

\*I would like to thank Dean Keith Simonton for developing this handout.

To guide your biographical sketch, I provide some questions that you should ask yourself when pouring through the information about the subject of your paper. You will not necessarily obtain answers to all questions, and you do not need to adhere to this particular order.

*Background.* What was his or her birth order? What kind of family was he or she born into in terms of socioeconomic class, professional status of parents, diversity of their backgrounds, and so on? Was the family environment stable or unstable, traumatic or bland? For example, did your subject suffer the experience of orphanhood? Were there any role models available that guided him or her in the choice of occupation and domain of achievement? Was your person popular with peers or a loner? Any disabilities? Was he or she extremely precocious or talented early in childhood? Any instances of “crystallizing experiences” that launched the individual on a scientific career?

*Education.* How well did your subject do in school? In college? What level of formal education did he or she attain? If a PhD or other higher degree was earned, was it received at an unusually young or old age? Were there any teachers who served a special mentor role in your person’s intellectual or academic development? Was your subject’s training marginal or central to the domain in which eminence was ultimately obtained? If an outsider, did that marginal background leave an impression on your subject’s distinctive contribution?

*Personality.* Was he or she highly intelligent, perhaps even possessing a “genius-level” intellect? Independent and nonconformist? Introverted? Risk taking? Hardworking, even workaholic? Did he or she have broad intellectual interests? Any evidence of psychopathology, such as manic depression, neurosis, or mild psychosis? Any instances of psychopathology in close relatives that might help explain your subject’s idiosyncrasies?

*Thought processes.* Was your subject an intuitive thinker? Any examples of leaps of imagination or inspiration? Or was your subject extremely analytical and logical in approach questions? Was there a sense of purpose, of destiny underlying his or her work? Was everything, no matter how diverse, connected by some central theme or preoccupation? What role did chance play? Any examples of serendipity?

*Career development.* What kind of professional positions were occupied? For example, did he or she attain a professorship at a distinguished university? Did your subject establish connections with a considerable number of notable colleagues? Or was he or she professionally isolated? What about the number of students and followers? Collaborators or rivals? Did your subject receive any contemporary recognition, such as special honors or awards? In the individual’s final years, did he or she become a defender of a newly established status quo, rejecting the innovative ideas that were to become important in the next generation?

*Productivity.* At what age did he or she first make a contribution to the field? Was this unusually young or old? At what age did your subject produce his or her single best work or “masterpiece”? Did this contribution come out at the typical age for the discipline? And at what age was the last contribution made? Was this at an exceptionally advanced age? What was the total number of works produced? How does this compare with what you would expect? Did the rate of productivity rise to some peak and then

decline in a fashion you would anticipate or were there some surprises? Any instances of some "swan song" -- some final work conceived shortly before death that encapsulated in a distinctive manner the entire course of a career? How influential were your subject's works in that person's own time and in later generations? Any disastrous mistakes that exerted a profound influence on the discipline?

*Zeitgeist.* Did your subject fit in with the mood of the times? Or was your person ahead of the zeitgeist? Were your subject's ideas rejected by contemporaries so that he or she experienced an uphill fight to fame? Or did celebrity status come easily? Can you identify any examples of multiples? That is, did anyone else come up with the same ideas as your subject at roughly the same time? Finally, what were the general economic, political, social, and cultural conditions in which your subject worked? Economic prosperity? Peace or war? Political or ethnic oppression? Did the general milieu help or hinder your person in achieving greatness?

*Final influence.* What was your subject's ultimate impact in making psychology a legitimate science? Did he or she move the field forward, placing the discipline closer to other recognized sciences? Or was your subject's effect on the field negative, lowering our discipline's status as a science? Did your subject even aspire to make psychology a science? In answering this last question, please be clear what you mean by a science. Do you mean a natural or exact science? Or do you mean a human science? If the former, what criteria do you use to define a hard science? Empiricism? Mathematics or quantification? Theoretical rigor? Falsifiability? If you mean a soft science, then by what criteria do you judge whether someone has made a scientific advance?

In addressing the foregoing questions, please remember to make explicit what your answers tell us about the fundamental theme of your essay-whether or not your individual fits the profile of a "scientific genius."