

Introductory Psychology: Unit 1 Research Paper Assignment

The point of this assignment is to get a feel for the type of research conducted in psychology, how it's done, and how to write about it. Choose one research plan from those listed below. You have some liberty to modify these scenarios or come up with your own, but get instructor approval in advance. Whether a particular course of action could be potentially harmful is not always obvious. As a rule of thumb, if the idea you have involves committing a crime it's probably not appropriate.

The first step is to get some background information. You'll want to know what prior researchers have encountered conducting similar research. From this you may gain insights as to what to expect, what pitfalls to avoid, what precautions to take, and so forth. The research plans for this assignment are similar to the breaching experiments done in social psychology. The term reflects the idea that you are breaching the normal social conventions. Besides social psychology and breaching experiments, other search terms for background information include social norms, conformity, influence, negotiation, social withdrawal, emotional triggers, and frustration. You could also find some relevant information under the topic of experimental methodology in psychology.

For this research the pertinent information is the reaction you get from the subjects as well as your own reactions. But be aware of how things are going as you conduct your experiment. Back off if you think there might be trouble (like someone punching you or threatening to have you arrested). Although you can always explain that you're doing a project for your psychology class, that's not always particularly helpful if someone has gotten emotional. Your personal safety, and that of your subjects, is a priority. Don't enter into any situation that you feel may put you at risk. Leave if a potential risk develops. I'd advise enlisting a friend or classmate to assist you in your field research both to aid in recording observations and to better ensure your safety. You can work with a partner on this assignment if you wish.

You should repeat your chosen experiment at least three times. The different reactions across subjects is particularly interesting to psychology. Age and gender are major factors in this kind of research and should be noted for each subject. Also make note of other factors that may be influencing your subject's reactions such as the time of day, number of people nearby, as well as the nature and overall activity level of the surrounding environment.

In your paper state your initial hypothesis, what you expected to happen based on your review of related research articles. Describe your procedures, providing enough detail that someone reading your paper would be able to repeat your experiment. Provide a detailed account of each encounter describing what actually happened. That should include all of the relevant situational factors mentioned above as well as both the reactions of your subjects and your own reactions. Make some suggestions to account for differences in the reactions across different subjects. And discuss what you learned from the experience.

01. Get in an elevator and don't turn around to face the doors, face everybody inside instead.
02. Attach a bluetooth device to your ear and go somewhere with a lot of people around. Start talking as if you were having a phone conversation, about the people near you. Describe what they're wearing, items in their shopping cart and so forth. Gauge their reactions.
03. Go up to a complete stranger in a bar, or some other social environment, and see just how much information you can obtain about them. Often people will tell you a great deal.
04. Go up to a complete stranger and ask them if you can use their cell phone to make a call.
05. Compliment somebody on some item such as his/her shirt, car, dog, etc. Then ask them, "Can I have it?"
06. Give someone you know a birthday card, and maybe a present, though you know it's nowhere close to their birthday. Refuse to accept that it's not their birthday.
07. When riding in another person's car, just the two of you, refuse to ride in the front passenger seat (the death seat). Insist on riding in the rear driver's side seat, so their body can act as a shield. Hey, that's where we put the baby right? However, don't displace somebody's baby so you can sit there.
08. Go to a store or restaurant and don't speak. Try to convey what you want through gestures and so forth. If you know American Sign Language use that as well. Note how your subjects react to you and listen carefully to both what they say to you and about you. Although you'd expect courtesy from people (especially if they believe you may be deaf) they may totally ignore you, be quite impatient with you, or even make rude comments on the assumption you can't hear them.
09. Go to a store, find an item you want, then try to negotiate the price with the sales person. You'd be surprised how often this actually works, especially if there's some minor flaw or if you're buying multiple items.
10. Many stores sell condoms and there is usually quite a selection. Ask someone nearby, preferably a fellow shopper rather than someone who works there, what brand and type of condom they'd suggest you purchase. We all know what these things are and the necessity for using them, yet nobody discusses them.
11. Go to a fast food establishment and ask for a few packets of every condiment they have: Salt, pepper, sugar, ketchup, mustard, BBQ sauce, hot sauce, honey, whatever. For an added flair, ask for each individually.