

# PSY 6760: SKINNER'S BEHAVIORISM

## FINAL PAPER GUIDELINES

### Overview

You must write a 10–15 page final paper for this course (10–15 pages of *text*, excluding title page, abstract, references, and any figures or tables). An outline for the paper is due October 26 and is worth 50 points. The final paper itself is due November 30 and will be worth 100 points. You will then present your paper to the class during the final two class meetings (your presentation is worth 60 points). Your paper must focus on key philosophical assumptions or theoretical concepts of behavior analysis, and adhere to one of the formats described below.

### Types of Theoretical Papers\*

Your final paper must be theoretical in nature, and not focused simply on applied implications of a theory or empirical studies which serve to validate particular theories or analyses. To see many contemporary examples of theoretical papers, read any issue of the journal *The Behavior Analyst*. Theoretical papers can take a variety of forms, but some of the most common are described below.

#### Critical Analysis

Seeks to identify theoretical problems related to the adequacy of how key concepts or categories are defined and/or the extent to which those definitions and analyses are consistent with underlying philosophical assumptions. Suggests appropriate corrective actions based on analysis (e.g., re-definition or expulsion of key concepts).

#### Logical Extension

Seeks to extend a theory (or theoretical system) to issues not currently addressed by it, or to elaborate the treatment of particular issues using the theory's key concepts and assumptions.

#### Historical Development

Seeks to describe how particular theories, trends, individuals, historical events, or intellectual movements contributed to the current status of a theory or theoretical system. It can also analyze important changes in a theory or system over time, or the evolution of its key concepts and philosophical assumptions.

#### Comparative Analysis

Compares and contrasts the key concepts and assumptions of one theory or theoretical system to another. The two theories or systems may come from the same discipline or content area (e.g., methodological behaviorism and radical behaviorism), or they may not (e.g., radical behaviorism and cultural materialism). An attempt should be made to highlight key similarities and differences, along with potential contributions the theories or systems could make to one another.

### Requirements

- 10–15 pages of *text* (excluding title page, abstract, references, and any figures or tables), double-spaced, 1-inch margins (all around: top, bottom, left, right), 12-point Times New Roman font
- Follow strict APA style (5<sup>th</sup> edition) for *journal article submission* (NOT for a course paper or thesis submission)
- You must provide an abstract for your paper (follow APA style)
- You must use at least five sources other than class readings (you can use as many of the class readings as you wish, and you *should* use any relevant class readings)

### Paper Evaluation

Your paper is worth a total of 100 points, and will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- 30 points – Mechanics & Style (including APA style)
- 35 points – Scope & Accuracy
- 35 points – Argument & Analysis

Refer to the "Final Paper Scoring Criteria" handout for the detailed scoring checklist I will use for your paper.

\*Note: mad props to Linda Hayes for this breakdown of types of theoretical papers

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## FINAL PAPER POTENTIAL TOPICS

Potential topics for your final paper are listed below, according to paper type. All topics require approval from the instructor and each topic can be selected by only one person from the class. Topics not on the list can also be selected (but must be approved by the instructor). The scope of these topics can also be broadened or narrowed, depending upon the nature of your analysis.

**Topic selection notification:** You must have a topic for your paper *approved* by **February 12**. This means you should email me both the topic you would like to choose *and* the type of paper it will be well in advance of this deadline. Your topic may not be approved or you may not get your first choice, as topics will be allocated on a "first come, first serve" basis. Please do not hesitate to contact me via phone, email, or during office hours with any questions you have about topic selection.

### Possible Critical Analysis and Logical Extension Topics

These topics include complex topics in behavior analysis. You would want to focus on what Skinner and other behavior analysts have said about the topic, and then provide a critical analysis or synthesis, or extend the analysis to a new area. *Topics in bold are ones that are available to you this semester.*

- aversive control
- **generalized operants**
- establishing operations
- **meta-contingencies**
- free choice and determinism
- rules and rule-governed behavior
- **prediction and control as an analytic goal for science**
- defining behavior
- **any of the 20 misconceptions about behaviorism Skinner describes in the intro to *About Behaviorism***
- verbal behavior
- private events
- **self-awareness/consciousness**
- the matching law
- relational frames/RFT
- **selection as a causal mode**
- superstitious behavior
- non-contingent reinforcement
- biological determinants of behavior
- **molar vs. molecular behavioral analyses**

### Possible Historical Development Topics

These topics include important influences on Skinner's writings and/or the theoretical basis of behavior analysis. Papers on these topics should not focus on the particular position or person per se, but rather on how the theoretical position or person influenced Skinner and behavior analysis. *Topics in bold are ones that are available to you this semester.*

- pragmatism (James and Pierce)
- **operationism and logical positivism**
- postmodernism
- **Skinner's personal history**
- Ernst Mach
- Jacque Loeb
- William J. Crozier
- John B. Watson
- Ivan Pavlov
- **Charles Darwin**
- **Frances Bacon**
- **Bertrand Russell**
- **Claude Bernard**

### Possible Comparative Analysis Topics

These topics consist of theoretical perspectives or movements to which you could compare and contrast Skinner's radical behaviorism. *Topics in bold are ones that are available to you this semester.*

- **Rachlin's teleological behaviorism**
- Baum's molar behaviorism
- **Hayes's functional contextualism**
- **Kantor's interbehaviorism**
- Staddon's new behaviorism
- Hull's neo-behaviorism
- modern neuroscience
- Tolman's purposive behaviorism
- **Harris's cultural materialism**
- **feminism**
- social constructionism/constructivism
- postmodernism
- evolutionary psychology

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## FINAL PAPER TIPS FOR SUCCESS

### Grammar and Style Tips

- Follow APA style carefully! See pages 306–316 of the APA style manual for a sample of how your paper should be formatted. Several APA style summary and crib sheets are available on the course website.
- Do not overquote! Reserve direct quotations for particularly eloquent, pithy, well-known, or important. In general, try to describe in your own words and then just cite the source as appropriate.
- You **MUST** include page numbers when quoting a source!
- Make effective use of headings and subheadings to guide the reader through your analysis/argument.
- Do **NOT** simply describe what someone else has said about a topic. Provide some **analysis** based on the type of theoretical paper you are writing.
- The names of academic fields and disciplines (e.g., “behavior analysis”) are **NOT** capitalized unless they contain a proper noun (e.g., “French literature”) or are part of the name of an organization (e.g., “Association for Behavior Analysis”)
- Compound adjectives (two adjective that are modifying the same noun) should be hyphenated (e.g., “behavior-analytic theories”) unless the first word ends in -ly (e.g., “behaviorally oriented theories”)
- Use only a **SINGLE SPACE** after all punctuation, including periods at the end of sentences.
- Do **NOT** use contractions (e.g., “don’t”) and avoid informal language or slang.

### Wikipedia and Encyclopedias

Encyclopedias, including Wikipedia, can be great starting points for learning about a topic. They should **NOT** be used as primary references in a formal research paper, however. Encyclopedia entries are not as complete and thorough as articles or books about a subject matter, and are also secondary sources (see section below). Wikipedia, as an open-content encyclopedia editable by virtually anyone, can also have problems with information accuracy and reliability. Thus, you can use Wikipedia and other encyclopedias as a way to start learning about your topic, but you should not rely on them as major sources for your paper.

### Primary Sources vs. Secondary Sources (adapted from [www.writing.ku.edu](http://www.writing.ku.edu))

Academic research sources may be primary or secondary. Whenever possible, you should seek out primary sources for your paper.

**Primary sources** provide information directly from a source. Historical documents, autobiographies (written by the sources themselves), information gathered from interviews or questionnaires are all examples of primary sources. Because these sources are primary, you can know that they reflect what the writer chose to write at the time, but keep in mind that the information in these sources may or may not be accurate and well-reasoned. In this class we will read Skinner’s article titled “Selection by Consequences.” This can be considered a primary source for Skinner’s views on selectionism.

**Secondary sources** provide information indirectly, through authors who have made judgments about the quality of the primary and secondary information they have used. You must evaluate how well-informed and unbiased these judgments were. In this class we will read a book chapter by Jay Moore, titled “Selection by Consequences,” describing Skinner’s views on selectionism. This would be considered a secondary source for Skinner’s views on selectionism.

If you are discussing Skinner’s views on private events, for example, seek out books and articles written by Skinner on that topic, and cite them accordingly in your paper. Do not rely on other authors’ descriptions or interpretations of Skinner’s views. You can certainly incorporate these secondary sources into your paper, but you should also read and cite the primary source whenever possible. If you must rely on a secondary source, carefully consider these questions:

- What is the writer’s expertise in this field?
- What motivated the writer to compose this document?
- How is this person evaluated by others who are known to be experts in this field?
- What is the argument this writer is making about the topic?
- What contradictions do other sources offer? How credible are they?