**Common Issues and How to Avoid Them**

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**IMPORTANT:**

Before you begin a new ethics application to the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB), first consider whether it is necessary to submit a new application. If you have CFREB approval for a very similar study you may only need to submit a Modification (created in IRISS). A Modification describes how your new research will differ from your previously approved research and is much simpler to complete. For example, if you are administering a different questionnaire, recruiting from a different location, making minor changes to your methodology, or recruiting different participants, a Modification may be adequate. Contact the CFREB for advice if you suspect that you can submit a Modification instead of a new application (cfreb@ucalgary.ca).

1. **General**
   a) Are you familiar with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (the TCPS) and how it relates to your research? The TCPS can be found online at: [www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/](http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/)
   b) Be sure the University of Calgary logo appears on all printed materials (consent forms, recruitment notices, etc.).
   c) Be sure to use the CFREB consent form template. Researchers should use the template unless there are compelling reasons not to. The section headings on the template (e.g., “What Happens to the Information I Provide?”) address questions that must be explained to participants and the template organizes this information in a way that significantly facilitates the review process. The template can be found on the CFREB web page: [www.ucalgary.ca/research/ethics/cfreb](http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/ethics/cfreb)
   d) Be aware of the distinction between “course-based research” and “research in courses”. There is an option in the IRISS application to indicate that your research is “course-based research”, but this is applicable in the minority of circumstances. The TCPS definition of “course-based research” (Article 6.12) indicates that the intent of the activity is to provide students with exposure to the research methods/professional activities in their field of study (e.g., interviewing techniques, survey construction and administration, simple observational activities). Such pedagogical activities are normally required of students as part of their undergraduate or graduate training. In many cases the review of course-based research is carried out at the Department or Faculty level (e.g., the Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Committee) and not by the CFREB, because it is not considered to be genuine research. On the other hand, if you are recruiting participants from your courses for the purposes of an genuine research project (i.e., the data is being collected with the intent to publish and present the findings), then this activity does not qualify as “course-based research” and is instead an example of “research in courses”; in these situations you should not identify your research as “course-based research” in your application. (Note that there are special considerations for
conducting research in courses, which are described in Section 2g below.) When in doubt, contact the CFREB for clarification (cfreb@ucalgary.ca).

e) If your proposed research involves deception, be sure to read Chapter 3 (Article 3.7) of the TCPS (Research Involving Partial Disclosure or Deception). You will need to address all of the principles covered in Article 3.7 in your application. Research using deception is carefully reviewed by the CFREB (as stipulated by the TCPS) with these principles in mind.

f) If your study has several phases and procedures, you can submit a research protocol document that outlines and summarizes this information (upload the document to the “Protocol” section of the Documentation page, section 6.0). This will facilitate the review of your application.

g) If your study will be conducted outside of Alberta or Canada, the TCPS has several regulations that are applicable. The TCPS is clear that 1) the CFREB is responsible for the ethical conduct of research undertaken by its faculty, staff, or students, regardless of the location where the research is conducted, and 2) that both the CFREB and the research ethics board (REB) in the research location should conduct an ethics review:

An institution is responsible for the ethical conduct and ethical acceptability of research undertaken by its faculty, staff or students regardless of where the research is conducted. Thus, for a Canadian research institution, review of the ethical acceptability of the research by the institution’s REB is required, in addition to ethics review by an REB or other appropriately constituted review body with jurisdiction at the research site elsewhere in Canada, or outside Canada, if any. (Article 8.3)

Research conducted under the auspices of a Canadian research institution and conducted outside its jurisdiction, whether elsewhere in Canada, or outside Canada, shall undergo prior research ethics review by both 1) the REB at the Canadian institution under the auspices of which the research is being conducted; and 2) the REB or other responsible review body or bodies, if any, at the research site. (Article 8.3)

Please confirm in your application that you will submit your application to a local REB for approval, or provide evidence that you have already done so. In your consent form, please identify the local REB contact who can respond to participant’ concerns or complaints (see the CFREB consent form template for an example of such language).

h) If your research includes administering an American-based online survey (e.g., Survey Monkey; Qualtrics), a reference to the USA Patriot Act is required in the consent form. Contact the CFREB for details (cfreb@ucalgary.ca).

2. Recruitment
a) Be sure that all of your recruitment materials (including letters of invitation) indicate that the research has been approved by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (i.e., “The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study”).

b) Be sure that your recruitment materials provide an accurate and reasonably complete description of the tasks/activities that participants will be asked to perform. Participants cannot make an informed decision to sign up for a study unless they understand what the study is about and what their participation will involve. There should never be any “surprises” when a participant arrives for a study. This is especially critical if you are asking sensitive and/or potentially distressing personal questions of prospective participants—your recruitment materials should make this very clear.

c) If you will be video recording and/or audio recording participants, this must be stated explicitly in the recruitment materials.
d) If participation in the study involves any type of group interaction (focus groups, discussion groups, etc.), this must be stated explicitly in the recruitment materials.

e) If you will be asking participants sensitive personal questions this must be stated explicitly in the recruitment materials. Examples of questions or the themes of questions will be necessary (e.g., “You will be asked questions about your use of illegal drugs”).

f) If you are paying participants for their participation you should indicate this in recruitment materials. Conversely, if there is a cost to participate, this must be stated.

g) Are you proposing to recruit participants from one of your courses? Several sections of the TCPS make it clear that this dual role (researcher/instructor) should be avoided (e.g., Article 3.2). Due to potential for the perception of coercion and conflict of interest, the CFREB must review such research carefully. See the document “Special Ethical Considerations for Research in University Courses” on the CFREB web page for more information.

h) Are you proposing to recruit employees from a workplace? The TCPS (Article 3.1) requires that researchers be sensitive to the recruitment context:

The approach to recruitment is an important element in assuring voluntariness. In particular, how, when and where participants are approached, and who recruits them are important elements in assuring (or undermining) voluntariness. In considering the voluntariness of consent, REBs and researchers should be cognizant of situations where undue influence, coercion, or the offer of incentives may undermine the voluntariness of a participant’s consent to participate in research.

In general, supervisors should never be involved in the recruitment of employees for a study, because of the potential for the supervisor’s authority to infringe on the voluntariness of consent. Keep in mind that these considerations are also applicable to an academic workplace—faculty members may feel obligated to participate in a study if a Dean or department head is involved in the recruitment.

i) If you are proposing to recruit employees from a workplace, be clear in your recruitment documents what the role of the employer is in your research. Is the employer funding or sponsoring the research? Will you be sharing the results with the employer? Will any personal identifying information be shared with the employer? Be sure to include such information in the recruitment and consent documents (e.g., “Boston Pizza is not funding or sponsoring this study and has had no involvement in the study design. The researchers will provide a final report to Boston Pizza but they will not be sharing any personal identifying information. Your employer will not know whether you have chosen to participate in this study or not.”)

j) If you are using email to send recruitment information to prospective participants, whenever possible send your consent form in the same email or in a follow-up email. This ensures that participants are fully informed as to the purpose of the research and what they will be asked to do. If your research includes interviews, for the same reasons it is wise to send participants the actual interview questions prior to the interview (if this is feasible). This ensures fully informed consent. When recruiting via email, it is recommended that no more than two reminder emails be sent out when there is no response.

k) If you are recruiting children in schools in most situations you will need to obtain signed consent from a child’s parent or guardian. To facilitate this process, be sure to provide parents/guardians with copies of the child’s assent/consent form and other relevant information (e.g., a written description of the purpose of the study; questionnaires that the child will be asked to complete).
3. **Informed Consent**

a) Your consent form must provide an accurate and reasonably complete description of the tasks and activities that participants will be asked to perform. Remember that participants cannot provide truly informed consent unless it is clearly explained to them what they will be asked to do.

b) If you will be asking participants sensitive personal questions, this must be stated explicitly in your consent form. Examples of the types of questions that will be asked are usually necessary, unless you choose to indicate the themes that will be addressed (e.g., “Your experiences with depression”; “The financial problems created by your gambling”; “Your sexual fantasies”; “Your opinions of same-sex relationships”).

c) Be sure that your consent form is written to be appropriate for your participants. If your participants are children or adolescents, the consent form language must be age-appropriate. If your participants are adults (or the parents of child participants), keep in mind that it is likely they will not be experts in your field of research, and therefore the text in the consent form should be written to inform and educate (especially the section “Purpose of the Research”).

d) If you will be making video or audio recordings of participants this must be stated explicitly in your consent form. If it is possible for an individual to participate in your study without being video or audio recorded, you should provide a checkbox in your consent form asking for permission to video/audio record; this provides participants with the option to decline this request. On the other hand, if it is not possible for an individual to participate in your study without video/audio recording, then you should state this very explicitly in the recruitment materials and the consent form and remove these checkbox options from your form.

e) Be sure that the consent form explains what will happen to any video/audio recordings that are collected. How will it be stored? Who will see it? Will it ever be shown in public? When will it be destroyed?

f) If you are administering a questionnaire or survey, be sure to indicate in the consent form (and on the questionnaire/survey) that participants are free to decline to answer any and all questions.

g) If you will be obtaining oral consent for participation (in person or over the telephone), please refer to the document “Obtaining Oral Consent from Research Participants” on the CFREB webpage.

h) Your consent form should indicate what will happen to the data from participants who chose to withdraw from your study before completing it. The TCPS is clear that the expectation is that the data from such participants will be destroyed. If this is not possible or practical (e.g., because there is no way of separating the participant’s data from other participants’ data), please explain this in your application and your consent form.

i) If a participant withdraws from your study before completing it, and participants are paid for their participation, you should arrange for a partial payment for participants who withdraw, and this should be clear in the consent form. A partial payment of 10%-50% of the full payment (depending on the size of the full payment) is typical to compensate the participant for their time.

j) If your study involves deception, you need to create a second consent form for participants to sign (using the consent form template), one that fully describes the nature of the deception. This second consent form allows your participants to withdraw from your study after full disclosure has been made, a decision that must be respected. Be sure to include this second consent form with your IRISS application.

k) Always be clear to participants that their participation in the research is voluntary and that they can decline to participate in any and all parts of the research and decline to answer any questions.
4. **Debriefing**

a) If your study involves deception you must provide a full explanation for why the deception was necessary to carry out the research. For research that involves deception, the debriefing is especially critical. It must be used to educate the participant about your research and the methodological necessity of deception. The debriefing must also correct any erroneous information that may have been provided to participants in your study. As stated in the TCPS, “Where partial disclosure or deception has been used, debriefing is an important mechanism in maintaining the participant’s trust in the research community.” The TCPS also indicates:

> The researchers should give details about the importance of the research, the necessity of having to use partial disclosure or deception, and express their concern about the welfare of the participants. They should seek to remove any misconceptions that may have arisen and to re-establish any trust that might have been lost, by explaining why these research procedures were necessary to obtain scientifically valid findings. (Article 3.7)

Research using deception is reviewed by the CFREB (as stipulated by the TCPS) with these points in mind.

b) If your study has the potential to identify individuals who are upset, distressed, or disturbed, you should describe the arrangements made to assist these individuals. For example, you can provide information (e.g., a hand out) listing counseling resources available to participants if they decide they want to discuss their experiences with a professional.

For more information on any of the points above, please contact an Ethics Resource Officer at cfreb@ucalgary.ca.

Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board