

PSCH 352 (Cognition and Memory)

Instructor

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Learning Goal

The purpose of the *Cognition and Memory* course is to give you a better understanding of the intellectual functions of your mind by teaching you to think like a cognitive psychologist. Intellectual functions include attention, memory, thinking, imagery and language. In the cognitive approach, intellectual functions are explained in terms of information processes. For each function, we ask what information is involved, and what processes are applied to it. We relate the answers to your own everyday experience as well as to class demonstrations and experimental findings from the research literature. Sometimes the phenomena we talk about are well-known from everyday life and common sense; others are more surprising or unexpected. The goal is that you should be able to use the concepts and principles introduced in the course to understand cognitive phenomena, whether in yourself or in others. A second theme is that you should understand what methods are used to study cognition.

Format

The format of the course is a mixture of lectures, reading materials and outside-of-class activities. Dr. Ohlsson does not take attendance at lectures, but you cannot do well in the course without coming to class, because some of the concepts introduced in class are not well explained in the textbook. Dr. Ohlsson posts the MSWord and PowerPoint files that he uses to support the lectures on the course Blackboard site.

The materials include a textbook and some handouts. There are some concepts in the textbook that will not be covered in the lectures, so you will have to read those parts of the text on your own. The class assignments include two written reports (see below), and participation in demonstration experiments (the “labs”). The latter are done via a software system called Launchpad/ToolKit; access to this software is bundled with your textbook.

Handouts, announcements, instructions, etc., will be posted on the Blackboard site for the course. Because you are reading this, you obviously found your way to that site. If you have questions about or problems with Blackboard, contact the course TA as your first step in fixing it. Pay attention to Blackboard, because all course announcements will be posted there.

On Blackboard, under “Course Documents”, you’ll find a file called “Schedule”. This is a very important file. It gives you lecture-by-lecture instructions about what to read, when assignments are due, the dates for the mid-term exams, and so on.

Reading Materials

The textbook is Russell Revlin, “Cognition: Theory and Practice”, MacMillan, 2015. Make sure that the textbook you buy comes with an access code to the Launchpad/Cognitive Toolkit web site.

Handouts written by the instructor will be posted on Blackboard. The handouts pertain to a couple of lectures that will cover topics not covered at all in the textbook.

Activities

There are several outside-of-class activities. They are all voluntary, but they earn you points towards your grade and you cannot do well in the course if you skip them. On the other hand, if you do all of them, do them well, and on time, they contribute significantly toward a high grade.

Activity 1: Participate in a Group Discussion

You can earn points by participating in a group study event in which 5-9 students enrolled in the course get together and discuss some topic covered in the course for at least 2 hours. There can be no fewer than 5 participants and no more than 9. Look at the Blackboard site in the "Assignments" folder for the detailed instructions about how to do the group discussion and how to write the report.

Activity 2: Participate in Demonstration Experiments

Another activity outside class is to participate in demonstration experiments. In the Blackboard folder "Course Documents" you'll find a document with instructions for how to do this. In brief, you go to the Launchpad/ToolKit login page, and enter your access code. You will see a list of five different experiments, in the order in which they are due. You open up an experiment by clicking on it. You read and follow the instructions. The fact you have completed an experiment will be recorded automatically. You get points towards your grade for each of the experiments. Because the lab results are pooled across students for discussion in class, they are of little use if you complete an experiment late. Check the course schedule (a separate document posted on Blackboard next to this one) for the due date for each experiment.

Activity 3: A Self-Study of Memory Failures

In this semester-long activity, you keep a diary of memory failures that happen to yourself, interpret each failure in terms of the concepts introduced in the course and analyze their similarities and differences. You find the detailed instructions for how to do the memory diary on the Blackboard site, in the "Assignments" folder. We'll also go over those instructions in class. Many students gain important insights into how they themselves function, memory-wise, from this activity.

Activity 4: Take the Examinations

There will be two "Midterm" Examinations, at the end of the 5th and 10th weeks, respectively, and one Final Examination. All three exams consist of multiple choice questions. There will be 20 questions on each of the two "Midterms". The questions are worth 1 point each, for a total of 20 points.

The final exam consists of three parts. The first part of the final covers the same material as the first "Midterm" and serves as a make-up opportunity for that exam; the second part of the final likewise consists of questions covering the same material as the second "Midterm". The third part of the final covers the material discussed in the last five weeks of the semester.

The final exam will have three parts, each with 20 questions, for a total of 60 questions. The exams are not graded with letter grades. The points you earn on them are added to the points you earn through other activities. You can earn a maximum of 60 points by taking the exams.

The relation between the “Midterms” and the final exam are handled as follows: Your score on the first part of the course is *either* your score on the first “Midterm” *or* your score on the first part of the final, *whichever is highest*. Likewise for the second part of the final. This means that you can't lose by trying to improve your score.

Neither the “Midterms” nor the final exam are mandatory. In particular, you can choose which section(s) of the final exam you want to take. If you do well on one of the “Midterms”, you have the option of skipping the corresponding part of the final, turning the latter from a cumulative into a non-cumulative exam.

Once we know the date for the final, Dr. Ohlsson will announce an alternative time later in the day before, and early the day after the regular time. Those are the only make-up opportunities for the third part of the final exam. Details about time and place will be posted on the Blackboard site.

Grading

You earn points for every activity you participate in, and the sum of your points at the end of the semester determines your grade. This includes the exams. The course as a whole is worth a total of 100 points. See the table below for what each activity is worth in terms of points.

Table 1. The points for the various course activities.

Activity		Max points
Group Discussion Report	10	
Demonstration Experiments	$3 * 5 = 15$	
Memory Diary Report	15	
		40
Midterm Exam 1	20	
Midterm Exam 2	20	
Final, Part III	20	
	$3 * 20 = \text{maximum of}$	60
Sum		100

Table 2. The grading scale.

<u>Score interval</u>	<u>Grade</u>
91 - 100	A
81 - 90	B
66 - 80	C
50 - 65	D
0 < 50	F

Notice that the exams can earn you no more than a total of 60 points; that is barely sufficient to pass the course. **YOU CANNOT DO WELL IN THIS COURSE BY ACING THE EXAMS.** You have to engage in the other activity as well. However, if you do all the reports and all the labs and collect 40 points there, you only need to collect a total of 41 more points on the three exams to get a B. That is, you only have to get 2/3 of the questions on the exams right. Of course, if you want an "A", you'll have to work a bit harder and do better than that on the three exams.

Dr. Ohlsson does not grade on a curve. You do not compete against other students. If you help another student study, and he or she does better as a result, this will not affect your own standing. The ideal outcome of the course is that everyone gets an "A".

Policies on Late Submissions Etc

Dr. Ohlsson's policies on extra credit, late submissions, missed exams, incompletes, letters of recommendation, and academic dishonesty are detailed in a separate document posted on the Blackboard site. You should read that document. Dr. Ohlsson will not accept "I didn't know this because I didn't read it" as a valid excuse for not adhering to the rules for the class.

(Last page)