

Flourishing, Guidelines for the Final Paper

Psyc 403 (Haidt), Due 12/05

The final paper for Flourishing should have two parts. The first part is the writeup of the self-improvement project that you undertook during the semester. The second part should be a short paper about your future, and how to make it better using the skills and techniques you have learned about in this course, as a psychology major, and at UVA more generally. The second part should build on what you learned about yourself, self-change, and positive psychology in the first part.

I) The Self-Improvement Project.

You should write this up in the form of an empirical psychology paper. An ideal paper would have the following sections, although you can use a different format if you think it is more appropriate. (Just be sure you address all of the issues below).

A)Introduction: explain why you chose the change you chose, and what are the issues and difficulties about making this change

B)Methods: explain how you went about changing yourself. What techniques did you use? What is the psychology behind these techniques? How did you set up a measurement procedure?

C)Results: What happened. You must present evidence here beyond your own impressions. A log counting up successes and failures, or reports from 6 friends, or some objective health or behavioral measure might be appropriate.

D)Discussion: What have you learned about self-change, and positive psychology? You might talk about strengths and weaknesses, difficulties of changing the elephant (automatic processes), or you might explain why some techniques seemed to be more effective than others.

II) Your ideal future, or future self

Ancient philosophy and modern positive psychology both aim to help people think clearly about who they are and what it is they want, or should want. People often fall into traps and pursue goals that leave them worse off, even when they are successful. We began the semester with Ben Franklin and a discussion about strengths and weaknesses, and throughout the semester we will consider a variety of aspects of happiness, virtue, and personal growth. By the end of the semester you should know a lot more about yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, what makes you happy, what kinds of future selves may be within reach, and what kinds of future selves are worth reaching for. In this part of the final paper, you should sketch out a vision of your future life, or future self.

Drawing on many of the readings for the semester, explain why this life would be a pleasant life, a good life, or a meaningful life. Talk about what growth would mean for you, and the means by which you hope to grow into your future self. Talk about limits and obstacles, as well as about facilitators.

Here are some general comments about the final paper:

–The most important thing about this paper is to show me that you have learned to think like a positive psychologist. Be sure to draw on many of the readings, and ideas that came up in class discussion.

–The biggest mistake you could make would be to write a paper that could have been written in the second week. If you just describe some new habits you wanted to cultivate, say that your method was just to try really hard to cultivate the habits, and then talk in very personal terms about your experiences, you will get at best a C (on Part I).

–I'm expecting between 11-17 double-spaced pages for the main text (assuming 12 point proportional font).

Appendices, such as charts of progress or daily data recording sheets, should be included in addition. There is no fixed weight or balance between the two parts. Ideally, both should show deep thought, great insights, and lots of hard work. But if for some reason you are not able to make a lot of progress on one of the parts, you can do an exceptionally good job on the other part and the total will be fine. If one of the parts is very personal, then the other should be more academic. You **must draw in a large number of readings and research findings.**

–**I expect everyone to do some reading or research beyond class readings.** Include a “Works Read” page, after your reference page, that gives the reference for any works you read beyond class readings. It's OK if some of these works were read for another class. I want you to integrate across classes. But put an “*” next to any works that were read especially for this project.

--To get an A on this paper you must have good measurement in part I, and a good deal of integration in part II. You must go beyond listing the techniques learned.

Some further notes about writing:

- You should use standard “in-text” citations in your text (e.g., Gilbert & Sullivan, 1997).
- You should have a standard bibliography at the end (with the full reference for Gilbert & Sullivan). However if you want to leave off the references that are on our syllabus, you may do so.
- In general you should follow APA style, as you learned it in psyc 306. However do not be a slave to it; sometimes it tells you to do things that decrease readability. You can use your own judgment to produce the best (most readable, intelligible) paper that you can.
- You should use first person throughout; this is of course a very personal paper in both parts.
- Odds are I am the only person who will be reading this paper, so you don’t need to explain everything fully, as though it was being read by someone with no familiarity with the material. So you can refer to the “elephant” and the “rider” without explaining who they are. However you might still want to include a very short description such as referring to the rider (conscious, controlled processes) and the elephant (automatic, often unconscious mental processes). This will help me make sure you are using the terms correctly, and it may create a more coherent and compelling paper.
- Remember that good writing is clear, simple, and direct. Never use words like “utilize” or “proffer” when “use” and “offer” mean the same thing. Stuffing your prose full of big Latin words makes you sound like an uneducated person trying to compensate.
- You do not need an abstract.

A few notes from past years:

- Journaling is a good idea because it allows you to look back and see what was happening. But it is a very wimpy intervention method.
- You should extend yourself, challenge yourself. If your intervention is just journaling 3 times a week and meditating twice a week, I’ll take off points for laziness.
- Meditation must be done at least 6 times a week, for at least 12-15 minutes a day.
- Think about the difficulties of working on a weakness. Think about any way you can at least incorporate one of your strengths in the process.