

# Origins of Mind Seminar Tasks

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## **Warning**

This document may be updated during the course. Tasks might change. Please always check you have the latest version from <http://origins-of-mind.butterfill.com> before completing a task. This version was last edited October 1, 2013.

## **Formal requirement**

All students are required to submit a 1500 word unassessed essay by 12 noon on Thursday of week 7.

I will provide essay questions and reading lists in Week 4 for this unassessed essay. I am also happy to discuss your essay plan individually.

I will return unassessed essays with comments and we will discuss them in weeks 8 and 9.

All other tasks are optional.

## **About the seminars**

Seminars focus on the tasks described below. Some tasks need to be completed by the Monday or Tuesday before the seminar (at least if you want feedback). Which task should be completed before which seminar? See the table below.

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1.	week 2	<i>Task 1</i> Introduce a scientific paper
2.	week 3	<i>Task 2 or 3</i> Write a review
3.	week 4	<i>Task 3 or 2</i> Peer-review a review essay
4.	week 5	<i>Task 4</i> Plan an essay
	week 6	(No seminar)
5.	week 7	<i>Task 5</i> Submit unassessed essay early
6.	week 8	<i>Task 5 ctd</i> Discussion of unassessed essays
7.	week 9	<i>Task 6 or 7</i> Write a third essay
8.	week 10	<i>Task 7 or 6</i> Peer-review an essay

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Table 1: Provisional seminar schedule

## Wildcard Task: Ask a Question

Ask a question in or after a lecture, in person or by email. Write up the question you asked, the answer you got, and your reflections on the question and answer.

You should complete this task, either in addition to the tasks below or in place of one of them (you can choose which task to substitute).

## Task 1: Introduce a scientific paper

Your group will be assigned one of these papers:

- Baillargeon, R. (1987). Object permanence in 3.5- and 4.5-month-old infants. *Developmental psychology*, 23(5):655–664
- Shinskey, J. and Munakata, Y. (2001). Detecting transparent barriers: clear evidence against the means-end deficit account of search failures. *Infancy*, 2(3):395–404
- Chiandetti, C. and Vallortigara, G. (2011). Intuitive physical reasoning about occluded objects by inexperienced chicks. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 278(1718):2621–2627. PMID: 21270036

Your task, as a group, is to prepare a 7–10 minute presentation to introduce the paper. This presentation should answer the following questions:

1. What question is the paper intended to answer?

2. Who are the subjects of the experiment(s)?
3. What materials did the experiment(s) involve?
4. What was the procedure?
5. What were the main results?
6. What did the researchers conclude from these results?
7. What further questions arise from all of this?

If the paper has multiple experiments, don't describe them all. Pick the most interesting.

You should probably not describe all the control conditions. But you should be prepared to explain them in response to questions.

## **Task 2: Write a review of some scientific research**

### **Suggested question**

Can 4-month-old infants represent objects they are not perceiving?

### **Aim**

The aim of this first essay is just to get you reading scientific papers and to practice writing about evidence. Later essays will demand more analysis. But for this essay it's enough to provide a review of some scientific research.

### **Hint**

In this essay you might:

1. review some of evidence that infants can represent objects they are not perceiving (see readings, especially Baillargeon 1987);
2. consider the apparently conflicting findings that infants cannot do this (Shinskey and Munakata 2001);
3. attempt to resolve the conflict.

And, if ambitious, you could further:

4. link your discussion to the conflict between empiricists and nativists.

### **Peer review**

Your review essay will be subject to peer review (see next task). Another student in your seminar group will be assigned as your reviewer. You should send the essay to your reviewer by 6pm on the Monday before your seminar.

### **Reading: Essential**

Baillargeon, R. (1987). Object permanence in 3.5- and 4.5-month-old infants. *Developmental psychology*, 23(5):655–664

Shinskey, J. and Munakata, Y. (2001). Detecting transparent barriers: clear evidence against the means-end deficit account of search failures. *Infancy*, 2(3):395–404

Spelke, E. (1998). Nativism, empiricism, and the origins of knowledge. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 21(2):181–200 (You need read only as far as p. 189.)

### **Reading: Optional (\*=hard)**

Aguiar, A. and Baillargeon, R. (2002). Developments in young infants' reasoning about occluded objects. *Cognitive Psychology*, 45:267–336

\*Charles, E. P. and Rivera, S. M. (2009). Object permanence and method of disappearance: looking measures further contradict reaching measures. *Developmental Science*, 12(6):991–1006

McCurry, S., Wilcox, T., and Woods, R. (2009). Beyond the search barrier: A new task for assessing object individuation in young infants. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 32(4):429–436

\*Moore, M. K. and Meltzoff, A. N. (2010). Numerical identity and the development of object permanence. In Johnson, S. P., editor, *Neoconstructivism: The new science of cognitive development*, pages 61–83. Oxford University Press, Oxford

\*Spelke, E. (1990). Principles of object perception. *Cognitive Science*, 14:29–56

Spelke, E. and Hespous, S. (2001). Continuity, competence, and the object concept. In Dupoux, E., editor, *Language, Brain, and Cognitive Development*. MIT, Cambridge, Mass

## **Where to find the readings**

All the readings are available online unless otherwise noted.

One fast way to find a paper is to copy its title into google scholar and search. To download the paper from the journal website, you may need to select 'log in' or 'institutional log in'.

If you have trouble locating a resource, check the list of journals available here:  
<http://fs6jr8lx8q.search.serialssolutions.com/>

## **Citations**

When citing articles in your essay, use the same system that my handouts and nearly all the readings use. That is, put author-year in the main text (e.g. 'Spelke et al have argued that ... (Spelke et al 1993, p. 22).') and include the full citation in a list of references at the end.

A bibliography manager like Zotero can save you a lot of time.

## **Length**

Your review may not exceed 2000 words. Reviews longer than this words may be rejected without review.

Shorter is better, all things being equal.

## **Task 3: Peer-review an essay**

A student will send you a short essay by 6pm on the Monday before your seminar. Your task is to write a review of the essay and send the review to the student by 6pm the day before your seminar.

## **Hints**

Your review should start by stating the essay's aim and briefly outlining what it achieves.

You should discuss one or more of the main claims defended in the essay. It may be useful to mention sources the author has not considered, or to raise objections.

Discussion of the essay's flaws is important. But make sure that adverse criticism is carefully justified.

If you can, suggest how the essay could be improved.

#### **Task 4: Plan an essay**

In this task you identify a question for your unassessed essay, do some background reading and produce an outline for the essay plus a list of readings.

You can take one of the suggested questions from the list provided. Or, if you prefer, you can propose your own question (which will need to be approved before you can submit the essay).

Send your essay plan to your seminar leader by 6pm on the Monday before your seminar.