

## A guide to research ethics for online survey design

1. As with any other research, you should provide respondents with a description of the study and include as a minimum, the possible risks to the respondent, a privacy statement, and an indication of what type of questions are going to be asked and if any are particularly sensitive. If your research is on a particularly sensitive issue you should include an appropriate helpline number for participants.
2. Respondents may be unfamiliar with the computer-based methods you will use in your study, so you should explain in clear detail the procedures that will be used to track their responses and preserve their confidentiality.
3. In order to reduce the possibility of psychological harm to subjects, researchers should allow subjects to skip questions or withdraw from the study.
4. In questionnaires it can be easy for respondents to accidentally skip a question. In order to avoid this some online surveys require participants to answer every question before the form can be submitted or go to the next page. You might want to require respondents to answer each question, but include a response option for each item that allows the respondent to skip the item.
5. On each page of your online questionnaire, you should include an option that will allow the respondent to withdraw from the survey. If the respondent chooses this option, all responses from that subject should be discarded.
6. Some respondents may be concerned that their answers on an online survey could be traced back to them via their e-mail address, their IP address, or other information that you could attempt to capture. You should reassure respondents that you will not attempt to capture information that they do not voluntarily provide.
7. If you are asking about sensitive information and you request respondents' e-mail addresses for any reason, you should specify that you will save the e-mail addresses in a separate file from the other responses, such that a respondent's specific responses cannot be linked back to their e-mail address.
8. Be clear about the distinction between anonymity and confidentiality and the implications for participants.