

**PSYCHOLOGY 309a**  
**COGNITIVE PROCESSES**

Section 001 Winter 2025-26, Term 1, Tu-Th 2:00-3:20

**INSTRUCTOR**

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PLEASE NOTE: I DO NOT USE THE CANVAS EMAIL SYSTEM

**ACKNOWLEDGING THIS LAND AND ITS HISTORY**

First, a moment for reflection. Please appreciate that we are all deeply fortunate to have our learning and living experiences take place in this most beautiful of places, the ancestral territory and home of the Musqueam First Nation. As the traditional caretakers of this land since time immemorial, they welcome us all here with open arms, a generous spirit of sharing that we should all return in kind by giving this place, its people, and their deep history together our most humble respect.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

The goal of this course is to give you a general introduction to human cognition, or the mental processes that support our perceptions, thoughts, emotions, decisions, and behaviors. However, it is not a course that emphasizes learning about the science of how we study cognition. Rather, it's a course that emphasizes learning how that science helps us to understand what we experiences in our own everyday lives. It's a course that teaches you how to observe your own mind and discover the nuances of how it works. As such, at the end of the course, the successful student should be able to understand to overarching things:

1. How the brain helps to reveal the structure and organization of our cognitive processes, and how this organization relates to our normal, everyday experiences.
2. How biases in our cognitive processes impact our everyday thinking, behavior, and decisions.

**BUYER BEWARE: ATTENDANCE AND LAPTOPS**

Towards promoting a learning-positive agenda, this course has two important policies in place. First, learning begins with coming to class on a regular basis. To encourage this, ***each of the three exams (see below) will include at least 2 1-point questions based on happenings and/or discussions exclusive to lecture and that thus that directly reward attendance.*** So beware: this is not a good course for the attendance-challenged. Second, research has shown that the use of

laptops in lecture settings (1) distract the user and those around them from the lecture, and (2) students who take notes by hand show greater retention of material from lecture, relative to students who take notes on laptops. Likewise, not all students may have access to laptops/tablets, which arguably might confer an unfair advantage on those that do have laptop/tablet access. *As such, laptops, tablets, phones, and other forms of attention-distracting technology are not to be used in class.* For insight into the science on this, please see the WHY NO LAPTOPS IN CLASS? module on the course Canvas site.

## LECTURE SLIDES

In the LECTURE SLIDES module on the course Canvas site, I will post the slides for each lecture. Although I will always try to post each lecture's slides the evening (or morning) before each class, I can only guarantee that slides will be posted shortly after each lecture. Please note, however, that this is a privilege that can be revoked at any time; so please, don't be demanding about posting times.

## ASSIGNED READINGS

There is no textbook for this course. Instead, we will be reading one assigned research article per lecture, beginning with Lecture 2. All of the assigned readings can be found in pdf format on the course Canvas site, under the ASSIGNED READINGS module. There you will find three files, one containing the readings for each of the three parts of the course (see the course lecture schedule at the end of this syllabus). For each of the assigned papers, I also include a brief summary or introduction to each paper in the reading files, along with a few key terms that would be helpful to Google prior to reading the paper. For the file containing the readings for Part 1 of the course, I also include some important introductory comments on the papers themselves, what you should focus on in general when reading them, and a set of strategies for reading each paper that will hopefully help maximize what you learn while minimizing anguish and stress. As I note in these notes, I STRONGLY encourage you to read each paper prior to the class for which it is assigned. I don't assign a lot of pages of reading; rather, I expect you to spend quality time with what is assigned.

## EXAMS

There are **three** non-cumulative exams for the course. Dates for the exams can be found on the lecture schedule below; **Exam 1 is worth 56 points, Exam 2 is worth 64 points, and Exam 3 is worth 64 points.** The first two exams will take place during the regularly-scheduled lecture time. The third exam will take place during the final exam period at the end of the term, with the time and date TBA. As such, the duration for Exams 1 and 2 will be 75 minutes (or 1 class period), while the duration for Exam 3 will be 2.5 hours (or the duration of the final exam slot).

The following points should also be noted regarding exams:

1. Each exam will consist of 10 1-point multiple-choice questions, and then the remaining points on the exam will be in the form of short answer questions.
2. Exams will begin 5 minutes into the class period.
3. No extra time will be given to those who are late for an exam.
4. **Make-up exams will only be considered for students facing exceptional emergency circumstances that are communicated to the instructor prior to the time of the exam.** The format of any make-up exam granted will be at my discretion.
5. Cheating on exams will not be tolerated. Any student found cheating will get a "0" for that exam. Please see the UBC Calendar for information regarding academic offences and penalties.
6. UBC accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance or completing scheduled examinations. Please let me know **by email no later than Thursday, September 18** if you will require any accommodation on these grounds. Students who plan to be absent for varsity athletics, family obligations, or other similar commitments cannot assume they will be accommodated, and should discuss their commitments with the instructor before the drop date.

## TERM MARKS

Marks for the term will be based on a total of 184 points, as distributed across 3 exams. However, if the grade distribution for the final course marks fails to meet the Psychology Department's norms, scaling will be applied to final course marks. For details on scaling course marks, please see below.

## DEPARTMENT SCALING POLICY

The Psychology department employs department-wide grading standards to promote equitable alignment, supporting students and course instructors as they learn and teach across many diverse courses and sections. For each Course Section, instructors should aim for a grade average in the following Target Ranges (before any bonus HSP points are added, but including any mandatory HSP points): B- (68-71%), in Introductory 100-level and 200-level courses; B (72-75%), in Intermediate 300-level courses; B+ (76-79%), for Advanced 400-level courses and Selective-Entry lower-level courses (e.g., PSYC 277, 278, 312, 370, 371, 349, 359, 365).

Ranges are intended to provide some flexibility to instructors and account for differences that can occur between classes. Ranges increase across year levels to account for improvements in student learning, and students' ability to self-select into more specialized courses.

During the course, instructors may choose to adjust grades and/or difficulty of the assessments, to align with the Target Range. At the end of the course, if the average falls outside the Target Range (either direction), instructors will typically be expected to use a linear transformation to adjust final grades (i.e., add or subtract the same number of points to all students' marks, while ensuring no student fails the course due to this transformation).

If a course mean falls in within one +/- letter grade band above the Target Range (e.g., in the B+ range for Intermediate courses), and the instructor believes these grades to be justified, the

instructor may submit a justification request using the departmental approval final grades submission form, and the grades may stand. This Upper Range is intended to inspire further excellence in learning and teaching, and allow for the possibility that some classes select for higher performing students. Courses with means exceeding the Upper Range will be expected to provide justification as well as use a linear transformation to fall within the Upper Range.

## **CONTACTING THE INSTRUCTOR**

As noted above, I will not be available for questions at the lectern either before or after class. If your questions aren't answered during class time (I will try to make time available for that at the beginning and end of each lecture), then email is the appropriate option.

AND PLEASE NOTE: I DO NOT MONITOR OR RESPOND TO EMAILS ON THE CANVAS SYSTEM

**WITH RESPECT TO EMAILING QUESTIONS (to [todd@psych.ubc.ca](mailto:todd@psych.ubc.ca)):** To avoid having your emails automatically deleted as spam, the subject header must read "Psych 309." The answers to questions regarding lecture/reading content may often be useful for the entire class to hear. As a consequence, questions may be answered in the live lecture rather than via an email response. **Please also note** that while I try to be responsive to student emails, there are limits that must be put in place when dealing with large classes. Unfortunately, in a large lecture course I can not respond to students who generate excessive/frequent emails or who generate long lists of questions, as in the name of fairness it would be impossible for me to provide this level of service to all students. **Finally, in order to promote good problem solving skills, I will deduct 1 point from a student's final course mark for each email question that can be answered by consulting this syllabus, the Department of Psychology web page, and/or the UBC web page.** Examples of such questions would be *When is the next exam?*, *Where/when is Exam 3?* and *What are the assigned readings for the next exam?*

## **ACADEMIC CONCESSIONS**

Arts Students must contact Arts Advising as soon as you are aware you may need an [in-term concession](#). Please review [their website](#) for concession criteria as well as process to follow. Students in other Faculties should contact their Faculty advising office for direction.

## **OUTSIDE RESOURCES**

UBC provides a full range of supports for students in need, be it academic-, financial-, or health-related, or stemming from injury, assault, harrasment, or discrimination; the full range of supports can be found and accessed [here](#). Also note, If you run into trouble and need information on effective studying, preparing for exams, how to take notes, or manage your academic time, free workshops and advice are available from the Student Resources Center, which can be reached through the School and College Liaison Office at 822-4319.

## LECTURE SCHEDULE

NOTE: All assigned readings are available in pdf format on the course Canvas page.

### **Part 1: Neurocognitive Processing**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Lecture</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assigned Reading</b>
9/4	1	Course Introduction	Course Syllabus
9/9	2	Motor processing	Kim (2017)
9/11	3	Visual processing	Ku (2022)
9/16	4	Emotional processing	De Beukelear (2023)
9/18	5	Language processing	Rose (2017)
9/23	6	Processing interactions	Robertson (2017)
9/25	7	CLASS Q & A	--
10/2	<b>Exam 1:</b>	<b>On Lectures 1-7</b>	

### **Part 2: Cognitive Biases**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Lecture</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assigned Reading</b>
10/7	8	Priming	Tal (2017)
10/9	9	Processing fluency	Alter (2013)
10/14	10	Unconscious thinking	Li (2022)
10/16	11	Metacognition	Ackerman (2017)
10/21	12	Loss aversion	Schindler (2017)
10/23	13	The Ikea and free effects	Marsh (2022)
10/28	14	Cultural cognitive biases	Yiend (2019)
10/30	15	CLASS Q & A	--
11/4	<b>Exam 2:</b>	<b>On Lectures 8-15</b>	

### **Part 3: Social Cognition**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Lecture</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assigned Reading</b>
11/6	16	Emotion recognition	Albohn (2022)
11/7	17	Mimicry	McIntosh (2006)
11/18	18	Mentalizing	Larsen (2016)
11/20	19	Social evaluation	Boothby (2018)
11/25	20	Social exchange	Rim (2019)
11/27	21	Shared experiences	Qi (2023)
12/2	22	Social status	Cho (2020)
12/4	23	CLASS Q & A	--
TBA	<b>Exam 3:</b>	<b>On Lectures 16-23</b>	