Psychology 260, part II - Lecture 0

Introduction

Readings: (none)

1. Goal
To explore how the “picture” of the world we experience (including our image of ourselves) is created. In particular:
   1. To help you think creatively and critically about human perception can be studied experimentally
   2. To learn how your conscious perceptual experience is based on your neural hardware.

2. Main things you will hopefully learn
   1. You can do it. Doing well in research is not governed primarily by genetics, but by training. Most important factor is curiosity.
   2. It’s all connected. Skills needed are just more controlled forms of everyday thinking:
      • Recognize the weaknesses of human reasoning, and guard against them
      • Lessen the grip of your current beliefs, and open your mind to alternatives
      • Develop a robustness that will allow you to “hang in there”, and live comfortably with uncertainty.
      • Learn to accept negative feedback so that you can continue to improve.
   3. Communication is key. Community is an important part of doing research.

   Effectiveness = Content * Transmission

3. Approach:
   Organization
   - 3 sections, each with 8 classes and 3 labs
   - classes: intended to provide you with basic knowledge of our perceptual systems, and how we can study their operation
     - important: look at required readings before lectures
     - 4 classes introduce material
     - 3 classes involve exercises in analysis
     - 1 class will have presentations, and a test
   - labs: intended to provide you with an opportunity to create, revise, and carry out your own experiments
     - will also help integrate the material in the lectures
     - proposals will be analyzed in class
     - results will be presented in class

   Communications skills (Background mode – distributed throughout class)
   • Writing
   • Presentations

4. Syllabus, Evaluation, Contacts
   - available on website
REAL-WORLD SEGMENT:  Writing I – Basic Style
(Based on Strunk & White, The Elements of Style)

Main goals of style:

1. **Clarity** – communicate exactly what you have in mind
   - including the level of precision you intend

2. **Conciseness** – do this with the fewest words possible
   - maximum signal-to-noise

1. **Omit needless words.**
   Use whatever words are necessary. No others. Each word should do something critical.
   - See what happens if something is removed – is there a significant change?
   - Alternatively, see if there’s a simpler way of saying the same thing.)

Thus,

the reason why is that… NO
-> …because… YES

on account of the fact that… NO
-> as… YES

if it is assumed that… NO
-> if… YES

2. **Avoid fancy words and jargon**
   Use precision no higher than needed (i.e, to avoid confusion with other things discussed).
   - Each word should be precise enough convey an unambiguous meaning,
   - but not beyond what is needed for the task at hand.

Thus,

He established visual contact with the ungulate. NO
-> He saw the cow. YES

Also,

accomplish -> do
additional -> extra
subsequently -> later
etc., etc.
3. **Use definite, specific, concrete language.**
   - Prefer the specific to the general.
   - Prefer the definite to the vague.
   - Prefer the concrete to the abstract.

   Thus,
   
   A period of unfavourable weather set in.  **NO**
   -> It rained every day for a week.  **YES**

1A. **Use strong nouns** as often as possible
   - pastoral environment  **NO**
   - farm  **YES**

1B. **Use strong verbs** as often as possible
   - made arrangements for  **NO**
   - arranged  **YES**

   *Note:* A phrase involving a nominalization (e.g., “made… arrangements”) can usually be transformed to the corresponding verb (e.g., “arrange”).

4. **Put statements in positive form.**
   - Make definite assertions.
   - Avoid tame, colourless, noncommittal language
   - **Minimize use of the word “not”**.

   Thus,
   
   He was not very often on time.  **NO**
   -> He usually arrived late.  **YES**