Appendix: Session Checklist

Jonathan Rogers, New York University Abu Dhabi

The following is a modified[[1]](#footnote-1) form of a checklist that I give to undergraduates who are running experiments in the Social Science Experimental Laboratory as part of their senior capstone projects (year-long independent research projects). The checklist begins at the point where the experimenter believes that their program is ready for implementation. This list is built for economic experiments run in zTree, but could easily be modified for other types of experiments run in other programs. The lab director is the faculty head of the group, while the lab manager is a full-time staff member in charge of the day-to-day operation of the lab.

1. Obtain IRB approval and submit a copy to the lab director and lab manager.
2. Make an appointment with the lab manager, who will load your program(s) and any necessary files onto laboratory computers.
3. Book time for testing the program in the lab with the lab manager.
4. Test the experiment in the laboratory, without subjects. The lab director or their designee must certify the test as fully successful before a pilot session may be scheduled.
5. Once testing is successful, book the lab for a pilot session with the lab manager.
6. Register the experiment in the recruitment system, schedule a pilot session.
7. Recruit sufficient subjects for one full session of your experiment. Send invitation emails three to four days before the session.
8. Obtain the cash, checks, gift cards, or other forms of payment. If paying cash, be sure to have plenty of small bills and change
9. Print more than sufficient quantities of:
   1. Consent forms
   2. Instructions
   3. Receipts
10. Print list of names of subjects registered for the experiment.
11. 24 hours before the session, send a session reminder to subjects (if this is not automatically done by the recruiting system).
12. The day of the experiment, arrive at the lab early to make sure that everything is functioning, and that the lab is set up correctly.
13. If you are a new faculty or graduate student experimenter, the lab director or their designee must be present for your pilot session. If you are a student, the lab director or their designee (usually your advisor) must be present for all sessions. If you are an experienced faculty or graduate student experimenter, you do not require supervision.
14. Post any signs needed for subjects to find their way to the lab.
15. Start zTree on the server.
16. Start zLeaf on the maximum number of client machines that you might need for the session.
17. Check the Clients Table in zTree to make sure that all client machines are connected properly.
18. Greet subjects as they arrive. Check student ID against registered subject list. Only seat subjects who are correctly registered
19. Start the session as close to the scheduled time as possible. Wait no more than 5 minutes after the scheduled start time to begin. Pay any extra/unneeded subjects their show up fee, invite them to register for a later session, and dismiss them.
20. Post the “experiment in progress sign” outside and close the door.
21. Collect signed consent forms.
22. Double check parameters in zTree
23. Run treatment in zTree
24. Run questionnaire in zTree. Do not close zTree until you have finished running the questionnaire.[[2]](#footnote-2)
25. After the questionnaire is finished, print the .pay file that contains a list of how much to pay each subject.
26. All subjects should remain seated. Call them one-by-one by seat number.
27. Pay subjects in the alcove near the front door, out of view of other subjects.
28. Make sure that the subject signs and dates the receipt
29. If paying cash, keep a list of how many of each denomination you have used.
30. Wait for each subject to leave the room before you call the next subject for payment.
31. After all subjects have left the room, return the “experiment in progress” sign to the inside of the lab.
32. Close zLeaf on each of the client machines.
33. Note any damage to equipment and/or furniture. Report any damage to lab director and lab manager.
34. Close zTree on the server.
35. Save copy of experimental data to a USB drive
36. Throw out any trash generated during the experiment. Leave the lab clean and ready for the next experiment.
37. Report to the subject recruitment system which subjects participated, which subjects showed up, but were not needed, and which subjects did not show up.
38. Examine pilot data. Check:
    1. Were payments calculated correctly?
    2. Was the intended data collected?
    3. Do any parameters need to be modified?
    4. Are subjects earning enough per hour to meet lab rules?
    5. Are subjects earning more than you anticipated, meaning that your budget would not sustain the number of sessions/subjects you require?
    6. Were there any bugs, common questions, confusions, or other issues that occurred that need to be fixed?
39. If there were any significant problems during the pilot, revise the program/instructions as needed. Report changes to the lab director (and IRB if the revision changes any aspect of your approved experiment, as you may need to wait for them to approve an amendment to your approval).
40. If the pilot was successful, you may proceed to book lab time with the lab manager, schedule your sessions in the recruitment system and run your experiments. Repeat steps 7 – 37 for each session.
41. When all sessions are complete, mark the experiment as “closed” in the recruitment system.

1. For instance, our lab has blanket IRB approval for all experiments that meet a set of criteria that are common in economic experiments (no deception, full information about rules and payments, etc). In our lab, experiments are submitted to the lab director, who verifies that the experiment conforms with the rules. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In zTree terms, the “treatment” is the experimental program that executes your experiment (even if your experiment is a survey). The “questionnaire” is only used for generating a list of payments. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)