

INTRODUCTION



This chapter considers the many ethical and moral dimensions involved in conducting a research project. It is your responsibility as a researcher to make sure that your project does not breach any legal boundaries and that it adheres to accepted ethical standards. This chapter will cover the following:

- The difference between ethics and morals.
- Ensuring you follow any ethical guidelines drawn up by your institution and research setting, and that you understand your ethical responsibilities as a researcher.
- How to handle research contracts, codes of practice, protocols and the principle of informed consent.
- Where appropriate, taking account of the demands of ethics committees and preparing to meet their requirements.
- Understanding the meaning of ‘confidentiality’ and ‘anonymity’ and how they apply to the context in which you are carrying out your research. The application of these concepts to the online environment.
- Practical considerations about ethics in practice, including a case study that describes how Stephen Waters tackled his first research project and the ethical issues he faced.
- Understanding the concept of intellectual property rights and the ethical and legal obligations relating to the ownership of ideas.

Key terms

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It was once possible to plan and carry out a small piece of research with the permission of a head of department, principal of a college, headteacher of a school or an administrator without having to go through formal channels. The informal route will still apply for many 100-hour studies as long as whoever is in charge is convinced of your integrity and of the worth of your research. In most cases, your supervisor will be aware of any restrictions or legal requirements relating to your research, and will ensure that you have appropriate advice about procedures well before you begin to plan your data collection. However, you may not always be able to rely on your supervisor’s knowledge. For example, if you work in one organization but are supervised somewhere else, the supervisor may not know what your organization’s requirements are. If you live in Singapore or Bahrain but are registered for a higher degree in an Australian or British university, your supervisor may not be familiar with the local rules, so it will be up to you to find

out what is required. In particular, if you have any doubts about the ethics of your proposal, make sure you consult as widely as you can, discuss your concerns and do not proceed if you or your advisers have any misgivings.

The difference between ethics and morals

It is worth distinguishing between ethics and morals, as the two are sometimes confused. *Ethics* are the guiding principles that help an individual or group to decide what is right or wrong. *Morals* are the beliefs of the individual or group as to what is right or wrong. In the context of research, it is important to understand what this means. To guard against both intentional and unintentional harm to participants, it is essential that researchers are ethical in the way they conduct their research, treat participants and write up their research with objectivity. Although the vast majority of researchers set out with these aims in mind, the organizations to which they belong will have their own ethics for how research should be carried out. This may be a university, a funding body, a research organization, a medical company, a public body like the National Health Service (NHS) in England, to name but a few. Let us now consider how applying ethical guidelines to research works in practice.

Research contracts, codes of practice, protocols and the principle of informed consent

There is nothing new about research contracts and ethical guidelines. They have all been used in a variety of ways for many years. They may have been called something different and their use was on a less formal basis than now, but they existed. Lutz, writing about ethnographic research, advises researchers that:

‘... it is undoubtedly necessary for every ethnographer to establish some type of “contract” with the society to be studied. Such a “contract” may include specifications about what records may and may not be examined; where the ethnographer may or may not go, when, and under what circumstances; which meetings may be attended and which are closed; how long the researcher will stay in the field; who (if anyone) has access to field notes, and even who has the right to review and/or approve the ethnography and its analysis prior to publication, or under what circumstances they may or may not be published at all.’

(Lutz 1986: 114)

This is good advice – but it is ‘advice’, not a ‘requirement’. Today, many organizations and professional bodies, including the World Health Organization, the Medical Research Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the British Sociological Association and the General Medical Council to name a few – have gone a long way in formalizing procedures and have produced their own ethical guidelines, research contracts, codes of practice and **protocols**, addressing such issues as deception regarding the purpose of investigations, encroachment on privacy, confidentiality, safety, care needed when research involves children – and much more.

The NHS in England sets out the following definition and outline of its research protocol for its research arm, the Health Research Authority (HRA):

‘The research protocol forms an essential part of a research project. It is a full description of the research study and will act as a “manual” for members of the research team to ensure adherence to the methods outlined. As the study gets underway, it can then be used to monitor the study’s progress and evaluate its outcomes.

No two research protocols will be the same, but they will have a similar structure:

- title
- abstract/summary
- background or rationale of the project
- aims/objectives
- experimental design and methods (including statistical analysis)
- ethical considerations
- benefits of the study

- resources and costs.’

(<http://www.hra.nhs.uk/research-community/before-you-apply/protocol/> [Accessed 4 June 2017])

If you are undertaking research on behalf of a body like the HRA, you will almost certainly follow a similar framework when setting out the purpose and method of your study.

Hart and Bond (1995: 198–201), writing about action research in health and social care, provide examples of different types of codes of practice or protocols that require researchers to ensure that participants are fully aware of the purpose of the research and understand their rights. Some of these are to be read out at the start of an interview, explaining that participation is voluntary and that participants are free to refuse to answer any questions and can withdraw from the interview at any time. Most promise confidentiality and anonymity, but, as will be seen later in this chapter, it may be more difficult to fulfil such promises than you might think. Some suggest that respondents should be asked to sign a copy of the protocol form before the interview begins, indicating that they understand and agree to all the conditions. However, Hart and Bond argue that:

‘It is not sufficient for the interviewer simply to read it [the protocol] out and then expect the respondent to sign . . . The respondent might justifiably feel anxious about signing anything, particularly at an early stage when the interviewer may be unknown to him or her. In our view it would be better to give the respondent time to read and re-read the protocol for himself or herself at his or her own pace, and to negotiate any additions or changes to it with the researcher. We would also recommend that the respondent should have a signed copy of the form as a record.’

(Hart and Bond 1995: 199)

This is sound advice. In my view, respondents should never be expected to sign any protocol form unless they have had time to read and consider the implications. All researchers will be aiming at the principle of **informed consent**, which requires careful preparation involving explanation and consultation before any data collection begins (Oliver 2003: 28–30). If an interview is being conducted online, for example, using Skype or other video conferencing software, the contract should have been sent in advance and the participant’s agreement secured. If a signature is necessary, DocuSign, electronic signature software, can be used to sign and return the contract online.

Bowling (2002: 157) also makes what is to me an important and rarely considered point – namely, that in addition to ensuring that participants know exactly what will be involved in the research, the informed consent procedure ‘reduces the legal liability of the researcher’. In these litigious times, it is as well to be sure you have done everything not only to ensure participants’ rights, but also your own position.

Blaxter and colleagues summarize the principles of research ethics involved in obtaining consent as follows:

‘Research ethics is about being clear about the nature of the agreement you have entered into with your research subjects or contacts. This is why contracts can be a useful device. Ethical research involves getting the informed consent of those you are going to interview, question, observe or take materials from. It involves reaching agreements about the uses of this data, and how its analysis will be reported and disseminated. And it is about keeping to such agreements when they have been reached.’

(Blaxter *et al.* 2006: 158–9)

Ethics committees

Ethics committees play an important part in ensuring that no badly designed or harmful research is permitted. Darlington and Scott consider they have:

‘. . . an important gatekeeping role in all research involving human subjects and are likely to be extra vigilant in their consideration of proposals for research concerning any potentially vulnerable groups of people. Ethics committees have a duty to consider all possible sources of harm and satisfy themselves that the researcher has thought through all the relevant issues prior to granting permission to proceed.’

(Darlington and Scott 2002: 22–3)

Ethics committees have a duty to protect research participants from unwarranted intrusion and

research practices that cross professional and personal boundaries. In this respect, they are gatekeepers and researchers might feel that they are standing in the way of their investigation. Ethics committees are powerful and if your research proposal is rejected, you won't even be allowed to begin the research. They also have a duty to ensure that no poorly planned, damaging or illegal research is allowed to slip through, and their requirements have to be met.

One complaint frequently levelled at ethics and research committees is the time taken to respond to submissions. Bowling (2002: 158) reports that researchers have been known to wait three to six months before receiving approval to proceed. Admittedly these delays have generally related to medical or other health-related topics where requirements are, and no doubt should be, stringent, but few committees are speedy – at least, as far as anxious researchers are concerned. They may meet infrequently but dates of meetings are generally known in advance and researchers will invariably have to submit applications well ahead of those dates. Everything takes time, so be aware of dates and of possible delays.

These requirements and delays may be alarming if you are working on a 100-hour project, but unless you are concerned with medical or health-related research, you may not always be required to go through the ethics committee procedures. However, you will still have to conform to whatever vetting procedures your own organization, department and profession require, so make sure you know what they are.

Ethics and research committees often do their best to fast-track approval procedures for small studies but, even so, they will never rubber stamp a badly prepared submission, and nor should they, so do your best to get your submission right. It's unlikely your first draft will be good enough, so make sure your supervisor sees it, take advice, obtain any guidelines provided by the committees and meet their requirements. Of course, there may be no requirements to submit anything to a committee. It may be quite sufficient if your supervisor gives you approval to proceed, but if you do find you have to wait for approval, there is a lot you can do, such as reading about and around your topic, carrying out a Google search, making notes, trying out different types of indexing and cataloguing systems, and thinking about ways in which your findings might become part of your literature review. You might spend time familiarizing yourself with databases, recording references and, all being well, considering the possible design of some of your proposed data collection instruments. What you can't do is begin to collect data and contact participants before written approval is received.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Not surprisingly, all the 'informed consent' statements and ethical guidelines I have seen mention **confidentiality** and **anonymity**. We all know what they mean, don't we? Not necessarily. Is my 'confidentiality' likely to mean the same as yours? I regret to say that I have come across many broken promises of confidentiality and anonymity in research projects, and imprecision about what is meant by the two terms can result in serious misunderstandings between researchers and participants. So, if you say that participants will be anonymous, then under no circumstances can they be identified. If you promise confidentiality, decide what you mean by that in the context of your investigation.

A useful and practical distinction between *confidentiality* and anonymity can be made. Confidentiality is a promise that a participant will not be presented in the research in any way that could identify them; *anonymity* goes one step further by guaranteeing that even the researcher is unable to identify the participant. An example of the latter is the collection of data from individuals in an organization via an online survey that does not ask for personal details, such as name, address, email address, mobile number, etc.

The implications of confidentiality and anonymity can be significant. I discuss some of the issues in 'Selecting methods of data collection' in Part II of this book, but they are sufficiently important to be raised here also. If you promise anonymity to survey respondents, then that means that no one, *including you*, will know who has completed the survey. As far as I am concerned, this means that no follow-up letters can be sent, no surveys can have coded numbers or symbols so that responses can be identified, and no other sneaky tricks that enable you to identify participants can be used. If you feel you have to have the option of sending follow-up letters, then you must qualify your definition to respondents by saying something along the lines of, 'By "anonymity" in the context of this study, I mean that no one will see (your completed

survey/interview transcript) except me and all surveys and records will be shredded or deleted once the research is completed. Is that what *you* mean?' It is important to consider this question carefully.

There may also be difficulties regarding confidentiality. If in your report you speak about the Director of Resources or the Head of English, you are immediately identifying the individual concerned. If you invent a pseudonym or a code, it might still be easy for readers who are in the know to identify the individual or institution concerned. I recall the anger of one school principal who was guaranteed confidentiality for his school but the way the report was written made it clear to the local community which school it was. No one minds being identified if the report is complimentary, but this particular principal was head of a school in an area of high deprivation that for some years had had a reputation for truancy and indifferent examination results. Great strides had been made and many improvements achieved in the two years before the research but, of course, long-term improvement takes time. His anger centred on the fact that he had been promised that the report would be written in such a way as to make it impossible for an individual school to be identified. His comment was that if any researcher came anywhere near his school in the future, they would be shown the door. So, don't promise anything you can't deliver.

Safeguarding confidentiality and anonymity if disseminating information online

From time to time, a news story breaks about the loss of data – on a mislaid laptop or memory stick, for example, or in confidential documents found in a bin. Most of us have, at one time or another, been rather careless. We might even have been unaware of the existence of rules and regulations relating to the security and dissemination of electronic data – or by any other method come to that. Common courtesy and common sense might have seemed enough, but not any more. Now you must be fully aware of and observe individuals' rights of privacy in any research, in particular with respect to the storage, processing and dissemination of personal data.

As always, first consult the guidelines provided by your department and/or institution. It won't be sufficient to say that your supervisor, or someone else, told you it would be okay if you did that or did not do the other. You must obtain a copy of the guidelines and consult your supervisor if any item is unclear or if you have any queries about the interpretation of any item.

If you have time, particularly if you are involved in postgraduate research, it might also be helpful to consult any available published reports relating to the way information has been used in different cases. You might wish to consult the 1997 report of the Caldicott Committee review of patient-identifiable information. The review was commissioned because of concern about ways in which data about patients was used in the NHS in England and Wales and the use of information technology to disseminate information. This is a very large, thorough and well-conducted review. Eighty-six flows of patient-identifiable information were mapped during the review and sixteen recommendations for the improvement of practice produced. It is easy to see how information stored electronically and transferred to other departments, hospitals or general practitioner (GP) clinics might easily become available to individuals and organizations without any right to that information. The same concern might also be expressed about the way companies, hospitals, universities and individuals disseminate information about employees, students and, in the case of research programmes, participants – unless steps are taken to ensure no individual can be identified. If you have any concerns about maintaining the confidentiality of your participants, I recommend that you read this and more recent reports.

You should also be aware of the relevant sections of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016, and the clauses that relate to individuals' right to privacy and the processing of personal data. The extracts below serve as a useful summary of the clauses most relevant to your research project. However, if you are in any doubt whether the data you collect conforms to the requirements of these pieces of legislation, you should consult them in detail and ask for advice from your supervisor or from the organization whose protocols you are following.

Freedom of Information Act 2000

If you are conducting your research under the protocols of a public body, such as a school or the

NHS, the data you collect on an individual can be requested under the FOI. Although in my experience a request of this type is rare, especially if you have robust procedures in place to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality, you should be aware of a participant's rights under the FOI:

‘The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides public access to information held by public authorities.

It does this in two ways:

- public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities; and
- members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities.

The Act covers any recorded information that is held by a public authority in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and by UK-wide public authorities based in Scotland. Information held by Scottish public authorities is covered by Scotland's own Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

Public authorities include government departments, local authorities, the NHS, state schools and police forces. However, the Act does not necessarily cover every organisation that receives public money. For example, it does not cover some charities that receive grants and certain private sector organisations that perform public functions.

Recorded information includes printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs, and sound or video recordings.

The Act does not give people access to their own personal data (information about themselves) such as their health records or credit reference file. If a member of the public wants to see information that a public authority holds about them, they should make a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 1998 [The General Data Protection Regulation from 2018].’

(<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-freedom-of-information/what-is-the-foi-act/> [Accessed 3 May 2017])

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016

The principles of the GDPR are similar to those of the Data Protection Act (DPA), which it replaced. The main difference is that the GDPR includes an accountability requirement that requires the holder of personal data to show how they comply with the principles of the legislation – for example, by documenting how the data has been collected and where it is stored.

Article 5 of the GDPR places the following obligations on anyone collecting personal information from an individual to protect the data so that it is:

- ‘(a) processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to individuals;
- (b) collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes; further processing for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes shall not be considered to be incompatible with the initial purposes;
- (c) adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary in relation to the purposes for which they are processed;
- (d) accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date; every reasonable step must be taken to ensure that personal data that are inaccurate, having regard to the purposes for which they are processed, are erased or rectified without delay;
- (e) kept in a form which permits identification of data subjects for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which the personal data are processed; personal data may be stored for longer periods insofar as the personal data will be processed solely for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes subject to implementation of the appropriate technical and organisational measures required by the GDPR in order to safeguard the rights and freedoms of individuals;
- (f) processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate technical or organisational measures.’

(<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/principles/> [Accessed 3 May 2017])

Note that clause (b) allows the ‘... further processing for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes’, which will cover the

dissemination or publication of your research study beyond its initial purpose.

If you decide you need more subject-specific information, you might see what your specialist research council has to offer. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), for example, produces invaluable information and guidance about participants' rights and your responsibilities. I mention the ESRC because this is the area in which I work, but your research council might be the Medical Research Council, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, the Natural Environment Research Council, the Arts and Humanities Research Council – or whichever council relates most closely to your own topic.

While the FOI and the GDPR are important, you can be reassured that, if you follow the guidance in this book about keeping a research diary, preserving confidentiality and anonymity, and writing up your research, you will comply with the terms of these Acts governing the use of personal data.



The collection, storage, security and dissemination of data are your responsibility. You must carry out your research within the conditions of the GDPR (http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/reform/files/regulation_oj_en.pdf [Accessed 25 August 2017]) and any other guidelines that relate to the people or organizations you are collecting information about.

Make a note in your **research diary** of any items you wish to return to later, but if you are working on a 100-hour project, then 100 hours, more or less, is all the time you have. Avoid becoming side-tracked by the wealth of research results that a Google search will unearth. Focus on those that are relevant to your research study and bookmark the page or make a note of the URL. Provided that you have used keywords effectively to focus your search, most search results that are relevant will be found on the first page, one of the main reasons why most people do not look beyond it. Search results that are within shaded boxes at the top of the first page and results on the right-hand side of the page are paid advertising (i.e. Google has been paid to rank the advert as high as possible via Google Adwords). Each time someone clicks on these adverts, the business or organization they promote pays Google. This is known as pay-per-click (PPC). These search results may or may not be the most relevant for your research study. You will need to decide this for yourself when you open them to read the content. Even if you are working on a three-year full-time PhD programme, you will only have three years, not the rest of your life, so be ruthless about rejecting search results that don't relate closely to the data or information you are hoping to find in your study. Remember also that an article found in a Google search will have references to related studies – some of those references may be what you are after, so allocate some time to following them up.

Ethical research in practice, the problems of 'inside' research and personal codes of practice

Regardless of the requirements of your institution and of your supervisor, this will still be your research. Even if you are not obliged to conform to required codes of practice or to the demands of ethics or research committees, you will need to satisfy yourself that you have done everything possible to ensure that your research is conducted in a way that complies with your own ethical principles. This is the approach adopted by Stephen Waters, the co-author of this book and formerly a postgraduate diploma student and first-time researcher. At the time of his research study, he was a teacher of English in a high school and decided that he would like to undertake research in his own institution. He was interested in investigating the role of his own Head of English (called Director of English). The Director had expressed interest in and support for the study, and this convinced Stephen that the topic would be worthwhile and would have a good chance of being successfully completed in the time allowed (effectively three months). He decided to produce his own personal code of practice which made clear the conditions and guarantees within which he felt he must work, in order to ensure his own and his school's integrity. The preparation proceeded on the following lines:

- 1 Informal discussion with the headteacher to obtain agreement in principle.
- 2 Refinement of the topic, statement of the objectives of the study and preparation of a project outline.
- 3 Discussion with his tutor and further discussion with the Director of English.
- 4 Minor adjustments made to the project outline and consideration of the methods to be used.
- 5 Formal submission of the project outline to the headteacher, together with names of colleagues he wished to interview and the guarantees and conditions under which the research would be conducted.

The conditions and guarantees were presented as follows:

- 1 All participants will be offered the opportunity to remain anonymous.
- 2 All information will be treated with the strictest confidentiality.
- 3 Interviewees will have the opportunity to verify statements when the research is in draft form.
- 4 Participants will receive a copy of the final report.
- 5 The research is to be assessed by the university for examination purposes only, but should the question of publication arise at a later date, permission will be sought from the participants.
- 6 The research will attempt to explore educational management in practice. It is hoped the final report will be of benefit to the school and to those who take part.

So how did it go? This is what Stephen wrote after the project was completed:

I felt that presenting the guarantees formally was essential. As I was completely inexperienced in research, I had to assure the headteacher that the fieldwork would be carried out with integrity and convince him that he could place his trust in me.

With hindsight, I should have exercised greater caution. Condition 3 could not be met in full since I later found that, although a proper check could be made to verify statements participants had made while being interviewed, there was insufficient time for them to proofread a full draft. Condition 4 was fulfilled but the cost proved to be prohibitive and I decided to eliminate this condition when other case studies were undertaken. This experience certainly alerted me to the danger of promising too much too soon.

It was only when the time drew near for the findings of my research to be disseminated that I became aware of the two areas where the wording of my conditions of research was open to interpretation. The first was that, in promising confidentiality (Condition 2), I had not made it clear what the implications of releasing information would be. As there was insufficient time to produce a draft report, no one could check whether my interpretation of what they had said was fair. In any case, as the headteacher was the only person to hold a written copy of my guarantees, the respondents could only interpret the conditions under which they had agreed to participate from my verbal explanation. In retrospect, it would have been better to have provided a duplicated explanation of the written outline of my intentions. Teachers are busy people and it was unreasonable to assume that they would be able to remember a conversation which had taken place some time before their services were formally required. As it was, whether or not they remembered the guarantees, they were totally dependent on my integrity to present their views in a balanced, objective manner.

More naively, until I was writing the report, I had not realized that identifying people by role may preserve the guarantee of anonymity for an outside reader, but it did not confer the same degree of obscurity for those within the school. Fortunately, my failure to clarify these points did not lead to problems – but it could have done.’

Stephen learnt a great deal from his first experience of conducting an investigation. He felt he had made some mistakes at his first attempt and was uneasy because he had not been able to fulfil all the conditions and guarantees. He had prepared the ground very well but had not fully appreciated the time and effort involved in reporting back to colleagues and in producing copies of reports. He was concerned at his lack of precision in defining exactly what he meant by anonymity and confidentiality, and made quite sure that in subsequent investigations he clarified the position. He found it harder to know what to do about role conflict. He was a full-time teacher and a part-time researcher – a not unusual combination – and on occasions found it difficult to reconcile the two roles. There were definite advantages to being an ‘inside’-researcher. For example, he had an intimate knowledge of the context of the research and of the micro-politics of the institution, travel was not a problem and participants were easily reached. He knew how best to approach individuals and appreciated some of their difficulties. He found that colleagues welcomed the opportunity to air problems and to have their situation analysed by someone who understood the practical day-to-day realities of their task. On the other hand, he found interviewing some colleagues an uncomfortable experience for both parties. As an insider he quickly came to realize

colleagues an uncomfortable experience for both parties. As an insider, he quickly came to realize that you have to live with your mistakes after completing the research. The close contact with the institution and colleagues made objectivity difficult to attain and, he felt, gaining confidential knowledge had the potential for affecting his relationship with colleagues. In the event, this did not seem to be the case, but he could foresee situations where problems might have arisen.

When he had successfully completed his diploma, Stephen was asked whether he felt it had all been worthwhile and whether he had any comments that might be helpful to others who were undertaking a research project for the first time. He wrote as follows:

‘I may have given the impression that my research was so fraught with difficulties that it was counter-productive. If so, it is because I wish to encourage the prospective inside-researcher to exercise caution and to be aware of possible pitfalls. In reality, I enjoyed my research immensely and found that the experience of interviewing a cross-section of teaching staff provided me with a much greater working knowledge of the school’s management practices. Indeed, my research was so absorbing that at times I found myself struggling to keep pace with my teaching commitments. I am certain, even with hindsight, that I could have done little to resolve this dilemma. I can honestly say that my research has made me more understanding of the problems confronting those responsible for running the school and has subsequently provided a great deal of thought about educational issues. If my research had not been practically relevant I would have felt concerned about the extent of my commitment to it. As it was, several recommendations which appeared in my first report have been taken up by the school; my third report on the role of the governing body in the curriculum was placed on the agenda of a governors’ meeting in spring and many colleagues have been complimentary about the content of the case studies in general. If I had to choose one strategy that I would encourage prospective inside-researchers to adopt, it would be to relate the research report to the pragmatic concerns of the institution. That might perhaps help to persuade colleagues that participation in research will be as beneficial to them as it is to the researcher.’

Whether or not you relate your research to the pragmatic concerns of the institution depends on the nature of your task and your own special concerns, but whether you are an inside- or outside-researcher, whether you are full-time or part-time, experienced or inexperienced, care has to be taken not to make promises that cannot be honoured. When Stephen carried out his first piece of research, guidelines, protocols and research contracts were less common than they are today. He had to devise his own guarantees and conditions. Nowadays, most organizations have their own set of rules, not only about the conduct of research, but also about who owns what. Even so, you should still ensure that your research is conducted in a way that conforms to your own ethical principles and code of practice.



Be clear what you mean when promising that your research will be confidential and that participants will be guaranteed anonymity. Don’t assume that these terms have the same meaning for everyone. Even if names or roles of participants are not used in your research report, it may still be possible to work out who you are writing about.

Codes of ethical practice relating to intellectual ownership/property

At one time, relatively little was heard about **intellectual property** or ownership. It was, and still is, customary in scientific and technological departments for supervisors’ names to appear on joint papers, the decision about the positioning of the names having been decided by the supervisor and/or in accordance with common departmental or institutional practice. Where research has been sponsored by government agencies or commercial organizations, institutions generally have an agreement in place regarding intellectual property rights about which students are, or should be, informed at the start of their research, particularly if they have been recruited specifically to carry out some predetermined and pre-planned research. In some cases, students may be required to assign ownership of their intellectual property to institutions, to ensure that any potential patent or marketable findings are not lost, and so it is particularly important that everyone understands what this means. Is what students write the property of the institution, organization or research council that funded it? Is it the property of the researcher alone, or the joint property of the researcher and the supervisor? If jointly owned, whose name comes first in any published work? The question of the positioning of names may seem trivial, but the importance to all concerned

The question of the positioning of names may seem trivial, but the importance to all concerned cannot be underestimated. Universities in particular want their research students, and require their academic staff, to publish. Doing well in research assessment exercises brings not only recognition and prestige but also money – and all three count.

In hospitals and other health-related organizations, institutional property guidelines and rules have been in place for many years, and advertisements that include responsibility for intellectual property are common for individual hospitals and for groups of hospitals, which seems to me not only to indicate the importance of this issue but also its complexity. Even where codes and guidelines are issued, disputes about ownership are still known to rage where students who consider they have done all the work find that their supervisor's and professor's names appear before theirs on published reports of the research.

The various codes of practice, guidelines and policies that are frequently provided by academic institutions and businesses, departments, hospitals and funding bodies should go some way to eliminating unethical practice and misunderstandings over ownership, just as I believe codes and protocols can help to eliminate similar unethical practice in issues relating to informed consent. No codes of ethical practice can resolve all problems, but they do at least clarify some of the major issues in this difficult area – and that is a start.

If you are a first-time researcher, the idea of asking to see your institution's or organization's guidelines relating to intellectual property rights may seem irrelevant. Even so, it might be interesting to find out what the guidelines say. You never know, your research may be outstanding and of sufficient interest to be considered for publication, and it's as well to know what your rights would be in that happy eventuality. It's always a good idea to be prepared for success!



Self-reflection

You may not be able to answer these questions right now but you should come back to them when you are ready. Your answers will help you to make decisions about how you will carry out your research.

- Do you understand the difference between ethics and morals and how ethics applies to research?
- Do you know which organization is responsible for the protocol that will apply to your research?
- Do you know how to get hold of a copy of the protocol?
- How will you guarantee confidentiality and anonymity?
- How will you ensure that the data you collect from participants is protected according to the requirements of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016?
- Will intellectual property rights affect your research? If so, how? Who do you need to consult for advice?
- Do you have an idea of two research projects that you could explore?

Ethics and Integrity in Research Checklist



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|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. It is your responsibility to discover whether any restrictions or legal requirements relate to your research. | If you or your advisers have any doubts about the integrity of your proposal, don't proceed unless the issues can be resolved. | ☒ |
| 2. Many organizations now have ethical guidelines, codes of practice and protocols. | Make sure you know if such guidelines exist and conform to their requirements. | ☒ |
| 3. Always aim for the informed consent | Ensure that your participants' understanding | ☒ |

of your participants.	of 'informed consent' is the same as yours. Remember that they should not be expected to sign a protocol form unless they have had time to read and consider the implications.	☒
4. If all proposed research has to be vetted by the ethics committee in your organization, ensure your submission is well thought out. Find out when the committees meet and allow time for your submission to be considered.	Consult, show your draft to your supervisor, talk to any students who have had their submission to the ethics committee rejected – or approved.	☒
5. Confidentiality and anonymity are generally promised to participants.	However, make sure you know what you <i>and</i> your participants mean by each.	☒
6. You must never break any promises to participants, so watch your language and never promise anything you can't deliver.	Thus if you promise anonymity, you can't send out follow-up letters. No tricks!	☒
7. Make sure you consult the guidelines of your department and institution on the dissemination of electronic information. Try to find time to read any reports that relate to participants' rights to privacy.	Consult the Freedom of Information Act and General Data Protection Regulation, your research council's guidance and any subject-specific reports that relate to individuals' right to privacy with respect to the processing of personal data.	☒
8. Regardless of the requirements of your institution and of your supervisor, this will still be your research, with your name.	Even if you are not obliged to conform to the required codes of practice, or to the demands of ethics and research committees, you should still ensure that your research is conducted in a manner that conforms to your own code of practice.	☒
9. If you are carrying out research in your own institution or organization, do your best to let your colleagues know what you plan to do and how you hope they might be willing to help.	Don't be too ambitious. Consider how much time you are allowed in order to complete the research on time.	☒
10. If you think you might wish to publish some of your findings at some stage, first make sure that you have obtained the permission of the people concerned.	Also make sure you have seen a copy of all codes of practice, protocols and guidelines relating to your organization and profession, in particular, ethical guidelines relating to informed consent and to intellectual property.	☒
11. You may think you own what you have written and thus can do as you like with any research report, article or book.	That might sometimes be possible, but not always, so check before you commit yourself.	☒
12. No codes of ethical practice, protocols, guidelines and policies can solve all your problems, but they will help.	They at least clarify some of the major issues. Don't forget to keep a record in your research diary of books, articles, URLs, names of people you consulted, mobile/cell numbers, email addresses – anything you might need at a later date.	☒