

**The University of Texas at El Paso**  
**Department of Psychology**  
**Cognitive Psychology (PSYC 3348, CRN 17231)**  
**Fall 2018**

**Instructor:** Abdolhossein Abdollahy Zarandi, PhD

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**Office:** Department of Psychology

**Class Days and Time:** Tuesdays and Thursdays: 3:00 pm - 4:20 pm

**Location:** College of Business Administration, Room 313

**Office Hours:** Monday through Friday (online communication)

### **Course Description and Objectives**

This course orbits one of the most original and exciting fields of the science of psychology: cognitive psychology. The course takes students on an enjoyable journey to a learning destination with many stops. The first stop energizes them with a sweet treat: how we sense and perceive the world. The second stop teaches them a lot about attention: how and why we, knowingly and unknowingly, take notice of things, events, and people. The third stop sees students off with a big portmanteau of knowledge on how we draw in, hold and keep, and remember information; it's about human memory.

Another stop of this journey is festooned with many beautiful linguistic portraits showing us, say, why we become speechless upon facing this sentence: "The school is near the bike.", but fully digest its upturned mate; that is: "The bike is near the school." Or what is the mystery behind the following sentence? "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously." This stop is called "Language." There is also a stop spotted from far away by this four-word sign: Decisions, Judgments, and Reasoning. It is really an eye-opener: most of our daily judgments and decisions are on the wrong track -- and most of the time we fail to get them back on track. More stops? Yes, students will get through many other stops, but the destination is close at hand.

The main objective of the course is to help students come away from the above-mentioned journey with such self-generated gifts in hand: understanding the book content and hopefully starting to use their newly-attained knowledge in daily life; taking part in and enjoying an array of in-and-out-of-class activities – both individually and in groups; orally present a selected portion of the book; and finally coming up with a research idea on a cognitive psychological topic, conducting a small-scale study to test the idea, and writing a paper on the whole endeavor.

## **Course Text**

**Gabriel A. Radvansky & Mark H. Ashcraft (2014). *Cognition* (6th edition). Pearson.**

**ISBN 10: 0-205-98580-7 • ISBN 13: 978-0-205-98580-7**

## **Course Format**

Tuesdays: lectures, student presentations, and participation

Thursdays: lectures, student presentations, and participation

## **Course Assignments**

### **1) Student Oral Presentations**

Students are expected to give a talk on an assigned book chapter subject. The oral presentation may take two forms: Individual presentation or two-member group presentation. During the initial class meetings, students will be scheduled to give their talk. More details will be provided in class.

### **2) Cognitive Interview Exercise**

An interesting question in cognitive psychology -- discussed in the course textbook Chapter 10 -- pertains to how readers comprehend written material. There are a number of models and theories which try to explain textual comprehension. One is "embodied cognition"; the idea that the physical world, your body, and the interaction between the physical world and your body determine the way you think. This is a good place to take a deep look at this idea by conducting a "cognitive interview" and writing a short paper on it. Here I suggest a detailed plan:

Three comprehension passages (adapted from Thomas and Turner, 2011) appear below. Copy and paste the passages onto a Microsoft Word blank document and print it out. Ask an individual (let's call him or her an interviewee) with at least some college background to join you in this effort. Tell him or her to carefully read the three passages (appearing below) for at least nine minutes. Next, ask him or her the subsequent questions (see below). Then, create two (or more than two) relevant questions and enter all the answers (the transcript) into your to-be-submitted paper (in a Microsoft Word document).

In the next step, write your own reaction to the answers in a few paragraphs consisting of at least 500 words. In this reaction section, you will analyze the interviewee's responses and include your own evaluation and interpretation of the responses. You can use the following link to direct and enrich your analysis, evaluation, and interpretation:

<http://classicprose.com/csguide.html>

Please note that according to an “embodied cognition” perspective, Passage B (see below) is supposed to be the most comprehensible one -- which should logically be the favorite one as well. Passage B seems to be the best answer, because it brings to mind a familiar image schema: ignoring or rejecting several secondary things in order to get to a desired primary one. For example, imagine you want to pick the biggest orange from a bag of 10 oranges. What would you do? You put your hand in the bag and start to ignore or reject the smaller oranges -- one by one -- until your hand grabs the biggest one. Similarly, according to Passage B, if we want to understand a science, we should, at first, ignore its *theories, findings, and apologists* and only look at *what the practitioners of science do*.

You’re free to write in any style you like. The finished paper is expected to be uploaded onto Blackboard before or on **December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018**.

**The passages:**

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**Passage A:**

“If you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories but you should instead, putting aside its findings, concentrate your attention on its practice entirely, taking care not to be distracted by anything its apologists might say about that.”

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**Passage B:**

“If you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not at what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do.”

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**Passage C:**

“If you want to understand what a science is, and you look at its theories and its findings and its representations by apologists, you will find that you must set all this aside to look at what its practitioners do, which is where you should have directed your attention in the first place.”

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**Note.** Your interviewee may need to be told what the plural word “apologists” means. Two synonyms of the word are “supporters” and “advocates.”

**The Interview questions:**

1) To you, which passage is easier to understand?

- 2) Which passage is your favorite?
- 3) Why did you select this specific passage? (Encourage the interviewee to give at least three reasons.)
- 4) How much do you like your selected passage? (Encourage the interviewee to give a long answer.)
- 5) Will you please try to rewrite your selected passage? (For this, give the interviewee a pen and a sheet of paper.)
- 6) .....? (to be created by you)
- 7) .....? (to be created by you)

**Reference:**

Thomas, F., & Turner, M. (2011). *Clear and simple as the truth: writing classic prose*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

**3) Small-scale research project**

One of the goals of this course is to give you a first serious opportunity to discover your ability to investigate and write about a research question in such areas as perception, attention, memory, learning, language, reasoning, judgment, decision making, and problem solving. Everyone has the capacity to give life to new research questions: Why do children often attend to bright colors? How do our grandmas and grandpas remember their teen age years? What drives us to make regrettable decisions? Ideas abound here.

This suggested small-scale research endeavor invites you to get on board and create your own new idea and do a study or experiment on it. You can conduct an experiment in a single one-hour session with a few participants -- and equipped with only one or two simple questions! That's it. After doing your study, you will write your masterpiece up and submit it onto Blackboard. The paper is expected to contain at least 1500 words, excluding the references. The report will consist of five main parts including a) Abstract and Introduction, b) Method, c) Results, d) Discussion, and e) References and Appendices. Each part will be assigned 2 points. So this assignment counts 10 points (10%) towards the final grade. The deadline for submitting the paper to Blackboard will be **December 4th, 2018**. During the first weeks of the semester, I will talk about the assignment at length. You are also welcome to come see me and/or email me for consultation and discussion.

**Quizzes and Exams**

You will take two random unannounced quizzes, a midterm exam, and a final exam throughout the semester (see Course Assessment below). The quizzes and exams consist of multiple-choice

items. The exams dates are specified in the course timetable (see below). Each quiz begins at the top of the hour and takes 15-20 minutes to finish. Note that each question on the quizzes and exams counts one percent towards the final grade. Also, please keep in mind that the possibility of a quiz or exam makeup is zero. If you, for some reason, couldn't attend a quiz or exam, let me know to deal with it.

### **Quiz and Exam Misses**

The students that miss the quizzes and/or exams and have valid excused absence documents in hand will not be able to make up, but they can avail themselves of an opportunity. That is, through a procedure that I call "mapping", I can transfer their attended quizzes or exams grades to their missed ones. For example, if a student has missed the first quiz (consisting of, say, 10 items having a worth of 10 points) and has received a zero grade, and also if she/he has taken the second one (also consisting of, say, 10 items having a worth of 10 points) and has received a grade of 9 out of 10, the second quiz grade (that is 9) will be given (applied) to the first one -- which has now a grade of 9 as well.

### **Class Attendance and Participation**

Class attendance is expected because you can learn better when you are physically present. Also, there will be two random unannounced quizzes throughout the semester. Missing a quiz means losing an influential portion of the final grade.

Class participation is important and has its own points as shown below. Class participation involves two parts: Part 1) Showing such behaviors and attitudes as active listening to the lectures and to other students, making comments during class discussions, asking questions, and being respectful to others and Part 2) Taking part in an activity I call "In a Cool Huddle". In this activity, students are expected to discuss some topics in groups of 2-4 and report the results of their discussions at the end of the class sessions.

### **Extra Credit Assignment Possibility**

If needed, students can choose to do a possible extra credit assignment to increase their final grades. But it comes with a condition: students can use this possible assignment only if they do not have a noticeable history of unexcused absences.

## Course Assessment

1. Quiz 1	10%
2. Quiz 2	10%
3. Midterm exam	20%
4. Final exam	20%
5. Oral Presentation	10%
6. Cognitive Interview	10%
7. Small-scale project paper	10%
8. In-class activities	10%

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**Total** **100%**

## Grading Scale

90% - 100% = A

80% - 89.9% = B

70% - 79.9% = C

60% - 69.9% = D

00% - 59.9% = F

## Classroom Behavior

Please turn off your cell phone on arrival. Don't talk when others are talking. If you want to ask a question or make a comment, raise your hand and try not to interrupt others as they speak. Don't use your computer for irrelevant activities such as emailing, visiting a social network profile, playing games, watching videos, listening to music and so on. These activities prevent you from focusing on lectures and other class engagements and may distract other students.

## Disability

If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at 747-5148, or by email to [cass@utep.edu](mailto:cass@utep.edu), or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/>.

## Academic Conduct, Discipline, and Integrity

It is assumed that students are implicitly aware of the principles of academic conduct, discipline, and integrity. But having an explicit knowledge of the principles will be highly beneficial for anybody working within the realm of academia. The following link provides

wide-range information about academic conduct and discipline at UTEP. Please read the file carefully and enthusiastically:

<https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/osccr/student-conduct/academic-integrity.html>

## Course Timetable and Lecture Topics

### Week 1

August 28: Introduction

August 30: Chapter 1: Cognitive Psychology: An Introduction

### Week 2

September 4: Chapter 1: Cognitive Psychology: An Introduction

September 6: Chapter 2: Cognitive Neuroscience and Cognitive Science

### Week 3

September 11: Chapter 2: Cognitive Neuroscience and Cognitive Science

September 13: Chapter 3: Sensation and Perception

### Week 4

September 18: Chapter 3: Sensation and Perception

September 20: Chapter 4: Attention

### Week 5

September 25: Chapter 4: Attention

September 27: Chapter 5: Short-Term Working Memory

### Week 6

October 2: Chapter 5: Short-Term Working Memory

October 4: Chapter 6: Learning and Remembering

### Week 7

October 9: Chapter 6: Learning and Remembering

October 11: Chapter 7: Knowing

### Week 8

October 16: Chapter 7: Knowing

October 18: Chapter 8: Using Knowledge in the Real World

### Week 9

October 23: Midterm Exam

October 25: Chapter 8: Using Knowledge in the Real World

**Week 10**

October 30: Chapter 9: Language

November 1: Chapter 9: Language

**Week 11**

November 6: Chapter 11: Decisions, Judgments, and Reasoning

November 8: Chapter 11: Decisions, Judgments, and Reasoning

**Week 12**

November 13: Chapter 12: Problem Solving

November 15: Chapter 12: Problem Solving

**Week 13**

November 20: Chapter 13: Cognition and Emotion

November 22: **No Classes**

**Week 14**

November 27: Chapter 13: Cognition and Emotion

November 29: Chapter 10: Comprehension: Written and Spoken Language

**Week 15**

December 4: Chapter 10: Comprehension: Written and Spoken Language

December 6: Review

**Week 16**

**December 13: Final Exam: 4:00 pm – 6:45 pm**

This syllabus is subject to change.