



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH  
**informatics**

# Ethics – When, Why, How?

Informatics Project Proposal  
The University of Edinburgh

Alexandra Birch

# The Informatics ethics committee



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# Agenda

- Why ethics?
- What needs ethics approval?
- How do I apply?
- What happens after I have applied
- Q&A

# Why ethics?

## AP WAS THERE: Black men untreated in Tuskegee Syphi

By JEAN HELLER May 10, 2017



In this 1950's photo released by the National Archives, men included in a syphilis study pose for a photo in the segregated South withheld treatment for unsuspecting men infected with a sexually transmitted disease and dissect their bodies afterward. It was finally exposed in 1972. (National Archives via AP)

### Panel Judgments on Charge

1. In retrospect, the Public Health Service's Untreated Syphilis in the Mississippi Delta study, Alabama, was ethically unjustified. The study made in 1932 is made with the advantage of hindsight sharpened over some forty years, concerning an activity in a different age with different social standards. Nevertheless one fundamental ethical rule is that a person should not be subjected to avoidable risk of death or physical harm unless he freely and intelligently consents. There is no evidence that such consent was obtained from the participants in this study.

## Facebook emotion study breached ethical guidelines, researchers say

Lack of 'informed consent' means that Facebook experiment on nearly 700,000 news feeds broke rules on tests on human subjects, say scientists

**Poll: Facebook's secret mood experiment: have you lost trust in the social network?**



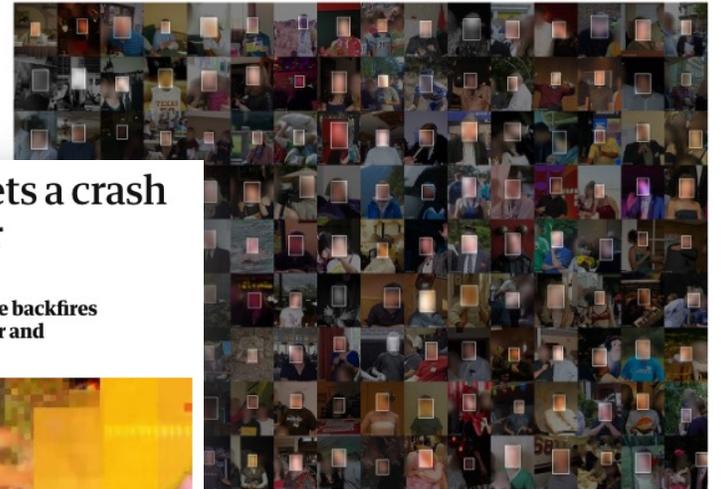
The results found that users' emotions were influenced by what they saw on the site, a phenomenon called 'emotional contagion'. Photograph: PA Photo

NEWS FEATURE | 18 November 2020

## The ethical questions that haunt facial-recognition research

Journals and researchers are under fire for controversial studies using this technology. And a *Nature* survey reveals that many researchers in this field think there is a problem.

Richard Van Noorden



Images which scraped online photos. Images are obscured to protect people's privacy. Credit: Adam Harvey/megapiwels.cc based on Shlitzman et al based on the 'Yahoo Flickr Creative Commons 100 Million' data set and licensed under Creative Commons

## Tay, Microsoft's AI chatbot, gets a crash course in racism from Twitter

Attempt to engage millennials with artificial intelligence backfires hours after launch, with TayTweets account citing Hitler and supporting Donald Trump



Tay uses a combination of artificial intelligence and editorial written by a team including improvisational comedians. Photograph: Twitter

Microsoft's attempt at engaging millennials with artificial intelligence has backfired hours into its launch, with waggish Twitter users teaching its chatbot how to be racist.

Researchers wrote to the publisher Wiley to "respectfully ask" that it not publish the paper. The study, published in 2018, had trained algorithms to recognize faces of people, a predominantly Muslim minority ethnic group in China, of Tibetan ethnicity<sup>4</sup>.

# Good ethical practice

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### Participant Information Sheet

Project title:	[redacted]
Principal investigator:	[redacted]
Researcher collecting data:	[redacted]
Funder (if applicable):	[redacted]

This study was certified according to the Informatics Research Ethics Process, RT number [redacted]. Please take time to read the following information carefully. You should keep this page for your records.

**Who are the researchers?**  
[redacted]

**What is the purpose of the study?**

The study will carry out participatory design of an online course on data visualisation targeted at professionals (i.e., with work experience beyond study). The overall aim is to ensure the course meets the needs of target participants. We aim to identify key learning goals of a range of participants based on their immediate and future needs for data visualisation at work, and current capability for working with and creating value via data visualisation. The study aims also to identify potential stumbling blocks to study in what will be a relatively short, intense period alongside work, to ensure effective, accessible support is provided to students. This will help us identify and manage factors likely to negatively impact performance or lead to dropout, and increase, rather, adoption of the skills acquired in data visualisation beyond the course.

**Why have I been asked to take part?**

Participant information sheet

Please tick yes or no for each of these statements.

- I agree to being audio recorded.  Yes  No
- I agree to being video recorded.  Yes  No
- I allow my data to be used in future ethically approved research.  Yes  No
- I agree to take part in this study.  Yes  No

Name of person giving consent	Date dd/mm/yy	Signature
<hr/>		
Name of person taking consent	Date dd/mm/yy	Signature
<hr/>		



Consent form

## Edinburgh Data Management Plan Template

This template has six sections based on the University of Edinburgh Research Data Management Policy (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/is/research-data-policy>). For each question there is an example question (taken from existing shared plans) and basic University of Edinburgh guidance.

### 1. Data Capture

**What data will be generated or reused in this research?**

**Guidance**

Here you should give a short description of the data you will create, or any third-party data that you plan to reuse.

Consider the types of data your research will generate, for example qualitative survey data, computational models, statistics, measurements, text, images, audio visual data, or samples.

Also consider the longevity of the file formats that you choose. Using open standards so your data can be read by a variety of software makes it easier to preserve and share with others.

If you are reusing third-party data, make sure you have sought appropriate permissions to allow for any data sharing or preservation plans.

**Example answer**

“Every two days, we will subsample *E. affinis* populations growing under our treatment conditions. We will use a microscope to identify the life-stage and sex of the subsampled individuals. We will document the information first in a laboratory notebook and then copy the data into an Excel spreadsheet. For quality control, values will be entered separately by

Data management plan

# What needs ethics approval?

## Level 0: No application required

- Involves no human participants
- Involves no personal data
- Involves none of the points mentioned under Level 2
- You can still submit an ethics application if your funder / supervisor / ... requires it

## Level 1: Reviewed by one member

- Involves human participants or personal data
- Involves none of the points mentioned under Level 2

## Level 2: Reviewed by two members

- Involves collecting sensitive personal data
- Issues with regards to data protection good practice (e.g. anonymisation and secure storage of personal data)
- Some research without explicit participant consent (e.g. social media data)
- Significant potential for harm – physical or psychological
- Vulnerable participants (e.g. children, disabilities, stigmatised minorities)
- Targeting developing countries (incl. India, China)
- For more, see <https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/research/ethics-and-integrity/ethics-levels>

# What needs ethics approval?

## Level 3: Reviewed by full committee

- Involving extremely vulnerable populations
- Conducted in war zones
- Potentially serious implications for participant welfare

## Level 4: Escalated for review at College

- Intention to observe an illegal activity
- Use of materials which are the subject of legal action against the University

These levels are very rare – talk to use before considering doing such research!

# What needs ethics approval?

- Consider a research project in your area, e.g.
  - Your dissertation project
  - An influential paper in your field
  - A hypothetical project

It has to have human participants or personal data

- Think about the research methods
  - Will you need existing data? What kind of data?
  - Will you collect new data?
  - Will you have human participants / users / data created by or about humans?

# Things to consider: Human participants

- Are you collecting personal data?  
e.g. names, student numbers, email addresses, IP addresses, audio/video recordings...
- Are you collecting *sensitive* personal data?  
e.g. race, religion, political opinions, sexual orientation, ...
- Do you comply with GDPR? (don't know? take the training!)
- Can the participants understand their rights and provide informed consent? (e.g. are they aged 15 or older?)
- Conflicts of interest

# Participant Information Sheet

Template at <https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/inf-researchservices/SitePages/Ethics-resources.aspx>

- Who is conducting the study?  
That's you!
- Who is responsible?  
That is your supervisor!
- Who can people ask if they have questions?  
That's the Ethics panel of the School that has approved the study, or an external expert
- Can people stop and withdraw from the study at any time?  
The only correct answer is YES\*

\* until you have anonymised the data so that it would no longer be possible to identify the participant

# Participant Information Sheet

- Why are you doing this study?  
For your dissertation project. If your supervisor will also use the data for their research, you must say so, and you must explain what that research is
- What will the study involve?  
Describe what they will be asked to do, and how long the study will take
- What are the risks and benefits?  
„furthering science“ is too vague
- What will happen to their data?  
How will it be analysed? Where will it be presented? How will it be stored? Who will have access?

# Things to consider: Personal data

- If you get data from other sources, do you have permission?
- Does your intended use comply with terms of use?

Relevant for all who work with speech corpora and language data!

- Treat any data carefully and confidentially
- Only collect and process the data you need
- Is it possible for people to be identified? What would be the harm?

# Other things to consider

- If you are working with industry partners or academics outside Informatics, is there an agreement about their / your role?
- Has the research been reviewed in other countries, if (some of) it takes place outside the UK?
- Who will benefit from the research? Will you make findings available to participants?

# How do I apply?

## Ethics application via online form

This is the online form, which has replaced the old Word forms. Please use it for all staff and student projects. Your data is stored on a server in the EU, following GDPR rules. The Principal Investigator will receive a copy of the form.

If you are submitting more than one ethics application, please wait to receive the automated confirmation of receipt for your first application before submitting the next.

Once submitted, the panel will aim to reply within 10 working days.

 [Informatics ethics form](#)

## PDF version of form

Here is a PDF version of the form. This is for your information only. Don't worry if it looks long. In the online version, the form branches extensively, so that you don't need to complete parts which are not relevant for you and your project.

 [Informatics ethics form - PDF reference \(93.95 KB PDF\)](#)

**You must complete this form online. We do not accept handwritten or edited versions of this PDF.**

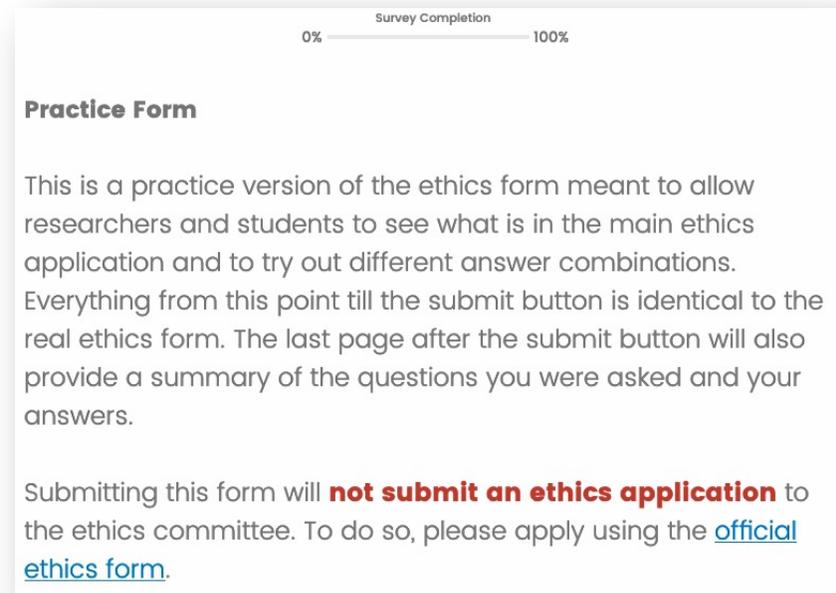
## Practice version of form

Here is a **practice version** of the form. **This form is for practice and reference ONLY. Submitting an application via the practice form does NOT submit an application for review by the Ethics committee. You must use the Informatics ethics form above to submit your actual application.**

 [Practice version of ethics form](#)

<https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/inf-researchservices/SitePages/Ethics-procedure.aspx>

# How do I apply?



0% ————— Survey Completion ————— 100%

**Practice Form**

This is a practice version of the ethics form meant to allow researchers and students to see what is in the main ethics application and to try out different answer combinations. Everything from this point till the submit button is identical to the real ethics form. The last page after the submit button will also provide a summary of the questions you were asked and your answers.

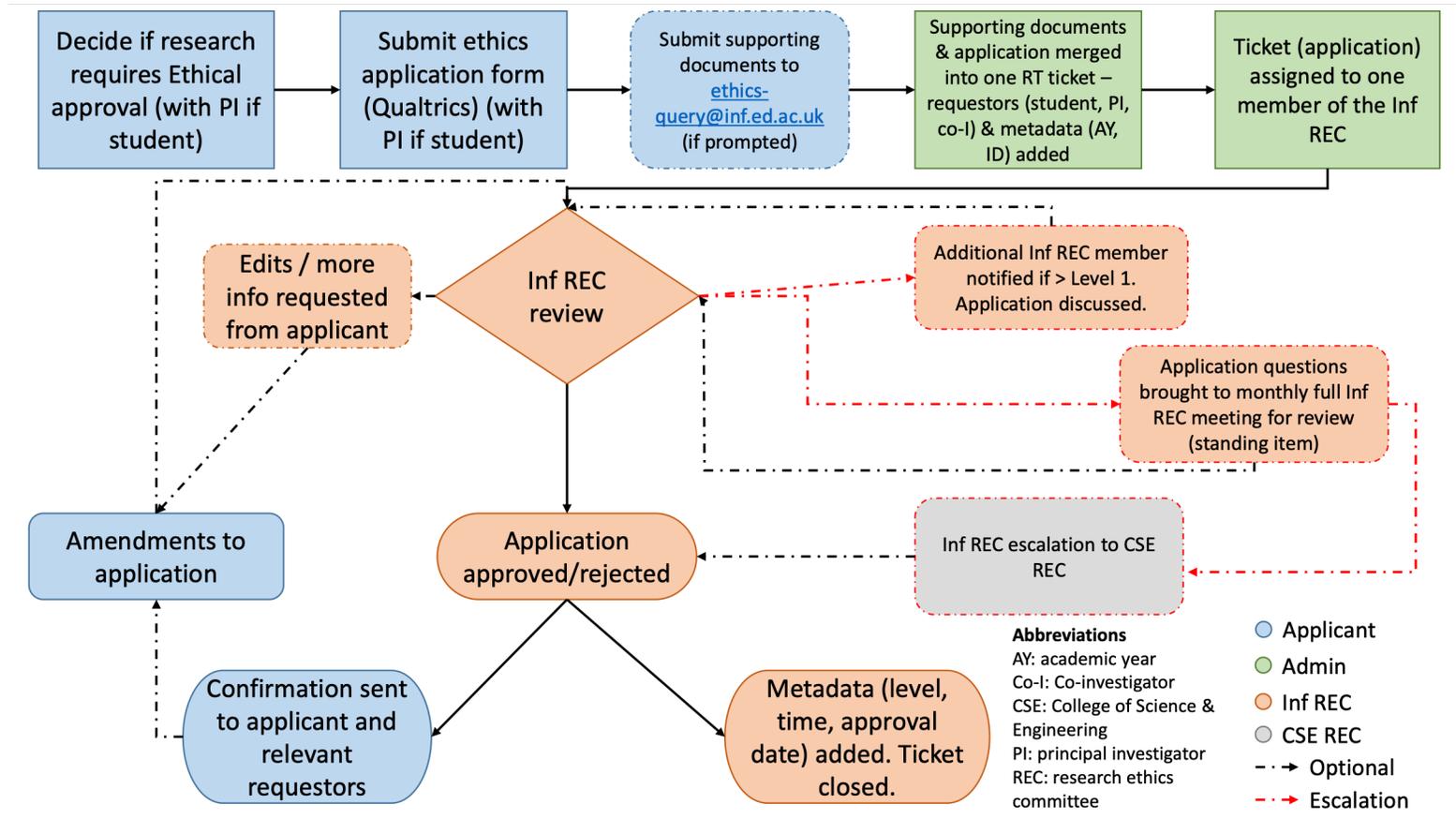
Submitting this form will **not submit an ethics application** to the ethics committee. To do so, please apply using the [official ethics form](#).

[https://edinburghinformatics.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_7PvXNZJtMj4HAbk](https://edinburghinformatics.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_7PvXNZJtMj4HAbk)

# How do I apply?

- Ask for advice beforehand, if unsure
- Consider emailing [ethics-query@inf.ed.ac.uk](mailto:ethics-query@inf.ed.ac.uk) if your question is not addressed in the [FAQ](#)
- Prepare, if relevant, Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form and Data Management Plan, by changing our [templates](#)
- Complete a practice ethics application and forward the completed form to your supervisor; only submit with their approval

# What happens after I have applied?



# What happens after I have applied?

- Want to make changes? Email us and quote the reference number
- When recruiting participants, always state who has granted ethics approval and quote the reference number
- Application expected to cover the entirety of the project: one application per dissertation project sufficient

Q&A

Your questions..?