Guidance on obtaining participants’ consent orally

It is good practice to make sure participants are able to make an [informed](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/consent) decision about whether or not to take part in a research project. It is also important for the researcher to keep a record of participants’ informed consent. While in most cases a consent form is used for this purpose, in some situations it may be preferable to obtain participants’ consent orally rather than in writing (e.g. literacy issues, political issues, certain types of elite interviewing, ethnographic studies or if the interview will be conducted online).

Preparing an oral consent script in advance should help you, or the person seeking consent, make sure that participants are provided with the information they need in order to make an informed decision about participating. The following is a general guide to writing an oral consent script. The template below may be used as a starting point but should be modified so that it is appropriate to the nature and context of the research. Researchers should also follow relevant guidance from [Professional Associations](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/guidance) and adopt CUREC [Best Practice Guidance](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/bpg) in planning their research. The recommended script wording is intended for use in research involving competent adult participants or [competent youths](http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/bpg) only. For children under 16, please refer to the template Assent form associated with [Approved Procedure 25](http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/ap#collapse3-1) instead.

Please note that using a script (and using the associated consent templates) may not necessarily be appropriate for all types of research, e.g. ethnographic research, or where consent is obtained in an emergency setting, or with elite interviewing). You should still follow relevant guidance from [Professional Associations](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/guidance), CUREC [Best Practice Guidance](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/bpg) and provide details in your CUREC application as to how you will negotiate and obtain consent as appropriate from participants in the research. Student researchers should also discuss with their supervisors what the most appropriate approach will be before applying for ethical review.

You should submit the wording you will use for your oral consent script as part of your ethics application if you intend to use this approach in your project.

An oral consent process can take the form of:

* a [written information sheet](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/consent#collapse281091) provided to participants, plus a short oral script to gain consent from the participant, **or**
* a full oral script which captures both the information and consent stages. Below, a sample oral script is provided, with suggestions as to which sections may be omitted for a briefer version marked by an asterisk (**\***). The asterisked sentences could be removed provided that a full written information sheet was given to participants in good time before the oral consent stage.

How you arrange your oral process depends on how you will encounter your participants (e.g. email, phone, an on-the-street-meeting by chance). The participant should be given a reasonable amount of time to think about whether to consent

Further information on written and oral informed consent is available at <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/consent>.

## Oral Information Giving and Consent Seeking Process

You should make sure that there is a record of the consent process, though the best way to do this will depend on the nature of the project and the reason for obtaining consent orally. For example:

* Audio recording the consent process. You should seek the participant’s consent to audio record the consent process first. The recorder should be PIN-protected (particularly for sensitive data). This is only recommended if you are already recording other aspects of the research, e.g. an interview. Otherwise, it is unnecessary collection of personal data.
* Completing a [Record of Consent Form](http://researchsupport.web.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/researchsupport/documents/media/template_researcher_record_of_oral_consent.docx).
* You could complete a copy of the consent form on behalf of the participant. This could then be signed, scanned and emailed to the participant so that they have a copy.

## Template oral consent script

The following template should be adapted to the research project and the participants. Where an information sheet is provided to participants in advance, and you are satisfied that they have read and understood this information to make a fully informed decision, certain sections may be removed for a briefer script – these are marked by an asterisk (**\***).

**Introduction** (**\***): Hello [again], my name is [x]. I’m currently [doing my undergraduate degree/ a DPhil/ Masters student/ a researcher] at the University of Oxford in [Department/ Faculty].

* **Project details and aims**: In my study, I want to investigate [brief project aims]. I’m interested in [briefly describe/ recap topic and type of person or persons which make up planned research population]. If you choose to be a part of this project, here is what will happen:
* **Interviews/ surveys/ tasks description**: I will [have a conversation with you/ give you a survey/ task (add length in minutes/ hours, location, any follow-up interviews)] where I will ask a range of questions about [provide details – include greater detail about any topics that could be upsetting or controversial].
* **Data sharing/ access/ confidentiality**: The [answers/ data] you give will form the basis of my [undergraduate essay/ MPhil/ DPhil thesis/ research publication].

(**\***) On a practical level, the [researcher and/ or e.g. research team, supervisor, collaborator/ translator/ transcriber…] will have access to [personal/ sensitive/ research data].[[1]](#footnote-1) [explain confidentiality/ security arrangements].

* **Data storage**: I will store your data safely and confidentially [explain how/ add location] and will keep the research data for [x] years after publication.[[2]](#footnote-2)

(**\***) [If applicable] I would like to be able to use your de-identified data in future studies, and to share this data with other researchers.

* [**Audio/ video recording**](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/covid-19/data)**/ photos/ notes**: With your permission, I would like to [make an audio recording of our discussion to make sure I’m getting an accurate record of the interview/ photograph you/ video record you]. Instead of recording you, I can take notes in my notebook. Which would you prefer?
* **Keeping contact details:** I would also like your permission to keep your contact details so that I can re-contact you to clarify information you gave me in your interview.
* **How identifiable you will be**: [Explain how easy it will be for them to be identified from any publications or other research outputs.]
* **Risks**: The following risks are involved in taking part [list risks, e.g. an interview could cover sensitive issues or be time-consuming]. You might find aspects of this interview [difficult/ distressing/ other] as I’ll be asking for your opinions about [explain why]. In order to reduce any potential risks, I will [add how you will mitigate risks – e.g., you could make it clear that they can choose not to answer any questions they don’t want to, pause for a break or stop the interview altogether].
* **Rights**: You don’t have to take part; you can ask me any questions you want before or throughout; you can also withdraw at any stage of the [interview/ other activity] without giving a reason. After the [interview/ other activity] you can withdraw your information/ data until [(dd/mm/yy) (i.e. before it is anonymised; before publication)].
* **Publication plans**: The project may/ will be published in a(n) [thesis/ dissertation/ academic journal/ academic book/ academic website. Describe any other research outputs such as conference presentations, videos, reports, or creative works.] [For doctoral students or other qualifications or research where a thesis, dissertation or other research output needs to be published in the Oxford University Research Archive: A copy of my thesis/ dissertation, will be deposited online in the University archives.][[3]](#footnote-3)
* **Complaints/ concerns procedure**: If you have any complaints or concerns please feel free to contact me. My phone number is [mobile number – give local number if available or a research mobile phone, not your private mobile]. You can also reach me at [Oxford University email address, not private email address].
* **Ethics review details**: This research project has been reviewed and approved by an Oxford University ethics committee. The ethics reference is [**Rxxxxx**]. If, after contacting me with any concern, you’re still unhappy and wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the University of Oxford Research Governance, Ethics & Assurance (RGEA) team at [rgea.complaints@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:rgea.complaints@admin.ox.ac.uk). [For applications reviewed by the Oxford Tropical Research Ethics Committee (OxTREC), please insert the contact details for the local ethics committee which has reviewed your study].
* (**\***) **Data Protection statement**: The University of Oxford is responsible overall for ensuring the safe and proper use of any personal information you provide, solely for research purposes. Further information about your rights to information you provide is available from the University’s data protection website. [If research participants ask for more information, this is available here <https://compliance.web.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>].
* **Questions/ concerns**: Do you have any questions?
* Do you give your permission for me to interview you/ take your photo/ video/ audio record you?
* [If applicable] Do you give permission for me to re-contact you to clarify information?
* Do you give me permission to quote you directly [using your real name/ without identifying you]?
* [If collecting ‘[special category](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/faqs-glossary/glossary#S)’ or sensitive[[4]](#footnote-4) personal data]: Are you happy for me to collect [detail sensitive personal data which may be collected]?
* Are you happy to take part?

Ok, thanks, let’s start.

1. Please follow CUREC’s [Best Practice Guidance on Data collection, protection and management](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/bpg) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This should be a minimum of three years after publication according to [University Policy](http://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/university-of-oxford-policy-on-the-management-of-research-data-and-records/), or longer depending on [funder requirements](http://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/funder-requirements/). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Oxford students following D.Phil., M.Litt. and M.Sc. (by Research) courses should refer to <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ora/oxford_etheses>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Please note that ‘[special category](https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/faqs-glossary/glossary#S)’ or sensitive data is defined in the General Data Protection Regulation as information about an individual’s: race; ethnic origin; politics; religion; trade union membership; genetics; biometrics (where used for ID purposes); health; sex life; or sexual orientation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)