

Guide to Consent for Mail & Telephone Surveys

The consent process for mail surveys can be handled in more than one way. In the first way, the PI sends the subject a letter requesting participation; the letter is accompanied by a conventional consent form which the individual signs and returns with his/her survey. If the study is to be anonymous, the consent form is separated from the survey immediately upon opening the package. In the second way, the PI provides on the face page of the survey the information generally found in the consent form; also included there is a statement that by answering the questions and returning the survey, the subject is providing and documenting his/her consent. The PI annotates the survey to the effect informed consent was received.

For telephone surveys, the interviewer reads from a "script"* written on the survey document. The script contains a comprehensive, though succinct, description of the study and includes the relevant elements of informed consent - in narrative form. If parts of the study will be audio or video recorded, that must be stated in the consent. The interviewer solicits any questions the potential subject may have and answers them. The interviewer directly asks the person if he/she agrees to participate in the survey. Finally, the PI documents on a data sheet: (1) that the script was read; (2) the individual was offered the opportunity to ask questions; and (3) the individual agreed or declined to participate in the study.

IRB contact information by me listed on mail surveys and read on telephone surveys. Questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, contact Dennis Landin, Chairman, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb.

* N.B. (The script must be submitted to the IRB for approval prior to its use in the study.)