

## Jessica Lin, Humanities/Philosophy

**Course:** Humanities: World Views – *The Foundation of Violence*

**Task:** Research report and letter (first “paper”)

**Objective:** To have students clearly express their understanding of the psychological theories and to apply the theories to the case study in an interesting and justified manner. In this assignment, students use excerpts from Philip Zimbardo’s *The Lucifer Effect: How ordinary people turn evil*, an article by Seymour Hersch on the tortures at Abu Ghraib published in *The New Yorker* magazine, and the documentary *Standard Operating Procedure* by Errol Morris. There are two parts to the assignment: a research report and a letter. In the report, students must apply Zimbardo’s 10 compliance strategies to the tortures at Abu Ghraib (the report has the same structure as the in class assignment students complete in Step 3 of the scaffolding process). Students must use their research to inform the letter they write. The letter is penned from the perspective of one of the American prison guards and is written to the Iraqi prisoner Satar Jabar (referred to as “Gilligan” by the prison guards). The main goal for students is to demonstrate their understanding of the theories, apply the theories to the tortures at Abu Ghraib, support their understanding with evidence from the texts, and concretely explore the compliance strategies.

**Format and Process:**

### Step 1: Milgram, Arendt

- Viewing of *Das Experiment*, a German film loosely based on Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment.
- In class short writing assignment done in groups applying Milgram’s theories to *Das Experiment*: students must analyze the violent events in the film using Milgram’s ideas on compliance. **See *Informal Writing Assignments: Example 3***
- In class short writing assignment on Arendt done in groups: students must explain the meaning of selected passages.
- In class short writing assignment on Arendt and Milgram: students must create links between Arendt’s thesis and Milgram’s experiment on obedience to authority figures.
- Quiz on Milgram and Arendt

### Step 2: Zimbardo

- In class short writing assignment done in groups on specific passages from the text (*says and does* format)
- In class short writing assignment done in groups on specific experiments from the text: students must explain the intention of the experiment and the implications of the results.
- Quiz on Zimbardo

### Step 3: McDonald’s strip-search: a case study

- Viewing of two short news reports on the McDonald’s strip-search scandal (supplemented by Zimbardo’s discussion of the scandal in *The Lucifer Effect*).
- In class short writing assignment done in groups on Zimbardo’s 10 compliance strategies and the McDonald’s strip-search scandal: students must analyze the McDonald’s strip-search scandal according to Zimbardo’s ideas (students must provide evidence from Zimbardo’s text to justify their interpretation). **See *Informal Writing Assignments: Example 4***

### Step 4: Abu Ghraib: *Standard Operating Procedure*

- Viewing of Errol Morris’ *Standard Operating Procedure*.
- Free individual writing assignment where students describe and reflect on their gut reaction to the events portrayed in the documentary. **See *Informal Writing Assignments: Example 5***

### Step 5: Refining the Research: exploring the reality of the prison guard

- Students are given a series of ethical dilemmas, such as the ticking time-bomb scenario, designed to help them think through questions faced by the prison guards in Abu Ghraib. Class time is broken into three parts: First, groups are asked to prepare arguments for both sides of the debate and to be prepared to present their ideas in a class discussion. Second, the class as a whole discusses and debates the scenarios. Third, back in groups, students explain and analyze the assumptions in the ticking time bomb scenario in an informal writing assignment.

**Step 6: Writing the assignment**

**Evaluation:**

See Example 1.