Guidelines and suggestions for papers, Psychology 20

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Prof Camerer

The guiding principles behind the papers are these:

1. Use the paper to either deepen your understanding of a topic we covered (since all the topics are covered rather shallowly in an introductory course), or broaden your knowledge of psychology by writing about something in a related field (computational models e.g. neural nets, something in clinical psychology like depression or learning disabilities, a topic in biology which is related to cognition, etc.).

2. Communication is important in science and good writing benefits from practice. Writing a short paper hones your skills in getting ideas across, which will be useful no matter what you do in the future.

3. Reading your papers sometimes gives me ideas for material to add to the course in the future.

The best papers are ones that are motivated by curiosity and build on a little familiarity. One person wrote about motorcycles and the psychophysics of car-motorcycle interaction because her dad rides a motorcycle. Another wrote about "handedness" (why are there left-handers, given evidence that lefties get into more accidents and die sooner), motivated by her own left-handedness. Karen Kerbs (Baxter 332) has two examples of papers which I particularly liked and gave high grades to, which you can look at.

Here are some topics I am interested in that might make good papers of the scope I would like to see:

More on dream theories.
Clinical topics-- are there neural underpinnings of obsessive-compulsive disorder? Drug addiction (disease or failure of willpower)?

What is willpower (Roy Baumeister has interesting work on the "muscle model")?

"Affective neuroscience". (How do emotions and cognition interact? See Antonio Damasio, Joe LeDoux and Richie Davison who are the leading experts)

Language-- Chomskian grammars, learning language…

Developmental psychology. (How kids develop and learn). Piaget is the former authority but many of his ideas-- that there are very regular phases of learning-- are being questioned.

Special talents-- genius, creativity, "idiot savants". Often these special cases tell us a lot.

Intelligence. Is there "general intelligence" g? Or specialized intelligences (probably both of course). Robert Sternberg is an expert on this.
The paper should be 6-8 pages of text, 12 point font, double spaced. This guideline is just meant to give you an idea of the **scope** of your topic. Do **not** fret if you are a paragraph or even a page over or under. If you have an interesting story to tell, it can be 10 pages-- but reread it one last time and see if you can cut out half a page.

A typical good paper will usually consult 2-6 references, depending on length and how effective the references are in conveying ideas efficiently. Use graphics when possible.

On writing: Be sure to motivate why the topic is interesting and important. What are the scientific controversies? Was there a theory in the past that seemed "obviously" true which turned out to be wrong? What are the surprising results? How will answering the scientific questions make peoples' lives better?

Finally: Check your spelling, grammar and paragraph organization. Read the paper carefully before handing it in, leaving yourself a little time to make corrections or cut out "fat". Avoid run-on sentences. Be pithy and evocative. Try to surprise, amaze, and amuse the reader. Knowledge is meant to be an adventure, not (just) power.