PSY 236: Personality Psychology, Fall 2025

**Tues/Thurs, 8:30-9:50, Olds Hall 111**

**Instructor: Dr. Ted Schwaba** (he/him)

E-mail: [schwabat@msu.edu](mailto:schwabat@msu.edu)

(Include “236” in your message subject, or I will not see your email)

Dr. Schwaba Drop-In Hours:Tues, 1pm-2pm, Psychology Building 249b

TA: **Josephine Fealy** (they/them) UA: **Liliana Vasileski**

**E-mail:** [fealyjos@msu.edu](mailto:fealyjos@msu.edu) **E-mail:** [vasilesk@msu.edu](mailto:vasilesk@msu.edu)

**TA Drop-In Hour:** Tuesday, 10:30am – 11:30am, PSY 244 or by Zoom

<https://msu.zoom.us/j/95445275714> Passcode: 930491

*Alternative TA hours by Zoom may be requested by appointment.*

### Course Materials

### A book cover of a puzzle AI-generated content may be incorrect.REQUIRED Textbook: David Funder, *The Personality Puzzle*, 9th Edition (2024)

You can buy the textbook [here](https://www.amazon.com/Personality-Puzzle-David-C-Funder-dp-1324060549/dp/1324060549/ref=dp_ob_title_bk), or at any bookseller near campus. There will be additional copies at the MSU library. You will need the textbook for exams, which ask about content in the textbook, and class assignments, which require you to cite the textbook. The text also expands upon concepts discussed in lecture, so it will be a useful study guide. Some concepts on exams will come directly from the textbook. The 7th and 8th editions are similar but not identical to the 9th edition and can be used in a pinch. The 6th edition and before are quite different and won’t work for this course.

A book cover with colorful shapes

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**OPTIONAL Class Reading:** Olga Khazan, *Me, But Better* (2025)

This book is optional; content from this book will not be tested on any exam. You can buy it [here](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0D7WF67H4) or at any bookseller near campus. There will be an additional copy at the MSU library. *Me, But Better* is a general-audience nonfiction book, published this spring, that charts the author’s attempts to change their personality for the better using research. I enjoyed the book, and it will help you understand class concepts more clearly. It is a required resource if you are pursuing the honors option for this course.

### Course Webpage: D2L

The course webpage is located on D2L (<https://d2l.msu.edu/>). On this page, you’ll find slides from past lectures (I will post slides *after* class) and assignments.

### Prerequisite

PSY 236 requires that you have taken PSY 101 to introduce yourself to psychological science. No other classes are pre-required. It may help to have taken PSY 295 or 395 so that you can connect the concepts discussed in class with the statistical and research methods used to study them, but this is not necessary (we will go over any necessary concepts from these courses throughout the class).

### Description & Objectives

This course is designed to teach you about the science of personality psychology. Every living being has a personality, and for thousands of years, philosophers have theorized about the origins, structure, and consequences of individual differences in personality. It’s a rather important topic to study! There are three main goals for this course:

1. Comparing and contrasting different perspectives on personality.
2. Understanding modern research on personality traits.
3. Equipping yourself with the tools for evaluating myths surrounding personality.

## Course Schedule for Fall 2025

| Week | Course Component | Topic | Readings | Assignments Due |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Week 1 | Tues 8/26 | Introduction | Syllabus |  |
| Thurs 8/28 | Methods 1: Data and Assessment | Ch. 2 |  |
| Week 2 | Tues 9/2 | Methods 2: Evaluating Research | Ch. 3  (only what is discussed in lecture) |  |
| Thurs 9/4 | Traits 1: Persons and Situations | Ch. 4 |  |
| Week 3 | Tues 9/9 | Traits 2: The Big Five | Ch. 5  (129-132, 147-158) |  |
| Thurs 9/11 | Traits 3: Beyond the Big Five | Ch. 5  (132-147, 159-164) | Writing Assignment 1 |
| Week 4 | Tues 9/16 | Catch-up and Exam 1 Prep |  |  |
| Thurs 9/18 | Exam 1 |  | Exam 1 |
| Thurs 9/18 | Tuition Refund Period EndsSignup deadline for Honors Option (p. 8) |  |  |
| Week 5 | Tues 9/23 | The Self  Exam 1 Review | Ch. 14 |  |
| Thurs 9/25 | *Guest Lecture: Positive Psych and Humanism w. Josephine Fealy* | Ch. 11 |  |
| Week 6 | Tues 9/30 | Development 1: Across the Lifespan | Ch. 6 (158-186) |  |
| Thurs 10/2 | Development 2: Events and Experiences | Ch. 6 (186-200) |  |
| Week 7 | Tues 10/7 | Development 3: Volitional Change |  |  |
| Thurs 10/9 | Psychoanalysis | Ch. 9 |  |
| Week 8 | Tues 10/14 | Catch-up and Exam 2 Prep |  | Writing Assignment 2 |
| **Thurs 10/16** | **Exam 2** |  | Exam 2 |
| Week 9 | Tues 10/21 | **No class: Fall Break** |  |  |
| Thurs 10/23 | Learning, Cognition, Motivation, Emotion Exam 2 Review | Ch. 13 |  |
| Week 10 | Tues 10/28 | Cross-Cultural | Ch. 12 |  |
| Thurs 10/30 | Evolution + Cross-Species | Ch. 8 (238-251) |  |
| Week 11 | Tues 11/4 | Biology 1: It’s All In The Brain | Ch. 7 |  |
| Thurs 11/6 | *Guest Lecture: Personality and Mental Health w. Dr. Raffles Cowan* |  |  |
| Week 12 | Tues 11/11 | Biology 2: Genetics | Ch. 8 (252-265) |  |
| Thurs 11/13 | Personality, Work, and Love | Ch. 15 |  |
| Week 13 | Tues 11/18 | Catch-Up and Exam 3 Prep |  |  |
| Thurs 11/20 | Exam 3 |  | Exam 3 |
| Week 14 | Tues 11/25 | **No Class: Thanksgiving** |  |  |
| Thurs 11/27 | **No Class: Thanksgiving** |  |  |
| Week 15 | Tues 12/2 | Exam 3 Review and Personality Myths |  |  |
| Thurs 12/4 | Class Choice and Final Prep |  | Writing Assignment 3 |
|  | Sun 12/7 |  | Honors Option Project and  Extra Credit Due | |
| Finals Week | Final Exam:Tues 12/9 | Final Exam (Exam 4): 7:45-9:45, Olds Hall 111 (I am so sorry for this time) |  | Final Exam |

## Drop-In Office Hours

The course TA and I will have weekly drop-in office hours, where we are happy to talk with you. They are noted at the top of the syllabus. You can come to ask a single question or stay to discuss something in depth (even if it’s about personality or psychology or your future more generally); this time is dedicated to your learning.

**Note that this is the only time during the week that I will be able to meet with students. If you need to meet during a different time, you can email Jo to schedule a Zoom meeting with them.**

Going to drop-in office hours is an awesome opportunity to meet scientists and pick their brain about questions you have regarding this course, science in general, or what it’s like to earn a PhD in psychology (if that’s something that interests you). If you’re looking to go to grad school, and would like a letter of rec, I’d suggest attending my drop-in hours throughout the semester so I can get to know you.

## Course Activities and Grading

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Category | Description | % of Final Grade |
| Exams | Three Total Exams  (Out of 4 total) | 60% (20% per exam) |
| Assignments | Writing Assignment 1: Big Five Reflection | 10% |
| Writing Assignment 2:  Your Personality Development | 10% |
| Writing Assignment 3:  Describing Someone Else | 10% |
| Attendance Pop Quizzes | Five Total Pop Quizzes  (Out of 8 total) | 10%  (2% per pop quiz) |
| Extra Credit | Article Review | +2% |
| Other Extra Credit | +? |
| Honors Option | Honors Project | 0% |

Your final grade will be based on your percentage on these course activities (Before the final, I will provide a spreadsheet for calculating your grade going into the final).

| **Grade** | **Points** |
| --- | --- |
| 4.0 | 90 – 100% |
| 3.5 | 85 – 89% |
| 3.0 | 80 – 84% |
| 2.5 | 75 – 79% |
| 2.0 | 70 – 74%  (passing cutoff for PSY majors) |
| 1.5 | 65 – 69% |
| 1.0 | 60 – 64%  (passing cutoff for non-PSY) |
| 0.0 | < 60% |

I will not round grades up. If you are worried about your grade, there will be opportunities to earn extra credit throughout the course. At the end of the semester, if you believe that I made an error in calculating your grade, please let me know. This is the only circumstance under which I will change a grade.

**---**

*Exams.*60% of your grade will come from exams. Each exam is a set of multiple-choice questions. Four exams will be given in person during class (the last exam will the final). Exams emphasize material covered in lectures and the textbook. Exams 1-3 are *not* cumulative, meaning nothing on exam 1 will be tested on exam 2 or 3, and nothing on exam 2 will be tested on exam 3. The last exam is a cumulative final exam that covers material throughout the entire course.   
  
Of your four exam scores, only the top three will count towards your final grade. At the end of the semester, if you have taken all three other exams and are happy with your grade, you do not need to take the final exam (It will count as a 0, which will then be dropped). Dropping an exam gives you flexibility in the course; if you do poorly on one exam, it will not ruin your grade. It also means that, if there is some reason you need to miss an exam, you do not need to stress out!

Any material discussed in lectures or presented in the book may be tested in exams, but most material will come from lecture. I am not trying to trick you. If there is an important concept, it will be on the study guide.

If you show up late for the exam, you will not have extra time to finish the exam.

### Exam Makeup Policy:

You can miss one exam for free, for any reason! This is because only your top 3 of 4 exam scores count towards your grade. You do not need to provide any documentation for your first missed exam.   
  
Makeup exams are only offered for a documented medical emergency, religious observance, or bereavement. A prior commitment (e.g., going on vacation, attending a conference) does not count as valid excuse; you will need to use your free skip for these occasions. **For this reason, you should not miss an exam early in the semester simply because you do not feel like taking the exam, as you cannot predict what will happen later in the semester.**

**Medical Emergency:** If you have a medical emergency, you must notify me via email *within 24 hours of the exam* and provide a note from a medical professional.

**Religious Observances:** If you plan to miss an exam for a religious observance, you must notify me via email *before* the exam that you will be missing it for this reason, and we can work together to find a makeup date. If you email me *after* the exam about a religious observance, I will not grant an extension.

**Bereavement:** Please follow the grief absence policy at the end of this syllabus so that we can work together to figure out a makeup time.

**Thank you for understanding!**

**---**

***Assignments***. 30% of your grade will come from three assignments (10% each). These assignments will be explained to you in depth when they are assigned, and each assignment will come with a detailed rubric so you will know how you will be assessed on each assignment. Briefly, the first assignment will require that you complete a personality inventory and reflect on your score, the second assignment will require that you write about your own personality development, and the third assignment will require that you write about someone else’s personality following the approaches we discussed in class.

Assignments are due at 11:59pm on the date mentioned on the syllabus. **Late writing assignments will not be accepted under any circumstances.**

**If I determine that you use AI on a writing assignment, you will receive a 0, and I will be very disappointed that you described yourself or a loved one using AI.**

**---**

***Attendance Pop Quizzes*** 10% of your grade will come from attendance pop quizzes, which are short in-class assessments designed to build understanding of course concepts. Pop quizzes will be given at random times throughout the semester. There will be eight attendance pop quizzes administered, and each is worth 2% of your grade, capping at 10%. In other words, you will get full points if you complete 5 attendance pop quizzes, so you can miss 3 attendance pop quizzes with no penalty to your grade. These **pop quizzes are for completion points**, so as long as you complete the pop quiz, you will receive the 2%.

**There are no make-ups for missed Attendance Pop Quizzes, under any circumstances, including emergencies or with an accommodations letter. This is because these pop quizzes are designed to measure class attendance and you are allowed to miss over 1/3 of them.**

**---**

***Extra Credit.*** There is an extra credit research participation opportunity that will be presented near the end of the course that involves reading an empirical journal article and connecting it to course content.

There are additional extra credit opportunities that will be given throughout the semester as seen fit by the instructor. For example, there will be an option to complete Writing Assignment 2 in a way that earns extra credit points.

**---**

*Honors Option****.*** The honors option for this course involves reading *Me, but Better*, applying the concepts in the book to your own life to try and change your personality for the better.

If you would like to pursue the honors option, **please email me by 9/18.**

**If I determine that you use AI on the honors option, you will fail it.** You’re better than that, and it’s a fun assignment!

**---**

## Course Policies

### E-mail Policy

E-mail is the best way to get ahold of me and your TA. Please use the following guidelines when e-mailing one of us:

1. First, ask yourself this question: “Can this question be answered by looking in the syllabus?”
2. If you can’t find the answer in the syllabus, ask yourself whether the question would be better to send me your TA or to me. If it is a question about content discussed in class, first email your TA. If it is a class administration question, please email me.
3. Use 236 in the subject line. That makes it clear you are a student in this course asking a question, and your email will be prioritized (we get a lot of emails!)
4. Please sign your e-mail with your full name, so we know who you are.

### Academic Honesty

[Article 2.III.B.2](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/academic-freedom-for-students-at-michigan-state-university/article-2-academic-rights-and-responsibilities) of the SRR states: “The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards.” In addition, the Psychology Department adheres to the policies on academic honesty specified in General Student Regulation 1.0, [Protection of Scholarship and Grades](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/general-student-regulations); the all-University Policy on [Integrity of Scholarship and Grades](http://www.reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Print.asp?Section=534); and [Ordinance 17.00](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/student-group-regulations-administrative-rulings-all-university-policies-and-selected-ordinances/examinations-ordinance-17-00), Examinations.

You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, unless authorized, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source (except as specified in the assignment). This also means that you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in this course. **Finally, you are not allowed to use AI in this course.**

In addition, plagiarism of written work is forbidden. It includes taking the work of

another individual or source and presenting it as your own. This is considered plagiarism even if the source has given you permission to use their work, or the work is in the public domain (e.g., on the web). Any student who violates these rules will receive a penalty grade, possibly a failing grade on the assignment or in the course and will be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Student Affairs. See also: <https://www.msu.edu/~ombud/academic-integrity/student-faq.html>

Contact me or your TA if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work.

### Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at [rcpd.msu.edu](http://rcpd.msu.edu). Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation ("VISA") form. If you require testing accommodations (additional time, etc.) you must contact me and present your accommodations letter at least NINE DAYS before the exam date (for exam 1, this means by 9/9). This will ensure that I have enough advance notice to make sure I can meet these accommodations. Thank you for your understanding!

### In Case of the Death of a Loved One

The College of Social Science follows the official MSU **grief absence policy**, which can be found [here](https://reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Notices/GriefAbsence.aspx). If you are grieving a loved one who has recently passed away, and need to miss an exam or labs, you will need to complete the [grief absence form](https://reg.msu.edu/StuForms/Stuinfo/GriefAbsenceForm.aspx) in your StuInfo portal and email supporting documentation to [SSC.GriefAbsence@msu.edu](mailto:SSC.GriefAbsence@msu.edu). If you need additional help, you can call (517) 432-3598 for compassionate help through this process. (Remember, you can miss 1 exam and 3 labs for free, due to the grading policy above). This form will require you submit acceptable documentation: either the loved one’s death certificate or a letter from the funeral home involved containing the deceased individual’s name, date of death, relationship to deceased, visitation and funeral services date or an official published obituary. These letters are extremely common and funeral homes will be happy to provide them for you. After you send this form to the college of social science, you will receive a grief absence documentation, which you can send to me. Most grief absences are valid for a few days up to 2 weeks. Up to one week can be approved for a distant relative passing or 2 weeks for an immediate family member. After completing this process, please email me the grief absence documentation, and we will work together to figure out a plan for you.

### Academic Assistance

This is a university and you are expected to produce college level work. If you have any trouble with assignments or the material covered in class, please make an appointment to speak with me or your TA as soon as possible. We’d like to see you succeed in class and can work to help find solutions when you are having difficulties with the course materials! Please don’t wait until the end of the semester to seek help as this is often too late for us to turn things around! In the past, nearly all students who have failed the course have not attended lectures and have missed exams and labs. If you are worried that this course may be difficult for you, I’d strongly recommend making sure that you show up to everything – it goes a long way.

### Limits to Confidentiality

Please be aware that class materials are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, all University employees, including instructors, cannot maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues based on external legal obligations or to protect the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As the instructors, the TAs and I must report the following information to other University offices (including the Office of Inclusion and Department of Police and Public Safety) if you share it with one of us:

* Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child,
* Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and
* Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

The Office of Inclusion will reach out to you via a confidential email, to see if you would like to pursue legal action and to provide you with additional university resources. You have the right to choose whether or not you would like to utilize any of these services or even respond to the university’s email. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the MSU Counseling Center (<https://counseling.msu.edu>).