Guidelines for Answering the Question:
How can I tell if I am progressing satisfactorily in the program?

As your humble faculty mentors, we fully realize that it is often difficult to know how you are progressing in your graduate studies, whether you are “successful enough”, and whether there is any danger that you will not be continued in the program.

It is impossible for us to anticipate any and all situations in a handout such as this and for that reason, the best way to answer the question is…to have a frank, open, and honest discussion with your faculty mentor regarding the matter.

Other signposts exist as well. What follows is our attempt to identify the top 10 signposts that you are making satisfactory progress in the program. If you don’t see these things happening for you, you most definitely want to have a talk with your advisor. And even if they are happening, it is always a good idea to have a talk with your advisor.

Top 10 signposts that indicate you are most likely succeeding in your quest to become a social psychologist.

#10. You are on track to complete all of the program requirements in a timely fashion. Note however that this is a minimal expectation. Successfully completing all program requirements amounts to something like a “C” grade. It is the things you do above and beyond this that will determine your success.

#9. You are impatient having to wait your turn to present your latest research at brown bag. You are an active participator in classes, always prepared and energetically offering your insights, thoughts, and criticisms no matter what the topic at hand. A true intellectual almost cannot help her or himself from becoming interested in (and having an opinion on) pretty much any topic, not just her/his own narrow area of interest. You attend (and actually *want* to attend) brown bag, colloquia, and your respective lab meetings.

#8. You feel connected to the program, to the faculty, and to the field. You find yourself genuinely enjoying the prospect of being part of the discipline of social psychology.

#7. Your yearly evaluation letters are positive in tone, indicate you are making successful progress, and you actively pursue the items that are suggested areas of improvement or things that need attention. If your letter says things like, “We are concerned about…” or “You are at a critical juncture…” these should send off red flares. These are matters that need serious attention and need to be dealt with effectively.

#6. You’ve had the discussion with your mentor and your mentor assures you that you are on track and successfully completing the program.
#5. You feel a sense of ownership and pride in your work (and by ownership we mean responsibility for the work, not just “mine, mine…”).

#4. You have a faculty mentor who wants to work with you. Don’t laugh – this one is important. If there is no faculty member who (typically after repeated tries) is willing to supervise your work, you really have no options.

#3. As a first year student your projects are likely to be heavily guided by your research mentor. With time, however, the expectation is that you will be able to develop as an independent researcher. This means you should be able to conceive of research ideas and ways to test these ideas, construct appropriate materials to do so, gather and analyze data, and capably write the data up in manuscript form. Critically, we are looking for a progression through your graduate career, with a movement towards ever-greater levels of independence in your work. You will not succeed as a researcher without these abilities.

#2. In light of #3, in the later years of your graduate career you find yourself becoming a productive, independent, and successful researcher as indicated by posters and talks at meetings, grants and papers submitted and on their way towards acceptance.

And the #1 signpost that you are succeeding in your graduate studies:

You have a passion and drive to find answers to the research questions that burn in your heart – so much so that you find yourself staying up late into the night to perform that “one final analysis” that just might make it all make sense for you.