



# PSY198H1 S LEC0101 – Psychology of Magic

Winter 2023

Mondays, 2 – 4 pm, Sidney Smith Hall, room 581 (ground floor)

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## Contact Information

**Instructor:** Dirk Bernhardt-Walther  
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**Office Hours:** by request

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## Course Description, Goals, and Prerequisites

Magicians entertain us with their tricks. What appears as “Magic” is based on fundamental aspects of human psychology: visual and auditory perception, decision making, logic, memory, and verbal abilities.

In this class, we will consider and discuss the psychological basis of magic tricks and use magic to explore aspects of psychology. The class will require reading of scientific articles and book chapters as well as watching and analyzing magical tricks. The only prerequisite is a curious and critical mind. The course puts great emphasis on writing and on starting to read primary scientific literature.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

1. Have overview knowledge of aspects of Cognitive Psychology that are related to stage magic.
2. Be able to use exploratory writing to develop arguments and develop their understanding of subject matter.
3. Begin to be able to read and summarize a scientific research paper in Cognitive Psychology.

The class will meet in person. It will not be recorded. I strongly encourage you to attend class meetings for the interactive class activities and discussions. Please bring a laptop to class – we will need it for some of the activities.

## Reading Material/Textbook(s)

Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals about Our Everyday Deceptions by Stephen Macknik, Susana Martinez-Conde, Sandra Blakeslee  
(ISBN: 978-0312611675)

The textbook is mandatory. You will need it throughout the entire class, starting from the first week.

## Course Evaluation/Marking Scheme

You can earn up to 100 points in this class. Your grade will be based on the following three components. They are described in detail below.

<b>Class participation</b>	24 points = 24%
<b>Reading Journal</b>	39 points
<b>Handout and in-class presentation</b>	37 points

These components encourage you to work toward and eventually demonstrate your mastery of the course objectives. Their respective alignment with the course objectives is as follows:

	Course Objective					
	Overview knowledge of aspects Cognitive Psychology.		Use exploratory writing		Begin to read and summarize academic papers.	
	Practice	Demonstrate	Practice	Demonstrate	Practice	Demonstrate
<b>Class participation</b>	X				X	
<b>Reading Journal</b>		X	X	X		
<b>Handout and in-class presentation</b>						X

### *Class Participation (24 points)*

Every week your participation in the class will be scored. Clear instructions will be provided for each class so that you know how what components constitute the participation grade. You can achieve a maximum of 2 points for each component per week. Missed class periods cannot be made up.

### *Reading Journal (39 points)*

Over the course of this semester, 10 chapters from “Sleights of Mind” will be assigned reading. (see course schedule below). For nine of these 10 reading assignments, you will complete an

exploratory (unconstrained) writing exercise and submit your writing on Quercus by Sunday 10 pm before the respective class. I will introduce you to the technique of unconstrained writing, and you will have a chance to practice it in our first class.

You will earn 2 points for each of nine submitted writing pieces. Three times this term, your writing will be randomly selected for detailed grading based on these aspects:

1. written with an authentic voice (3 points)
2. related to the assigned chapter (2 points)
3. exploring topics related to cognitive psychology (2 points)

*Paper handout and in-class paper summary (37 points)*

Every student will give a five-minute presentation about an assigned paper in week 11 or 12 of this term, and prepare a handout summarizing key aspects of this paper. We will discuss the structure of papers, how to approach them, as well as how to prepare a handout and a presentation in class. I will provide you with a handout template. A list of possible papers will be available on Quercus. Please submit three preferences by week 2. Papers will be assigned in week 3.

You should submit two intermittent drafts of your handout in weeks 7 and 9 (3 points each, grading based on effort). The final version of your handout and presentation are judged based on:

1. accurately conveying the idea and content of the paper
2. explaining the relevance of the paper's insights, e.g., in the context of the in-depth-company case studies
3. making good use of space / time
4. satisfying the format requirements and being of professional quality.

Number of points	Step	Due date
3	First page draft of handout	February 6 <sup>th</sup> , 2 pm
3	Complete draft of handout	March 6 <sup>th</sup> , 2 pm
21	Final version of the handout	March 27 <sup>th</sup> , 2 pm
10	In-class presentation of the handout	March 27 <sup>th</sup> / April 3 <sup>rd</sup>

***There will be no midterm or final exam for this class.***

**Course Webpage/Quercus**

The website associated with this course is accessible via <http://q.utoronto.ca>

## Course Policies

### Grading Policy

I strictly follow the official U of T grading scheme:

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/general/grading-policy>

I do not round grades. That is, you actually have to achieve 80% to get an A-, for instance. 79.9% is not enough. There has to be a cut-off somewhere, and the U of T grading scheme provides explicit cut-offs for the individual grades. If I were to round grades, then the cut-off for an A- would be at 79.5%, which is just as arbitrary as 80%.

### Penalties for Lateness

Late submission of all assignments will be penalized with a 1 point deduction per day or fraction of a day.

### Email Policy

Please check the syllabus and the class materials posted on Quercus before sending an email. You will find answers to most of your questions there.

I am available to answer questions about lecture material during the break, right after class and during office hours. If you cannot make it to office hours, you may send me an email to request an appointment.

Please do not send email to tell me that you have to miss class, to inquire about your grade (it's on Quercus), to ask questions about class material (come to class or office hours) or any question answered in the syllabus or on Quercus. You may send a polite follow-up email if you haven't received a response within 48 hours.

Finally, please **consider email as professional correspondence**. Send email only to the email address listed in the syllabus. Use a meaningful subject line, start it with "PSY 198". Use a proper greeting and sign with your name. State your concern clearly and succinctly. Proof read your email for spelling and grammar. Do not use short-hands and abbreviations – I am not your Facebook/Snapchat/WhatsApp buddy. Remember, **emails last forever and cannot be unsent**.

### Religious Accommodation

As a student at the University of Toronto, you are part of a diverse community that welcomes and includes students and faculty from a wide range of backgrounds, cultural traditions, and spiritual beliefs. For my part, I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling compulsory activities on religious holy days not captured by statutory holidays. Further to University Policy, if you anticipate being absent from class or missing a major course activity (like a test, or in-class assignment) due to a religious observance, please let me know as early in

the course as possible, and with sufficient notice (at least two to three weeks), so that we can work together to make alternate arrangements.

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## Academic Resources

### **Accessibility Needs:**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an acute or ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) ([www.accessibility.utoronto.ca](http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca)) at the beginning of the academic year. Without registration, you will not be able to verify your situation with your instructors, and instructors will not be advised about your accommodation needs. AS will assess your medical situation, develop an accommodation plan with you, and support you in requesting accommodation for your course work. Remember that the process of accommodation is private: AS will not share details of your condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

### **Writing:**

As a student here at the University of Toronto, you are expected to write well. The university provides its students with a number of resources to help them achieve this. For more information on campus writing centres and writing courses, please visit <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/>.

### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:**

All students, faculty and staff are expected to follow the University's guidelines and policies on academic integrity. For students, this means following the standards of academic honesty when writing assignments, collaborating with fellow students, and writing tests and exams. Ensure that the work you submit for grading represents your own honest efforts. Plagiarism—representing someone else's work as your own or submitting work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program—is a serious offence that can result in sanctions. Speak to me or your TA for advice on anything that you find unclear. To learn more about how to cite and use source material appropriately and for other writing support, see the U of T writing support website at [www.writing.utoronto.ca/](http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/). Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations. For more information, please see <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai> and <http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/>

### **Other Resources (optional)**

Student Life Programs and Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/>)

Academic Success Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/asc>)

Counselling and Psychological Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc>)

## Course Outline/Schedule

Date	Topic	Assignments
Jan. 9 <sup>th</sup>	Introduction	
Jan. 16 <sup>th</sup>	Visual Illusions and Magic	Chapter 1
Jan. 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Why Magicians Watch Their Angles	Chapter 2
Jan. 30 <sup>th</sup>	Cognitive Illusions	Chapter 4
Feb. 6 <sup>th</sup>	More Cognitive Illusions	Chapter 5 First page draft of handout
Feb. 13 <sup>th</sup>	Multisensory Illusions	Chapter 6
Feb. 20 <sup>th</sup>	No class – Family Day	
Feb. 27 <sup>th</sup>	Memory Illusions	Chapter 7
Mar. 6 <sup>th</sup>	Expectations and Assumptions	Chapter 8 Complete draft of handout
Mar. 13 <sup>th</sup>	The Illusion of Choice	Chapter 9
Mar. 20 <sup>th</sup>	Illusory Correlations, Superstition, Hypnosis, and Flimflam	Chapter 10
Mar. 27 <sup>th</sup>	Will the Magic Go Away? In-class Presentations  (This class will be on Zoom.)	Chapter 12 Final version of handout
Apr. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	In-class Presentations  (This class will be in person.)	