

# Sona Rules and Regulations

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## Introduction

These rules and regulations apply to all Researchers and Principal Investigators (PIs). It is important that all researchers and PIs using the subject pool (regardless of whether they access the Sona system) familiarize themselves with these rules and procedures so that participants are treated with respect, and to ensure that the educational goals of the research requirement are met. **Any researcher/PI who violates these rules may lose privilege of using the subject pool.**

The Department of Psychology at the University of Kansas maintains a research participation pool using an online tool called the Sona system, or Sona. Using Sona, researchers can post studies, which participants can then sign up for. When studies are completed, Sona should be used to award credits to the participants for their time.

Each student enrolled in PSYC 104 and 105 is required to either (a) participate as a subject of research, or (b) complete an alternative assignment at the instructor's discretion (generally this alternative would involve writing a short-term paper concerned with psychological research). Current credit requirements for student participants are as follows:

- Fall & Spring: 11 credits
- Summer: 7 credits

Nearly all students enrolled in PSYC 104/105 in a given semester choose the research participation option. This requirement is meant not only to give researchers the data necessary to complete their studies, but also to be an educational experience for the students to learn about psychological studies. Occasionally other courses participate in the research pool, as a means for students to earn extra credit, but this is at the instructor's discretion.

Research supervisors (including instructors of PSYC 480, 618, 620, 622, 624, and 625 and Clinics 1 and IV) are responsible for providing these guidelines to each of their students and for ensuring that each understands and adheres to them. Any person working with participants in the subject pool (whether or not they are using the SONA system) should understand these rules and regulations and complete the Subject Pool Use Quiz (see *Access to the system* > [Requesting a Researcher or PI account](#) below). Passage of this quiz is necessary before working with participants or participant data.

## Access to the system

### General rules for access

Only researchers associated with the Psychology Department, and who have been approved by the Sona administrator, are eligible to use participants from the subject pool. More specifically, this includes:

- Faculty members and their supervised graduate students

- Undergraduates in the Psychology Honors Program, an Experimental Psychology course, an Independent Psychology course, or when otherwise supervised by departmental faculty
- Faculty or graduate students outside the Psychology Department IF approved in advance by the Subject Use Committee AND co-sponsored by a departmental faculty member

All individuals conducting research involving human subjects must also complete the online tutorial required by the Human Subjects Committee (HSC). Confirmation of its completion must be saved and uploaded as a PDF when taking the Subject Pool Use Quiz.

### Requesting a Researcher or PI account

All new researchers must follow these steps to request access to the research pool (these steps need to be taken regardless of whether you will be requesting a login to the SONA system):

1. Read and understand the required Rules & Regulations as detailed in this file. You will be tested on this information in step 3.
2. Learn about ethical standards for research by completing the online Human Subjects Compliance Training at <https://research.ku.edu/human-subjects-training>. You will need a PDF of your certificate confirming completion of this training for the next step.
3. Provide information for the creation of your account, upload a copy of your online training certificate, and check your knowledge of the Rules & Regulations by taking the Subject Pool Use Quiz at [https://kusurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0PcORYoL9UO1gLX](https://kusurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0PcORYoL9UO1gLX).

## Studies

### Before you create a study

Once you have received approval from the department (by following the steps above), you can begin the process of using Sona to recruit participants for your research studies. This process is as follows:

1. Secure HSC-L approval for your research study and obtain an IRB (HSCL) approval letter and number.
2. Create your study on Sona, following the detailed instructions in [Creating studies](#) below.
3. Before your study can start running, it must be approved by the Sona administrator.
  - a. Once you are ready to start running, click on the “[Send a Request] to make this study visible” link on your study’s Sona page.
  - b. Make sure to attach the PDF of your IRB approval letter with your approval request.
  - c. The Sona administrator will review your study to verify that it is compliant and will contact you to resolve discrepancies as needed.
  - d. We will need to verify that your study is compliant and that we have your HSCL approval letter on file.
4. Your study will be automatically deactivated when your HSC approval expires. It is your responsibility to notify the SONA Coordinator, and provide documentation, of any extensions. If you are done with a study before this happens, please deactivate it yourself.

## Creating studies

Log into the Sona website at <https://ku.sona-systems.com/>, and click “Add New Study.” You can then select the type of study and make other specifications. Please make sure to follow the policies below, which specify constraints on how studies can be set up in the Sona system.

### *Online studies*

Because of space limitations on the Sona system, researchers are no longer allowed to conduct surveys that run inside the Sona system itself. Thus, you may create any type of study **except** the “Online Survey Studies” option. Instead, researchers must use an external system to create online surveys, which then must be linked to Sona for the purpose of scheduling and granting credit to participants. The University offers accounts with Qualtrics to use with the Sona system.

Other notes on web-based studies:

- Web-based studies are subject to the same policies as other studies, including requiring HSC approval and debriefing procedures.
- Students may earn no more than four of their credits from web-based studies.
- In order to make sure your web-based study is visible and accessible to participants, please list a single timeslot, at the end of the semester, with the desired number of total participants.

### *Study names*

Individual studies must be identified by unique study names, which are assigned by researchers. These names should be boring and nonsensical to avoid competition between studies for researchers. Inclusion of any descriptive information about the study in the study name is prohibited. To set a study name:

- The first set of characters should consist of the researchers’ last name(s), followed by the characters “study”. A second set of characters can consist of a simple alpha-numeric labeling convention established by your research team.
- Valid names could be “Smith Study A1” or “Taylor Study HB6”; however, “Wilson Study on Alcohol” would not be a valid name since it includes descriptive information about the study.

The name of your study in Sona is the name you must use to identify your study to participants (for example, on door signs or in any communications).

### *PI/Researcher names*

Every study requires one Principal Investigator (PI) and at least one Researcher to be listed. The PI is the faculty supervisor who has ultimate responsibility for that study. Researchers are the people directly involved with running the study (faculty members may have both, if necessary). For graduate and undergraduate students, it is recommended that the name and contact information of the faculty supervisor be included in the “Detailed Description” section of your study.

### *Abstract, description, and eligibility sections*

These sections are visible to participants. Placement of any descriptive information in these sections, specifically of any information that may encourage students to sign up for your particular study (e.g., “only 20 minutes” or “this study involves sex”) is strictly prohibited. You may not list participation restrictions unless they are based on gender, class enrollment, or history of participation in other

studies. If necessary, you may leave any special instructions regarding the location of your study in the “Detailed Description” section.

### *Contact*

Contact: You are encouraged to include your phone number and email address (please do not instruct participants to contact the main office).

### *Cancellation*

Please let participants know the best way to cancel appointments. All participants may use the online cancel option, but you must also provide a phone number/email address they can use for cancellations.

### *Duration/credits*

Duration must be set to a multiple of 30 (minutes). The max duration is 180 (i.e., a three-hour study). Credits should be set based on the duration, with 1 credit due for each 30 minutes of expected duration. (i.e., 30 mins = 1 credit, 60 mins = 2 credits, etc.). For more information on awarding credits, see [Credits](#) below.

## **Participants**

### **Soliciting participation**

Once you have created your study, you can add timeslots which will allow participants to sign up for and complete your study. To do this, click “View/Administer Time Slots” from your study’s SONA page. If your study requires that you recruit participants with certain characteristics, you can use the prescreening feature (see the following section).

**Researchers may not solicit PSYC 104/105 students’ participation via class announcements or campus postings.** PSYC 104/105 students may only be emailed or called in exceptional circumstances when given specific permission to do so by the Subject Use Committee. Additionally, participants occasionally show up at the wrong location for a study, but researchers MAY NOT run them in different studies if they weren’t previously signed up (that is, please don’t snatch up lost participants from the hallways).

### **Pre-screening for eligible participants**

There is a prescreening survey that is given to each participant on the system each semester and is meant to determine participant eligibility in further studies. A new prescreen is created each fall and spring, in the weeks just prior to the beginning of the academic semesters. Researchers who wish to submit items to be included in the prescreen must follow the instructions on the Prescreen Memo—which is sent to faculty members during the prescreen creation period before each semester begins.

Researchers can screen participants’ answers to these questions and only allow eligible participants to sign up for their studies. These restrictions can be enforced automatically by the SONA system. In certain circumstances, such as when data needs to be scored by hand, it may be necessary for researchers to request the raw data for the items they have submitted for the prescreen. In order to use this option, the Subject Pool Use Committee must be petitioned for approval. However, you are strongly encouraged to use the first option when at all possible.

## Setting automatic restrictions

### *Prescreen restrictions*

The SONA system can be configured to display your study only to the participants who have answered in a certain way on the prescreen questionnaire. Participants will not be aware of these automatic restrictions. Any questions used to screen participants must be formatted as multiple choice (select one). To do this:

1. From your study's Study Information page, click the "View/Modify Restrictions" link.
2. Follow the instructions at the top of each page. You can set restrictions on individual items or on summed/averaged items (in this case, all items must also be numeric).

### *The System Instructions State*

You may restrict to one choice or many choices for any question. If you restrict on multiple questions, it is the same as a logical "AND." For example, if you setup the pretest restrictions so that participants must have answered "Yes" to a "Do you wear glasses?" question and "Blue" or "Grey" to "What color are your eyes?", then they must meet both requirements to participate. In other words, only participants who wear glasses and have either blue or grey eyes are eligible. There is no support for a logical "OR" restriction across multiple questions.

## Manually scoring data and contacting participants

This option should only be used if there is a specific reason you cannot use automatic restrictions. It is NOT to be used to supplement participant data. You must request approval each semester.

1. Petition for approval from the Subject Use Committee by sending an email to [psychpool@ku.edu](mailto:psychpool@ku.edu) with the following information:
  - a. An explanation as to why you can't use the automatic restriction feature to screen for eligible participants
  - b. If the request isn't coming from a faculty member, the name of the faculty sponsor to whom the data should be sent
  - c. Your IRB approval number and the names of the studies for which you are recruiting
  - d. The abbreviated question names of the items you need
  - e. Whether you need participant names and contact information
    - i. If you do not need contact information, the SUC does not need to approve your request, but the SONA Coordinator still needs the above information to process your data request.
    - ii. If you do need names/contact info, you must include an exact script (or as close as possible for phone contact). The preferred method for communication is email. If you have a reason to use phone contact, you additionally must include your rationale.
    - iii. **\*\*All contact with participants must be kept as generic as possible, and no information about the specific study can be given until participants agree to participate (e.g., you should only mention available timeslots, length, and credit value for your study. Do not say what the study involves or use encouraging language such as "it would be a great help if you would please participate in my study").**

2. If/when your request is approved, the SONA Coordinator will send your data to the faculty advisor. You will be responsible for sorting and analyzing it.
3. If approved, you may now contact eligible participants. Important points to remember:
  - a. You must CC psychpool@ku.edu on every invitation email you send
  - b. Confidentiality of eligible participants must be maintained. That is, participants must either be emailed one at a time, or by blind copying (BCC-ing).

### Options for scheduling participants

Here are some methods that can be used to schedule participants, if you're contacting them directly:

1. You can post available times on the web system and give out "authorization" codes & the Study Name to only those students who qualify for your study. Please make sure the student has clear instructions including your name, the Study Name, and the code that will allow that participant to sign up for times you have posted on the web system.
2. With a participant's consent, you can schedule the timeslot on his/her behalf. You are strongly encouraged to schedule the session on the web system. If you do not schedule a session on the web- system, the participant will not be able to cancel via the web. In addition, they will not be able to check the web to confirm the time and location of the study. If you do not schedule the session on the web, you will need to make sure the participant knows how to cancel the appointment (calling or emailing you). Please make sure the student writes down the following information: your name, study name, date, time, room location, and all contact information (e.g., phone and email). Have the subject repeat the information so no misinformation is given. You should make arrangements to send the participant confirmation of the schedule details. In addition, make sure the participant has already registered on the web-based system. Credit will always be awarded via the web-based system. Do not leave an appointment time on an answering machine. Have the participant return your call to schedule the appointment time. You may leave a message offering a variety of available timeslots, then have the call returned to arrange the desired timeslot.
3. Another alternative is to schedule "open sessions" for eligible participants. You can then inform participants that they can receive credit if they show up for one (and only one) of several available sessions. You will not officially assign an appointment time, but will only give credit if the person completes one of your available sessions. Thus, a student cannot be penalized for a no-show with this approach. Rather, they can attend one of several possible sessions based upon personal convenience.

**Note:** It is important that experimenters (1) not unnecessarily delay notifying students who have "qualified" for the experiment and that (2) the appointments be scheduled as soon as possible. Students who have been told by experimenters that they will be scheduled for testing sometime later in the semester and who then are not contacted for several months are likely to become worried that they have been forgotten or may complete their credits elsewhere.

### Your responsibilities when working with participants

In addition to adhering to HSC-L's policies on working with human subjects, the Psychology Department requires the following.

### *Receipt of participation*

Please give the participant some form of receipt of participation. This will be used if an error occurs in the web-system and credit was not assigned electronically. A receipt could take the form of the participant's copy of the consent form. Be sure to include the following information on all receipts of participation: Your name, Study Name, date, time, and duration of the study, credits received, your contact information (e.g., phone number, email address). Instruct the participant to keep the "receipt" until they have verified receiving credit on the web system.

### *Explanation of purpose*

Researchers must explain the purpose of the experiments to participants. In order to maintain the credibility of the claim that research participation is an educational experience, it is necessary that students be educated in some way about research in general and/or about the specific research in which they have just participated. Therefore, it is the experimenter's obligation to clearly explain the specific purpose and procedures of the study to the subject at the end of the testing session. If, for the purpose of maintaining the experimental naiveté of future subjects, a full explanation is not possible at that time, the experimenter must arrange to provide such an explanation at a later date. However, all experimenters should always provide the subject with at least a general idea of what the study was about and why it is of importance (theoretically, practically, or both) at the end of the testing session(s).

## **Credits**

### **General guidelines on credits**

Experimenters must record all research credit via SONA, the web-based system. Consult the system manual for details on the various ways to assign credit. For external web-based studies, see the "External Online Survey Memo".

Our policy is that one credit should be awarded for every 30 minutes of participation. Fractional credits are not allowed. If a participant runs over the expected end time, they should be awarded one additional credit. That is: 1-30 minutes = 1 credit; 31-60 minutes = 2 credits; etc.

Experimenters have 48 hours to award any credits or penalties, including those listed below. All participant questions and complaints regarding studies should be responded to within 48 hours. Failure to follow these guidelines may result in disciplinary action, which may include suspension of access to the subject pool.

### **Credit limits**

No single research study may use (award) more than 700 subject participation credits. For purposes of the limit, separate listings on SONA will be counted as part of the same study (they will be considered "linked") if participating in one makes a student ineligible to participate in another, or if one listing is required to participate in another listing. Exceptions must be approved by the Subject Use Committee. The subject pool administrator will track credit use and will shut down experiments that exceed this limit. When starting a new experiment, do not reuse an existing study listing or the limit may be inadvertently exceeded.

Note that SONA will automatically set a limit of 600 hours (1200 credits) for each experiment. The true limit is 700 credits. We set it at 1200 credits because SONA enforces credit limits based on slots

scheduled not actual credits used so as the limit is approached it becomes difficult to schedule sessions for studies where many more slots are posted than actually filled.

No study can award more than 6 credits at a time (which means that no study can have a duration of more than 180 minutes).

In addition, a researcher may not award more than 700 credits for web-based studies in a term.

### Assigning credits in various situations

Here are the instructions for how to handle a few common situations with regard to awarding credits.

#### *If a subject declines to participate*

If, at any point after reading the "Informed Consent" form (which is required for all experiments), a subject declines to participate in the experiment, they should be gracefully excused from the experiment and given one credit, despite not having participated in the experiment.

#### *If an experiment cannot be completed*

If a student who shows up for an experiment cannot be used for any reason (e.g., the equipment has failed, more subjects than are necessary for a group experiment have arrived), they should be awarded one credit, even if the appointment is rescheduled. At the time of the rescheduled testing session(s) (if any) the subject must receive the appropriate credit, without considering the one already earned.

#### *Multiple testing sessions*

For experiments involving multiple testing sessions, the subject should receive their research credit(s) after completing each session. If, after a particular session, the subject declines to participate further, the credit(s) earned to that point have to be awarded. If a subject participates in one (or more) session(s), but fails to show up for the remaining one(s) and has not rescheduled or canceled, a "No-Show" should be recorded on the participant's account.

#### *Subject cancellations*

Students may cancel experiments via the web-based system, or by calling a number you have provided. You can also give participants the option of cancelling via email. You may try to reschedule the participant for another time. Participants may cancel appointments up to 60 minutes before their start time.

#### *Participant "No-Shows", or cancellations with LESS than 60 minutes notice*

In these situations, a "No-Show" should be recorded on the participant's account. Experimenters should **wait 5 minutes** before recording a No-Show, and should always check all three cancellation modalities (web, email, voicemail) to see if a participant cancelled before logging the "No-Show" on the web-based system. The "No-Show" must be recorded **within 48 hours** of the research appointment.

#### *Experimenter "No Shows"*

This will be handled by the experimenter. The experimenter should make arrangements to assign +1 credit on the web system and notify the student of the missed appointment. Students are to **wait 10 minutes** for the experimenter before determining that it is an experimenter "no show". The student may also contact the experimenter directly when it becomes clear that the experimenter is absent. The student must report the "Experimenter No Show" directly to the experimenter within 24 hours. The experimenter should respond to the student's request within 48 hours. If a participant has not received

a satisfactory response, they can file a "Complaint Form" with the main office. The office staff and/or the research pool coordinator will make a final decision on the complaint and assign credit if necessary.

Note: If an experimenter arrives tardy or misses experiments three or more times during a semester, or if other complaints are received, the Subject Pool Use Committee may decide on disciplinary action, including suspension of access to the subject pool.

### *Experimenter cancellations*

If an experimenter needs to cancel a session, they may do so by contacting the participant directly (meaning an actual conversation—not a message) **at least 24 hours before** the appointment. If the experimenter needs to cancel with less than 24 hours' notice, or is unable to reach the participant in person, they should leave a note for the subject(s) on the laboratory door, leave phone and email messages for the participant, and notify the Psychology Department Office. The note should inform the subject(s) that they have been or will be credited with 1 credit via the web system. Please assign this credit as soon as possible to avoid any problems or participant complaints.

## **Additional resources**

Questions or comments can be directed to the Sona administrator at [psychpool@ku.edu](mailto:psychpool@ku.edu).

The complete Sona system manual can be found at:

[http://www.sona-systems.com/support/docs/ems\\_docs.pdf](http://www.sona-systems.com/support/docs/ems_docs.pdf)