

## PSY 429: The Development of the Social Brain Weekly Assignment Instructions

**Part A)** Summary Section: Each week, students will pick one of the required readings marked with an “S” and write a 1 page Summary. The summary includes a) a review of the main points of the paper (2-3 sentences), b) two strengths (empirical or conceptual) of the research, c) two weaknesses (empirical or conceptual) of the research, d) one quiz question that you might pose to your classmates, and e) one research question to pursue in the future.

**Part B)** Question Section: Students will submit at least 5 questions for **each** required reading. Submissions should include a mix of “clarification” questions and “discussion” questions.

*Clarification questions* are those that seek to clarify any points of difficulty or confusion (e.g., What do the authors mean by [unfamiliar/technical phrase]? Why did they run [statistical test] instead of [other statistical test]?). How is [method/technique A] different than [method/technique B]?).

*Discussion questions* are those involving but not limited to

- a) Analysis of strengths and limitations of the research, including conceptual/logical, method, and statistical issues  
Example: Could [results] be explained by [some alternative hypothesis] because [explanation]?  
Example: Would [results] differ in [some other group] since they have difficulties with [some type of task/ability]?  
Example: Did they control for [variable]? If not, couldn't it be possible that [alternative explanation].
- b) Synthesis of ideas, including connections to other research or previous readings  
Example: Does [current result] fit with research by [citation], who showed [previous result], because [statement of inconsistency]?
- c) Future directions that test new predictions/alternative explanations that extend/challenge the conclusions  
Example: Since [current study] did not control for [confound], if [description of new study controlling for confound], would it follow that [competing prediction]?  
Example: How would [variable A] relate to [variable B] in [culture] given that this culture emphasizes interdependence?

**Due date:** Assignments are due by Wednesday at 1:30 PM each week (24 hours before class). See the FAQ for the late policy (which includes an explanation of the 1-minute late policy).

**How to submit:** Upload your summary to Laulima in the assignments section. The file name should have the following format, with square brackets removed: psy429\_week[#]\_[student ID].docx  
For example, I'd use the following if I was submitting a summary for week 2 and my ID was 123456789:  
Psy429\_week2\_123456789.docx

**Length:** There is a strict 1 page limit for Part A. There is no page limit for Part B.

**Important: Do not modify the formatting of the template in any way!**

### Some advice:

For part A: Summary Section

1. As a suggestion for the 2-3 sentence **summary**: first sentence, state the question/problem; second sentence, state the theory and hypotheses; third sentence, state the results and what they mean/what their implications are. This is just a suggestion and other formats can be effective.
2. When discussing **strengths and weaknesses of the research**, you must explain **why** those aspects of the paper were strengths or weaknesses. For guidance, see the examples posted on Laulima.
3. When discussing **strengths and weaknesses of the research**, you're expected to focus on the content of the reading, not the format or style. Avoid saying things like, “I didn't like how the author used absurdly long sentences/how they started each section with lots of jargon/how they didn't use any analogies/how there were no figures to depict the important concepts.” Focus on content, which includes the hypotheses and assumptions, the methods and results, the conclusions and stated implications, and any other details of the

argument or study. Unlike the author(s), you do not get a free pass and will be graded on both the content and the quality of your writing.

**Avoid this (focusing on form):** Two strengths of the article (and explain why): a) I liked that they explained the procedure with clear images to depict exactly what the child was seeing. It also provided clarification when the instruction sounded confusing to picture mentally. b) I liked that this paper included a detailed description of how each step in the procedure was conducted. The level of detail provided in the description made it clear exactly what occurred and what beliefs the researchers would expect the infants and actor to hold as a result of viewing each particular condition. This enabled me to further understand what the researchers expected to find, and also aided in the comparison of the actual results to what was predicted by the study authors, allowing me to make my own determination of whether or not their results supported their hypothesis that 15-month-olds understand false beliefs.

See files on Lulima for examples of substantive, content-based answers.

4. When discussing **weaknesses of the research**, avoid superficial and general issues, including “the sample size was too small,” “the sample wasn’t representative,” or “the paper was published a long time ago.” Although these are sometimes genuine causes for concern, in the context of this assignment, they are too unspecific and unreflective. One exception is if you can provide *a substantive reason for why this might be deeper than a superficial issue for the paper*.<sup>1</sup>
5. The **quiz question** should test understanding of key concepts from the weekly reading. The question should not be so broad that it could be asked of any paper from the course. For example, “How does theory of mind differ from empathy?” is too broad for this reason.
6. When you pose a **research question** to pursue in the future, you should also explain **why** you’re posing this question (Why is it important? What would answering it show? What would we learn by answering it?).<sup>2</sup>

For part B: Question Section

7. If the answer to a clarification question can be Googled, it’s not a good clarification question.
8. Avoid “interview” questions. Ask questions **you** have about the readings and that **you** want clarification on or want to discuss further in class. Don’t turn the question around as if you’re interviewing someone.

**Do this (discussion or clarification question):** “Why did the authors only include children who anticipated the outcome of the second familiarization trial?”

**Not this (interview question):** “Do you think it’s justifiable that the authors only included children who anticipated the outcome of the second familiarization trial?”

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<sup>1</sup> Example: If a paper explores when North American children pass the false-belief task, it would be insufficient to say, “they only looked at North American children, so the sample wasn’t representative.” However, it would be acceptable to say, “only studying North American children is a problem because research from cultural psychology suggests that people from East Asia have a more interdependent representation of the self, which may lead them to think more about the thoughts and desires of other people and therefore enable children from East Asia to pass the false-belief task at an earlier age than North American children.” (This prediction happens to be false, but it’s reasonable given the theoretical considerations from cultural psychology. The fact children from East Asia do not pass earlier is somewhat of a mystery to researchers).

<sup>2</sup> Example: Imagine a paper studies whether number of siblings influences theory of mind development and shows that children with more siblings acquire theory of mind before children with fewer siblings. It would be acceptable to say, “How does theory of mind develop in children with only older siblings compared to children with only younger siblings? The reason this is an important question is that children with only younger siblings may have no one to interact with until their first sibling is born, but children with only older siblings have siblings to interact with from the moment they are born. As a result, children with only older siblings may acquire theory of mind much earlier than children with only younger siblings.” It would be insufficient to only ask the question without explaining why the question is being posed.