

PSY 545: Final Project Guidelines and Rubric

Overview

The final project for this course is the creation of a **case analysis**.

Forensic psychologists are often consulted regarding or assigned to difficult and complex cases that require careful and evidenced-based approaches to obtaining information for court proceedings. For example, forensic psychologists are frequently appointed by the court to assess a defendant's competence to stand trial, or they might be asked to make recommendations in a child custody case after conducting a forensic evaluation.

Imagine that you are working with a forensic psychologist assigned to a legal case. In this assistant role, you are tasked with providing support and constructing suggestions on how to proceed with the evaluation and making recommendations to the court. Your recommendations will be based on theory and research, as well as on the current trends and changes within the discipline itself.

You will choose *one* out of four scenarios listed in the Case Scenarios section in this document and evaluate your chosen case in an effort to help the assigned forensic psychologist implement effective, evidence-based approaches to deliver professionally sound recommendations to the court.

Each case scenario concludes with a set of “Framing Questions” that will help guide you in identifying the implications and ramifications specific to your selected scenario.

The project is divided into **four milestones**, which will be submitted at various points throughout the course to scaffold learning and ensure quality final submissions. These milestones will be submitted in **Modules Two, Four, Six, and Eight**. **The final submission is in Module Nine**.

In this assignment, you will demonstrate your mastery of the following course outcomes:

- Apply the scientific method to the practice of forensic psychology within the criminal justice system
- Evaluate dominant psychological explanations and theories of crime and delinquent behavior for informing the creation of appropriate and effective evidence-based approaches and strategies
- Develop evidence-based approaches and strategies for administering effective forensic evaluations to the criminally mentally ill and socially deviant individuals
- Assess the extent to which the role of ethics in various forensic scenarios influences decision-making processes consistent with the code of conduct in the field of psychology
- Assess the extent to which the role of diversity influences the effective delivery of forensic-related services, while maintaining the integrity of practice and high standard of professionalism

Prompt

Your case analysis should answer the following question: Based your evaluation of the case and utilizing the framing questions outlined at the conclusion of each scenario, what are your suggested approaches and strategies for administering an efficient forensic evaluation of the client(s)?

The sections of your paper should be presented in the same order as the critical elements below.

Specifically, the following **critical elements** must be addressed:

I. Introduction

- a) What case scenario will you be analyzing?
- b) Outline the key facts of the case.
- c) Overall, what are issues your assigned forensic psychologist would address in this scenario? Based on the scenario, what are the needs of the client? The defense team? The court?
- d) Include any other information that will establish a robust context for analyzing and evaluating the case.

II. Scientific Methodology

Evaluate the case **scenario**, applying the scientific methodology from the course. Remember, you are not stating opinions; you are breaking down this case through the lens of the scientific method. Walk through the scenario applying specific scientific methodology. In other words, determine which specific scientific methodology (e.g., forensic interviewing, psychological assessments, psycho-social assessments, the administering of psychological testing, court report writing) applies to the scenario.

III. Theoretical Framework

- a) How can previous research help your assigned forensic psychologist with developing **evidence-based approaches** and providing effective services to clients within the scenario?
- b) Select a **psychological theory** that would help inform the forensic psychologist's eventual decisions and recommendations in this case. In other words, provide a rationale that supports the approach as it relates to the specific scenario.
- c) Based on the scientific methodology(s) that you identified in Section II, what best practices or approaches would you recommend to ensure that they are effectively implemented in the particular **scenario**?
 - i. For instance, what recommendations would you make to the assigned forensic psychologist to ensure that the client maintains the limit of confidentiality? How would you determine the client's level of cognition with regard to the forensic psychologist's involvement? Note: These are guiding questions. You should address other best practices as they relate to your scenario.

IV. Role of Ethics

- a) Assess the forensic psychologist's role relative to the potential **ethical implications or ramifications** in the scenario. For instance, what is the importance of maintaining objectivity or maintaining the role of professionalism? Substantiate your claims, referencing the Ethical Principles for Psychologists and Code of Conduct.

- b) Assess the **potential risks** associated with implementing forensic psychology practices specific to the scenario. For example, are there personal biases that would impact the forensic psychologist's ability to be objective and fair in this scenario?
- c) What is your **recommended course of action** regarding the risks you identified, demonstrating your adherence to high ethical standards in working with all relevant parties in the scenario?
 - i. For instance, how do forensic psychologists still work clinically with defendants when they would be required to release information obtained in an individual therapy session? Or what would be the ethical implications for forensic psychologists working on a case in which they are privy to unethical behavior being engaged in on the part of other court officials?

V. Implications of Diversity

- a) What are the implications of diversity (e.g., race, gender) on the effective **delivery of forensic-related services** relative to the scenario? Overall, what are the drawbacks to being insensitive to and not culturally aware of differences when working with clients?
- b) How would you address issues of diversity in your selected **scenario**? In other words, what are your recommendations to the assigned forensic psychologist, ensuring that the psychologist will maintain the integrity of practice and high standard of professionalism?
- c) What steps are needed to ensure that best practices in addressing **cultural competency** are considered when providing services to clients of varying cultures and backgrounds?

VI. Conclusion

- a) Working as an assistant to the forensic psychologist, what **preparation** is needed to effectively serve as an officer of the court, as it relates to the specific scenario? In other words, what practices would you employ to effectively prepare for giving official testimony before the court?
- b) Based on the facts of the case scenario and the **framing questions** outlined at the conclusion of the case, what approaches and strategies do you recommend for implementation? How do these strategies adhere to policies and procedures of practicing forensic psychologists? Substantiate your claims with scholarly research.

Case Scenarios

Capital Punishment Sentencing (Competency Evaluations)

Mr. Davis, a Muslim who immigrated to this country five years ago, has a long history of psychiatric hospitalizations related to his diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. His delusions revolve around the belief that uniformed spies have been sent to execute him. He reports auditory and visual hallucinations when not on his medication. He was arrested for trespassing after he was found sleeping in the delivery shed of a warehouse.

During his stay in jail, he was put on antipsychotic medications and was released for time served after spending 45 days in jail. Upon his release, he returned to living on the streets and stopped taking his medications. While sleeping on a park bench, he was assaulted by several youths who hit and kicked him, leaving him on the ground but with no serious injuries. Mr. Davis was convinced that the juveniles who assaulted him were spies who would later return to assassinate him.

He found a 17-inch pipe and hid in the shadows the remainder of the evening, fearing for his life. In the early morning, he saw two uniformed youths approaching him, a 12-year-old boy and his 14-year-old brother, who were on their way to a Boy Scout meeting. Mr. Davis ran up behind the boys and started

swinging the pipe wildly, screaming that they would never take him alive. He struck the 12-year-old in the head, causing severe brain trauma. The 14-year-old was able to flee, but only after receiving a blow in the face. Mr. Davis returned to the 12-year-old and bludgeoned him to death.

He was still hitting the lifeless body when the police arrived. As soon as the police arrived, he dropped the pipe and sat in silence as he was subdued. He was found incompetent to stand trial and was committed to a state hospital. After eight months of pharmacological treatment, he was found competent, and tried and convicted of capital murder.

In most jurisdictions, mitigating circumstances are that the offender was, at the time of the offense, (1) under extreme emotional or mental distress, and (2) substantially unable to appreciate the wrongfulness of his act or conform his behavior to the requirements of the law.

Aggravating circumstances are that (1) the crime was committed in a wanton, atrocious, and cruel manner, and (2) the offender has the probability of committing criminal acts in the future.

In this case, you are working as an assistant to a forensic psychologist hired by the defense to assist during the sentencing phase. In this role, you will have to help prepare testimony that would support the position of the defense attorney regarding the defendant's competence, emotional stability at the time of the crime, and his ability to fully understand the consequences associated with his sentence.

Framing Questions

1. What role do the mitigating and aggravating circumstances play in capital sentencing?
2. Competency evaluations: If you were asked to disagree with the findings in the competency evaluation previously administered, what evidence could you use to counter the recommendations included in the psychological evaluation?
3. What approach would you take in assessing and working with a Muslim who may have encountered racism in this country due to his religion and ethnicity?

The Eggshell Defendant (Assessment of Psychological Injury)

Kathy Hall has had several episodes of clinical depression, the first one when she was 14 years old and the most recent one a year ago. She is currently 34 years old and takes an antidepressant at a prophylactic dose to prevent a fourth clinical depression episode. She has a high school education and no additional formal training. During her last job, she earned minimum wage.

Kathy spends one day a week volunteering at her community library. The library was renovating one of the reading rooms and asked volunteers to help out with minor construction, painting, and clean-up. One of the city employees had just finished using a glass pitcher to store a caustic cleanser used to remove glue and paint from wood surfaces. During the busy clean-up, a young child asked Kathy for a drink of water. Unknowingly, Kathy mistook the pitcher of cleanser for water and poured the child a glass. As a result, the child suffered serious burns throughout her mouth and down her throat.

Kathy is not held liable for the mistake, but the city is sued since the cleanser was placed in the pitcher by a city employee. The family of the child wins a \$4 million lawsuit against the city. After the incident, Kathy experienced an episode of clinical depression and blamed herself for the accident.

City law allows the city to seek compensation from individuals whose actions result in significant financial loss to the city. Based on this law, the city initiates a lawsuit against Kathy. The defense against the lawsuit and reliving the experience causes further emotional harm to Kathy.

The court appoints a forensic psychologist on this case to conduct a personal injury evaluation on Kathy, and you are hired by the forensic psychologist to assist him on this case.

Framing Questions:

1. What are some of the issues you may face during this evaluation?
2. Identify what harm that Kathy suffered is compensable. What standard for compensable damages would be applicable to this case?
3. How should the evaluation be conducted? What instruments should be used and what collateral sources of information, if any, should be pursued?
4. How might the fact that this client does not have any formal education and is currently unemployed affect how others will perceive her?

A King Solomon's Solution? (Child Custody Evaluation)

Kim and Halle met at a "Parents Without Partners" picnic. Halle, of Native American descent, was two years past a divorce and had her three children, all girls under seven years old, for the weekend. A friend suggested that she attend the picnic so that the children might have some friends to play with, while Halle interacted with other adults.

Kim, who is African American, had a four-year-old son and was never married. She was dating a man and had an unplanned pregnancy. She did not want to marry the father and decided to raise the child on her own. The father of the boy has not been involved in his life.

Halle and Kim hit it off at the picnic and had a commitment ceremony 18 months after meeting. Both Halle and Kim love children and decided to have more of their own through in vitro fertilization. Kim made the decision to raise the children and gave up her career as a pharmacist, while Halle, who owns a consulting business, could easily support the family. Halle and Kim have two additional children within the first five years of marriage. Halle continues to have weekend custody/visitation with her three children from her previous marriage, while they spend one month during the summer with the new family.

However, after seven years of marriage, Halle decides she wants a divorce and wishes to remarry her first wife. Kim is taken totally by surprise and learns that Halle has been having an affair with her ex-partner throughout the past three years of their marriage. Halle wants to have full custody of the two children she had with Kim, along with Kim's first son, who developed a strong attachment to Halle and thinks of Halle as his biological mother. Halle and her first partner file for full custody of all the children and threaten a long, drawn-out court battle. Kim countersues for shared custody of Halle's three girls, since she and the girls have established a family bond.

Note: The children involved in this case include Halle's three girls from her previous marriage, Kim's first son from her relationship, and Halle and Kim's two children.

The court appoints a forensic psychologist to conduct a child custody evaluation and make child custody recommendations to the court, and you are hired by the forensic psychologist to assist him on this case.

Framing Questions

1. What type of custody arrangement should be made based upon the information above?
2. What other information would be important to gather?
3. How did you reach your decision? What standards did you consider in reaching your decisions?
4. Do you notice any personal biases swaying your decision?
5. What might be considered in this case when working with a gay or lesbian couple relative to custody, the courts and society, as a whole?
6. What might be considered in this case relative to working with clients of varying cultures and backgrounds?

Can You Point Out the Person You Saw in the Park? (Eye Witness Memory and Recovered Memory)

In September 2011, an 11-year-old girl vacationing with her family at a large amusement park is reported missing. Due to confusion between the parents, with each parent thinking that the other parent was with the girl, the child was missing for approximately 45 minutes before authorities were notified. Once notified, park officials placed security at all park exits. Security watched for the girl as well as questioned patrons leaving the park regarding any unusual behavior they may have witnessed. Nearly 20 patrons reported seeing a young girl who fit the child's description with a man leaving the park. These individuals are asked for contact information. As the day ends and the park closes, the girl is still missing. Park officials conduct a thorough search of the park and find the girl's body in a dumpster in a remote section of the park near a service entrance. It appears that the girl was sexually assaulted.

Police contact patrons who offered earlier information in hopes of developing a composite sketch of the suspect. Of the 20 patrons who were contacted, only three were able to accurately identify the girl in a photo array with a photograph supplied by the parents. Eight of the patrons reported that the suspect appeared to be a Latino male, whereas four suggested the suspect was African American. The police artist, using computer software, generates a sketch. Fifteen of the patrons agree that the sketch resembles the man they saw. The police publicize the sketch on the evening news, asking for any information. Within the following three weeks, they receive approximately 200 leads. Only five of the leads result in individuals who were at the park on the day of the crime, based on surveillance videos from the entrance and exit of the park.

The detective in charge of the case recognizes that the only evidence the police have is eyewitness evidence, because there were issues with DNA collection and other physical evidence being obtained. The detective also realizes that the eyewitnesses presented conflicting information. She decides that in order to obtain a conviction of the guilty individual, she will need to meticulously handle any eyewitness accounts placing any of the five subjects with the girl on the day of the disappearance.

The detective contacts you and asks for your consultation on the case and for your suggestions as to how to obtain the most accurate and convincing eyewitness identification.

Framing Questions

1. What procedures would you implement in this situation?
2. Discuss how the eyewitness identification should be conducted, including format, number and appearance of foils or opportunities for error, feedback, individuals present, and interaction among witnesses.
3. How would you prepare for testifying in court if you are called by the prosecution and/or the defense?
4. How does race come into play here? Is there something to be said about how some eyewitnesses immediately suggested that the suspect was Latino, while others believed he was African American?

Milestones

Milestone One: Introduction to Case Analysis (Draft of Section I)

In **Module Two**, you will submit a **two- to three-page paper**. In the paper, discuss which case scenario you will be analyzing. Also include an outline of the key facts of the case, and discuss the issues that your assigned forensic psychologist should address in the chosen scenario. Discuss the needs of the client, the defense team, and the court. Finally, include any other information that will be used to establish context for analyzing and evaluating the case.

This milestone is graded with the Milestone One Rubric. The feedback provided by the instructor should be applied to your final case analysis.

Milestone Two: Methodology and Theory (Draft of Sections II and III)

In **Module Four**, you will submit the Methodology and Theory section for your case analysis. **This milestone submission should be three to four pages in length.**

In this paper, you will evaluate and apply the scientific methodology and theoretical framework for the case scenario you have chosen. You will walk through the case scenario, applying methodology and determining which specific scientific methodology applies to the scenario. You will also discuss what previous investigations or existing cases could be applied to the scenario.

Along with looking at the methodology, you will look at theoretical framework. You will look at how previous research helps in developing evidence-based approaches and provides effective services to clients in this scenario. You will select a psychological theory that would help inform the eventual decisions and recommendations for your chosen scenario. Provide a rationale that supports your chosen theoretical framework. Based on your chosen scientific methods, discuss what best practices or approaches you would recommend to ensure they are effectively implemented in your scenario. **This milestone is graded with the Milestone Two Rubric.** The feedback provided by the instructor should be applied to your final case analysis.

Milestone Three: Ethics and Diversity (Draft of Sections IV and V)

In **Module Six**, using what you have learned so far in the course, you will complete the ethics and diversity section of your project. **This milestone submission should be three to four pages in length.** In this paper, you will examine the role of ethics and implications of diversity in the scenario you have chosen. As the assistant to a forensic psychologist in this case, assess your role relative to the potential ethical implications or ramifications in the scenario. Use the Ethical Principles for Psychologists and Code of Conduct to substantiate your claims. Also assess the potential risks associated with the scenario, or potential personal biases that would impact a forensic psychologist's ability to be objective and fair. What is your recommended course of action regarding the identified risks? Once you have discussed ethics, discuss the implications of diversity on the scenario you have chosen. Discuss the implications of diversity, race, or gender on the delivery of services in this scenario. What are drawbacks of not being culturally competent or culturally aware? How would you address these issues? How would

you ensure integrity and the high standard of professionalism? What steps are needed to ensure that the best practices in addressing cultural competency are considered when providing services to clients of varying cultures and backgrounds? **This milestone is graded with the Milestone Three Rubric.** The feedback provided by the instructor should be applied to your final case analysis.

Milestone Four: Conclusion (Draft of Section VI)

In **Module Eight**, you will submit your conclusion. In this **one- to two-page paper**, you will conclude your case analysis. In the conclusion, you will discuss what preparation is needed to effectively serve as an officer of the court as related to your scenario. Based on the facts of the case and framing questions outlined in the conclusion of your case, what approaches and strategies do you recommend for implementation? How do these strategies adhere to policies and procedures of practice of forensic psychologists? Use scholarly research to substantiate your claims. **This milestone is graded with the Milestone Four Rubric.**

Final Submission: Case Analysis

In **Module Nine**, you will submit **the final case analysis**. It should be a complete, polished artifact containing **all** of the critical elements of the final product. It should reflect the incorporation of feedback gained throughout the course. Be sure to organize your paper in the same order as the sections (I–VI) listed in the prompt. **This submission is graded using the Final Product Rubric.**

Deliverables

Milestone	Deliverables	Module Due	Grading
1	Introduction to Case Analysis (Draft of Section I)	Two	Graded separately; Milestone One Rubric
2	Methodology and Theory (Draft of Sections II and III)	Four	Graded separately; Milestone Two Rubric
3	Ethics and Diversity (Draft of Sections IV and V)	Six	Graded separately; Milestone Three Rubric
4	Conclusion (Draft of Section VI)	Eight	Graded separately; Milestone Four Rubric
	Final Product: Case Analysis	Nine	Graded separately; Final Product Rubric

Final Product Rubric

Guidelines for Submission: Students should submit a well-developed case analysis that outlines effective approaches and strategies that will help you appropriately serve the client(s) on the case, while also making sound recommendations to the court. The paper should be 9–13 pages long and include at least 5–7 references of peer-reviewed scholarly research, using APA format.

Critical Elements	Exemplary (100%)	Proficient (90%)	Needs Improvement (70%)	Not Evident (0%)	Value
Introduction	Meets “Proficient” criteria and uses concrete examples to substantiate claims or describe the case	Identifies the case scenario and includes an accurate and detailed overview of the key aspects of the case	Identifies the case scenario and includes an overview, but key aspects of the case are not given or are not accurately detailed	Identifies the case scenario, but an overview is not given	7
Scientific Methodology: Specific to the Scenario	Meets “Proficient” criteria and uses scholarly research to contextualize the application of scientific method(s) specific to the case	Evaluates the case scenario by applying appropriate scientific methodology(s) specific to the case	Evaluates the case scenario by applying scientific methodology(s) specific to the case, but application is not appropriate or lacks detail	Does not evaluate the case scenario by applying scientific methodology(s)	7
Theoretical Framework: Evidence-Based Approaches	Meets “Proficient” criteria and evidence-based approaches are well-supported and worthy of implementation	Applies previous research to inform the development of evidence-based approaches in providing effective services to the clients in the scenario	Applies previous research to inform the development of evidence-based approaches, but research does not speak to providing effective services to the clients in the scenario, or discussion overlooks relevant factors	Does not apply previous research to inform the implementation of evidence-based approaches	7
Theoretical Framework: Psychological Theory	Meets “Proficient” criteria and uses scholarly research to contextualize the application of the psychological theory to the scenario	Selects an appropriate psychological theory and provides a rationale to support the approach as it relates to the scenario	Selects a psychological theory and provides a rationale to support the approach as it relates to the scenario, but discussion overlooks relevant factors or lacks detail	Does not select a psychological theory	7
Theoretical Framework: Scenario	Meets “Proficient” criteria and recommended best practices or approaches are innovative and well-supported	Outlines recommended best practices or approaches to ensure that the suggested scientific methodology(s) are effectively implemented in the scenario	Outlines recommended best practices or approaches to ensure that the suggested scientific methodology(s) are effectively implemented in the particular scenario, but outline lacks detail or overlooks relevant factors	Does not outline recommended best practices or approaches	7

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Role of Ethics: Ethical Implications or Ramifications	Meets “Proficient” criteria and makes novel insights that comprehensively capture the various roles of forensic psychologists	Accurately assesses the role of a forensic psychologist relative to potential ethical implications in the scenario and substantiates claims referencing the Ethical Principles for Psychologists and Code of Conduct	Assesses the role of a forensic psychologist relative to potential ethical implications in the scenario and substantiates claims referencing the Ethical Principles for Psychologists and Code of Conduct, but assessment is not accurate or lacks detail	Does not assess the role of a forensic psychologist relative to potential ethical implications and ramifications	7
Role of Ethics: Potential Risks	Meets “Proficient” criteria and uses concrete examples to substantiate claims	Accurately assesses the potential risks with implementing forensic psychology practices specific to the scenario	Assesses the potential risks with implementing forensic psychology practices specific to the scenario, but assessment is not accurate or lacks detail	Does not assess the potential risks with implementing forensic psychology practices specific to the scenario	7
Role of Ethics: Recommended Course of Action	Meets “Proficient” criteria and the recommended course of action is innovative and well-supported	Outlines a recommended course of action, demonstrating adherence to high ethical standards in working with all relevant parties in the scenario	Outlines a recommended course of action, but does not demonstrate adherence to high ethical standards or recommendations overlook relevant factors	Does not outline a recommended course of action	7
Implications of Diversity: Delivery of Forensic-Related Services	Meets “Proficient” criteria and uses scholarly research to illuminate the importance of cultural awareness when working with the clients in the scenario	Accurately assesses the implications of diversity, race, or gender on the effective delivery of forensic-related services relative to the scenario and discusses the drawbacks of not being culturally aware of differences when working with clients	Assesses the implications of diversity, race, or gender on the effective delivery of forensic-related services relative to the scenario and discusses the drawbacks of being culturally unaware, but assessment is not accurate or overlooks relevant factors	Does not assess the implications of diversity, race, or gender on the effective delivery of forensic-related services	7
Implications of Diversity: Scenario	Meets “Proficient” criteria and recommendations are evidence-driven and plausible	Recommends how the issues relative to diversity in the scenario will be addressed, ensuring that the integrity of practice and high standard of professionalism will be maintained	Recommends how the issues relative to diversity in the scenario will be addressed, but discussion is not couched in terms of ensuring the integrity of practice and high standard of professionalism will be maintained, or recommendations are not appropriate	Does not recommend how the dynamics of diversity in the scenario will be addressed	7

Implications of Diversity: Cultural Competency	Meets “Proficient” criteria and the identified steps are well-supported and worthy of implementation	Outlines the steps necessary to ensure that best practices relative to cultural competency are considered when providing services to clients of varying cultures and backgrounds	Outlines the steps necessary to ensure that best practices relative to cultural competency are considered, but identified steps lack detail or do not appropriately address cultural issues within the specific scenario	Does not outline the steps necessary to ensure that best practices relative to cultural competency are considered	7
Conclusion: Preparation	Meets “Proficient” criteria and the recommendations are well-supported and worthy of implementation	Develops appropriate and detailed preparation practices necessary to effectively serve as an officer of the court	Develops preparation practices necessary to effectively serve as an officer of the court, but recommendations are not appropriate to the scenario or lack detail	Does not develop preparation practices necessary to effectively serve as an officer of the court	7
Conclusion: Framing Questions	Meets “Proficient” criteria and the recommended approaches are plausible and worthy of implementation	Identifies the best approaches and strategies based on the facts of the case scenario, discusses how the identified strategies adhere to policies and procedures of practicing forensic psychologists, and substantiates claims using scholarly research	Identifies best approaches and strategies and discusses how the identified strategies adhere to policies and procedures of practicing forensic psychologists, but they are not based on the facts of the case scenario or discussion lacks detail or overlooks relevant factors	Does not identify the approaches and strategies based on the facts of the case scenario and the framing questions outlined at the conclusion of the case	7
Articulation of Response	Submission is free of errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, and organization and is presented in a professional and easy-to-read format	Submission has no major errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization	Submission has major errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization that negatively impact readability and articulation of main ideas	Submission has critical errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization that prevent understanding of ideas	9
Earned Total					100%