Explanation for the Assessment – Instructor Notes

Context

This is the second major essay students had to write in my FWS course – *" Big Brain Moments: a Logical History of Neuroscience"*. So far in this course, we had been discussing ancient civilizations, their beliefs and worldviews, and how it affected the way they have argued about consciousness.

Task

This essay asked the students to summarize the arguments they had learned so far, and present it in a 'scientific report' to their contemporary PI – Frankensteininus. After summarizing the arguments, the students stated which argument sounded the most believable to them, and why. Based on this, they gave their PI - Frankensteininus a recommendation on where he should place the seat of consciousness in his creation.

Design

I use Bloom's revised taxonomy to estimate assessment difficulty. Since this is the second essay in the course, the assignment tests students learning in the lower levels of both the Cognitive Process Dimension and the Knowledge Dimension.

I intentionally chose an anachronistic audience for the essay. I wanted to start moving them beyond five-paragraph essays they have been conditioned to in high school. The goal is to allow students to start developing their individual writing voices and styles, while learning the basics of argumentation.

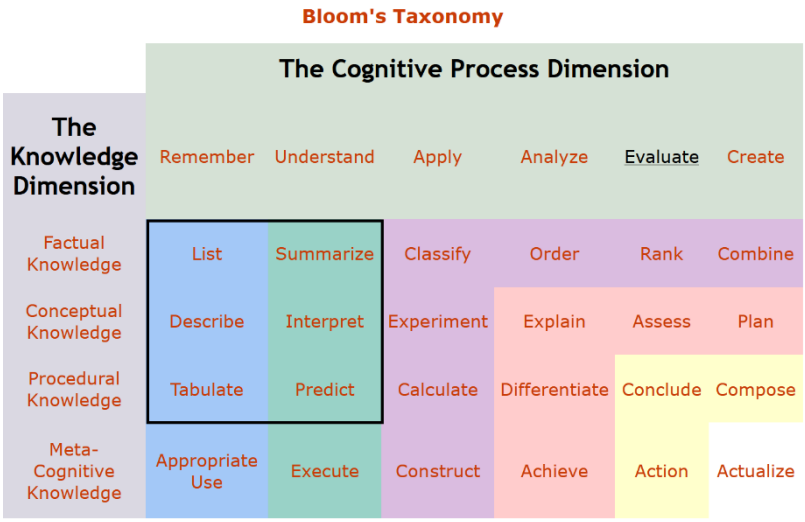


Figure 1 Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (adapted from Dianna Fisher, OSU)

Index

The essay is divided into three parts -

1) First submission (50 point)- Graded for completion only

2) A structured peer review, which also acts as the rubric for final grading (15 points) – Graded for completion only

3) A Revision reflection (20 points) alongside the revised submission (80 points)

First Submission Essay Prompt - Student Facing
Frankensteininus wants YOU (to do research)

You are the assistant to a mad Roman scientist, Frankensteininus. Frankensteininus wants to build a human being and give it life and consciousness, but he has no time to research how. He sends you to the Library of Alexandria, where the world's accumulated wisdom on the mind is kept.

Write Frankensteininus **a report** on the different models of where the seat of consciousness (or its other names - the rational soul, the mind, the soul) was believed to reside, drawing on your reading of ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman sources (see attached chapters - Chapter 2 , Chapter 3, Chapter 4).

For each major model you cover: **name who held it, and the reasoning (the premises) that led them to their conclusion**. Also note, where you can point to it in the reading, **what social, political, or religious force was shaping that reasoning** : was a ruler's authority, a religious doctrine, or an institution's politics visibly leaning on the conclusion?

Close your report with a simple, practical recommendation to Frankensteininus: based on everything you found, **where should he try to place consciousness in his creature**? You don't need to defend your pick against every counterargument - just point to the one or two specific observations from your reading that make it your best bet.

You may use GenAI to help locate additional readings; verifying that a source is real and legitimate is your responsibility. Include citations at the end (not counted toward the page count).

Learning Goals / Rubrics:

- Extract the premises and conclusion of an argument across multiple historical sources, and track how the reasoning shifts across time.
- Recognize where social, political, or religious forces are visibly shaping a piece of scientific reasoning.
- Turn a body of evidence into one specific, well-grounded practical recommendation, without needing to defend it against every possible objection.

Rationale:

Essay 1 asked you to report an argument as you found it. This essay asks for that same core skill, but now across three different eras, so you start noticing how reasoning shifts as history moves rather than staying fixed. You'll also start noticing that these weren't neutral arguments: social and political forces were shaping what people were willing to conclude about the mind.
You are not being asked to judge whether any of these models is right, or whether the socio-political explanation is convincing. For now, your job is to trace accurately and then make one bounded, practical call, the way an assistant reporting back to a busy boss would.

PEER REVIEW WORKSHEET -- Student Facing

Essay 2

Give the feedback that you would hope to receive. ***Be specific and respectful.***

How to Use This Worksheet

Read the report ALL THE WAY THROUGH once before writing anything. Get a sense of the whole piece - what the writer covers, where they seem most confident, and what recommendation they land on. Then read it a second time with this worksheet in front of you.

Two rules for giving good feedback:

- Be specific. "I liked this" is kind but not useful. "The way you traced the shift from Egyptian heart-centrism to Galen's ventricles made the change across eras easy to follow" is useful.
- Point to the text. When you suggest a change, quote or paraphrase the specific sentence or passage you are referring to.

First Impressions

Before diving into the criteria, capture your initial response to the whole report as a reader.

1. Which model of consciousness does the writer seem to find most compelling, and where does that come through?

---

2. Where in the report did you feel most convinced that context (social, political, religious) was shaping a thinker's conclusion?

---

1. Content Accuracy

Is the historical content accurate? Do the thinkers, models, and eras described match what the course readings report?

- ✓ The thinkers and their beliefs about the seat of consciousness match what the readings describe.
- ✓ No significant factual errors (wrong era, misattributed beliefs, confused thinkers).
- ✓ The report does not overstate or oversimplify what a source actually claimed.

What is working well:

Point to one moment where the historical content felt particularly grounded and accurate. What made it feel trustworthy?

One suggestion for revision:

---

2. Argument Mapping (Premises → Conclusion)

For each model of consciousness covered, can you tell what the writer says the premises were and what conclusion they led to?

- ✓ At least three distinct models are covered, spanning Egypt, Greece, and Rome.
- ✓ For each model, the writer states specific premises — not just "they believed X."
- ✓ The premises clearly and logically connect to the conclusion the writer attributes to that thinker.

What is working well:

Which model is mapped most clearly — where could you see exactly how the premises led to the conclusion? Quote or paraphrase the passage.

One suggestion for revision:

Where does a model get reported as a bare belief, without the reasoning behind it? Point to the spot and say what's missing.

---

3. Tracing Change Across Time

Does the report show change or continuity across the three eras, or does it read as three separate, disconnected summaries?

- ✓ The report makes at least one explicit comparison or connection between eras (e.g., “unlike the Egyptians, the Greeks…”).
- ✓ The order of the report suggests a throughline, not just a list of unrelated facts.
- ✓ The writer notices where one era's thinking built on, reacted to, or ignored an earlier one.

What is working well:

Where does the writer most clearly connect one era's thinking to another? What made the throughline visible?

One suggestion for revision:

---

4. Socio-Political Force

Where the writer claims a social, political, or religious force shaped a model, is that claim grounded in something specific from the reading?

- ✓ At least one socio-political or religious influence is named with a specific textual anchor (a person, institution, or event from the reading).
- ✓ The writer avoids vague, generic claims ("religion influenced science") without specifics.
- ✓ The connection between the force and the conclusion is explained, not just asserted.

What is working well:

Where does the writer make the social/political influence feel concrete and specific, rather than a vague gesture? Quote the passage.

One suggestion for revision:

Where does a socio-political claim feel asserted rather than shown? What specific detail from the reading could the writer point to instead?

---

5. The Practical Recommendation

Is the closing recommendation to Frankensteininus grounded in one or two specific cited observations, and appropriately bounded?

- ✓ The recommendation names a specific location or model for the seat of consciousness.
- ✓ It is backed by one or two specific observations pulled from the report.
- ✓ The writer keeps the recommendation historically bounded – they don't report any fact that would not have been known in roman times.

What is working well:

What makes the recommendation legitimate?

One suggestion for revision:

Does the recommendation drift into over-arguing (defending against objections nobody raised), or does it feel disconnected from the evidence above it? What would you suggest to the author to make the recommendation more believable.

Overall Feedback

The single most important thing this writer should focus on in their revision: *Choose one. What would make the biggest difference?*

Something in this report that you genuinely want to steal for your own writing: *What did this writer do that you wish you had done?*

Any questions you have for the writer: *Questions show the writer where a reader's mind got curious or confused.*

REVISION REFLECTION -- Student Facing

Essay 2

Submit this with your revised report. ***Tell me what you changed, why, and what you'd do next.***

Name: _____ Date: _____

How to Use This Worksheet

Fill this out after you finish revising, with your first draft, your peer review worksheet, and my comments open next to your revision. This is not a test and there are no right answers. I read it before I read your revision, so it tells me where to look and what you were trying to do.

Three things to know:

- **You don't have to take every suggestion.** You are the author. Declining a suggestion with a clear reason is good revision.
- **Revision is more than editing.** Fixing commas and word choice is editing. Revision changes what the report says, how it is organized, or how well it is supported. Aim for at least one real revision.
- **Point to the text.** When you describe a change, quote or paraphrase the before and after.

Part 1. What Did Your Peer Reviewer and Instructor Say, and What Did You Do?

For each criterion on the peer review worksheet, summarize your reviewer's (and your instructor's, if any) suggestion in your own words. Then circle what you did with it and explain. If your reviewer had no suggestion for a criterion, write "none" and tell me whether you revised that part anyway.

1. Content Accuracy
Is the historical content accurate? Do the thinkers, models, and eras match what the readings report?

Your reviewer's suggestion (in your own words):

What you did (circle one): Adopted Adapted Declined

What you changed or why you declined:

2. Argument Mapping (Premises → Conclusion)
For each model, can a reader tell what the premises were and what conclusion they led to?

Your reviewer's suggestion (in your own words):

What you did (circle one): Adopted Adapted Declined

What you changed or why you declined:

3. Tracing Change Across Time
Does the report show change or continuity across the three eras, or read as three separate summaries?

Your reviewer's suggestion (in your own words):

What you did (circle one): Adopted Adapted Declined

What you changed or why you declined:

4. Socio-Political Force

Is each claim about a social, political, or religious influence grounded in something specific from the reading?

Your reviewer's suggestion (in your own words):

What you did (circle one): Adopted Adapted Declined

What you changed, or why you declined:

5. The Practical Recommendation

Is the advice to Frankensteininus grounded in one or two specific observations, and historically bounded?

Your reviewer's suggestion (in your own words):

What you did (circle one): Adopted Adapted Declined

What you changed, or why you declined:

Part 2. Your Most Important Revision
Pick the ONE change that made the biggest difference to your report.

Which level was this change at? (circle one)
Whole report (structure, order,voice) A section or paragraph Sentences

Before:
Quote or paraphrase an example what the first draft said or did.

After:
Quote or paraphrase an example what the revision says or does now.

Why is the new version better?
What can a reader like Frankensteininus now see or understand that they couldn't before?

Part 3. Looking Ahead
What will you take from this revision into your next essay?

One thing you still aren't satisfied with:
If you had another week, what would you work on next, and why?

One habit you'll carry into Essay 3:
Something about how you read, plan, draft, or revise, not just "proofread more."

Keep a copy of this worksheet. You will come back to it in Essay 5.