

Department of Psychology
ETHICS CHECKLIST – for supervisors and students.

This guidance is intended to help supervisors and students to navigate their way through the online ethics application system and consider the issues that are relevant in each section. It should be considered alongside the guidance provided here <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/educationresources/onlinesystem>.

Sections A & B are fairly straightforward and this guidance therefore starts from “Section C: Summary of research”.

Section C: Summary of research

This section needs to provide a reviewer with enough detail to decide if the aim of the research justifies the investment of time by the intended participants and whether any potential risks are outweighed by the potential benefits of conducting the research.

Aims & Objectives

This section should address the following questions;

- What previous research is the current study based on?
- What contribution does the current study make to the literature?
- What do you expect to find (i.e., what is the hypothesis)?

Example:

The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of _____ compared to _____. Previous research has highlighted that _____. For example, Whittle and While (2014) demonstrated that _____. Despite the evidence collected to date, however, there is still some debate concerning _____. This study therefore aims to _____. Our prediction is that _____.

Methodology

It is important that this section is detailed enough for a reviewer to be able to assess whether there will be any risks to the participants or researchers.

For example, in order to effectively assess the ethical implications of research that plans to recruit children, it is important to know how long the study will take and to have enough detail to decide whether children will be able to cope with the proposed methods.

This section should therefore cover each of the following elements in some detail;

- What will participants be asked to do?
- How long will each task take?
- What materials will be used? Give examples of the stimuli or questions that will be used and upload any stimuli (e.g. the pictures that participants will be shown), questionnaires etc. as additional materials alongside your application
- How will the procedures allow the research question(s) to be answered?

Section D: About the participants

How will you identify potential participants?

- Who are they?
- Are there any restrictions on who can take part?
- How many participants will be recruited and how have you decided on this number (e.g., power analysis)?

How will potential participants be approached and recruited?

You should use this section to specify how you plan to identify, approach, and recruit participants for your research. Some possible options are outlined below, but you should try to anticipate all of the recruitment methods that you might potentially use (including considering back up plans, should you not recruit as many participants as hoped via your intended means) to prevent having to request an amendment or revise your ethics application.

- The online research participation system (ORPS) in the Department of Psychology
 - <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/psychology/current/orps>
 - Include the fact that credits will be given for participating 1st years
- Emails to the lists of staff and student volunteers maintained by CiCS
 - <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/cics/email/distributionlists>
 - Please note that we are under pressure to minimise use of the volunteer lists and so this is only available on request and is not available to 3rd year undergraduates as a matter of course. For further guidance, please visit <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/psychology/research/volunteerslists>
 - Please include a draft / drafts of the email(s) that you plan to send.
- Facebook and other social media
 - Include details of how these media will be used, it is advised that you provide a link to a website or online questionnaire where full details of the study can be viewed and include precautions to ensure that people cannot identify others who have taken part (e.g., because they 'like' the Facebook page).
- Flyers around the department
 - If you plan to do this, then include the flyer in supporting documents

Will informed consent be obtained from the participants? (i.e. the proposed process)

The purpose of informed consent is to give participants as much information about what they will be asked to do as possible, so that they can decide if they want to take part or not.

It is recognised that in psychological research it is often not possible to be completely transparent about your aims and / or your hypotheses. Participants should therefore be presented with clear information about what they will be asked to do, but you do not necessarily need to explain *why* they are being asked to do it.

Providing that participants understand the nature of the tasks that they are being asked to complete they can provide *informed consent* without needing to know the exact aim of the research. Any potential distress caused by not being transparent about your aims should be managed by careful

responses). If deception is deemed necessary then researchers should explain in detail why withholding information or deception is necessary for the viability and validity of the research.

Please note that there is a difference between active deception and the omission of details. For example, not mentioning the point at which there will be a memory test, is quite different to deliberately telling participants that they will be asked to complete a task that will never be presented.

Alternatively, details of surprise tests can be omitted and a 2 stage consent process can be used whereby consent to take part in the surprise test is obtained just before the test rather than at the beginning of the experiment. It is also possible to debrief participants part way through experimental procedures if appropriate.

See note 2 of the Research Ethics Policy Notes for further information
<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/policy-notes>

PAYMENT

It is important to specify any incentives or expenses that will be provided to participants in order to allow reviewers to make a decision regarding the appropriateness of such payments.

Experimental credits given out to 1st year psychology students who take part in your research should be included under the section on payments.

COMPLAINTS

Participants who wish to make a complaint about the research should be directed to contact the member of staff supervising the research in the first instance and then the Head of the Department of Psychology if they do not feel that their concerns have been adequately addressed.

What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm/distress to the participants?

You should use this section to demonstrate that you have carefully considered whether your procedures could potentially cause physical and / or psychological harm, or distress to your participants. For example, asking a person to read text may be upsetting for someone who finds reading difficult. However, if your information to participants is clear enough then it should enable participants to make their own decision about whether the tasks will cause them discomfort.

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate protection and well-being of the participants?

Having identified whether your procedures might be distressing for participants, the aim of this section is to work out how you will manage any potential distress (assuming that it is unavoidable). A first step is to make it clear to participants that they can withdraw from the experiment at any point.

Careful debriefing is also used to manage potential harm - the aim here is to make sure that participants do not leave the experiment feeling distressed

Contact details for services that may be of use to participants are also often provided. For example, numbers for medical or counselling services. Typically, participants who find that taking part raises concerns for them about, for example, their health, are directed to contact the GP in the first instance.

Section E: About the data

What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

It is usually possible to make the data collected as part of a psychology experiment anonymous and this should be done at the earliest possible point.

Once the data has been anonymised researchers do not have to comply with the data protection act 1998, which controls the use and storage of personal data. As part of the conditions set out in this act participants can request access to their data and data must be stored in accordance with 8 principles¹. Therefore, if data is not anonymised researchers need to be able to link participants with their data.

If you keep a document linking participant details with, for example, their ID numbers, then make sure this is kept separately from data and preferably in an electronic, password protected format (rather than on pieces of paper that can easily be misplaced). This document should be destroyed as soon as possible.

If there is no need to collect names during the testing phase (e.g. if participants are not completing a second session) then the data can probably be anonymised at source. However, this means that participants cannot withdraw after taking part. This is standard practice for online administration of questionnaires (IP address trackers can be de-activated for questionnaire software such as Qualtrics).

Participants should be made aware of the fact that they will or will not be able to request their data after completing the experiment.

However, if you plan to collect data that might be considered sensitive, then it would be preferable to offer participants the chance to withdraw after taking part. It is advisable to set a time limit for this in order to avoid participants withdrawing their data after data analysis has taken place.

If participants need to be identified at a later date then codes can be used to prevent participants being identified by a third party. Please make sure that the information included in ID codes cannot be used to identify participants. Research on ID codes suggests that the following sorts of codes are effective;

First letter of mother's first name	M
Number of older brothers(living and deceased)	01
Number representing the month of your birth	10
First letter of your first or middle name	A
Subject generated code	M0110A

Note that complete confidentiality / anonymity is often very difficult to ensure. Therefore, please avoid promising participants that data will be 'completely confidential' unless it is.

¹ See note 4 of the Research Ethics Policy Notes for further information
<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/policy-notes>

see the Specialist Research Ethics Guidance Paper on PRINCIPLES OF ANONYMITY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION for detailed information on the Data Protection Act 1998.
<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/further-guidance/special-guidance/papers>

How and where will the data be stored, used and (if appropriate) destroyed?

In addition to storing data securely applicants may need to keep the anonymised data for a considerable amount of time depending on the requirements of a journal. It would be advisable to keep data until research has been published.

Audio recordings

If audio recordings are being made, then best practice is to transcribe them and destroy the originals as soon as possible. Participants should be provided with details regarding how and when audio recordings will be destroyed after data collection in the information sheet and associated consent form.

Supporting documentation

The following can all be helpful to reviewers in making their decisions;

- Copies of any questionnaires or measures that you plan to use
- Examples of stimuli that participants will be shown
- Information provided to participants
- Consent forms
- Debrief forms
- Letters to schools
- Drafts of emails that you will use to advertise your study to potential participants

For further information the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) has provided detailed notes on a number of ethical issues at the following URL;

<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/policy-notes>