

Sample Interpersonal Psychotherapy Syllabus With Embedded Deliberate Practice Exercises

APPENDIX

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This appendix provides a sample one-semester, three-unit course dedicated to teaching interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT). This course is appropriate for graduate students (master's and doctoral) at all levels of training, including first-year students who have not yet worked with clients. We present it as a model that can be adapted to a specific program's contexts and needs. For example, instructors may borrow portions of it to use in other courses, in practica, in didactic training events at externships and internships, in workshops, and in continuing education for postgraduate therapists.

Course Title: Interpersonal Psychotherapy: Theory and Deliberate Practice

Course Description

This course teaches theory, principles, and core skills of IPT. As a course with both didactic and practicum elements, it will review the theory and research on IPT and foster the use of deliberate practice to enable students to acquire 10 key IPT skills.

Course Objectives

Students who complete this course will be able to

1. describe the core theory, research, and skills of IPT.
2. apply the principles of deliberate practice for career-long clinical skill development.
3. demonstrate key IPT skills.
4. evaluate how they can fit IPT skills into their developing therapeutic framework.
5. employ IPT with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds.
6. describe the ways in which IPT is an evidenced-based practice.

Date	Lecture and Discussion	Skills Lab	Homework (for next class)
Week 1	Introduction to interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT): history and treatment overview	Exercise 1: Presenting the Interpersonal Inventory: Interpersonal Inventory I	Exercise 1; Markowitz & Weissman (2012); Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapter 5); Stuart et al. (2017, in press); Weissman (2006)
Week 2	Theoretical basis for IPT: attachment and interpersonal theories	Repeat Exercise 1; Exercise 2: Exploring interpersonal relationships: Interpersonal Inventory II	Exercises 1 & 2; Ravitz et al. (2008); Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapter 2)
Week 3	Effectiveness of IPT and IPT therapeutic stance	Exercise 3: Clarifications	Exercise 3; Cuijpers et al. (2011, 2016); Markowitz et al. (2014); Ravitz et al. (2019); Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapter 8)
Week 4	Patient selection and IPT case conceptualization	Exercise 4: Interpersonal framing of distress	Exercise 4; Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapters 4 & 6)
Week 5	IPT initial phase and treatment goals	Repeat Exercises 1 & 2	Exercises 1 & 2; Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapter 3 & 7)
Week 6	IPT problem areas and middle phase of treatment	Exercise 5: Helping the client describe their distress and need for support	Exercise 5; Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapters 14–16)
Week 7	Using communication analysis to understand communication	Exercise 7: Communication analysis	Exercise 7; Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapter 9)
Week 8	Midterm paper due, self-evaluation, skill coaching feedback	Transcript session (Exercise 11) or mock session (Exercise 12) with a beginner client profile	Reading and exercise identified by mock or real session
Week 9	IPT techniques for working with communication and affect	Repeat Exercise 5; Exercise 6: Reinforcement of effective communication	Exercises 5 & 6; Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapter 11); Weissman et al. (2018, Chapter 10)
Week 10	IPT techniques for improving communication	Exercise 8: Generating communication options	Exercise 8; Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapters 10 & 12)
Week 11	IPT techniques for increasing social support	Exercise 9: Mobilizing social support	Exercise 9; Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapters 2 & 13)
Week 12	IPT techniques for increasing social support	Exercise 10: Motivating interpersonal action	Exercise 10; Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapter 13)
Week 13	Applications of IPT to diverse populations	Practice a mock session (Exercise 12) with an intermediate client profile	Cuijpers et al. (2018); Schultz & Stuart (2014); Stuart et al. (2021)
Week 14	IPT conclusion & maintenance phases	Practice a mock session (Exercise 12) with an advanced client profile	E. Frank et al. (2007); Stuart & Robertson (2012, Chapter 17)
Week 15	Final paper due, final exam, self-evaluation, skill coaching feedback	Transcript session (Exercise 11) or mock session (Exercise 12)	Reading and exercise identified by mock or real session

Format of Class

Classes are 3 hours long. Course time is split evenly between learning IPT theory and research and acquiring IPT skills.

Lecture/Discussion Class: Each week, there will be one Lecture/Discussion class for 1.5 hours focusing on IPT theory and related research.

IPT Skills Lab: Each week there will be one IPT Skills Lab for 1.5 hours. Skills Labs are for practicing IPT skills using the exercises in this book. The exercises use therapy simulations (role-plays) with the following goals:

1. Build trainees' abilities and confidence in using IPT skills with real clients.
2. Provide a safe space for experimenting with different therapeutic interventions, without fear of making mistakes.
3. Provide plenty of opportunity to explore and "try on" different styles of therapy, so trainees can ultimately discover their own personal, unique therapy style.

Mock Sessions: Twice during the semester (Weeks 8 and 15), trainees will do a psychotherapy mock session in the IPT skills lab. In contrast to highly structured and repetitive deliberate practice exercises, a psychotherapy mock session is an unstructured and improvised role-played therapy session. Mock sessions allow trainees to

1. practice using IPT skills responsively.
2. experiment with clinical decision making in an unscripted context.
3. discover their personal therapeutic style.
4. build endurance for working with real clients.

Homework

Homework will be assigned each week and will include reading, 1 hour of skills practice with an assigned practice partner, and occasional writing assignments. For the skills practice homework, trainees will repeat the exercise they did for that week's IPT skills lab. Because the instructor will not be there to evaluate performance, trainees should instead complete the Deliberate Practice Reaction Form, as well as the Deliberate Practice Diary Form, for themselves as a self-evaluation.

Writing Assignments

Students are to write two papers: one due at midterm and one due at the last day of class. Some possible topics for the papers are as follows:

- Exploration of one aspect of IPT theory, research, or technique
- A partial transcript of one of the trainees' therapy cases with a real client, with discussion from an IPT perspective

Multicultural Orientation

This course is taught in a multicultural context, defined as "how the cultural world-views, values, and beliefs of the client and therapist interact and influence one another to cocreate a relational experience that is in the spirit of healing" (Davis et al., 2018, p. 3). Core features of the multicultural orientation include cultural comfort, humility, and responding to cultural opportunities (or previously missed opportunities). Throughout this course, students are encouraged to reflect on their own cultural identity and improve

their ability to attune with their clients' cultural identities (Hook et al., 2017). For further guidance on this topic and deliberate practice exercises to improve multicultural skills, see the book *Deliberate Practice in Multicultural Therapy* (Harris et al., 2024).

Vulnerability, Privacy, and Boundaries

This course is aimed at developing IPT skills, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills in an experiential framework and as relevant to clinical work. This course is not psychotherapy or a substitute for psychotherapy. Students should interact at a level of self-disclosure that is personally comfortable and helpful to their own learning. Although becoming aware of internal emotional and psychological processes is necessary for a therapist's development, it is not necessary to reveal all that information to the trainer. It is important for students to sense their own level of safety and privacy. Students are not evaluated on the level of material that they choose to reveal in the class.

In accordance with the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (American Psychological Association, 2017), students are **not required to disclose personal information**. Because this class is about developing both interpersonal and IPT competence, following are some important points so that students are fully informed as they make choices to self-disclose:

- Students choose how much, when, and what to disclose. Students are not penalized for the choice not to share personal information.
- The learning environment is susceptible to group dynamics much like any other group space; therefore students may be asked to share their observations and experiences of the class environment with the singular goal of fostering a more inclusive and productive learning environment.

Confidentiality

To create a safe learning environment that is respectful of client and therapist information and diversity and to foster open and vulnerable conversation in class, students are required to agree to strict confidentiality within and outside of the instruction setting.

Evaluation

Self-Evaluation: At the end of the semester (Week 15), trainees will perform a self-evaluation. This will help trainees track their progress and identify areas for further development. The Guidance for Trainees section in Chapter 3 of this book highlights potential areas of focus for self-evaluation.

Grading Criteria

As designed, students would be accountable for the level and quality of their performance in the following:

- the discussion classes,
- the skills lab (exercises and mock sessions),
- homework,
- midterm and final papers, and
- a final exam.

Required Readings

- Cuijpers, P., Donker, T., Weissman, M. M., Ravitz, P., & Cristea, I. A. (2016). Interpersonal psychotherapy for mental health problems: A comprehensive meta-analysis. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 173(7), 680–687. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2015.15091141>
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- Stuart, S., Schultz, J. M., Palmer Molina, A., & Siber-Sanderowitz, S. (in press). Interpersonal psychotherapy: A review of theory, history, and evidence of efficacy. *Psychodynamic Psychiatry*.
- Weissman, M. (2006). A brief history of interpersonal psychotherapy. *Psychiatric Annals*, 36(8), 553–557.
- Weissman, M. M., Markowitz, J. C., & Klerman, G. L. (2018). *The guide to interpersonal psychotherapy* (Updated and expanded ed.). Oxford University Press.

Supplemental Readings

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