

# APA Ethical Guidelines

## Step One: Institutional (Research) Review Board (IRB or IRRB)

The IRRB reviews all research proposals for ethical violations and/or procedural errors. This board ultimately gives researchers the permission to go ahead with the research or requires revisions.

## Research on Human Subjects

**Informed Consent:** Subjects must know that they are involved in research and give consent. If the participants are deceived in any way about the nature of the study, the deception must not be so extreme as to invalidate the informed consent. What the participants thought they were consenting to and what is actually being done in the study must be similar enough that the informed consent has meaning. Also, researchers must be very careful about potential trauma related to deception.

- Tell them about purpose of the research, expected duration, procedures
- Tell them of the right to decline and withdraw once it has started
- Tell them potential risks and adverse effects as well as potential benefits
- Warn them of the limits of confidentiality
- Tell them the incentives for participation (avoid excessive or inappropriate pay)
- Tell them whom to contact afterwards if they have any questions or concerns

## Deception - Lying

### Cannot Deceive

- Researchers cannot give false statements about their training, experience, or competence
- Researchers cannot give false statements about their institutional affiliations
- Researchers cannot claim degrees as credentials if they are not from an accredited (approved) school

### Deception can only be used if:

- Deception must be approved in advance by an IRB
- Deception must be justified by having a valid scientific, educational, or applied value and no other procedures are available that do not involve deception.
- Deception cannot cause physical pain or severe emotional distress
- Deception in some cases must be mentioned as part of the informed consent procedure if required by the IRB
- Any deception must be explained to participants as soon as possible after research is completed (debriefing) and participants must be allowed to withdraw their data

**Debriefing** Participants must be told the purpose of the study and provided with ways to contact the researcher about study results.

- Researchers must promptly tell participants the purpose of the experiment and the need for deception.
- Any delay in debriefing must be justified and not cause harm
- Researchers when they became aware of harm must take reasonable steps to minimize harm.

- Debriefing must include letting participants know who to contact about results or if they have any questions.

**Coercion** – All research participation must be VOLUNTARY and participants must be informed that they may quit at any time.

- Researchers must tell participants that they have the right to decline and withdraw from the study even after it has started.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality** Psychologists create, and to the extent the records are under their control, maintain, disseminate, store, retain, and dispose of records and data relating to their professional and scientific work in order to (1) facilitate provision of services later by them or by other professionals, (2) allow for replication of research design and analyses, (3) meet institutional requirements, (4) ensure accuracy of billing and payments, and (5) ensure compliance with law.

Participants' privacy must be protected. Their identities and actions must not be revealed by the researchers. Participants have anonymity when the researchers do not collect any data that enables them to match a person's responses with his or her name. In some cases, such as interview studies, a researcher cannot promise anonymity but instead guarantees confidentiality, that the researcher will not identify the source of any of the data.

- Researchers must obtain permission to record participant's voices or record video.
- Researchers must obtain permission before disclosing information.
- Researchers must disguise the identity of participants in any sharing of the results (writing, lectures, and other public media).

Psychologists may break confidentiality if:

- Permission is given by the participants to share their information.
- Clinicians may break confidentiality if there is a serious threat to life or safety of others.

**Risk** Participants cannot be placed at significant mental or physical risk. This clause requires interpretation by the review board. Some institutions might allow a level of risk that other boards might not allow. This consideration is highlighted by Stanley Milgram's obedience studies in which participants thought they were causing significant physical harm or death to other participants.

### **Animal Research**

Groups concerned about ethical treatment of animals are focused on how animals are used in research environments. The APA has strict guidelines about what and how animals can be used in research. Ethical psychological studies using animals must:

- Have a clear scientific purpose that answers a specific, important scientific question.
- Animals are chosen because they are best suited to answer the question presented.
- Researchers must care for animals in a humane way and ensure appropriate consideration of their comfort, health, and treatment.
- Researchers must acquire animal subjects legally. Animals must be purchased from accredited companies. If wild animals must be used, they need to be captured in a humane way.
- Researchers must design experimental procedures that use the least amount of suffering possible. Minimize discomfort, infection, illness, and pain.
- Researchers must perform surgical procedures under appropriate anesthesia and use techniques to avoid infection and minimize pain during and after surgery.

- When appropriate the animal's life is terminated quickly and with minimal pain.

### **Publication**

Scientific research requires publication for other psychologists to evaluate studies and results.

- Psychologists do not fabricate data.
- If psychologists discover significant errors in their published data, they take reasonable steps to correct such errors in a correction, retraction, erratum, or other appropriate publication means.
- Psychologists do not present portions of another's work or data as their own, even if the other work or data source is cited occasionally. (no plagiarism)
- Psychologists take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed or to which they have substantially contributed.
- Principal authorship and other publication credits accurately reflect the relative scientific or professional contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their relative status. Mere possession of an institutional position, such as department chair, does not justify authorship credit. Minor contributions to the research or to the writing for publications are acknowledged appropriately, such as in footnotes or in an introductory statement.
- Except under exceptional circumstances, a student is listed as principal author on any multiple-authored article that is substantially based on the student's doctoral dissertation.
- Faculty advisors discuss publication credit with students as early as feasible and throughout the research and publication process as appropriate.