

PsychBusters

Objective

In addition to the content that you learn in an introductory psychology course, the other main skill you should learn is how to think critically about scientific claims, particularly those concerning human behavior and thinking. The purpose of this exercise is to give you practice at learning that kind of ability.

Assignment

Listed below are the various chapters, starting with Chapter 3, that we will address in this course. With each chapter are a handful of statements. Some of these statements are true, some are false, and some are in between.

Pick one of the statements (you only have to do one!) and decide if the myth is “confirmed,” “plausible,” or “busted.” A “confirmed” myth would be one that, as stated, is generally considered to be true, while a “plausible” myth is one that, given the right definitions and conditions could be true. A “busted” myth is in no way true. If you know or think of a myth that is not on the list but you would like to do, that should be fine as well—just run it by me first.

The PsychBuster should generally follow this format at a minimum:

- 1) The first slide should introduce the myth
- 2) The second slide or two should define the terms
- 3) The next slide should state the sources you used in developing your thinking (min of 3)
- 4) Next should be slides detailing the findings/results
- 5) The last slide should state if the myth is “confirmed,” “plausible,” or “busted.”

Examples are included. Oh, and in case you are not familiar with it, this assignment was partly inspired the Discovery Channel television show *MythBusters*.

Grading

The assignment is worth 30 points. Grading will be based on the quality of the argument you build to base your conclusion: 1) how well you defined your terms 2) the quality of your sources 3) the manner in which you used your results, and 4) the presentation itself (thorough research explained, etc.)

The Myths

Chapter 4: Biological Bases of Behavior

- 1) We only use 10% of our brains
- 2) A person's cognitive ability would be decimated if they lost half their brain
- 3) It is possible to beat a lie detector machine
- 4) Feeling no pain would be an advantage in living life
- 5) Some people are visual in their learning while some people are verbal

Chapter 6: Sensation and Perception

- 1) Blind people have unusually sensitive organs of touch
- 2) The Mosquito ringtone cannot be heard by adults
- 3) Eating carrots improves eyesight
- 4) People watching a film can miss obvious continuity errors
- 5) Colors appear different at dusk

Chapter 5: Variations in Consciousness

- 1) You cannot die from lack of sleep
 - 2) If you die in your dream, you die in real life
 - 3) Some people can not become addicted to drugs
 - 4) Hypnosis acts like a "truth serum"
 - 5) Meditation increases your lifespan
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Chapter 7: Learning

- 1) You learn differently than your dog or cat does
- 2) Animals can learn to communicate using a language
- 3) Learning language is much easier prior to age thirteen
- 4) You can quit smoking by listening to tapes while you sleep
- 5) Reward is more effective than punishment in learning

Chapter 10: Human Memory

- 1) A person cannot increase the size of their memory
- 2) When old people's forget something frequently, it means they have Alzheimer's
- 3) Babies have no memory until they are 5 years old
- 4) Inside our brains are memories for everything that we have experienced
- 5) Having more and shorter study sessions is better than having longer and fewer ones

Chapter 9: Cognition and Intelligence

- 1) Experts are born, not made
- 2) Listening to Mozart makes you smarter
- 3) Computers cannot be creative

- 4) Intelligence scores have no correlation to academic performance
 - 5) Creativity usually occurs in a burst of insight
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Chapter 8: Social Behavior

- 1) Birds of a feather flock together
- 2) Opposites attract
- 3) Familiarity breeds contempt
- 4) There is safety in numbers
- 5) Absence makes the heart grow fonder

Chapter 11: Motivation and Emotion

- 1) Botox injections can make people happy
- 2) To change people's behavior toward members of ethnic minority groups, we must first change their attitudes.
- 3) The more highly motivated, the better you will do at solving a complex problem
- 4) People are naturally motivated by money
- 5) Painting your room certain colors can change your mood

Chapter 13: Personality

- 1) Money can't buy happiness
- 2) The unstructured interview is the most valid method for assessing someone's personality
- 3) Pencil and paper personality tests reveal your basic motives, including those you may not be aware of
- 4) Your handwriting is a strong indicator of your personality
- 5) Our personality is not formed until we are about 5 years old

Chapter 10: Human Development across the Lifespan

- 1) Facilitated Communication is a good and useful way of talking with autistic children
 - 2) Children memorize much more easily than adults
 - 3) Boys and girls have no inherent differences in toy preferences
 - 4) By giving a young baby lots of extra stimulation (like musical toys and mobiles) we can markedly increase its intelligence
 - 5) Babies can only see black & white
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Chapters 16 & 17: Psychological Disorders / Treatment

- 1) A full moon affects people's behaviors
- 2) Psychotherapy has had its greatest success in the treatment of psychotic patients who have lost contact with reality
- 3) Mentally ill people are no more likely to be violent than normal people
- 4) Talking to a shrink is no better than talking to a good friend
- 5) Freud is the father of psychology