

# Sample Dialectical Behavior Therapy Syllabus With Embedded Deliberate Practice Exercises

This appendix provides a sample one-semester, three-unit course dedicated to teaching dialectical behavior therapy (DBT). This course is appropriate for graduate students (masters and doctoral) at all levels of training, including first-year students who have not yet worked with clients. If offering a full DBT course is not possible, aspects of the syllabus and associated exercises can be adapted for use in other courses, practica, didactic training events at externships and internships, workshops, and continuing education for postgraduate therapists.

**Course Title:** Dialectical Behavior Therapy: Theory, Case Formulation, and Deliberate Practice

## Course Description

This course teaches theory, principles, and core clinical skills of DBT. As a course with both didactic and practicum elements, it will review the theory and research on DBT, frameworks used to formulate and understand client problems, and the use of deliberate practice to enable students to acquire 12 key DBT skills.

## Course Objectives

Students who complete this course will be able to do the following:

1. Describe the core theory, research, and skills of DBT
2. Apply the principles of deliberate practice for career-long clinical skill development
3. Demonstrate key DBT skills
4. Evaluate how they can fit DBT skills into their developing therapeutic framework
5. Employ DBT with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds

## Format of Class

Classes are 3 hours long. Course time is split evenly between learning DBT theory (lecture/discussion) and acquiring DBT skills (DBT skills lab):

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

Date	Lecture and Discussion	Skills Lab	Readings
Week 1	Introduction to dialectical behavior therapy (DBT): history, theory, and research; case formulation in DBT	Introduction to principles of deliberate practice	Chapman and Wilks (in press); McMain et al. (2019); Sonley et al. (in press); Swenson (in press)
Week 2	Developing a DBT working alliance; establishing a session agenda	Exercise 1: Establishing a Session Agenda	Boritz et al. (2023); Heard and Swales (2016, Chapter 2); Rizvi (2011)
Week 3	Validation skills	Exercise 2: Validation	Koerner and Linehan (2003); Linehan (1997)
Week 4	Learning principles; reinforcing adaptive behaviors	Exercise 3: Reinforcing Adaptive Behaviors	Chapman (2018); Heard and Swales (2016, Chapter 1)
Week 5	Problem assessment; behavioral chain analysis	Exercise 4: Problem Assessment	Landes (2018, pp. 259–273)
Week 6	Commitment strategies	Exercise 5: Eliciting a Commitment	Pederson (2015, Chapter 15)
Week 7	Midterm paper due, self-evaluation, skill coaching feedback	Exercise 14: Mock sessions (beginner profiles)	No readings
Week 8	Problem solving; solution analysis	Exercise 6: Inviting the Client to Engage in Problem Solving	Heard and Swales (2016, Chapter 4); Landes (2018, pp. 273–282)
Week 9	DBT skills training	Exercise 7: Skills Training	Heard and Swales (2016, Chapter 5); Swales and Dunkley (2020)
Week 10	Modifying cognitions	Exercise 8: Modifying Cognitions	Heard and Swales (2016, Chapter 7)
Week 11	Informal exposure to emotion	Exercise 9: Informal Exposure to Emotions	McMain et al. (2001)
Week 12	Coaching clients in distress	Exercise 10: Coaching Clients in Distress	Linehan and Schmidt (1995)
Week 13	Dialectical strategies	Exercise 11: Promoting Dialectical Thinking Through Both–And Statements	Chapman (2019)
Week 14	Responding to suicidal ideation	Exercise 12: Responding to Suicidal Ideation	Linehan (2016); Mehlum (2018)
Week 15	Final paper due, final exam, self-evaluation, skill coaching feedback	Exercise 14: Mock sessions (intermediate and advanced profiles)	Annotated therapy transcript (Exercise 13)

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

1. Build trainees' skill and confidence for using DBT 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 in the semester (Weeks 7 and 15), trainees will do a psychotherapy mock session in the DBT 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 DBT skills responsively,
2. experiment with clinical decision making in an unscripted context,
3. discover their personal therapeutic style, and
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 DBT 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 on the last day of class. The first paper will explore one aspect of DBT theory or the empirical literature on DBT. The second paper will involve the completion of a DBT case formulation and treatment plan.

### **Multicultural Orientation**

Throughout this course, students are encouraged to reflect on their own cultural identity and improve their ability to attune with their clients' cultural identities. In this course, students will be expected to practice within a multicultural orientation that considers cultural safety and cultural humility. For further guidance on this topic and deliberate practice exercises to improve multicultural skills, see the forthcoming book *Deliberate Practice in Multicultural Therapy* (Harris et al., 2022).

### **Vulnerability, Privacy, and Boundaries**

This course is aimed at developing DBT skills (including self-awareness and interpersonal skills) in an experiential framework relevant to clinical work. This course is not psychotherapy or a substitute for psychotherapy: When engaging in role-playing or experiential exercises, students should consider the level of self-disclosure that is appropriate to the context, personally comfortable, and effective for their own learning and that of their classmates. Students are not evaluated on the level of personal material 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 DBT 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, and 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 *Deliberate Practice in Dialectical Behavior Therapy* highlights potential areas of focus for self-evaluation.

### Grading Criteria

Students will be evaluated on the level and quality of their performance in

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

### Required Readings

- Boritz, T., Varma, S., Sonley, A., & McMain, S. F. (2023). Alliance rupture and repair in dialectical behavior therapy for borderline personality disorder. In C. F. Eubanks, L. W. Samstag, & J. C. Muran (Eds.), *Rupture and repair in psychotherapy: A critical process for change* (pp. 141–164). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000306-007>
- Chapman, A. (2018). Behavioural foundations of DBT: Applying behavioural principles to the challenge of suicidal behaviour and non-suicidal self-injury. In M. Swales (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of dialectical behavior therapy* (pp. 69–90). Oxford University Press.
- Chapman, A. (2019). *Phone coaching in dialectical behavior therapy*. Guilford Press.
- Chapman, A., & Wilks, C. (in press). Applications of dialectical behavior therapy. In G. Gabbard (Ed.), *Textbook of psychotherapeutic treatments* (2nd ed.). American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Heard, H. L., & Swales, M. A. (2016). *Changing behavior in DBT: Problem solving in action*. Guilford Press.
- Koerner, K., & Linehan, M. M. (2003). Validation principles and strategies. In W. O'Donohue, J. E. Fisher, & S. C. Hayes (Eds.), *Cognitive behavioral therapy* (pp. 229–237). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

- Landes, S. (2018). Conducting effective behavioural and solution analyses. In M. Swales (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of dialectical behavior therapy* (pp. 259–282). Oxford University Press.
- Linehan, M. M. (1997). Validation and psychotherapy. In A. C. Bohart & L. S. Greenberg (Eds.), *Empathy reconsidered: New directions in psychotherapy* (pp. 353–392). American Psychological Association.
- Linehan, M. M. (2016). Linehan Risk Assessment and Management Protocol (LRAMP). <https://depts.washington.edu/uwbtrc/wp-content/uploads/LSSN-LRAMP-v1.0.pdf>
- Linehan, M. M., & Schmidt, H. III. (1995). The dialectics of effective treatment of borderline personality disorder. In W. O'Donohue & L. Krasner (Eds.), *Theories of behavior therapy: Exploring behavior change* (pp. 553–584). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10169-020>
- McMain, S., Korman, L. M., & Dimeff, L. (2001). Dialectical behavior therapy and the treatment of emotion dysregulation. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 57(2), 183–196. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-4679\(200102\)57:2%3C183::AID-JCLP5%3E3.0.CO;2-Y](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-4679(200102)57:2%3C183::AID-JCLP5%3E3.0.CO;2-Y)
- McMain, S., Leybman, M., Boritz, T. (2019). Case formulation in dialectical behaviour therapy. In U. Kramer (Ed.), *Case formulation for personality disorders* (pp. 1–18). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-813521-1.00001-1>
- Mehlum, L. (2018). DBT as a suicide and self-harm treatment: Assessing and treating suicidal behaviours. In M. Swales (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of dialectical behavior therapy* (pp. 307–324). Oxford University Press.
- Pederson, L. (2015). *Dialectical behavior therapy: A contemporary guide for practitioners*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Rizvi, S. L. (2011). The therapeutic relationship in dialectical behavior therapy for suicidal individuals. In K. Michel & D. A. Jobes (Eds.), *Building a therapeutic alliance with the suicidal patient* (pp. 255–271). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/12303-014>
- Sonley, A., Boritz, T., & McMain, S. (in press). Applications of dialectical behavior therapy. In G. Gabbard (Ed.), *Textbook of psychotherapeutic treatments* (2nd ed.). American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Swales, M., & Dunkley, C. (2020). Principles of skills assessment in dialectical behavior therapy. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 27(1), 18–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2019.05.001>
- Swenson, C. (in press). Applications of dialectical behavior therapy. In G. Gabbard (Ed.), *Textbook of psychotherapeutic treatments* (2nd ed.). American Psychiatric Publishing.

### Supplemental Readings

- Dimeff, L., & Koerner, K. (2007). *Dialectical behavior therapy in clinical practice: Applications across disorders and settings*. Guilford Press.
- Koerner, K. (2012). *Doing dialectical behavior therapy: A practical guide*. Guilford Press.
- Linehan, M. M. (1993). *Cognitive-behavioral treatment of borderline personality disorder*. Guilford Press.
- Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training handouts and worksheets* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Linehan, M. M., & Wilks, C. R. (2015). The course and evolution of dialectical behavior therapy. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 69(2), 97–110. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.psychotherapy.2015.69.2.97>
- Pryor, K. (1999). *Don't shoot the dog: The new art of teaching and training*. Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing.
- Ramnero, J., & Törneke, N. (2008). *The ABCs of human behavior: Behavioral principles for the practicing clinician*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Swales, M. (2018). *The Oxford handbook of dialectical behavior therapy*. Oxford University Press.
- Swenson, C. R. (2016). *DBT principles in action: Acceptance, change, and dialectics*. Guilford Press.