



Study Information and Informed Consent

Notes for Students

These notes are intended to support students who plan and conduct qualitative research projects as part of their qualitative methods training. They do not replace the discussion and clarification of research ethics issues in teaching and supervision, but complement them.

1. Study Information Sheet

The purpose of the written study information is to briefly describe a research project and to explain important aspects of the project to potential participants. This includes the following points:

- **Who is** conducting the project? The names of the students conducting the research project and their institutional affiliation should be provided; this includes information about the course or department, the university, and the name of the instructor.
- **Topic and objective:** what is the project about?
- **How** will data be collected? Who is being sought, for what period of time, and what exactly does participation entail? (e.g., "We are looking for people who eat a vegan diet and would like to learn more about the background to their dietary preferences in an interview lasting approx. 60-minutes").
- **What** happens to the data? How will they be used? For example, it should be specified that the data will be anonymized and treated confidentially; if necessary, the intention to publish or reuse the data can also be stated (e.g., use in a thesis).
- Researcher **contact details** (campus email/ student phone number if applicable).

Study information sheets should be short and concise in understandable language (max. 1 page). Information that is too detailed is often not read and can be a disincentive. Thematic headings, photos, and images, on the other hand, arouse interest.

Please use your campus email and not your private email: this protects you or your privacy while proving your institutional affiliation.

Study information can be handed out, posted on social media, or emailed, for example, if you want to write to potential interviewees or spread the word through key people.

A study information sheet is NOT signed.

The study information is a good foundation for subsequent informed consent processes.

2. Informed Consent

Informed consent is a basic research ethics principle that is in accordance with data protection law. It requires that potential participants in a study (e.g., a survey or interview study) are adequately informed about the study in order to be able to make a decision about their participation or non-participation.

The implementation of the principle may vary in practice. There are also exceptions. For example, in the case of participant observation in public places (such as the main train station), informed consent from all persons present there is generally neither possible nor necessary. Similarly, when analyzing freely accessible Internet data, informed consent is generally not required. However, in the case of research with data from restricted-access rooms (e.g., chats for which personal registration is required), informed consent is necessary. Here, informed consent should be obtained from the operators of the platforms and, if necessary, also from individual users. In traditional research (e.g., interview studies or group discussions), participants are also asked for informed consent (verbally or in writing - see below).

In qualitative research, informed consent is to be understood as a dialogical process, i.e., participants are repeatedly given the opportunity (e.g., when first approached, before the interview, during the interview, after the interview) to ask questions about the research project. In principle, the consent can be withdrawn by the participants at any time.

Informed consent is usually obtained in writing for interview studies. In ethnographic studies or participant observation, often only the oral form of informed consent is possible (e.g., from key persons). In this case, researchers document in writing (e.g., in field notes or postscripts) how informed consent was obtained.

Please be sure to discuss the appropriate procedure with your instructor or supervisor. Signed consent forms must be kept in a safe place; if necessary, hand them in to your lecturer for safekeeping at the teaching unit. Sample written consent forms can be found, for example, at Qualiservice, University of Bremen, or at the teaching unit. The legal requirements of data protection (DSGVO) must be observed.

3. Confirmation of the Institutional Link

You should always use your LMU campus email for research-related correspondence. This is more secure than private emails and at the same time identifies you as a student or member of the university. In some cases (e.g., if you are writing to an institution, an office or a school), it may be helpful to have an additional official confirmation from the instructor or the teaching unit that you are conducting the research as part of your studies. If you need such a confirmation, please contact the staff of the teaching unit.

Further reading

DGS (2017): Ethik-Kodex der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie (DGS) und des Berufsverbands Deutscher Soziologen (BDS). <https://soziologie.de/dgs/ethik/ethik-kodex> (accessed: 26.01.2022).

Qualiservice, University of Bremen: <https://www.qualiservice.org/de/helpdesk.html#downloads> (accessed: 26.01.22).

von Unger, Hella; Narimani, Petra; M'Bayo, Rosaline (eds.) (2014): Forschungsethik in der qualitativen Forschung. Reflexivität, Perspektiven, Positionen. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.