Students’ Guide to the Psychology Department Research Requirement

Many of the courses offered by the Psychology Department include a component of research experience. Students in Psychology 1 are required to earn four points of research credit; students in Psychology 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 101 are required to earn three points of research credit for each of these courses in which they are enrolled. Instructors of other courses may require their students to earn a certain number of points of research credit, or they may allow students to do so on an extra credit basis. Check with your instructor if you aren’t sure which situation applies in your course.

You can earn research points in two ways: 1) You can write reports about articles that describe psychological research or by participating in research studies. For every acceptable (guidelines for reports are provided below) report submitted at the end of the semester, you will receive one point of research credit. 2) You can participate in psychological studies. Credit for participation in such studies accumulates in half point increments. For every half hour of participation, you will receive half a point of research credit. If you participate for less than half an hour, you will receive half a point of credit. If a study requires that you attend multiple sessions, you will receive credit based on the total amount of time that you spend participating in the study. For example, if a study required that you attend two half-hour sessions and one forty-five minute session, you would receive two points of credit for participating. Whichever option you choose, the research requirement is designed to give you some hands-on experience with psychological research. Most of the concepts and facts that you’ve learned in your psychology courses have been tested through research. This is your chance to contribute to that process and learn more about it.

Participating in Psychological Studies

Your participation in psychological studies will be administered with the department’s web-based Experiment Management System (EMS). The URL for this system is http://research.psychology.gwu.edu. The operation of the system is explained in the document, Psychology Research Website Documentation (Participant), which should accompany the present document. You will use the EMS to sign up for each of the studies in which you participate. After you participate in a study, the researcher will report your participation to the EMS, and will provide you with a receipt proving that you participated, in case you are not correctly credited with your participation. At the end of the semester, the EMS will report the credit that you have accumulated to your instructor. Please note that the EMS system will not be fully functional till the end of the first week of classes. At that point, entries will have been created for all participating classes and EMS accounts will have been created for all students listed on the rosters of those classes. If an account has not been created for you by that time, you will need to create an account yourself, following the instructions in the Psychology Research Website Documentation. In creating an account for yourself, do not be concerned that the system appears to think that your email account ends in ‘.gwu.edu’. The system is set up to forward your mail to your ‘.gwmail.gwu.edu’ account.

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What are my rights as a participant? The American Psychological Association has set out some guidelines that psychologists must follow in conducting research, to insure that participants are treated fairly and respectfully.

Informed consent: You have the right to know something about the study before you participate, so that you can decide whether you want to participate. For example, "You will be filling out a questionnaire about coping with stress," or "You and the other subjects will make a group decision about how to resolve a conflict." If you are not comfortable with the activities of one of the studies you have signed up for, you can choose not to participate, and find another study instead.

Terminating participation: Once the study begins, you have the right to opt out of any activities that you find uncomfortable or upsetting, without facing any penalty. All studies in which you might participate are carefully screened by a university committee to insure your psychological and physical safety, and to minimize the chance of any discomfort or distress. If you decide not to complete a study, you will still receive credit for participating in the study.

Debriefing: After participating, you have the right to find out what the study was all about. In most cases, the researcher will provide you with an explanation right on the spot. However, in some cases it may be necessary for the researcher to mail you an explanation at the end of the semester, instead.

What are my responsibilities as a participant? YOUR PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY IS TO SHOW UP ON TIME. Be sure to write down the date, time, location, and name of the study WHEN YOU SIGN UP. If you forget any of this information, you can retrieve it from the Experiment Management System. Please see the attached handout for instructions as to how to do this. IF YOU FIND THAT YOU CANNOT ATTEND A SESSION FOR WHICH YOU HAVE SIGNED UP, you have several options. If the cancellation deadline for the session has not passed, you may use the Experiment Management System to cancel the session. Again, please see the attached handout for instructions as to how to do this. If the cancellation deadline has passed and you have a good excuse for not being able to attend the session, you may contact the subject pool administrator, at psychres@gwu.edu, stating you reasons for being unable to attend the session. The administrator may ask that you document your situation. In order to avoid penalty, you must contact the administrator after the cancellation deadline for the session has passed but before the time of session. PLEASE DO NOT CONTACT THE RESEARCHER. DOING SO MAY RESULT IN FURTHER PENALIZATION.

What if I don’t show up on time for a study? If you don’t show up on time for a study, and you have not cleared this in advance with the subject pool administrator, you will lose one point of credit. In other words, if you don’t show up on time for one study, you will have to earn one additional point of credit to make up for what you lost. The one-point penalty holds regardless of the length of the study.

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What if I show up and there is no one there? First, wait fifteen minutes. You and the researcher may not be in exactly the same time frame. If nobody shows up in fifteen minutes, inform the researcher, at the e-mail address given on the website, with respect to the date, time, location, and name of the study. If you screwed up (for example, you got the time or location wrong), you will not get credit. If the researcher screwed up, you will receive one point of credit for showing up. This one-point credit grant holds regardless of the length of the study.

What if all the study sessions are taken? Don't panic; not all projects begin collecting data at the very start of the semester. But don't put off your participation until the very end of the semester! If you wait until the last minute, there will probably NOT be enough opportunities to go around, and you will not be able to fulfill your requirement.

How can I prove that I participated? You should receive a receipt for every study in which you participate. Hang on to it until the end of the semester, in case there are any problems with the recording system.

My roommate got extra credit for doing a study; if I do it, will I get extra credit? Always ask your instructor. Some classes participate for extra credit, others for a requirement. Don't take your roommate's word on this, or the researcher's either -- they don't always know what your instructor has decided to do. Ask your instructor.

How long do I have to participate in studies? You have until Monday December 6. Please be careful when keeping track of dates! No exceptions will be made. This deadline cannot be extended.

What if I have questions not answered here? Check with the subject pool administrator, at: psychres@gwu.edu.

Writing Reports on Research Articles

If you choose this option, you must select articles from any of the journals listed below (if your instructor has any other requirements about the journals, he or she will let you know). For each article, write a two-page (double-spaced) paper that summarizes the article. Reports are due Monday, December 6 at 5 PM. There is a basket in the lobby of the Psychology Department building (2125 G Street) where you can turn them in. Please ask one of the staff members for a receipt when you place the paper in the basket.

Papers must follow this format:

1. You must turn in a photocopy of the first page of the article along with your summary.
2. The summary must be in your own words indicating your understanding of the study. If your summary or major parts of it are lifted word for word out of the article you will not receive credit.
3. Your summary should answer the following questions:
• What was the major research question being asked?
• Why is this question worth answering?
• Briefly, what sort of methods did they use?
• What conclusions did they draw from the study?

4. Many articles in these journals include more than one study - you only need to summarize one study from each article if you choose multi-study articles.

Journals

Child Psychology
Journal of Applied Psychology
Journal of Experimental Child Psychology
Journal of Abnormal Psychology
Journal of Personality
Journal of Physiological Psychology
Organization Behavior and Human Decision Processes

Developmental Psychology
Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology
Journal of Experimental Psychology
Journal of Experimental Social Psychology
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
Memory and Cognition