

How to Pilot Experiments

A pilot experiment is a small-scale preliminary study conducted in order to evaluate feasibility, time, cost, and adverse events, as well as improve upon the study design prior to implementation of a full-scale research project. **Students are expected to try their best when piloting an experiment (just as if they were participating in the actual study)**, unless they are told to focus solely on proofreading. This includes completing the experiment all in one sitting (a focused time block without interruptions), and attempting to answer all questions given with your best guess rather than leaving questions blank.

While taking the experiment please check for the following things. It is a good idea to have a piece of paper and a writing utensil for note taking purposes. *Please do not take notes on the to-be-remembered material* (i.e., don't cheat because we want to see how well motivated participants can do on the experiment without cheating).

Instead, take notes on the following:

1. How long did the entire experiment take you?
2. What did you think the experiment was investigating?
3. Were the instructions clear? If not, what instruction page or task was confusing?
 - a. Did you notice any mistakes or typos in the instructions (or stimuli)? ***note: sometimes we will ask you to complete the study without focusing on looking for typos!*
 - b. Were any instruction pages unnecessarily long?
 - c. Do you have any suggestions on how to make any of the instructions easier to understand?
4. Did you experience any problems completing the experiment (e.g., page failed to load, experiment would not advance, blank screen, etc.)? If so, when did this occur? Try to be as specific as possible.
5. How was the timing of each part of the experiment?
 - a. Was the appearance of the continue button too slow on any of the instruction screens?
 - b. Did you have enough time to study the stimuli? (or, were the stimuli presented too fast)?
 - c. Did you have too much time to study the stimuli? (we don't want participants to be too bored)
6. Any additional feedback to improve the study would be immensely helpful.

Remember! The 390 experience should be educational. Piloting experiments is an opportunity to put on your experimenter hat. You will learn more by being careful and critical when piloting experiments. Consequently, our experiments and data will be even better, thanks to you.