

Advanced topics in psychophysics, Fall 2006, PSY 6810-002, CRN 51652, 2 credits

Instructor: Professor Don Sinex
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Office hours: Any time, by appointment
Time and place: Tentatively M, 3:30pm-5:20pm, VSB214 (Sinex lab)
Textbook: None; see "Reading Assignments" below.

Catalog description:

Guided discussion of recent research and methodological issues in psychophysics and sensory processing. Each meeting will consist of in-depth review and evaluation of 1-2 journal articles. Papers will be selected from a broad spectrum of topics in sensory psychology or neuroscience. Some papers will be selected by the Instructor, but students will also have the opportunity to choose articles and lead the discussion on topics that reflect their interests.
Pre-requisite: PSY 3450 (or equivalent) and Instructor's consent

Overview:

The goal is to read, discuss, and critique papers from the published literature on perception, psychophysics, sensory psychology, or sensory neuroscience. Most papers can be covered in about an hour, so we can count on covering 1-2 papers per week. The first meeting will be mostly organizational, but I will also come prepared to present and discuss a book chapter entitled "Psychophysical measurement of thresholds: differential sensitivity" (from "Psychophysics: The fundamentals", George Gescheider, Erlbaum, 1997). That will serve two purposes. First, the chapter is a review of (or introduction to) fundamental principles of psychophysics that began to be developed by Weber and Fechner in the 19th century, to help get us started. Second, I hope my presentation and discussion will serve as a model for subsequent presentations, most of which will be given by the other participants.

Reading assignments

We will spend a few minutes during each class choosing papers for the next meeting. That will be most effective if each of you comes to each class having already identified a paper for which you would be willing to lead the discussion. Your paper won't be chosen each week, of course, but be prepared anyway. I think we'll have time for each person to present 2-3 papers over the course of the semester.

You are free to select papers that reflect your interests, within the broad range listed above. If necessary, I will be happy to help you narrow the range of your interests to make a specific selection. For your convenience, I have posted links to a few search tools and journal sites on WebCT. Not all are available in the USU Library, but I have access to some journals that are not available here, and there's always Interlibrary Loan. As soon as possible after a paper is chosen, I will make sure a copy is available on the Psych6810 site on WebCT for printing or downloading. The chapter for Week 1 is already available.

The assigned papers should be read before you come to class, so that you can participate in the discussion.

Grades:

Final grade will be based on your own presentations (50%) and your participation in the discussion of other papers (50%). Effort and enthusiasm will be weighted more heavily than expertise and insight (but that doesn't mean I'm indifferent to the latter).