



# Researcher's Guide to the Introductory Psychology Participant Pool

*University of Arizona Psychology Department*

*Psychology Human Participant Pool Committee 2025-26:  
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## *Overview*

This document provides guidance to researchers in the Psychology department about getting studies approved and gaining access to the Introductory Psychology Participant Pool. The potential study participants in the pool are undergraduate students enrolled in PSY 101 or PSY 150A1. The pool is administered through a website called Sona Systems (<https://arizona-psych.sona-systems.com>).

All researchers are responsible for knowing and following the rules in this guide. Faculty supervisors are responsible for ensuring that all graduate students and research assistants know and follow these rules.

There are three steps to gaining study approval and access to the Introductory Psychology Participant Pool (details about each step are available later in this document):

- **STEP 1: Review by the Psychology Department Human Subjects Committee**
  - **Step 1 is required for all studies, including those that do not use the Introductory Psychology Participant Pool.**
  - *Why does Step 1 exist?*
    - Review the scientific and scholarly validity of the project
    - Protect the Psychology department's reputation among potential participants and the broader community
  - *Whom do I contact with questions about Step 1?*
    - Any member of the [Psychology Human Subjects Committee](#)
- **STEP 2: Review by the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board (IRB)**
  - **Step 2 is required for all studies.**
  - *Why does Step 2 exist?*
    - University-level review of the ethics and participant protections of the project
  - *Whom do I contact with questions about Step 2?*
    - <https://research.arizona.edu/compliance-public/human-subjects-protection-program>
- **STEP 3: Request use of the Introductory Psychology Participant Pool**
  - **Step 3 is only required if you want to recruit participants from the pool.**
  - *Why does Step 3 exist?*
    - Monitor balanced use of the pool across the Psychology department
    - Confirm that steps 1 and 2 have been completed
    - Ensure that debriefings are thorough, educational, and relatable for participants
  - *Whom do I contact with questions about Step 3?*
    - Any member of the Human Participant Pool Committee (See above)

## *Step 1: Review by the Psychology Department Human Subjects Committee*

All studies require human subjects approval, whether they use the Participant Pool or not. You can submit your study for approval by using the Protocol for Human Subjects (aka. the “long form”). [Click here for full details and departmental resources about submitting the long form](#) under the section “Research with Human Subjects” and the University Human Subjects Protection Program page with forms and details:

<https://research.arizona.edu/compliance/human-subjects-protection-program/HSPP-form/forms-index>

### *Procedure for Step 1:*

- Email IRB submissions to [psy-irb@email.arizona.edu](mailto:psy-irb@email.arizona.edu)
- The subject line of your email must include the IRB number (if assigned one), PI last name, and type of submission (e.g., F200, F212, etc.).
- The body of your email must include a bulleted list of all attachments included in the review.
- Applications, consent forms, recruitment materials, and data collection measures must be submitted in .doc or .docx format. You may submit a .pdf format for documents that are typically not revised by the IRB (e.g., signature pages, sponsor protocols). Researchers will need to include a [Department Attestation Form and a Scientific Scholarly Review Form](#).
- Include only one submission request per email.
- ***What Happens Next?***
  - The Departmental Coordinator will obtain approval from the Psychology Human Subjects Committee.
  - The Departmental Coordinator will obtain the Department Head’s signature.
  - The Departmental Coordinator will send the application to the University Human Subjects Protection Program Committee (UA IRB).
- ***Important Note:***
  - All researchers affiliated with the University are required by the IRB to learn the guidelines for ethical research complete the training available through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program. See details at <https://research.arizona.edu/compliance/human-subjects-protection-program/hspp-training>
  - Please make sure that you and any collaborators, including undergraduate research assistants, have completed this training before seeking approval for use of the Participant Pool or engaging in data collection.

## *Step 2: Review by the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board (IRB)*

After completing Step 1, the Department coordinator will send your application to the UA IRB for approval. The IRB will review your study for ethical considerations and participant protection. Please see <https://research.arizona.edu/compliance-public/human-subjects-protection-program> for details about IRB submissions. This process is iterative and you will correspond with the IRB staff using the eIRB website: [eirb.arizona.edu](http://eirb.arizona.edu). This process can take some time, and depending on the complexity of your study, you should plan for 2-4 weeks from the time the application is submitted by the Departmental Coordinator to the IRB until you are likely to have full approval.

## *Step 3: Request Use of the Introductory Psychology Participant Pool*

After completing Steps 1 & 2 and receiving IRB approval for your project, you may choose to recruit study participants from the Participant Pool.

- ***Procedure for Step 3:***

- To receive access to the Participant Pool, you must complete the Participant Pool Access Request Form (aka. the “Experiment Short Form”) (available here: <https://psychology.arizona.edu/department-resources>). Be sure to answer all questions on the form.
- The short form must be submitted for each study for each academic year. If your study was approved using a short form for the fall semester and you intend to continue the same identical study in the winter, spring or summer sessions, you do not need to fill out a new short form. Instead, complete the [SONA Study Continuation Form](#).
- You cannot post a study on Sona until you receive departmental approval of your short form. It will be reviewed by a member of the Psychology Human Participant Pool Committee, which will usually happen within a two days of submission, although this is not guaranteed. Once your short form is approved, the SONA system TA will activate your study on Sona and email you a login ID and password.
- The maximum number of credits (30 minutes per credit) for any single experiment is 6 credits, or 3 hours.
  - Experiments must be in 30-minute increments, rounding up. For example, if your study takes between 30 and 60 minutes, you should schedule 60-minute time slots.
- All short forms must include the faculty supervisor’s signature, and email addresses of all experimenters and assistant experimenters.

- ***Important Note about Debriefings:***

- Your short form must include a detailed debriefing that will be given to each participant at the end of their study session. At times, the Psychology Human Participant Pool Committee will ask researchers to clarify their debriefings before access is granted to the Participant Pool.
  - For in-person studies, the debriefing must be delivered orally.
  - For online studies, the debriefing may be delivered online, as part of the Qualtrics survey or other online survey mechanism. This online debriefing should conclude with two (2) SIMPLE comprehension questions that the participant must answer correctly to receive credit. Students should be given multiple attempts to get the answers correct. Please include these two questions in the debriefing that you submit with your short form. The debriefing should also include contact information (email or office phone number) of the experimenter to allow students to ask questions about the study.
- Further details about debriefings are available in the “Debriefing” section later in this document.

## *Running Participants: Recruitment*

Only three methods of recruitment are allowed: email invitation, phone-calling (in some cases), and Sona sign-ups.

- **Phone Recruitment:**

- When recruiting by phone, provide participants with all the same information that is available on Sona. Be sure to give an email address and phone number to call in case of cancellation.
  - Be sure to also tell participants to remember the experiment number of your study.
  - Add the participant to a timeslot for your study in SONA so they receive reminders and can cancel if needed.
- Note that emailing and phone calling is only allowed for recruitment purposes. Screening potential participants by email or over the phone for eligibility is not allowed. Researchers may not ask questions to determine study eligibility over the phone. Experiments, surveys, or any other form of data collection are not permitted as part of phone recruitment.

- **Online Recruitment Using Sona:**

- The Sona Systems website for scheduling studies and awarding credits is located at <https://arizona-psych.sona-systems.com>.
  - Log in to Sona, using your UA NetID. Read and acknowledge the Human Participant and Privacy Policy Notice.
  - If you are a PI or an Experimenter, you will have your experiment(s) accessible to you.
- To set up your study on Sona:
  - Go to “My Studies”, then click on the experiment number on the left. At the bottom, select “Change Study Information”.
    - IMPORTANT: Do not change the *Study Name* or *Brief Abstract* of the study. These were approved on the short form and changing them can result in loss of participant pool privileges.
  - Edit the *Detailed Description* to include a study description (no more than 250 characters), contact info, exclusions, etc. You should also include the specifically approved language that was approved in your University IRB (long form) application.
  - Complete the remaining options and select “Save Changes” at the bottom. Before saving changes, make the experiment *Active* if you want students to be able to see it and sign up.
    - Do not change the *Approved* setting. This should already be set to Yes and should only be changed by the system administrator.
    - Instead, use *Active Study* to set the experiment to *No* to make sure it does not appear, or to *Yes* to make it visible to students.
  - Click “View/Administer Time Slots” to add new times or change existing times. You can choose to schedule a session for multiple participants at once, if appropriate for your study. Click “View All Timeslots” to see all your sessions.
  - To see those students signed up for your study, and to credit those who have participated, go to “My Studies” and click “View Your Uncredited Timeslots”.
    - You can also manually add a participant here, as well as view the pretest results (currently only age, sex, handedness, and native language) for any users signed up for the study.
  - You can include a sign-up password (aka. an “invitation code”) and set eligibility for your study, if special restrictions have been approved by the Human Participant Pool Committee. You can email eligible participants with the invitation code.

- **Important Notes About Participant Recruitment:**

- Please note that two other forms of recruitment are prohibited. Researchers may not recruit in PSY 101 or PSY 150A1 classes, and TAs may not recruit in their class sessions.

- Experiments offering course credit may not offer additional incentives (e.g., money) for recruitment. In other words, you can not state in the description that there is the possibility of financial compensation. On the other hand, some studies use monetary incentives as part of the experiment (e.g., rewards for performance) and this is allowed as long as it is not advertised in the study description or used to entice individuals to sign up. Once participants sign up and attend the experiment, then they may be informed of the monetary remuneration that is in addition to the credits.
- Special restrictions must be approved by the Psychology Human Participant Pool Committee. All experimenters are expected to run some participants whose data they may not be able to use, or to accommodate some participants with alternative projects.
  - The committee will only approve participants' restrictions when it is shown that not having the restriction would be excessively costly or burdensome. For example, if you need native English speakers for an online survey study, you are expected to run all individuals who sign up and then you can omit those who are not native English speakers. On the other hand, if you need native English speakers for your EEG or MRI study, or for a study that has group interaction or complicated protocols, it is likely the committee will grant the exemption.
  - **NEW:** Students under 18 cannot be run in your studies approved for use with the participant pool on Sona, as they cannot legally provide consent. All students under age 18 will have available educational demonstration studies where they can experience one of several classic experiment protocols (e.g., Cyberball, Implicit Attitudes, Memory studies, Dot Probe, etc.) but do not provide research data by doing so.
- To ensure equitable access to participants for all researchers, study descriptions should be truthful and suitably restrained.
  - The title and description should clearly represent the study. Claims regarding the interest level and value of the study should not be made. No colors or graphics should be used.
  - Study descriptions should be limited to 250 characters, unless additional description is approved by the Psychology Human Participant Pool Committee. The approved language in the Human Subjects approval should be used in this section.
- The order of studies displayed on Sona will be automatically randomized every time a participant logs in, to ensure fair access to participants.

## *Running Participants: Debriefing*

Debriefing fulfills two important objectives. The first objective is educational. Our primary justification for requiring students to participate in research is that this is an educational experience that contributes to their understanding of psychology. But this will only be true if all experimenters effectively explain the purpose and design of their research to participants in terms they can understand. Participants should also be able to ask questions about the study before leaving the session (or soon after, for online studies).

The second objective of debriefing is ethical. The debriefing should:

- reveal any deception used in the study
- alleviate any negative cognitive, emotional, or motivational impact of the study on the participant
- convey respect and appreciation for the participant as an individual

Before approving a study for the Participant Pool, the committee must ensure that the study will meet the educational objective of teaching students something about psychological research. Therefore, each short form request must include the debriefing that will be used with participants.

The debriefing should be a summary of what will be explained to students, in language that undergraduate students would understand. It is not sufficient to say that “The procedures will be explained”. Each experimenter, including research assistants, should be able to answer basic questions about the purpose and design of the study. Especially difficult or complex questions can be referred to the PI.

Each debriefing should include:

- A general rationale for the study and the hypothesis being tested
- A description of the hypothesis being tested and how the study is testing it (including description of the conceptual and operational independent and dependent variables, when applicable)
- Predictions of the study and potential implications for advancing psychological knowledge, if the predictions are supported
- For online studies, the two (2) comprehension questions should also be provided with the debriefing in the short form. Students should be given multiple opportunities to answer these questions correctly to receive credit.

**In-person studies** must include a debriefing that is delivered orally. A written debriefing can be used to supplement the oral explanation but is not acceptable as a substitute for it. The committee may ask researchers to clarify their debriefings before access is granted to the Participant Pool.

**Online studies** may deliver their debriefing online at the end of the survey or measurement tool being used. To ensure that students read the debriefing, it should conclude with two SIMPLE comprehension questions that the participant must answer correctly to receive credit. Students should be given multiple attempts to get the answers correct. Please include these two questions in the debriefing that you submit with your short form. The debriefing should also include contact information (email or office phone number) of the experimenter to allow students to ask questions about the study.

Violators of the debriefing policy, which is essential to the integrity of the research participation requirement, will be barred from further use of the Participant Pool.

### *Running Participants: Awarding Credit to Participants*

Each day after completing studies, you must complete the credit or no-show status for all time slots for that day.

- Go to the “My Studies” page.
- Select “View Your Uncredited Timeslots” link.

You must assign credit or no-show status within 24 hours of a participant’s completion of the study.

Participants are allowed no more than two (2) unexcused no-shows. If they accumulate more than two, Sona prevents them from signing up for future experiments (meaning they will then be required to complete the alternative assignment).

If a student fails to show up for your study, you have the option to record it as an excused or unexcused no-show. The Psychology Human Participant Pool Committee encourages researchers to attempt to reschedule participants who no-show and use the excused absence option whenever possible.

- **Excused No-Shows:**
  - Students may cancel up to two (2) hours before the study without the absence counting as unexcused.

- They also have 48 hours after the study session to present documentation of the excuse for missing the study, in which case researchers should mark the session as an excused no-show.
- “I forgot” is not an acceptable excuse for a no-show!
- ***Unexcused No-Shows:***
  - If a student doesn’t show up for a scheduled session, you may mark this as an unexcused absence.
  - Please check with all experimenters and the PI to be sure that the participant did not try to cancel by emailing the PI or experimenters. This is especially important on the day of and days surrounding your sessions.
    - Researchers should always show up for scheduled sessions. If you cannot, you are responsible for informing participants ahead of time, or at least via a note at the study’s location.
      - Participants who show up for a session that has been canceled at the last minute are entitled to one credit for having shown up. It is the researcher’s responsibility to record that credit in Sona.

## *Paying Participants*

If you are paying participants, you must keep other records and give special forms to participants, for tax purposes. The best way to pay for participants is to get a revolving operational advance. An operational advance is a cash advance used to provide funds for project directors and other authorized University employees for payments to participants for a relatively long period of time. It permits the initial advance amount to be kept to a minimum and requires the individual to periodically submit an accounting with participant log receipts to obtain additional operating funds. Contact the Psychology Business Office for more information or to start the paperwork for the operational advance.

As noted earlier, if you are paying a participant, you cannot advertise this for recruitment purposes.

## *Using the Participant Pool in Classes Other Than PSY 101*

By default, the Participant Pool is available to students enrolled in PSY 101 or 150A1. Depending on several factors, the pool may be accessible to students in other PSY courses for extra credit (at the instructor’s discretion, of course).

If you are interested in opening the Participant Pool to students in a PSY course other than 101 or 150A1, please email the chair of the Psychology Human Participant Pool Committee.

## *The Last Day to Run Participants*

The final day to run participants is the last day of classes for the semester. Studies using the Participant Pool may not be conducted on Reading Day or during the final exam period.

## *Questions? Problems? Ideas?*

Please contact the Psychology Human Participant Pool Committee Chair or any member of the committee.