

# Human Research Ethics: Participant Information Sheets

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## Clear, direct writing leads to true informed consent:

Participant information sheets are provided to participants to help them make an informed decision about their involvement in a research project. While these documents should not replace personal communication between researchers and participants, they should be sufficient for participants to understand what the research is about and what they are being asked to do without needing any additional information. *If participants are not able to understand what the research is about, they cannot truly give informed consent.*

Researchers should follow the information on the University of Adelaide's human ethics webpages and use the participant information sheet template:

<https://www.adelaide.edu.au/research-services/oreci/human/applications/> > Applications > About Participant Information Sheets.

The template has been developed to comply with the guidelines in the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2007\)](#) on the types of information that must be communicated to participants (Sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.2.6).

## Key points to keep in mind when writing your participant information sheet:

- The participant information sheet content should be focussed on participants and written in a *clear, accessible way* that describes what you would like them to do, as if you were explaining it to them in person.
- Use 'second person' narrative throughout to make the information sheet more *personal*. Second person narrative is used to address information to the reader. It involves the use of pronouns "you", "your", "yours". For instance rather than stating 'Participants are invited because...' outline 'You are invited to participate because...'
- Use *plain language* throughout as participants will not have the same understanding about your research as you do. Avoid using academic terminology or technical language.

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- Use *consistent language*. For example, if conducting a survey or questionnaire pick one term to describe the activity and use this throughout.
- Correct spelling, grammar and expression is important. Participant information sheets are professional documents that represent you as a researcher, and also The University of Adelaide.
- *Avoid overstating* the benefits of the research as this can raise unrealistic expectations. Benefits of the research also cannot be guaranteed. Describe any benefits as potential benefits. Use language that emphasises possibility, such as ‘this project *may* result in...’ and then describe the benefits.
- If your research involves more than one participant group (for example students and teachers), the use of separate participant information sheets is recommended. This way the information provided and language used can be tailored to the participants’ individual involvement.
- If your research involves multiple research activities, these should each be clearly described and participants informed as to whether their involvement is being requested for one or all of the activities. It may be clearer and more practical to use separate participant information sheets for each of the different activities.
- Participant information sheets should be clearly labelled to indicate which participant group and/or participant activity they relate to.
- Ask someone outside of the research team to proofread your participant information sheet, and to explain their understanding of the process to you. They should be able to understand what the research is about and what they are being asked to do by reading the information sheet. If they cannot, further details may be required in the information sheet or the content revised to make it clearer. The [Writing Centre](#) is available to help students with writing participant information sheets.

***Remember: true informed consent is only possible if your participants thoroughly understand what it is they are being asked to do, and your participant information sheet is key to this understanding.***