

## **Granting course credit (*Versuchspersonenminuten*) using SONA: Guide for researchers**

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## CONTENTS

<b>USING SONA: CHECKLIST .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Dos and don'ts .....	3
<b>GENERAL INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Summary of most important points .....	4
What is SONA? .....	4
What are Versuchspersonenminuten (VPM)? .....	4
Who has access to SONA? .....	4
Getting a researcher account.....	4
Accessing SONA .....	4
Who can run studies on SONA? .....	4
Maximum number of VPM per study .....	5
<b>ADDING A NEW STUDY ON SONA .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Different study types on SONA.....	5
Important settings when adding a new study.....	5
When can studies be added to SONA? .....	6
Getting study approval.....	6
<b>RUNNING STUDIES .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Adding time slots for your study.....	7
Time slots for online studies .....	7
Time slots for other studies .....	7
Contact study participants .....	7
<b>GRANTING CREDITS (VERSUCHSPERSONENMINUTEN) .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Granting credits manually and assigning no-shows .....	8
Changing the amount of VPM granted .....	8
Manually signing up participants.....	8
Granting credits automatically.....	8
Testing automatic credit granting.....	9
Automatic credit granting troubleshooting .....	9
Partial credits in online studies.....	9
<b>IMPLEMENTING COMPLEX STUDY DESIGNS IN SONA .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Is it possible to implement a study with more than four parts? .....	9
<b>DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Using SONA with SoSci Survey .....	10
<b>FAQ .....</b>	<b>11</b>

## USING SONA: CHECKLIST

To ensure swift approval of your study and minimal work for yourself and SONA administrators, please follow this checklist when using SONA:

- ☐ Request a Researcher Account (see p. 3)
- ☐ Add study on SONA with correct settings (see p. 5)
  - Add department abbreviation
  - Ensure duration equals VPM
  - Ensure no age restriction is set
  - Ensure participant sign-up/cancellation deadline is set to 0 for online studies
- ☐ Request and get study approval (ensure that study on external platform is published before requesting approval; see p. 6)
- ☐ Implement **and test** automatic credit granting (recommended for online studies; see p. 8)
- ☐ Add time slot(s) to your study (see p. 7)
- ☐ Set study to active (see p. 5)
- ☐ Start collecting data
- ☐ Manually assign no-shows or grant credits after study time slot is over (see p. 8)
- ☐ Set study to inactive when data collection is paused or completed (see p. 5)

### Dos and don'ts

- Register your study on SONA *before* collecting data.
- Study duration and VPM must be equal and should not exceed 180 minutes.
- Don't set course or age restrictions for your study in the SONA settings, this will make your study invisible for most participants.
- When advertising your study among Goethe University psychology students, don't share the link to your study (for example [www.soscisurvey.de/your\\_questionnaire](http://www.soscisurvey.de/your_questionnaire)). Instead, share the link to your study on SONA (for example [https://uni-frankfurt.sona-systems.com/default.aspx?p\\_return\\_experiment\\_id=123](https://uni-frankfurt.sona-systems.com/default.aspx?p_return_experiment_id=123), this link can be found on your study page) to have students register for the study first and only afterwards start the study through SONA. Otherwise, automatic credit granting will not work.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Summary of most important points

- SONA is the central platform through which studies run at the Goethe University Institute of Psychology are advertised and credits (*Versuchspersonenminuten*) are granted.
- All studies run at the institute must be registered on SONA **before data collection**.
- Studies are approved by the SONA admin team. Approval on SONA is not equivalent to ethics approval. The SONA admin team is not responsible for data protection matters.
- Researchers need a researcher account to register studies on SONA.
- Credits can be granted manually or automatically (e.g., for online/questionnaire studies).

### What is SONA?

SONA is an online platform through which studies can be advertised, students can sign up for studies and credits for study participation (*Versuchspersonenminuten*) can be granted to students. The platform further incorporates calendar functions for study scheduling and the possibility to contact study participants and managers.

### What are Versuchspersonenminuten (VPM)?

Undergraduate psychology students at Goethe University have to participate in 30 hours of experiments during their Bachelor's. This requirement is commonly referred to as "collecting minutes", and the 1800 minutes worth of experiment participation are referred to as "Versuchspersonenminuten" (VPM).

### Who has access to SONA?

By default, all Goethe University psychology students get access to SONA (participant account) at the beginning of their first Bachelor year and keep this account until they have finished collecting 1800 VPM. Students of other subjects/fields or other universities do not have access to the institute's SONA instance. Researchers do not have access to SONA by default (see below).

### Getting a researcher account

Please email [sona-support@dlst.server.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:sona-support@dlst.server.uni-frankfurt.de) to get a researcher account using your Uni Frankfurt email address (@psych.uni-frankfurt.de) and include your department.

Students requesting a researcher account need to (1) include information on the estimated duration of data collection, (2) name the project supervisor and (3) cc the project supervisor.

### Accessing SONA

Once you have an account, you can access SONA via <https://uni-frankfurt.sona-systems.com/>.

### Who can run studies on SONA?

Only studies carried out by scientific staff of the Goethe University's Institute of Psychology or in collaboration with the institute can be run through SONA, and only Goethe University psychology students can receive VPM for these studies through SONA.

Generally, we advise against giving students access to researcher accounts on SONA unless it is for projects they are directly and personally responsible for (e.g., Bachelor/Master theses, internships or HiWi jobs). Thesis supervisors are asked to monitor usage of SONA (correct duration/number of VPM granted, number of participants in study matching number of participants on SONA, etc.).

### Maximum number of VPM per study

The maximum number of credits granted for a single study is 180 VPM. Studies with an expected duration of more than three hours should be compensated financially. If this is not possible, please request permission to grant more than 180 VPM for your study from the Dean of Studies ([Studiendekan Psychologie](#), currently Prof. Holger Horz) and cc the following email address: [sona-support@dlst.server.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:sona-support@dlst.server.uni-frankfurt.de).

## ADDING A NEW STUDY ON SONA

After logging into SONA using your researcher account, click on “Add New Study” at the top of the page and follow the steps on screen (see below for more information).

### Different study types on SONA

In general, SONA distinguishes between “standard studies” (studies run in a laboratory), “online external studies” (studies run using another platform such as Pavlovia or SoSci Survey) and “online internal survey studies” (surveys implemented in SONA with limited features). Standard and online external studies can have up to four parts. All studies can be compensated in the form of VPM (option “Credit”) or money (option “Paid”). Note that payments cannot be handled through SONA though. The “Paid” option only ensures that no VPM are granted for this study while still allowing participants to sign up for the study through SONA.

### Important settings when adding a new study

Please note the following rules and recommended study settings when adding new studies:

- **Study Name:** The study name should contain an abbreviation of the department in which the study is carried out:
  - [A&O] Arbeits- & Organisationspsychologie
  - [Allg I] Allgemeine Psychologie I
  - [Allg II] Allgemeine Psychologie II
  - [DPPD] Differentielle Psychologie & Psychologische Diagnostik
  - [DIPF] Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation
  - [Entw] Entwicklungspsychologie
  - [KiJu] Kinder- und Jugendlichenpsychotherapie
  - [Klin] Klinische Psychologie & Psychotherapie
  - [Neuro] Neurokognitive Psychologie
  - [Päd] Pädagogische Psychologie
  - [PSA] Psychoanalyse
  - [Soz] Sozialpsychologie
  - [Stat I] Psychologische Methoden mit interdisziplinärer Ausrichtung
  - [Stat II] Psychologische Methodenlehre, Evaluation & Forschungsmethodik

- **Duration/VPM:** In Credit studies, duration (in minutes) and VPM must be equal. It is neither acceptable to grant students fewer VPM than participation in the experiment is expected to take, nor to advertise studies as “paying 60 VPM for a 30-minute study”. Please note that the number of VPM granted for participation in a study should not exceed 180 (see “Maximum number of VPM per study” above).
- **Researcher:** By default, the person adding the study will be listed as the researcher for a study (see window on the right). Additional researchers can be added by clicking on the names in the list on the left.
- **Principle Investigator:** Select one of the PIs from the department in which the study is carried out. The PI role does not come with special rights or permissions and is primarily for record-keeping.
- **Active Study:** As long as a study is inactive, it is not visible to students. Note, however, that setting a study to active while adding it will not make it visible to students immediately because the study has to be approved by the admin team first. If you set a study as “active” while adding it, it will immediately become visible to students once it is approved.
- **Course Restrictions:** Please do not change settings here unless you want to test a specific cohort of students. The default setting “All Courses” ensures that your study will be visible to students of all cohorts.
- **Age Restriction:** Please leave this setting to “No”. Students are not required to specify their ages in their SONA profile. Therefore, adding an age range using this setting will make your study invisible to the majority of participants. If you have specific age requirements for your study, note them in the study description/eligibility requirements fields and/or check them in your study.
- **Should survey participants be identified only by a random, unique ID code?** We recommend setting this to “Yes”. This will create a random identifier for each participant who signs up for your study and thus not allow identifying participants directly. Note, however, that SONA admins can still see the participants’ full names. If you need to identify participants in your study (e.g., to match data of different studies), we recommend using a stronger pseudonymized code that cannot be related to participants easily.
- **Participant Sign-Up/Cancellation Deadline:** These settings can be used to ensure that researchers have enough time to respond to sign-ups or cancellations (e.g., to organize appointments). For online studies, we recommend setting both these values to 0.

### When can studies be added to SONA?

You can add a new study to SONA at any time. Note, however, that studies need to be approved by the admin team before they are visible to students. This process usually takes up to 72 hours and requires that all study details are in finished form (i.e., online studies are published on the external platform and ready to start, a functioning link to the study is provided, etc.).

### Getting study approval

Once you have created your study on SONA and want to get approval to run it, please click on the “Send Request” button under “Study Information → Study Status”. Alternatively, click on “My Studies” at the top of the page, navigate to your study (note the Active/Inactive tabs) and click on the red “Not Approved” box on the right of your study. We usually approve studies within 72 hours.

## **RUNNING STUDIES**

### **Adding time slots for your study**

Before you request approval, please specify timeslots in which participants can participate in your study. To do so, open your study (under “My Studies” at the top of the page), click on the grey “Study Menu” button and then on “View/Administer Time Slots”. At the top right, you will find blue buttons allowing you to add time slots.

### **Time slots for online studies**

For online studies, you usually specify a single time slot with a Final Participation Date and Time (a “deadline” for participation) and the maximum number of participants allowed to sign up for this timeslot. Note that this maximum number only specifies how many participants can sign up for a study – it will neither guarantee that this number of sign-ups is reached nor that all participants who signed up will actually participate in the study. SONA will send participants who signed up reminders to participate in the study before the deadline, but experience shows that students often do not participate. If you did not reach your desired number of participants when the time slot deadline is reached, you can add another time slot.

### **Time slots for other studies**

For studies run in person/at specific times, you can set individual time slots (e.g., Tuesday, 11:30) using the “Add A Timeslot” button.

Alternatively, you can “Add Multiple Timeslots” at once. This feature allows you to specify a number of time slots you want to offer, a start date/time, free time between slots (breaks), business hours (times in which time slots should be offered, e.g., 09:00-16:00) and number of participants per timeslot (for testing several participants at once). SONA will then automatically create the number of time slots specified while considering the specified duration of the study, breaks and business hours (if the end of the business hours is reached before arriving at the desired number of time slots, more time slots will be added the following business day).

Last, you can copy timeslots from one week to another and then adjust them individually.

### **Contact study participants**

To contact study participants, click on the grey “Study Menu” button of your study and then “Contact Participants”. Here you can contact all participants, participants who were granted credit, etc. and choose specific dates of signups.

To contact specific participants, navigate to the time slots of a study (click on the grey “Study Menu” button of your study and then “View/Administer Time Slots”). Navigate to the appropriate time slot (note the “All/Recent/Upcoming/Older Timeslots” tabs). After clicking on the blue “Modify” button, you can either contact individual participants using the blue “Contact” button under their name or, for studies with multiple participants per time slot, scroll down and click the blue “Contact All Participants” button to contact all participants who signed up for this specific time slot.

To avoid emails getting lost, please include your own email address in the message.

## GRANTING CREDITS (VERSUCHSPERSONENMINUTEN)

### Granting credits manually and assigning no-shows

To manually grant credits to participants or assign No-Shows, open your study (under “My Studies” at the top of the page), click on the grey “Study Menu” button and then on “View/Administer Time Slots”. Navigate to the respective time slot and click the blue “Modify” button on the right. For each participant, you can now click on the Unexcused/Excused No-Show buttons or grant credits by clicking on the “Credit Granted” button. Afterwards, click the green “Update Sign-Ups” button to save your changes.

### Changing the amount of VPM granted

Once a study started, the amount of VPM students will be granted for participating in a study cannot be changed without requesting approval again. This should only be done in case of errors or a wrong estimation of study duration.

If finishing a study took a single participant longer than expected (e.g., due to technical problems on the experimenter’s part) or they abandoned the study before completing it, you can change the amount of VPM to be granted to that participant to any value between 0 and up to twice the originally estimated number of VPM. To do so, go to the participant’s time slot and specify the number of VPM granted in the drop-down menu and click the “Credit Granted” button above. Afterwards, click the green “Update Sign-Ups” button to save your changes.

### Manually signing up participants

To manually sign up a participant with a SONA account who has not signed up for a study through SONA, navigate to the time slot for which you want to sign up the participant, scroll down to “Manual Sign-Up” and enter the participant’s first and/or last name to search for users. Choose the desired accounts from the list and then click the blue “Sign Up” button to sign them up. This can be useful for granting credit to pilot participants or participants who spontaneously participated in a study without signing up through SONA first.

### Granting credits automatically

For studies carried out online, credits can be granted automatically at the end of the study. This requires a few settings in SONA and your online study (please follow the specific instructions for your experiment/survey software outlined in the [SONA help](#)). The general process of automatic credit granting is as follows:

1. Participants sign up for your study in SONA. Upon starting the study, SONA will direct them to the URL of your online study and include a unique identifier for the participant as a URL variable at the end of the study link.
2. After finishing the study (and saving your study data!), participants are redirected to SONA using a return link (or exit link). This link contains a unique identifier for the experiment that was carried out and the unique identifier of the participant. SONA uses this information to automatically grant credits.

Note that automatic granting of credits only works if students have signed up for your study through SONA **and** have started the study through SONA. If you send a direct link to your online study to participants, automatic credit granting will **not** work, and you will have to grant credits



manually (we advise against this). If you want to advertise your study to someone, always use the link to your study on SONA (see “Direct Study Link” under “Additional Study Information” on the right of your study page).

Please also note data protection considerations outlined [below](#), especially [for SoSci Survey](#).

### Testing automatic credit granting

You can test automatic credit granting by clicking on the blue “Sample Link with Embedded ID Code” button (under “Study Information” → “Website”). If, after finishing your study, you are redirected to SONA and receive the error message “System Message: No credit given, because you are not a participant, and therefore cannot sign up for this study. Study Name: [Your Study's Name]”, automatic credit granting is correctly set up for your study. Find [more information and help here](#).

### Automatic credit granting troubleshooting

If you encounter difficulties with automatic credit granting, please ensure that you are exactly following the steps described in the [SONA help](#) for your study software. If the problem persists, this could have different reasons:

- You are using the wrong Completion URL. Please note that each study and each individual part of a multi-part study has a unique Completion URL.
- Your participants are not starting the study through SONA (e.g., because you sent them a link that takes them directly to your study software).
- Participants cannot reach the point at which they are redirected from your study to SONA (e.g., because the experiment ends before participants are redirected).
- Participants did not finish the study. Note that the status “Awaiting Action” could simply mean that a participant has signed up for but not finished the study (yet).

### Partial credits in online studies

There is currently no implementation for automatically granting partial credits if a participant chooses to withdraw from a study before finishing it. In this case, researchers can only manually grant partial credits (see above).

## IMPLEMENTING COMPLEX STUDY DESIGNS IN SONA

If you need to implement a complex study design in SONA (e.g., more than four parts, testing at specific time points, testing specific groups, etc.) please get in touch with the SONA admin team at [sona-support@dlist.server.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:sona-support@dlist.server.uni-frankfurt.de).

### Is it possible to implement a study with more than four parts?

You can implement a study with, for example, six parts by setting up a four-part study (parts 1-4) and a two-part study (parts 5-6) and making participation in the four-part study a prerequisite for participating in the two-part study. To do so, first set up the four-part study. While setting up the two-part study, you can then specify the four-part study as a prerequisite under “Advanced Settings” → “Pre-Requisites”.

## DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

**Important: Please note that the conducting researchers are solely responsible for their studies and for ensuring that any procedures used adhere to applicable laws. The SONA administration team is happy to advise you in making safe use of SONA, but we are neither responsible for nor capable of taking care of all data protection considerations.**

Data collected as part of psychological studies are often **pseudonymized** (e.g., using a code consisting of different pieces of personal information that are hard to guess for third parties) and rarely completely **anonymized** (complete anonymization means that it is not unlikely or difficult but **impossible** to associate collected data with a person).

Automatic credit granting using SONA involves exchange of a pseudonymized code between SONA and the study platform (e.g., Unipark). **We generally advise against saving this code in the data collected as part of your studies (e.g., as a value in a variable or as part of the filename). Saving this information will allow linking individual participants to their data!**

Furthermore, the ID created by SONA represents a very weak pseudonymized code because (a) the codes will be the same across experiments (unless the question “Should survey participants be identified only by a random, unique ID code?” is answered with “Yes” in the SONA study settings which we recommend), thus potentially allowing researchers from other studies to identify individuals in your data, and (b) even if the aforementioned option is selected, SONA administrators (currently a team of three people) will be able to identify participants in your study easily.

If you decide to save personal identifiers in your data, you should make this transparent to participants and inform them about all people who have access to the data you collect and the coding list (in this case the names and identifiers of study participants saved within SONA).

### Using SONA with SoSci Survey

Please note that, when following the instructions for automatic credit granting outlined in the SONA documentation [here](#), SoSci Survey will automatically save a participant identifier created by SONA in the dataset. **As outlined above, this will make data collected in your study non-anonymous because other researchers and SONA admins may be able to identify participants in your data.**

To avoid this, in Step 3 of the tutorial, please insert the following code (instead of the code shown in the tutorial) in the PHP code window of the redirect page of your SoSci Survey (make sure to replace the red text below with the “SoSci Survey Exit Link” you find under “Study Information” → “Website”):

```
// Get ID
$ref = reference();

// Delete ID from dataset
put('REF', '', true);

// Redirect to SONA
redirect('Insert SoSci Survey Exit Link without the %SURVEY_CODE% tag
here'.$ref, false);
```

If you need to identify participants (e.g., for a follow-up study), please use another method (e.g., have participants create a pseudonymized code) and inform your participants accordingly.

## FAQ

### **Is it possible to specify multiple researchers for a study?**

Yes. In the study settings, scroll to “Researcher” and click on any person you would like to add as a researcher (the selected names appear in the list on the right).

### **Is it possible to let participants choose between money and VPM when they participate in a study?**

Yes. In this case, please set up your study as a “Credit” study. In the study description and consent forms, note the possibility to get either VPM or money for participation in the study. If participants decide to get money for their participation, you can manually change the credited VPM to 0 in SONA (see [Granting credits manually and assigning no-shows](#)). We recommend adding a note for these participants (e.g., “paid”).

### **How to proceed with studies that require participation of a group of participants (e.g., three participants need to sign up for the same time slot)?**

In this case, please set up time slots for three participants each. If less than three people sign up for a time slot, contact the remaining participants and inform them that the study needs to be rescheduled (see [Contact study participants](#)). We recommend describing this procedure transparently in the study description and asking students to check their emails regularly. Make sure to cancel/reschedule appointments latest 24 hours before the appointment.

### **Can students spontaneously participate in a study without signing up for it through SONA first?**

Yes, but please note that automatic credit granting will not work if participants are not signed up for a study. To ensure that automatic credit granting works, the participant needs to sign up first or should be manually signed up for the study by the researcher (see [Manually signing up participants](#)).

Alternatively, the students can also be signed up for the study *afterwards* and VPM are credited manually (see [Manually signing up participants](#) and [Granting credits manually and assigning no-shows](#)).

### **Can students get (partial) credits if they started a study but did not finish it?**

In online studies with automatic credit granting set up, no credits can be granted when the study is not finished. For in-person studies, the amount of VPM granted can be manually adjusted (e.g., if a study is cancelled before completing it, see [Changing the amount of VPM granted](#)).

### **When I click on a time slot, I see participants with the status “Awaiting Action”. What does that mean? Is it possible that these participants already participated in the study?**

The status “Awaiting Action” means that a participant has signed up for a study but so far has neither received VPM for their participation nor has been marked as a No-show (i.e., SONA treats this participant as “not yet decided”). This can have several reasons.

In a study with automatic credit granting correctly set up, it usually means that a participant has signed up for a study but has not finished it (yet). On rare occasions, it is possible that automatic credit granting did not work (usually due to a software problem on the participant's side, because automatic credit granting was not properly set up and tested, or because participants did not start the study through SONA).

In a study with manual credit granting, it means that the researcher has not yet decided whether the participant should receive VPM or not.

Please only grant participants VPM if you are sure that they finished the study (either because you can trace back their participation or because the participants provide proof of their participation, e.g., a pseudonymized code that you can match to the data you collected).