

**9.00 Introduction to Psychology  
MIT**

**Fall 2001  
First Short Assignment**

The purpose of this assignment is to get you started thinking, writing, and reading the textbook (*Psychology* by Peter Gray). In particular, you'll need to read Chapter 2, "Methods of Psychology."

People make claims about the causes of behavior all the time. Spare the rod and spoil the child. The death penalty deters murderers. Playing Mozart to babies will make them better at math. You'll remember material in the textbook better if you read the assigned pages every week rather than cramming the night before the exam. If parents talk to their teenagers, the teenagers will stay off drugs. The list is endless.

Unfortunately, many of these claims are not backed up by good scientific evidence. Chapter 2 explains some of the common pitfalls in psychological research.

Pick some hypothesis about human or animal behavior that someone has proposed and defended on the basis of some kind of evidence. It can be a report in the newspaper (such as the science section of the *Boston Globe* or *New York Times*), or in the magazine *Psychology Today*, or a journal or textbook, or website, or even a trashy tabloid paper. Clearly identify the hypothesis, the person who proposed it, and the logic of the study, or data, or other evidence that the proposer used to get everyone to believe the hypothesis. Now point out a flaw in the logic: why the hypothesis might be false, even though the author has presented data claiming it is true. Do not offer some general complaint like "there weren't enough subjects" or "how do we know the sample was representative?" Pinpoint exactly how the hypothesis could be wrong, despite the findings obtained. The best way to do this is to refer to some guideline for good or bad research described in Chapter 2 of the textbook.

Be brief: a page or two.

**THE ASSIGNMENT IS MANDATORY.**