



This is “Preface”, article 4 from the book [Beginning Psychology \(index.html\)](#) (v. 1.0).

This book is licensed under a [Creative Commons by-nc-sa 3.0](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/) license. See the license for more details, but that basically means you can share this book as long as you credit the author (but see below), don't make money from it, and do make it available to everyone else under the same terms.

This content was accessible as of December 29, 2012, and it was downloaded then by [Andy Schmitz](#) (<http://lardbucket.org>) in an effort to preserve the availability of this book.

Normally, the author and publisher would be credited here. However, the publisher has asked for the customary Creative Commons attribution to the original publisher, authors, title, and book URI to be removed. Additionally, per the publisher's request, their name has been removed in some passages. More information is available on this project's [attribution page](http://2012books.lardbucket.org/attribution.html?utm_source=header).

For more information on the source of this book, or why it is available for free, please see [the project's home page](#) (<http://2012books.lardbucket.org/>). You can browse or download additional books there.

Preface

When I first started teaching Introduction to Psychology, I found it difficult—much harder than teaching classes in statistics or research methods. I was able to give a lecture on the sympathetic nervous system, a lecture on Piaget, and a lecture on social cognition, but how could I link these topics together for the student? I felt a bit like I was presenting a laundry list of research findings rather than an integrated set of principles and knowledge. Of course, what was difficult for me was harder still for my students. How could they be expected to remember and understand all the many phenomena of psychology? How could they tell what was most important? And why, given the abundance of information that was freely available to them on the web, should they care about my approach? My pedagogy needed something to structure, integrate, and motivate their learning.

Eventually, I found some techniques to help my students understand and appreciate what I found to be important. First, I realized that psychology actually did matter to my students, but that I needed to make it clear to them why it did. I therefore created a more consistent focus on the theme of *behavior*. One of the most fundamental integrating principles of the discipline of psychology is its focus on behavior, and yet that is often not made clear to students. Affect, cognition, and motivation are critical and essential, and yet are frequently best understood and made relevant through their links with behavior. Once I figured this out, I began tying all the material to this concept: The sympathetic nervous system matters *because it has specific and predictable influences on our behavior*. Piaget's findings matter *because they help us understand the child's behavior* (not just his or her thinking). And social cognition matters *because our social thinking helps us better relate to the other people in our everyday social lives*. This integrating theme allows me to organize my lectures, my writing assignments, and my testing.

Second was the issue of empiricism: I emphasized that what seems true might not be true, and we need to try to determine whether it is. The idea of empirical research testing falsifiable hypotheses and explaining much (but never all) behavior—the idea of *psychology as a science*—was critical, and it helped me differentiate psychology from other disciplines. Another reason for emphasizing empiricism is that the Introduction to Psychology course represents many students' best opportunity to learn about the fundamentals of scientific research.

The length of existing textbooks was creating a real and unnecessary impediment to student learning. I was condensing and abridging my coverage, but often without a clear rationale for choosing to cover one topic and omit another. My focus on

behavior, coupled with a consistent focus on empiricism, helped in this regard—focusing on these themes helped me identify the underlying principles of psychology and separate more essential topics from less essential ones.

Approach and Pedagogy

I wrote this book to help students organize their thinking about psychology at a conceptual level. Five or ten years from now, I do not expect my students to remember the details of most of what I teach them. However, I do hope that they will remember that psychology matters because it helps us understand behavior and that our knowledge of psychology is based on empirical study.

This book is designed to facilitate these learning outcomes. I have used three techniques to help focus students on behavior:

1. **Chapter openers.** I begin my focus on behavior by opening each chapter with a chapter opener showcasing an interesting real-world example of people who are dealing with behavioral questions and who can use psychology to help them answer those questions. The opener is designed to draw the student into the chapter and create an interest in learning about the topic.
2. **Psychology in everyday life.** Each chapter contains one or two features designed to link the principles from the chapter to real-world applications in business, environment, health, law, learning, and other relevant domains. For instance, the application in [Chapter 6 "Growing and Developing"](#)—"What Makes a Good Parent?"—applies the concepts of parenting styles in a minihandbook about parenting, and the application in [Chapter 3 "Brains, Bodies, and Behavior"](#) is about the difficulties that left-handed people face performing everyday tasks in a right-handed world.
3. **Research focus.** I have also emphasized empiricism throughout, but without making it a distraction from the main story line. Each chapter presents two close-ups on research—well-articulated and specific examples of research within the content area, each including a summary of the hypotheses, methods, results, and interpretations. This feature provides a continuous thread that reminds students of the importance of empirical research. The research foci also emphasize the fact that findings are not always predictable ahead of time (dispelling the myth of hindsight bias) and help students understand how research really works.

My focus on behavior and empiricism has produced a text that is better organized, has fewer chapters, and is somewhat shorter than many of the leading books.

Finally, as with all Unnamed Publisher texts, this textbook also includes learning objectives, key takeaways, exercises and critical thinking activities, and a marginal glossary of key terms.

In short, I think that this book will provide a useful and productive synthesis between your goals and the goals of your students. I have tried to focus on the forest rather than the trees and to bring psychology to life—in ways that really matter—for the students. At the same time, the book maintains content and conceptual rigor, with a strong focus on the fundamental principles of empiricism and the scientific method.