IDEAS FOR PAPER TOPIC

Below I have listed the books that you can choose from for the main paper in cognitive psychology. Please stick with this list unless you want to use three research papers and contact me directly. Not every book will be of interest to everyone. I would strongly suggest that once you decide on a particular topic or title, you should go to one of the book sites like Amazon.com to find reviews of the book. That will give you an idea about the “readability” of the writing and how accessible it is. I usually picked books that are not too difficult to read, but opinions do differ on that. Another good indicator might be the sales rank that the book has – the smaller the number, the more understandable it should be.


This is an account of the questions that made modern cognitive science into its own scientific discipline. Only recommended if you are interested in the history of cognitive science – otherwise it might be too dull.

**Steven Pinker (1999). How the Mind Works.**

General cognitive theory by Steven Pinker. Pinker writes very well and his books usually make the NY Times bestseller list. This is probably more suited for people who have a genuine interest in the general field of cognitive science.

**Steven Pinker (1995). The Language Instinct: How the Mind creates Language**

One of Pinker’s many books on language and also one of his main bestsellers. A good read for people who are generally interested in language.

**Steven Pinker (1999). Words and Rules: The Ingredients of Language.**

For this book you need a real interest in language and specifically the etymology of words. It gives a good insight in how rules have been used to form words, in particular the past tense of irregular verbs.
**Steven Pinker (2002). The blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature.**

This book by Pinker is the most recent. It probably deals with the nature/nurture debate – I haven’t read it, though.

**Alison Gopnik, Andrew Meltzoff, and Patricia Kuhl (2000). The Scientist in the Crib: What Early Learning Tells us About the Mind.**

Understanding how we develop knowledge over time and how much of the knowledge is already present at a young age is always fascinating. This is a well-written book by developmental psychologists about cognitive development. (This book is also being sold under the title “How babies think” – same authors, same book.)

**Gerd Gigerenzer, Peter Todd, and the ABC Research Group (2000). Simple Heuristics that make us Smart.**

Gigerenzer’s group tries to give an account of rational human behavior in light of the limited time and capacity we have to arrive at decisions (bounded rationality). If you are interested in human decision making, this book is for you.

**James Reason (1990). Human Error.**

Classic book on why humans make errors and how to differentiate between different types of errors. Reason analyzes many accidents (from large to small) to give illustrations.

**Oliver Sacks (1987). The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat: And Other Clinical Tales.**

Very readable collection of stories of patients that Oliver Sacks encountered in his practice as a neurologist. If you have seen the movie awakening, then you know Dr. Sacks (played by Robin Williams). Very interesting anecdotes. He also has other books out like this one.


Along similar lines as Sack’s books. You might recall VS Ramachandran from our discussion of synaesthesia. It is lauded as very entertaining.

This book discusses different thinking styles – I have heard very good things about it, and also that Nisbett stereotypes ethnic groups too much in his accounts. You should make up your mind yourself.


I myself just bought this one – if you are interested in the development of art and what it might tell us about early human thought, then this might be a good book for you.


Collection of papers on perception with an eye on art. Richard Gregory is both a well-known researcher in the field of visual perception, he is also the main editor of the journal “Perception”


A neuropsychological account of visual perception with an application towards art.


A discussion of visual perception and how different findings from cognitive psychology can inform visual designers about the most efficient ways of designing displays.


Daniel Schacter is a prominent researcher in the field of memory (long-term memory) and gives a readable account of his theory of memory in this book.


If you are interested in consciousness, this book might be a good choice. I haven’t read it yet, but it has a very high sales rank at Amazon.com and probably is not too difficult to read (unlike most other philosophical literature that I don’t even include here).
Very easy reading material, looking at the relation between human cognitive and perceptual functioning and the design of modern technology (ranging from a door handle to a computer). Don Norman is a well-known cognitive psychologist who now is a consultant in the design field- he worked for Apple computers for a while.

Similar focus on the characteristics of human cognition in relation to technology.

Haven’t read this one yet. Looks interesting – deals with the role of the body in relation to the mental world.

How do humans (and animals) use tools as an extension of their motor system and cognitive abilities?

Situated cognition in teams – Huchins examines the working-together of a crew on a warship and analyzes the cognitive processes that occur in the group decision making process.

Gender influences on cognition. Kimura is a prominent researcher within this field.