

To: Graduate Students and Faculty
From: Susan Brennan, Graduate Director
Subject: Guidelines for SDI TA (Substantial Direct Instruction)
Date: Updated Sept. 25, 2024

This document summarizes the Psychology Department's SDI requirement for PhD students. It was updated to clarify the requirement that all SDIs must be pre-approved and observed.

1. Two SDIs are required for advancement to candidacy. This fulfills both a Departmental and a University teaching requirement for Ph.D. students. The idea is for the student to have at least two substantial teaching experiences, serving as an expert and authoritative figure in the classroom. Most students will complete their SDIs during their 2nd and 3rd years.
2. Students doing an SDI TA must do between 4 and 28 hours of class presentations. The upper limit is appropriate when SDI TAs are teaching a laboratory section, their own section of a course, serving as the instructor of record, etc. The lower limit of 4 hours distinguishes an SDI TA from a regular TA for which students might be asked to do (or may wish to do) one or two lectures as part of a regular TA assignment, which would not be counted as an SDI. The sessions counted toward an SDI must be part of the regular required class meetings (with all students expected to attend). As an example, an SDI associated with a 1:20 lecture course would require doing (at least) 3 full-class-period lectures. Running review sessions is *not* counted, as these are optional for students in the class.
3. Students must complete at least one of their SDI TA assignments by leading a lab section of PSY 310 (Research and Writing in Psychology). This is motivated by two factors: (a) to provide each student with at least one supervised intensive teaching experience that includes substantial individual contact with undergraduates, and (b) to help the Department cover its undergraduate teaching obligation for an essential core course. PhD students are expected to do this in the second year of their PhD program.
4. SDI TAs must be arranged **before the start of the semester**. Students should reach out to instructors to discuss their SDI interests, create a plan, and then submit an **SDI Pre-Approval Form** signed by the instructor to the Graduate Office for approval before the start of the semester. This new form is required for *all* SDIs (including 310-Lab, PSY 501, PSY 502, PSY 380, and PSY 382) because it documents a commitment from a faculty member (ordinarily the course instructor, or in the case of PSY 310-Lab, the student's PI/advisor) to observe the student and provide written feedback.
5. SDI TAs must be observed, ideally during two or more presentations, but at least once during each SDI. This requirement also applies to students who complete an SDI requirement by teaching a course during the summer session. With prior approval of the Graduate Director, students may receive feedback on recorded class sessions. The observing faculty member should provide a written evaluation by the semester's end.
6. SDI TAs must obtain student evaluations on their SDI presentations. If the presentations occur early in the semester, they may choose not to wait until the end of the semester to do this. The evaluations may be obtained electronically or via paper forms available from the Graduate Office (following University rules, if evaluation is in person, the student instructor may not be present during evaluation or handle the forms; a volunteer from the class should administer and submit the forms to the Graduate Office).
7. To teach a course as the primary instructor, prior completion of one SDI experience is necessary (a rare exception may be granted by the Graduate Program Director).
8. Except for PSY 310 and the graduate statistics courses (PSY 501 and 502), a course should **not have more than one SDI TA** associated with it, since the purpose of an SDI TA is not to substitute for the instructor's teaching responsibilities. Exceptions must receive prior approval from the Graduate Office.
9. Students may not do an SDI for a course being taught by another graduate student, unless prior approval is received from the Graduate Office. All SDI observations must be conducted by an appropriate faculty member (or other qualified individual) approved by the Graduate Director.