

MRP AND COURSE-BASED RESEARCH: GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTS

Please Note: Guidelines for informed consent documents for thesis and dissertation research may differ from the guidelines for MRPs and course-based research assignments. Information on informed consent for theses and dissertations is available on the Faculty of Graduate Studies website (www.yorku.ca/grads) as well as the York University Office of Research Services website (<http://research.yorku.ca>).

Graduate students are encouraged to refer to these websites, but please keep the differences in mind if you are doing MRP or course-based research assignments.

All research that is conducted in schools must have administrative consent. Some school boards (e.g., Toronto District School Board) require approval by their own research committees. **It is your responsibility to secure the appropriate consents before beginning your research.**

Principles of Informed Consent

All human participants (e.g., interviewees, research participants, community members, etc) have the right to be informed of:

1. Nature of the research (e.g., goals and objectives, hypotheses.);
2. Research methodology to be used (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, participant observation);
3. Risks and/ or benefits;
4. Their right not to participate, not to answer any questions, and/or to terminate participation at any time without prejudice (e.g., without academic penalty, withdrawal of remuneration);
5. Their right to anonymity and confidentiality;
6. Any other issues of which the participants should be aware, relevant to specific protocols and research projects.

How Informed Consent Is Obtained

The manner researchers use to obtain informed consent varies according to the nature of the research, status of the participants, and culturally-specific norms. Although the principles of informed consent must always be met, there is flexibility with regard to how this consent is obtained. The following three methods are acceptable:

1. **Informed Consent Form:** The traditional informed consent form is the standard for research involving human participants. This form details the principles outlined above and requires the participant's signature.
2. **Informed Consent Letter:** Where the traditional informed consent form is not preferred or is not appropriate (e.g., communications to parents/guardians regarding their child's participation in a research study, interviews with artists or government officials, mass mailed questionnaires), the researcher may wish to seek permission through a letter. This letter must incorporate the principles of informed consent outlined above and usually requires the participant's signature.
3. **Verbal Statement:** In some instances, where written communication is not feasible (children, illiterate adults, certain communities), researchers can relay the principles of informed consent verbally. This requires a written script that contains the elements of informed consent. The script is read to the participant who verbally agrees/does not agree to be a part of the study.

General Points to Consider When Developing Informed Consent Forms

1. Use a language level appropriate to the age and reading level of participants.
2. Use inviting "user-friendly" language. Avoid legalistic terms as much as possible.
3. Use formatting, highlighting and 12 point or greater font size to make consent forms easy to read.

4. Spell check and carefully proofread the final version for readability, correct spelling, and good grammar and punctuation.
5. The consent form should be written in the second person. (Use 'you', not 'I'.)
6. Refer to individuals involved in the study as participants, not subjects.
7. The consent form should be dated and signed by the researcher and the participants.
8. Participants should receive a copy of the consent form for their records.

For Participants Who Are Minors

A parent's or guardian's **consent** is necessary for all participants who are minors (**under the age of 18**). Consent forms should be worded to indicate this. The name of the minor as well as the parent or guardian's capacity should be included.

The **written or verbal assent** of minor participants is to be obtained for children and youth above the age of 6. (See **assent form template**.)

TEMPLATES AND SAMPLE DOCUMENTS

It is impossible to come up with *one* generic model that will suffice for every research endeavour; however, the following small sample of templates and consent documents may be used to guide researchers in the development of their own documents. You may follow FGS template found on their web site: http://www.yorku.ca/grads/policies/informed_consent_form.pdf

or follow the templates below.

Informed Consent Form Template

Although the consent process varies according to each project, the items that follow are usually included. Please note that the statements in each section do not have to be used verbatim (unless noted), nor in the order they are presented below. They should be seen as guides that are to be applied and/or modified as appropriate for your specific study.

You may develop your own form or you may use this template. Make sure, however, that you include all required information.

Date:

Study Title:

Researcher: Name of researcher, contact information (email address and/or phone)

Description of the Research:

Purpose: Explain the purpose of the research in easy to understand language. Provide a brief rationale as appropriate. Be sure that the description of the purpose provided in the consent form is consistent with the purpose as stated in the accompanying documents. Include an invitation to participate.

Why Research Is Being Undertaken: Major Research Project or Course-Based Research Assignments

- **For Course-Based Research Assignments**

Inform the participant/parent/guardian that you are conducting this study as part of the requirements for a graduate course (and give the course title). If you intend to use the data as part of your Thesis, MRP, or dissertation, you must inform the participant (*e.g., I may also use the data I collect from this project for a [select whichever is appropriate: major research project or thesis] as part of the requirements of the Masters of Education degree in Language, Culture, and Teaching from York University.*)

(e.g., *I may also use the data I collect from this project as part of a major research project [or thesis] as part of the requirements of the Masters of Education degree in Language, Culture, and Teaching from York University.*)

- **For MRP**

Inform the participant that you are conducting this study as part of a *major research project* to fulfill the requirements of the Masters of Education degree in Language, Culture, and Teaching from York University.

Invitation to Participate:

- Invite the individual/child to participate in research.
- It may also be appropriate to provide an explanation of why they have been asked to participate. In this case, you may want to include criteria that would exclude the individual/child from participating.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

- Describe the research protocol clearly and concisely in simple lay terms.
- State the expected duration of the participation, including number of sessions or visits, amount of time for each, amount of time required for interviews, etc.
- Provide information regarding audio or video taping and transcription of tapes as appropriate. If the study takes place in a school, and involves use of class time, include a description of what students who refuse participation or whose parents/guardians refuse participation will do when the other students are involved in the study.
- If the study involves activities that are part of the regular class routine, explain that the results for students who do not participate will not be included.
- Indicate that a decision to participate or not participate will not affect marks or class standing.
- If you intend to share the results with the participant/child, explain how you will do so.

Risks and Discomforts:

- Explain that you do not anticipate any risks associated with participation in the research.
- If there are possibilities of risk, harm or inconvenience, they must be described. (*e.g., I do not anticipate any risk in your participating in this study. However, you may become uncomfortable answering some of the questions.*)

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You [Your Child]:

- Describe any reasonably expected benefits to the participant and/or the research community or general public.
- Some research has no direct benefit to the participant, but may have potential benefits to the research community or the general public. Explain this to the participant.
- Discuss also any anticipated payments or reimbursements. (Note that if an individual decides to stop participating must still receive the promised compensation)

Voluntary Participation:

- Explain that participation in the study is completely voluntary. The participant, or a parent/guardian on the participant's behalf, may choose to stop participating at any time.

- Explain that a decision not to volunteer will not influence any relationship with the researchers or any other group associated with the project. (*Specify what that is - - employment, class standing, access to services, marks in a course*) and/or nature of the relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study:

- Explain that the participant (or parent/guardian on the child's behalf) may stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. If individuals decide to stop participating, any information they provide will be destroyed.
- Explain that a decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect any relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project.

If an individual decides to stop participating, they will still be eligible to receive the promised compensation for agreeing to be in the project (as appropriate).

Confidentiality:

- Provide information regarding who will have access to the data (generally limited to the researcher and supervisor).
- Provide information regarding the storage method, length of retention of data (including computer disks, audio and video tapes), and schedule and method for their disposal. Data should be kept in a locked facility. If the data are kept on a computer hard drive, explain how security will be maintained.
- There is no mandated time limit per se regarding data retention. The requirement is simply that you must be specific as to what happens to the data at the end of your project. However, you are not expected to keep data for an indefinite length of time.
- Assure the participant that all information supplied during the research will be held in confidence.
- Explain how confidentiality and anonymity will be assured.

Uses for the Data:

- You must inform the participant/parent/guardian: If you are intending to quote some of the participant's responses in the final paper and/or if you are intending to use the data for papers or publications. Provide assurances, unless specifically indicated in the consent form, the participant's name [and the names of other persons or places the participant mentions] will not appear in any report or publication of the research.

(e.g., I may quote some of your responses to the interview questions in the final paper that is a required part of my research project. As well, I may present part of the findings in other papers and/or publications in classes at York or in other academic and research contexts. No information that identifies you personally will appear in any papers or publications resulting from this study. To keep your identity confidential, I will use pseudonyms to refer to you, your school, and any person to whom you may refer.)

Include this statement regarding confidentiality:

- Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible.

Questions about the Research:

- Include who to contact for questions about the research in general and who to contact for questions about research ethics.
- For questions about the research or about the participant's role in the study: Provide name, email address, telephone number and other contact information for the student researcher and faculty supervisor.

- For questions regarding research ethics: Tell the participant to contact the Graduate Program in Education Human Participants Review Committee at 416-736-5018.

Include this statement regarding ethics approval: This research has been reviewed by the Graduate Program in Education Human Participants Review Committee and approved for compliance on research ethics within the context of the York Senate Policy on research ethics.

Consent Statements and Signatures: There are a variety of consent statements that can be used. It is necessary to provide a place for the participant/parent/guardian to sign their name and date the document. The researcher must sign and date the form as well. Make sure you provide participants with a copy of the signed informed consent form.

I (*insert name of participant/parent/guardian*), consent [for my child] to participate in (*insert study name here*) conducted by (*insert investigator name here*). I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature

Participant

Date

Signature

Principal Investigator

Date

On parent/guardian consent forms, you may include a statement of choice, for example:

- () I consent to my child's participation in this study.
 () I do not consent to my child's participation in this study.

For parents/guardians, you may include a separate section or page for signatures so that they can return the signature page and retain the information in the consent form for their records.

Additional Information for Informed Consent

1. Tapes (audio/video) and Photographs. There are two options if you intend to use audio/video tapes or photographs:
 - 1) If participants are required to consent to be taped or photographed in order to take part in the study, clearly state this in the informed consent form in the study description section;
 - 2) If participants have an option to be taped or photographed and may still take part in the study, clearly explain this in the informed consent form in the study description section, and include a separate signature line for consent to tapes/photographs.
2. Referrals. If the study has the potential to distress participants, you must include referrals (e.g., to counselors or other support personnel) for participants to contact if they feel the need to do so.
3. Research conducted by email and web-based research require informed consent.
 - Provide to participants an online information letter that describes the study and includes the major elements of informed consent and local contact information. The consent form should clearly identify the unit that approved the study (e.g., the Graduate Program in Education Human Participants Review Committee), state the name and email address of the principal investigator and faculty supervisor, and include information on who participants can contact

if they wish to bring a complaint or get further information (e.g., the name and telephone number of the Graduate Program in Education Human Participants Review Committee).

- Participants should be told to print out a copy of the informational letter for their records.
- In the case of e-mail research, such as an e-mail interview or survey, return of the survey may be considered implicit consent.
- In the case of web-based research, informed consent can be "documented" by requiring participants to click on a link or image that (1) indicates acceptance of the consent form, and (2) advances participants to an online web page that is otherwise inaccessible. *Consent forms should inform participants that responses transmitted over the World Wide Web may not be secure, unless the study is using a secure server.*