something you are assigned to watch, listen to, read, or experience. (That something is typically a film or book, but it could also be a short story, magazine article, poem, musical performance, YouTube video, etc.) You *never*

independently research and reference academic journal articles for a reflection paper in this course, as you might when you write in a research paper in other courses.

So what are reflections? Reflections are your own thoughts, questions, insights, interpretations, and speculations about the psychological aspects of whatever you have been assigned to watch, listen to, read, or experience. Primarily, your reflections should relate to or connect with specific concepts and theories you have learned in this class (and in other psychology classes). To a lesser extent, you may include insights related to your own personal observations and experiences in your own life. However, the focus in every paragraph of a reflection paper should either closely relate to specific, explicitly identified elements of the material on which you are reflecting, so only discuss things from your own life experience to demonstrate a connection with the assigned material.

One critical thing to remember about reflection papers is that you are not supposed to use them to summarize whatever you have been assigned. Here is an example of summarization in a paper that was supposed to be a reflection paper related to a film:

The film "As Good as It Gets" involves a main character by the name of Melvin Udall, who is first depicted as a smart aleck with a lot of obsessive-compulsive tendencies a bad temper, and a selfish outlook toward others. Melvin is a writer who lives alone. He is next-door neighbors with a craftsman named Simon, who gets robbed and beaten. Melvin hesitantly helps Simon out by watching his dog while Simon recovers in a hospital and he eventually lets Simon move in with him. The other main character is Carol. Carol is a waitress at a coffee shop where

Melvin goes for breakfast each day. For Melvin, having breakfast at the coffee shop and having Carol wait on him is an important part of his daily routine. So one day, when Carol takes off work to deal with her sick child, Melvin becomes extremely restless because his routine is disrupted.

That description is okay, but it's rather boring if you've already seen the movie. And honestly, if you wanted a summary of any film, you could find a much better one on the Internet. Although summaries can be very useful in the proper context, such as when you are trying to organize the essential points of a complex textbook chapter, they do not work in a reflection paper.

Once again, in contrast to summarizations of material, reflections are your own personal thoughts, questions, insights, interpretations, and speculations that relate to various psychological aspects of whatever you have been assigned (film, video, book, article, poem, et cetera). There are a million ways to write about your reflections, but here is one good example referring to the same film as above:

Melvin was the character I'd hoped he would be, artistically speaking. He puts up a mental wall blocking out the people around him. I believe he was thinking that his emotions were a vulnerability that might expose weaknesses within him. I've seen that before in other people. Growing up, I was always told by an uncle to be careful with whom I share personal information because it can back-fire. Perhaps because of that strategy of dealing with people, my uncle's judgment of character has not been the best because he's always at arms-length with everyone he comes across, trying not to "let them in." So that similarity between my uncle and

Melvin caught my attention. Also, there is a stereotype that all artists must be a little crazy. Like Melvin, my uncle is an artist. And he's a little crazy himself.

Isn't that more interesting? It shows that the author here has seriously thought about what he saw in the film. He is analyzing one of the film's characters and he makes a perceptive comparison with a person from real life. The author's reflections here are psychologically sophisticated, original, and unique to his own thoughts and experiences.

So this is what you should aim for in a reflection paper. It might involve more effort than simply writing a summary, but it makes you think. And it is an effective way to learn more deeply about the ideas you are studying.

Once again, an essential point to understand about reflection papers is that whatever you write in a reflection paper should *connect tightly and explicitly in clear and significant ways* throughout your entire paper with whatever work you are reflecting on—the book, chapter, article, film, podcast, et cetera. Unless what you are writing is both psychological in focus and closely related to the work you were assigned to reflect on, then instead of writing a reflection paper, all you might be doing is writing a **journal**.

A few students submit reflection papers in which they only briefly mention the work they were assigned to reflect on, and then seldom or never say anything else substantive about that work. Often these papers are interesting, and even quite touching, because the authors tell important stories about their lives. But unless such stories are closely intertwined with discussion of aspects of the book, film, etc. that has been assigned, such papers are only personal journals instead of reflection papers. Such journals have their

purposes; unfortunately, as journals, they do not meet the expectations of reflection papers.

Attachment 3: Avoiding Plagiarism

Students often have uncertainties about plagiarism and the proper citing of sources. I hope this little guide provides some clarity. – Dr. Wynne

In Chapter 5 of Straub (2019), we find the following passage:

Another important external factor in how we cope with threatening events is the degree of social support that we receive. Social ties and relationships with other people powerfully influence us, in both positive and negative ways. In stressful situations, people who perceive a high level of social support may experience less stress and may cope more effectively. (p. 145)

Question 1: Is the statement below plagiarism?

Another important external factor in how we cope with threatening events is the degree of social support that we receive.

Answer: Yes, it is obviously plagiarism. You cannot simply copy what someone else has written and use their words as your own. You have to give them credit.

Question 2: Is the statement below plagiarism?

An important factor in how we cope with threats is the degree of social support that we get from others.

Answer: Yes, it is plagiarism. All I've done here is rewrite someone else's statement. I've just changed a few words, but the sentence in this example is simply a re-write of Dr. Straub's copyrighted work to make it look like it's my own work. But it is not my own work; it's merely a re-write. You simply cannot do this. Ever. This is definitely plagiarism.

Question 3: Is the statement below plagiarism?

An important factor in how we cope with threats is the degree of social support that we get from others. (Straub, 2019).

Answer: Yes, this is plagiarism, too. I've referenced Dr. Straub's textbook but I still rewrote his statement, using a modified version of his sentence.

Question 4: Is the statement below plagiarism?

Another important external factor in how we cope with threatening events is the degree of social support that we receive. (Straub, 2019).

Answer: Yes, this would still be considered plagiarism. Even though I've used Dr. Straub's original sentence here and included a citation here, a reader would not know that I am quoting his words because I don't even use quotation marks. Whenever you quote someone, you have to make it completely clear that you are quoting them. Typically, this done by using quotations marks. Without those quotation marks, any reader would assume the words are your own and not Dr. Straub's words, and that cannot be allowed to happen.

Question 5: Is the statement below plagiarism?

“Another important external factor in how we cope with threatening events is the degree of social support that we receive.” (Straub, 2019).

Answer: This is not exactly plagiarism. After all, quotation marks are provided and a citation is made. However, there is still a major problem. When you quote someone, you need to tell the reader exactly where you found the quote, so that the reader can go and verify the quote. But (Straub, 2019) refers to a five-hundred-page textbook. You can’t expect anyone to search through an entire book to find a quote. What you do is include the page number where the quote appears.

Question 6: So how do I properly quote and cite something that I want to quote?

Answer: You can do it like this. This is a right way:

“Another important external factor in how we cope with threatening events is the degree of social support that we receive.” (Straub, 2019, p. 145).

Question 7: So should I always use quotation marks when I quote something?

Answer: There is an exception to using quotation marks: your APA Publication Manual explains on page 272 that if you quote something that is forty words or longer, you should not use quotation marks but should instead indicate you are quoting by using what is called a “block quotation.” My indented quote near the top of this handout is an example of a block quotation. I reproduce it here:

In Chapter 5 of Straub (2019), we find the following passage:

Another important external factor in how we cope with threatening events is the degree of social support that we receive. Social ties and relationships with other people powerfully influence us, in both positive and negative ways. In stressful situations, people who perceive a high level of social support may experience less stress and may cope more effectively. (p. 145)

Look again at that block-quoted passage above. Do you want to make sure you understand it but won’t plagiarize it when you try to summarize it in your own words? Do this: read the segment (or chapter section or subsection) two or three times to make sure you understand the main concepts. Then close the book. And then with the book closed, *rely on your memory* to reconstruct the main points. You can do this for whatever section or subsection of a chapter you are trying to summarize. Just remember to *close the book* before you start writing. Below is my own summary of the essential information in that block quote from page 145:

Social support – the care and concern we receive from our friends, family, and others – is also a major factor in stress and handling stress. Generally, individuals who feel like they have a healthy amount of social support feel like they can cope with stress better than people who do not. They might even sense events as less stressful thanks to the social support they enjoy.

See what I've done? I've restated the core concepts of that quote from p. 145 *in my own words*. It doesn't contain every idea in the quoted segment. It's not supposed to – it's just a summary, after all, and summaries are intended to summarize – to boil down the essence of something without including all the details. But it is all *in my own words*. And because these weekly exams are explicitly identified as summaries of chapters from the Straub text, and because you are citing the Straub text as the reference for your exam, you couldn't reasonably be accused of plagiarizing the text if you wrote something like this in your own exam.

However, it is important to point out that in other kinds of writing (not our chapter summaries but in works such as research papers, magazine articles, and books), many scholars would insist that you still need to cite and reference the Straub text in my example summary statement above, since that's where the information was found. When it comes to avoiding plagiarism, it is wise to err on the side of caution.

A final point: understand that I could have summarized the quoted segment from page 145 *much more concisely* just by saying this: "Social support helps people handle stress better." After all, that is the key point that you want to remember from the quoted segment.

Please examine pages 269-278 of your APA publication manual for more information on how to quote sources in APA style.

Reference

Straub, R.O. (2019). *Health psychology* (6th ed.). Worth Publishers.

Attachment 4: General Assessment Rubrics for Assignments in Psychology

Assessment rubrics are helpful to plan and evaluate professional writing and oral presentations. Students should refer to these rubrics at appropriate times during the development of their oral and written assignments.

RUBRIC FOR ORAL PRESENTATIONS					
DIMENSION OF ANALYSIS	Fail 0	Poor 1	Average 2	Good 3	Top 4
Topic and Focus follow the instructions provided for the assignment.					
Structure is logical in its organization & fully developed, with a distinct introduction & conclusion.					
Audio-Visual Aids are effectively utilized and appropriate for professional presentations.					
Verbal Communication is clear, fluent, well-paced, properly intoned, and not over-reliant on notes or slides.					
Non-verbal Communication clarifies and enhances the message with appropriate eye contact, gestures, and posture.					
Grammar, Spelling, & Punctuation meet levels expected for formal professional presentations.					
Documentation fully conforms to accepted professional standards.					

RUBRIC FOR PROFESSIONAL WRITING					
DIMENSION OF ANALYSIS	Fail 0	Poor 1	Average 2	Good 3	Top 4
Psychological Analysis of the subject matter is relevant, accurate, and thoroughly utilizes assigned sources.					
Clarity of Expression is appropriate for professional-level communication.					
Grammar, Spelling, & Punctuation meet levels expected for formal professional writing.					
Documentation fully conforms to accepted professional standards.					