Experimental Psychology - Instructions for Paper #1

Students who do not read these guidelines thoroughly will not do well on the paper

Overview

- Write an APA-style research report, based on data from our survey data file, accessible via Blackboard → Content → F2013 Data
    - Sections: Cover page, Abstract, Introduction, Hypotheses (optional), Method, Results, Discussion, and References
    - Can work alone or in a pair with someone in your lab section
        - If working in a pair, both people will get the same grade. Both people should understand and take responsibility for all aspects of the paper.
        - If completing a Writing Intensive, review those requirements
- Conduct statistical analyses using SPSS
    - Should include at least 5 continuous variables, all appropriate correlations, and two multiple regressions. Two study ideas are below, but there are many good options.
        - Idea #1: Use three variables to predict some outcome, and examine differences across groups (e.g. gender differences) using the split file command. For example, you might examine three factors predicting shame, with separate regression analyses for males and females.
        - Idea #2: Use three variables to predict some outcome. Then, use the same three variables to predict a related outcome. For example, you might examine three factors predicting shame. Then, you might examine how well the same three factors predict a related variable, such as self-esteem.
    - Analyses should be conducted, interpreted, and reported appropriately
    - Students should attempt to show off skills learned in this course
- Late papers can be submitted by e-mail before midnight (email your lab instructor – Heather or Jenny – and CC Mike) and will be marked 30% off; bring a hard copy to Mike at the next scheduled lecture. Late papers will not be accepted after midnight. Backup your work by email and/or flash drive to avoid disasters.

APA-style Report

- Use the "APA Style Report" template from the Term Paper section of the web site (http://www.psychmike.com/apa_paper.php). Feel free to copy directly from anything I have posted online
- Consult the sample papers. They were not written for this assignment but give an accurate depiction of what APA-style research reports tend to look like. They do vary somewhat in quality and attention to detail.
- Most journal articles use a similar format

I. Cover page

- See template; follow formatting exactly.

II. Abstract

- *Maximum* of 120 words (do not exceed this limit; it can be tricky). Begin with a general statement about why the domain of research is significant or important. Summarize the introduction of the paper. Briefly describe the sample of participants. Indicate your main findings. Describe why the results are important, surprising, or disappointing. Conclude by noting any limitations to the study, or by suggesting the next step for future research.

III. Introduction

- At least 300 to 500 words.
- Cite 5 sources or more (see VIII. References Page)
- Begin with a compelling statement describing why this area of research is important
- Move from general to specific. Begin by describing the importance of this area of research. Why should we care about this research? Next, describe the limitations, weaknesses, or unanswered questions from past research. Then, indicate how this study helps to answer new questions or build on past research. Conclude by describing the specific hypotheses under study.
- Any claim that is not "common knowledge" should be supported with references, logic, and theory
- Avoid statements, such as "I think" or "I believe" – focus on the reasoning behind your beliefs, explaining why your hypotheses are reasonable and worth studying

IV. Hypotheses (optional)

- No page/word limit. This section is optional, but often it is helpful to have a specific section listing out the hypotheses in order to make those hypotheses clearer
- Helpful if you have many hypotheses or very complex hypotheses
- Also helpful for students who may have difficulty clearly describing their hypotheses naturally in the introduction
- A diagram can also be helpful for expressing hypotheses

V. Method

- No page/word limit
- Briefly describe the participants in the study and the procedure used for obtaining the data. Feel free to directly copy my words, and add your own as needed. Then, describe each of the "measures" – how the variables were measured and what the scores mean.

VI. Results

- No page/word limit
- Include any and all relevant basic descriptive statistics (*M*, *SD*, frequencies, percentages, etc.) to let the reader know how participants tended to score on each of the variables of interest.
- Then, report the statistical analyses
- Run analyses involving at least five continuous variables. Report all appropriate correlations, and run at least two multiple regression analyses.
- Show off your statistical knowledge. Aim to impress
- Include a table, graph, diagram, or other figure, if it will help. Usually it does
- Attach a copy of the SPSS Output after the entire document

VII. Discussion

- At least 300 to 500 words
- Begin by providing a mini-summary of your introduction; briefly re-state why this research domain is important and what your hypotheses were. Re-cite references to support these claims again (kind of repetitive, yes).
- Then, describe the results of the study without using any numbers or statistics; explain the results in common language so anyone could understand them.
- Next, describe the broad conclusions or implications of the findings. Be specific.
- Finally, describe the limitations/weaknesses of the study and describe what future researchers could do to build on your results. Be specific.

VIII. References Page

- Minimum of 5 references to primary empirical articles (articles that describe methods and results for studies conducted by the authors). Although review articles, books, magazines, and newspapers can be cited, they are not included in the 5-count.
- APA-format
- Do not use web sites or dictionaries as sources
- Cite sources in the introduction and again in the discussion section

IX. CITI Training Documentation

- After the references section, attach a printout documenting that you completed CITI training.

Evaluation Criteria (How to get a top grade)

- Papers will be evaluated the same way scientific papers are evaluated by journal editors, based on their overall merit (correct analyses, well-written, significant/innovative topic)
- Meet all basic requirements: word limits, number of references, APA-style, analyses
- Make sure that the Results section is complete and accurate
- Proof-read to make sure the paper is well-written. If you are a poor writer, have a smart friend read and edit the paper critically
- Support all claims using references, logic, or theory
- Make sure the topic is interesting and important to society and to you
- Neatness counts

Plagiarism / Citing Correctly

- Citations: Cite a source any time you express an idea that is not your own and is not "common knowledge"
- Citation + page number: In addition to the citation, include the page number any time you quote, paraphrase closely, or cite a statistic, number, figure, or key fact.
- Quotation Marks: All quotes must be in quotation marks! Also, include the citation with page number.
- General strategy: When in doubt, cite a source or double-check with Mike and/or the lab instructor. Avoid excessive quoting by summarizing findings in your own words.
- These rules are very specific and can be tedious, but ignoring these rules is defined as plagiarism, which has serious consequences, including failing the course.

Writer's Block

It can be easy to get stuck when working on a research project. Do not hesitate to ask Mike or your lab instructor for help. We are happy to look at SPSS Output or drafts in lecture/lab.

Questions about Getting Started

- Is X an acceptable topic?
- I am interested in studying X. What other variables might I look at?

Questions about Writing the Report

- I am looking at variables X and Y. Is this the appropriate analysis?
- I am lost on what analyses to do. Can you help?
- Is this a correct way to write up the results?
- Are X, Y, and Z good examples of limitations of this study?
- Did I cite this article correctly?
- Is this a peer-reviewed journal?

Actions to Avoid

- Last minute e-mails, printing the article right before class and arriving late, making your paper smell like perfume, saving files to the desktop or other careless locations

Writing Efficiently

- Efficient writers tend to use a very similar approach to writing
- Step 1. Outline the paper in detail, paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence
- Step 2. Find a location that will optimize concentration.
- Step 3. Using the outline, write a draft of the paper as quickly as possible. Do not stop to edit. Do not correct spelling errors. Do not correct poorly-worded sentences.
- Step 4. Once an initial draft is complete, go back and meticulously edit the draft
- Step 5. Wait 1-3 days, and repeat Step 4.
- Step 6. Wait 1-3 days, and repeat Step 4.
- Step 7. Wait 1-3 days, and repeat Step 4. The time between drafts will allow you to view the writing with a fresh perspective and catch lingering writing issues.

Tips for Scientific Writing in the English Language

You: This word should be avoided in scientific writing.

I/We/Me/Us: Using them too frequently can make the paper appear colloquial (less formal), like a diary entry ("I think… I hope… I wish… I believe"). Do not use them more than a few times per paper, if at all.

Internet Lingo: Avoid using web abbreviations (lol, omg, wtf). Also avoid shorthand, such as "u" for "you" or "b/c" for "because" – yes, students actually do this, unfortunately.

And/But/So/Or: Using these words at the beginning of sentences often generates fragments.

Etc.: Usually, "etc." can and should be avoided. Generally, the use of "etc." reflects a failure of the author to determine the most appropriate examples for a given list or even determine when the list should end. Even worse than "etc." is "etc., etc."

Citing Sources: Cite a source for any information that is not "common knowledge." When in doubt, cite a source. Include a page number with the citation when referring to a specific fact, figure, or statistic, when quoting or paraphrasing very closely, or when mentioning an important or controversial point that the reading may want to look up.

Quotes: Whenever quoting material from another source, use quotation marks, and provide a citation with page number. Quotes are frequently overused by novice writers; instead, quotes should be used sparingly, or preferably, not at all. Mundane statements should be paraphrased or summarized, rather than quoted, so in most cases, quoting reflects laziness. Some students turn in papers that are actually 90% quotes, reflecting none of their own thinking. Usually plagiarism occurs when a student is haphazardly quoting ridiculous amounts of information and forgets to add the quotation marks. Most researchers are poor writers or are too busy with other tasks to carefully craft their publications—in other words, their writing often stinks, and most students can summarize and paraphrase more skillfully, given a little effort.

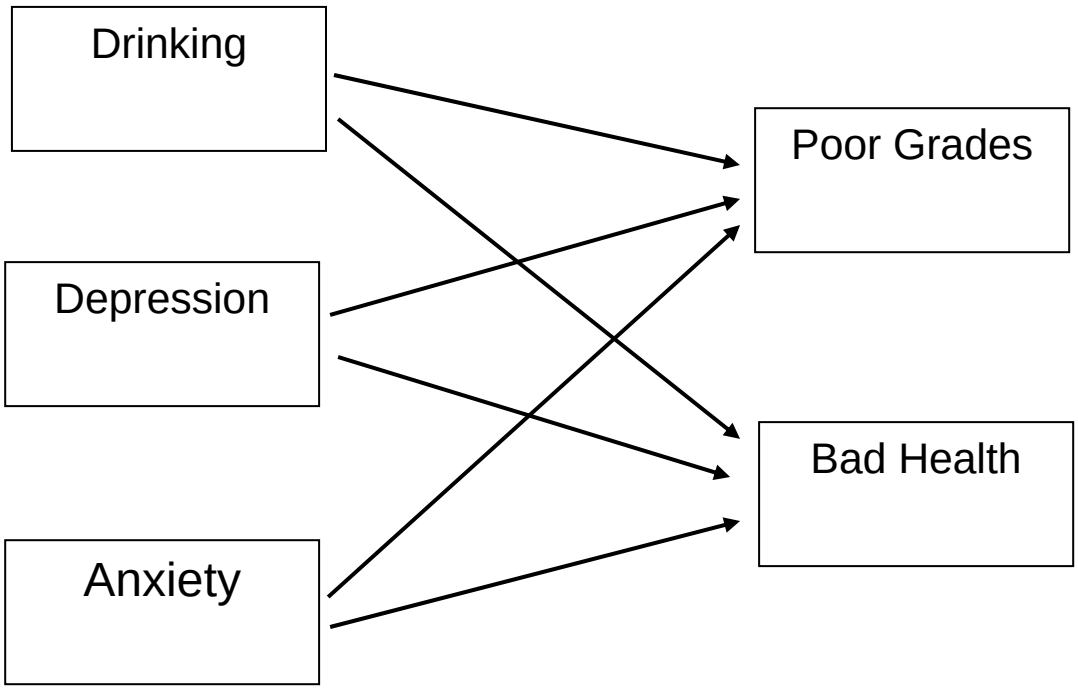
Questions: Questions should rarely be used in scientific writing, perhaps once or twice per paper, but preferably not at all. In writing, questions tend to reflect shallow curiosity, whereas statements tend to reflect more well-developed positions and hypotheses. Thus, in most instances, the overuse of questioning reflects laziness by the author.

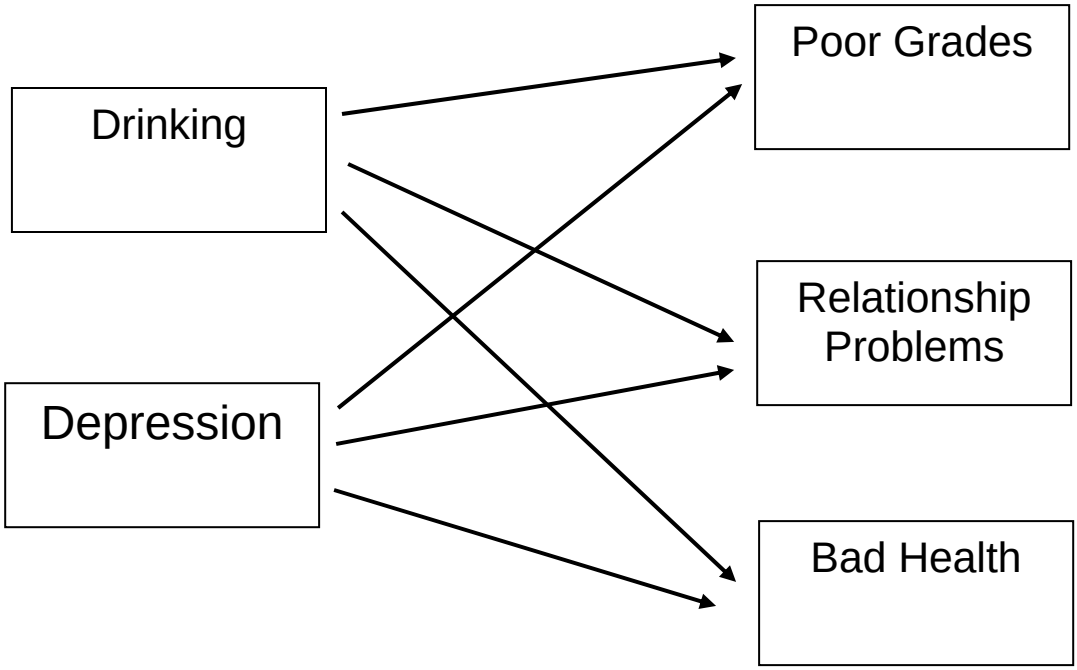
Personal Examples: Scientific writers avoid supporting claims with personal examples. It's best to avoid statements, like "I wanted to research this topic because my brother has Autism" or "Mama says that alligators are ornery because they got all them teeth and no toothbrush."

Drafting: Multiple drafts are needed to improve writing and also to improve one's self as a writer. Peer-review by an intelligent friend can be helpful. Also, it can be helpful to meticulously attack and question each individual sentence within a paper.

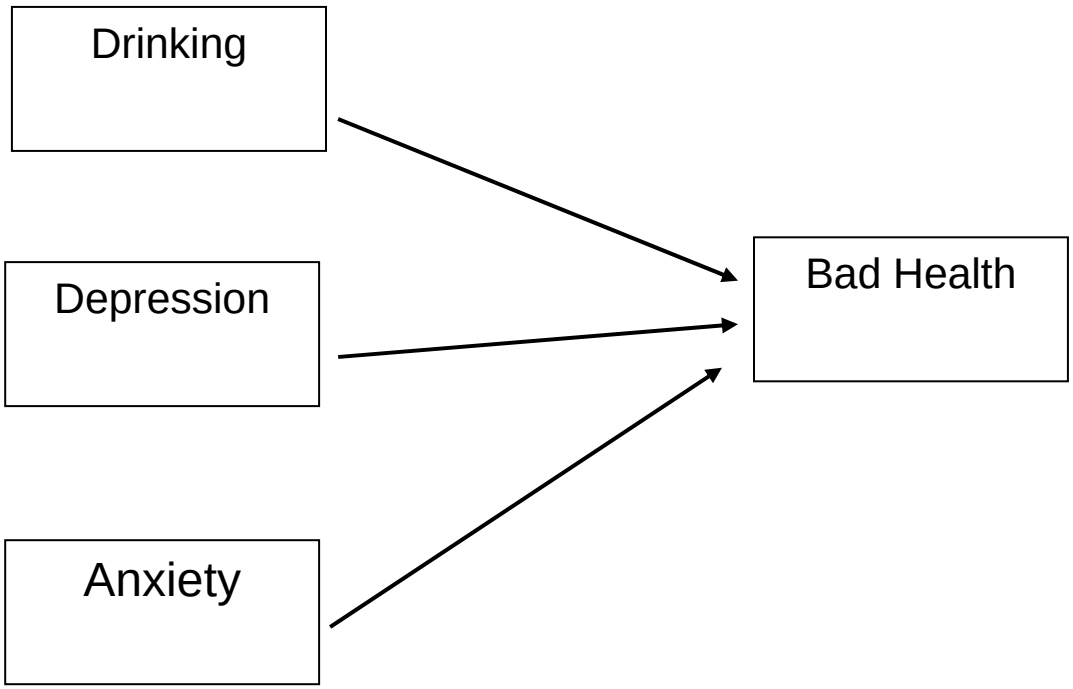
Useful Templates for Analyses

Any analyses are okay as long as they meet the requirements of the assignment: 5 variables, all appropriate correlations, and 2 multiple regression analyses. It might looks something like this:




Drinking
Depression
Poor Grades
Relationship Problems
Bad Health

Males:



Females: