

Myth Busting Assignment

Disinformation is ubiquitous these days. We've heard, for example, that vaccines cause autism (they don't), that climate change is not real (it is), and that listening to Mozart boosts intelligence (it does not). Myths about science are damaging in numerous ways. First, they misinform our decisions and choices (e.g., parents decide not to vaccinate and children become susceptible to measles; people fail to invest in green technologies; people waste time and money on products that don't work as advertised). Second, they undermine the public's faith in empirical science, and consequently when science has something important to say, the public does not listen.

This project is designed to help students (1) identify popular misbeliefs about psychological science, (2) track down and review the relevant evidence, and (3) communicate that evidence effectively enough to debunk the myth.

To prepare you for this project, you will read several chapters from *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology* that detail some of the most popular myths in psychology, along with the debunking evidence. You will then select (from the list below) a myth you would like to challenge, and get approval for that myth from me.

Once you select your myth, you will conduct a thorough literature search for all supportive and challenging evidence. You will carefully consider that evidence, and complete one of two projects. You can either:

OPTION A

Once you select your myth, you will conduct a thorough literature search for all supportive and challenging evidence. You will carefully consider that evidence, and write a cogent, thoughtful narrative that (1) explains the myth and demonstrates its popularity, (2) presents a thorough review of the evidence about the myth, and (3) offers a persuasive account of why the myth is in fact mythical, not factual. The narrative should be 5 – 10 pages long, double spaced, with citations to all scientific evidence. All citations should follow APA format. The essays in your book (*50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology*) provide excellent examples. Each written project should include a reference page (in APA format) that includes every single citation in your narrative. The reference page should come at the end of your narrative, on a separate page.

The narrative can then be used as a basis for a short video you will create to “Bust the Myth.” You are free to use any video platform (e.g., iMovie, Audacity, Garage Band, Videoscribe) you'd like for your video. Don't stress if you have limited (or no) experience in making videos! You can use the One Button Studio (click [HERE](#) for details) at the CofC library to make and edit your video. The One Button Studio is super easy to use, and there is a Production Lounge in the library for post-production editing. Videos should be 2 – 4 minutes long. Strong videos may be shared on our departmental social media.

OPTION B

Instead of selecting a myth from the list, you can opt to write a paper and create a video addressing the COVID-19 vaccine. Many people have opted against the vaccine, some because they believe it is ineffective or unsafe, or because they mistrust the governments/scientists. Regardless of the reason that individuals choose not to vaccinate, the failure of the U.S. to reach herd immunity has had negative consequences on the health of many and on our economy and schools. The College of Charleston has tried to incentivize vaccination, but these efforts have fallen short. Instead of focusing on a psychological myth, your project can review the myths related to the COVID vaccine, and offer a campaign for encouraging vaccination that will be effective, based on the principles of psychological science (hint: use what you know about human perception, conformity, reinforcement schedules, and memory). You may engage in this project regardless of whether you are pro- or anti-vaccine, but your project must be pro-vaccine.

You will carefully consider that evidence, and write a cogent, thoughtful narrative that (1) explains the arguments against vaccination and demonstrates their popularity, (2) presents a thorough review of the

evidence about vaccines, and (3) debunks many of the common myths with factual, documented evidence. The narrative should be 5 – 10 pages long, double spaced, with citations to all scientific evidence. All citations should follow APA format. The essays in your book (50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology) provide excellent examples of how you can construct your narrative. Each written project should include a reference page (in APA format) that includes every single citation in your narrative. The reference page should come at the end of your narrative, on a separate page.

The narrative can then be used as a basis for a short video you will create to promote vaccination. The video should include a PSA about the benefits of vaccination, and the best projects will include an empirically-based incentive program that harnesses the power of psychological science. Your paper should explain why your incentives will be effective, given what we know about human behavior.

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NOTE: Not all myths will be fully debunked! There is often a kernel of truth to a myth. So be sure that you explain what is and is not true, and back up your statements with evidence.

For an example of what **NOT** to do in your video, click [HERE](#).

For examples of what **TO DO**, check out these videos from other Intro Psych students at CofC:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hc2QfhuJTMw>

<https://youtu.be/Za2UsnJaW8k>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hFsxsRF7aI&t=186s>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jus97lS_sBA&feature=youtu.be

You can work on this project alone, or with a partner. If you choose to work with a partner, here are the rules:

1. You must collaborate on a partner agreement that details your specific roles in the project, along with a timeline for completion. The agreement must be signed by both students and submitted to Dr. May by September 30th. My strong advice is to set a timeline that completes the project well before it is due. That way, if one partner fails to complete his/her portion, the other partner has time to finish the project on his/her own.
2. Your grade will reflect this formula: The finished project grade X your partner's rating of you.
3. If your partner drops the ball, YOU are responsible for the full project and your grade will reflect performance on the full project.
4. If your partner drops the ball and you have to complete the full project, you can give your partner a 0 (or some other partial credit). In that way, you can receive full credit but your partner will not.
5. You assume all risk (and benefit) if you work with a partner. If your partner drops the ball, you must work it out with him/her.

Myth Options for this Project

(Each myth will be assigned to only one student/group on a first-come, first served basis. Pick early!)

Students learn best when teaching styles match a student's learning style.

Blind people have especially well-developed senses of hearing and touch.

Most autistic people are savants.

Alcohol enhances sexual arousal.

Drinking coffee is a good way to sober up after heavy drinking.

Most people with brain injury look and act disabled.

Magnets, like those embedded in shoe insoles, can reduce pain.

Mothers who talk to their infants in baby talk ("motherese") slow down their language development.

People need less sleep as they get older.

Placebos work only when people expect them too.

A large percentage of older adults live in nursing homes.

With effort, we can remember events back to birth.

Ginkgo and other herbal remedies improve memory in healthy individuals.

Lumosity and other brain training programs can improve overall cognitive functioning.

Most people with intellectual disabilities are severely impaired.

Punishment is a highly effective means of changing long-term behavior.

Many identical twins have their own private language.

Grouping students in classes by their ability levels promotes learning.

Speed reading courses are effective.

People have no memory for what took place while hypnotized.

Hypnosis can lead people to perform immoral acts they wouldn't otherwise perform.

Awakening a sleepwalker is harmful and dangerous.

Women have better social intuition than men.

Familiarity breeds contempt: We dislike things we've been exposed to more frequently.

Computers always enhance classroom performance, especially note taking.

Course evaluations are the best way to measure a teacher's performance.

Sex makes advertisements more effective.

People's attitudes are highly predictive of their behaviors.

To reduce prejudice, we must first change people's attitudes.

Brainstorming new ideas in groups works better than asking people to generate ideas on their own.

Basketball players shoot in "streaks."

Anatomically correct dolls are a good way of determining whether a child was sexually abused.

Almost all people with Tourette's syndrome curse.

The age group at highest risk for suicide is adolescents.

Police psychics have proven useful in solving crimes.

Drug Resistance and Education (DARE) programs are effective.

Antidepressants are much more effective than psychotherapy for treating depression.

Placebos only influence our imagination, not our brains.

The fact that a substance is "natural" means that it is safe.

The rates of domestic abuse against women increase markedly on Super Bowl Sunday.

Serial killings are especially common among Whites.

Positive self-affirmations ("I am beautiful") are a good way of boosting self-esteem.