

House rules for using mTurk in the YNCA Lab

To ensure that we are using Amazon's mechanical Turk consistently and effectively, I have written up the following "house rules". The lab's reputation is at stake, so let's all work to build a positive one with our mTurk workers. Fortunately, we have a lot of internal expertise in doing precisely that. [Numerous sites have additional information and tips.](#)

Happy experimenting!

General notes

1. Adopt a customer service attitude. That means that you should always give each worker the benefit of the doubt, and that you should be polite, helpful, professional, and prompt in all communications with them. mTurk brings both power and responsibility!
2. We initially only used participants who had reached the "Masters" level, but we soon found that there weren't enough of these folks for our larger studies. It would be worth choosing responders who have at least a 95% approval rating; requiring a certain number of successful HITs (e.g 1,000) also helps, though some projects have been fine even with a requirement of just 1 HIT.
3. Ensure that your experiment is in compliance with ethics regulations (Yale-NUS and/or IRB), and that it does not include aspects on [mTurk's prohibited uses list](#). Amazon errs on the side of caution, so you cannot even ask for a participant's name; that looks like you are collecting personal information.

Communication with workers

4. Direct communication from workers goes to ynca.lab@gmail.com. You can check this account by using the same login information that you use for the mTurk account itself. Especially after launching a new study, you should check this account frequently and/or temporarily set it to automatically forward messages to you. The account automatically forwards messages to me, and I will send these on to you as a reminder.
5. In some cases, you'll need to communicate with mTurk workers through the Amazon system, which lists my name as the sender of the message. That's fine, but be sure to include information in the body of the communication that explains A) who you are and B) who I am, the account owner and head of the Yale-NUS Cognition & Attention Lab.

6. Please copy me on all correspondence with mTurk workers. I am ultimately responsible for our reputation and practices, so it is important that I be able to monitor them. It's useful for me to see the problems we're facing as well, technical or otherwise.

HITs and payments

7. Don't reject payments. Doing so hurts the worker's reputation and ours. It is also not ethically consistent with how experiments are to be reimbursed. If you accidentally reject payment, you can reverse such assignments by following the instructions [here](#).
8. Grant fair payment to workers who have given an honest effort, especially if a technical difficulty has prevented them from completing the task. The best way to do so is [to set up a Dummy Hit specific to a given worker's ID](#).
9. In the early days of mTurk, requesters often paid rather low rates, perhaps just 1-2 USD per hour. Indeed, my standard started at 3 USD per hour, and many labs at Yale (as of 2016, anyway) have a standard rate of 0.10 USD per minute (6 USD per hour). Since workers complete our tasks in good faith and we have the resources to pay better, all new studies will use the rate of 9 USD per hour.
10. Amazon has a rather unfriendly commission structure for researchers, such that batches of 10+ incur a 40% charge on top of the participant payments. That amount can be reduced to 20% by being a bit clever (see the first Q on [this FAQ](#)), so please do consider being clever so as to stretch your dollars further--and not at the expense of our workers.