

Guidelines for getting your study approved by the Committee On the use of Humans as Experimental Subjects (COUHES)

Each research project at MIT has to be approved by the Committee On the use of Humans as Experimental Subjects (COUHES). The importance of such a committee in all research institutes emerged as a reaction to experiments that placed human subjects at physical and mental risks. Guarding the rights of experimental subjects is now an important part of the scientific process. MIT has a review procedure that is vastly superior to any other university that we are aware of, and we consider this to be an MIT treasure. This is a *public good* that we all need to work to keep COUHES at their level of performance – so please take your job seriously. Follow the guidelines below carefully, and provide sufficient detail to COUHES, so that your protocol could be approved with the least possible hassle.

If you want to use this version of the 1”5.301 COUHES quick form” you can conduct one of the following types of studies (**“Paper and pencil” based studies, “Simple market experiments,” or “games”**). If you want something different you might have to submit a full proposal. Below is information about these three generic types of studies. Once your COUHES application is ready (but not after the deadline), submit the cover letter and the forms of your questionnaires to your TA, who will get it to the COUHES office. Note that you cannot start collecting data until your protocol is approved by COUHES.

Note: if you intent to post any recruitment flyers around campus to let people know about your study, you will have to submit these as well together with your application.

“Paper and pencil” based studies: General information.

Such studies are conducted by passing along questionnaires and asking people to return them to a collection box. In your cover letter to COUHES describe the way you will distribute and collect the questionnaires in sufficient detail, and how anonymity will be maintained.

When conducting a “paper and pencil” based studies never ask for the participants’ names or any other identifying information (email). You can ask for limited demographic information if this is needed for your research (limit this information to the necessary information).

At the top of the questionnaire please include the following statement:

“Thank you for participating in this study. Your participation is voluntary, you may decline to answer any or all questions, and at any point you can decline further participation without adverse consequences. You will not be asked for your name or for other identifying information to assure the confidentiality and anonymity of this information.

“Paper and pencil” based studies: Cover letter.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all									Very much

On the following scale, where 1 indicated “not at all” and 10 indicates “very much,” how **happy** would you say you are **in general**? Please circle the corresponding number

1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all									Very much

On the following scale, where 1 indicated “not at all” and 10 indicates “very much,” how **hopeful** would you say you are **in general**? Please circle the corresponding number

1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all									Very much

Please write down the date and time

Today is (circle one): Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.

The date is: _____ Time of day is: _____

Thank you very much for your participation. Please fold this form and place it into the closed box.

“Simple market experiments”: General information.

These studies are conducted much like market transactions where you offer participants to purchase something for a known price, or make choices among a few different options. In these experiments you will change (manipulate) the prices between respondents and look at the propensity to purchase. With such protocols you will not collect any personal information and you can only use the information that you observe (how long it took the people to decide, were they in groups or by themselves etc.). Because you only observing behavior there is no need for an explicit consent of the participants.

“Simple market experiments” based studies: Cover letter.

Name of the study: Effect of price decrease to 0 on purchase.

Type of study: “Simple market experiments”

Purpose of the study: To test the effects of 0-prices, in order to understand if there is a discontinuity around the price of 0.

The general procedure: In this study we offer students around campus a choice between buying a more fancy chocolate for 18¢, a less fancy chocolate for 1¢ or nothing in one condition, and a choice between buying a more fancy chocolate for 17¢, a less fancy chocolate for 0¢ or nothing in the second condition. Students who are interested in the chocolate will buy it and pay with their own money and ones who are not will not. We will record the frequency of purchase as a function of the price conditions and the gender of the buyers.

Location of data collection: The student center and the infinite corridor

Confidentiality measures: No individual information will be recorded.

“Games” based studies: General information.

Such studies are conducted by creating a few different versions of a game and measuring how performance in the game changes as a function of the different versions of the game. Participants can play the game for points or for money. The game can be a computer game, a card game, or you can even use an existing game. Computer games are in most cases the best approach since they can help ensure confidentiality.

In your cover letter to COUHES describe where you will ask participants to play the games, and how anonymity will be maintained. When conducting “game” based studies never ask for the participants’ names or any other identifying information (email). You can ask for limited demographic information if this is needed for your research (limit this information to the necessary information).

At the start of the game please include the following statement:

“Thank you for participating in this study. Your participation is voluntary, at any point you can decline further participation without adverse consequences. You will not be asked for your name or for other identifying information to assure the confidentiality and anonymity of this information.

“Games” based studies: Cover letter.

Name of the study: Keeping doors open.

Type of study: “Games”

Purpose of the study: To test if individuals have a tendency to keep options open even when the expected value of such actions is negative.

The general procedure: In this study we will ask participants to log into the server and play a game in one of two different versions.

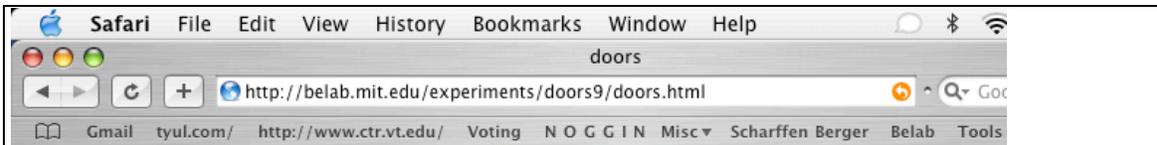
Data collection: We will set a few laptops at the student center and in the infinite corridor, and post a sign to ask students passing by to participate in the study. We might also post signs around campus and ask students to log into the server and participate. Since this study involves payment for performance, we will ask all participants to print the last screen of the game (which shows the amount of money they made) and come with it to our booth at the student center to get paid.

“Games” based studies: The game.

The game starts with a screen that reads as follows: “Thank you for participating in this study. Your participation is voluntary, at any point you can decline further participation without adverse consequences. You will not be asked for your name or for other identifying information to assure the confidentiality and anonymity of this information.

Next participants will be given the instructions for the game, and the game will start. In this game respondents will have three games, each with its own payment distribution. Participants will have 100 clicks to spend and their goal is going to be to make as much money as possible. The two versions will differ on the availability of the doors. In one version all three doors will be available during the entire game, while in the other version a door that has not been clicked for the past 12 clicks will disappear and will be no longer available.

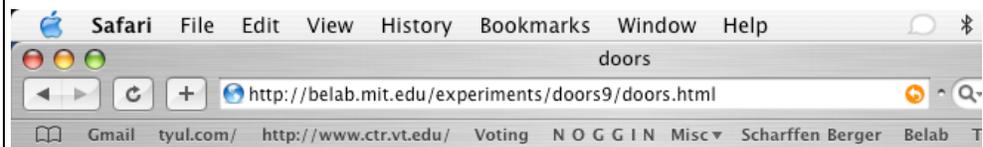
Sample screen shots of the second version of the game are presented below:



12 12 12

Clicks Remaining
100

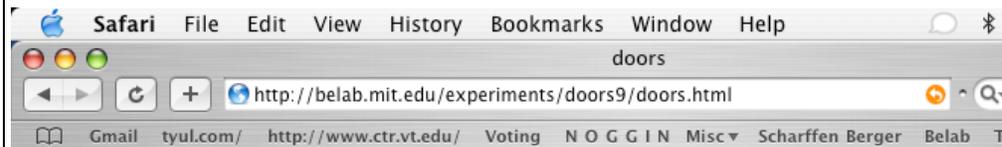
Total Earned
\$0.00



3 12 9

Clicks Remaining
91

Total Earned
\$0.15



6 12

Gone

Clicks Remaining
64

Total Earned
\$0.72

At the end of the game, participants will be shown their total earnings, asked to print the screen as an evidence of their performance and they will be given instructions of how to contact the experimenters for payment.