Expectations for written assignments:

You will be asked to write two types of assignments for this course: (1) Full summary, and (2) Short summary and assessment.

You may choose to work together with other students. This is fine, and indeed we encourage it, although we would like you to avoid working in groups larger than 3-4 people so that everyone participates actively. The key principle is that you must write your own assignment entirely in your own words. Avoid copying extended phrases from the paper you are writing about. Do use standard technical phrases when appropriate (e.g., “long-term depression”), but don’t lift entire clauses from the paper you’re summarizing (e.g., “immediate and robust induction of long-term depression”).

1. Full summary (800-1000 words)

- Your summary should begin by stating the major question the paper aims to answer. Provide some background or context that suggests why this question may be topical and significant. Then briefly state the overall experimental approach of the paper. If you feel it is appropriate, you may want to close your summary by stating the implications of the paper’s conclusions.
- Your summary should be organized. Group related ideas into paragraphs. You might follow the order of the paper, or you may find that a different order is more logical. Outlining your summary before you begin writing may help you organize your thoughts.
- You should make clear that you understand what is most important in this paper by focusing exclusively on what you perceive to be the major experiments. You probably should not summarize every figure in the paper. Omit minor controls or experiments that seem tangential to the main story.
- You should describe the logic of each major portion of the study. If one experiments leads directly and logically to a later experiment, then you should make this clear. When the experimental design is complicated or clever, the logic of that design should be explained.
- The implications of major results should be stated clearly. If possible, describe the broad significance of these findings for neurobiology as a whole.

2. Short summary and assessment (800-1000 words)

This assignment has two parts. First, begin with a short summary. This should follow the guidelines above, but it should be substantially shorter, probably about 400 words. The second part is the assessment. This section should be substantive and thoughtful, probably at least 300 words long.

- Identify the major problem(s) with this paper. The instructor may point out a specific major problem, but in other cases you may be asked to develop a critical assessment from scratch. You should explain the problem(s) in enough detail so that the authors could (in principle) write a targeted rebuttal. If you list any minor problem(s), make a clear distinction between these and the major problem(s). Number the problems you list and avoid repetition.
- For each major problem, state the implications of this problem. Does it make the interpretation of specific experiments difficult? Does it weaken your confidence in a major conclusion? Does it diminish the significance of the paper?
- When possible, indicate what solutions are appropriate. Should the authors soften a specific conclusion? Are new analyses required? If new experiments are needed, be specific.