

School Name **Houston Baptist University, Houston, TX**

Course Name **General Psychology**

Course Format **Face-to-face**

Key Results Three semesters of data show average final exam scores have increased seven percentage points, affirming a positive correlation between MyPsychLab with Writing Space scores and exam scores when assessments are required throughout the semester.

Submitted by

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Course materials

Mastering the World of Psychology, Wood, Wood, and Boyd;
MyPsychLab

Background

Houston Baptist University has a very diverse student body, in beliefs, ethnicity, and background. The general psychology course is taken by a variety of majors, along with many freshmen who have not yet chosen their major. Many students live off-campus and commute to class which presents unique challenges. This survey course focuses on the basic principles underlying behavior and mental processes. Emphasis is on the main areas of study in the field of psychology, such as learning, memory, personality, health and stress, human development, and psychological disorders.

Challenges and Goals

The general psychology course is tied to our college goals and designed to improve critical thinking skills. After teaching this course for a number of years, I began assigning material in MyPsychLab. I have always provided my students with out-of-class study resources, and was interested in incorporating MyPsychLab's Writing Space, which automatically grades student essays and provides instant feedback on both content and mechanics. Through writing, students work toward a deeper understanding of the course material and develop critical thinking skills that will help them apply the material purposefully to their lives. By incorporating frequent writing assessments, I hypothesized that student performance in the course would improve.

Implementation

Students complete 10 writing assignments within Writing Space throughout the course—one per chapter. These low-stakes assessments, designed to provide students with more

opportunities to practice writing, are due before each exam. The Writing Space prompts ask students to apply what they are learning and move beyond basic conceptual understanding.

Students also complete MyPsychLab's study plan before we begin discussing each chapter. The chapter study plans are due every Sunday to provide consistency with assignments and to help ensure students stay on track. Writing assignments and study plan posttests count as part of each students' course grade. Select media assignments (mostly video) focusing on some of the more challenging topics can be completed for extra credit. These frequent assessments provide personalized learning for each student, allowing them to focus their time on topics that give them the most trouble.

Benefits

- Student scores on the cumulative final exam increased by an average of seven percentage points over three semesters, compared to previous terms without MyPsychLab.
- Frequent assessments and personalized learning help students better prepare for exams.
- Students have multiple opportunities to write about the material, which improves their understanding of the topics while developing their critical thinking skills.

Assessments

60 percent	Five exams (lowest exam score dropped)
20 percent	MyPsychLab assignments (Writing Space; study plan posttests)
20 percent	Comprehensive final exam

Results and Data

Despite teaching a larger percentage of psychology students each semester, student performance has continued to improve. Since implementing MyPsychLab with Writing Space, cumulative final exam scores have increased 7 percentage points compared to previous semesters without MyPsychLab (Figure 1). |

*“I did not just memorize the information and forget it.
I actually learned it and applied it to real life.”*

–General psychology student

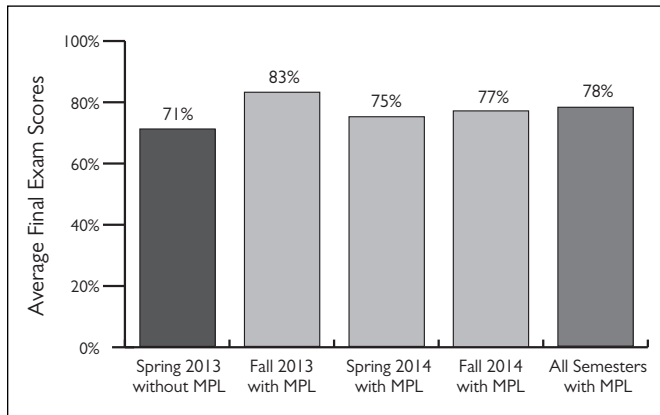


Figure 1. Average Final Exam Scores without MyPsychLab (Spring 2013, $n = 27$) vs. with MyPsychLab (Fall 2013, $n = 29$; Spring 2014, $n = 83$; Fall 2014, $n = 114$)

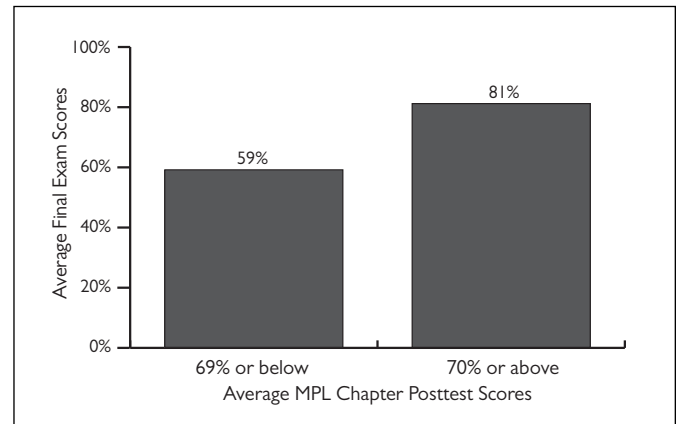


Figure 2. Average Final Exam Scores for Students Who Averaged 69 Percent or below ($n = 41$) vs. 70 Percent or above ($n = 185$) on Their MyPsychLab Chapter Posttests (Fall 2013–Fall 2014)

am encouraged that success on both the MyPsychLab study plan posttest and Writing Space assignments are positively correlated with students' higher final exam scores. Students who averaged 70 percent or above on their MyPsychLab study plan posttests scored, on average, two full letter grades higher on their final exams compared to students who scored 69 percent or below in their posttests (Figure 2). The same is true for student scores on Writing Space assignments (Figure 3).

The Student Experience

Many students benefit from additional help when it comes to basic study skills. Since I started using MyPsychLab, a number of students have told me they feel more prepared for their in-class exams; one stating that the MyPsychLab assignments were “pivotal to my success.” Student feedback also points to the benefits of frequent writing assignments: “The writing assignments required me to think deeper and, as a result, I retained the knowledge more often.” Another student stated that the greatest benefit of using MyPsychLab is that she had “more insight when she got to class.”

Because computer-graded essays are a new concept for most students, I tell them in my syllabus that, if they think their essay grade is unfair, I will grade their essay by hand using the same rubric as Writing Space. Although not many request hand grading, I find they do like having this option. For students who are struggling, I provide sample student essays to help them understand what constitutes a good college essay.

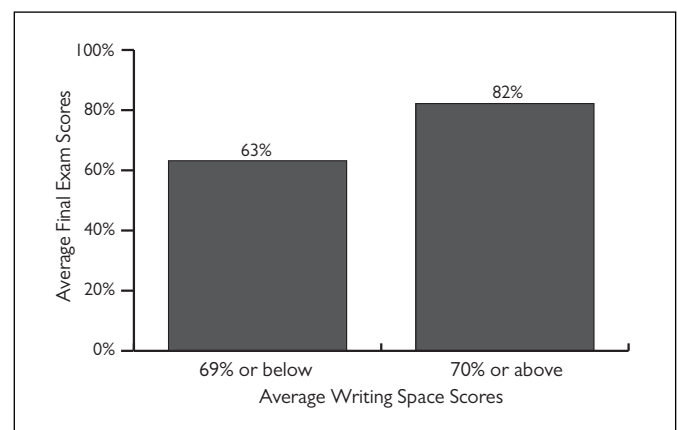


Figure 3. Average Final Exam Scores for Students who Averaged 69 Percent or below ($n = 64$) vs. 70 Percent or above ($n = 162$) on their Writing Space Assignments (Fall 2013–Fall 2014)

Conclusion

After three semesters of implementing MyPsychLab with Writing Space, the data shows increased student learning. Study plan posttest and Writing Space assignment scores are a strong indicator of success on the final exam and can be used to identify students who may need additional help going into the final. The ability to assign and grade writing helps students develop critical thinking skills, which, when they apply those to the material, leads to deeper understanding.