

**DECEPTION AND DEBRIEFING INSTRUCTIONS
AND SAMPLE FORM TEMPLATE
Effective Date: January 21, 2019**

What is Debriefing?

Debriefing means providing information about the research to participants after they have given their informed consent to participate, and usually after their participation is completed. A Debriefing Form is required if the research involves deception of the participants. Even if there is no deception, debriefing may be used to educate participants by providing useful information or resources not provided in the original Informed Consent Form. Debriefing is also used to notify participants of any risks discovered by researchers after the informed consent process. Regardless of its specific purpose, **a copy of the Debriefing Form should be given to participants to keep for future reference.**

Deception

Deception occurs when the initial informed consent process involves one or more of the following:

- Incomplete or misleading explanation of the purpose of the research
- Incomplete or misleading description of the research methods, materials, participant involvement, and/or the data being collected
- Incomplete or misleading description of participant selection criteria

In these cases, the deception must be justified by the value of the research. In general, deception should not be used in research involving children. Research participants should not be deceived about significant risks that could not be minimized through debriefing. If deception occurs, participants must be debriefed as early as possible after the original informed consent, and must be given a Debriefing Form to document that they are fully informed about the study and that they choose voluntarily to remain in or withdraw from the study.

IRB Application Requirements: In order for studies involving deception to be approved by the IRB, the following must be provided on the IRB Application Form, in addition to all other requirements:

- justification of the deception in relation to the benefits of the research and its contribution to the field
- explanation of why the deception is essential for the research design
- description of any foreseeable risks to participants resulting from the deception
- description of the debriefing procedures, including who will conduct the debriefing and when

Submit a copy of the Debriefing Form with the IRB Application.

Limitations on Deceptive Procedures: The IRB will carefully weigh the purpose, extent and risks of any deception in a proposed study in comparison to the value of the research. Deceptive procedures should not be used with **children** or in research posing **more than minimal risk** to participants. Deception should not be used in studies where participants are **anonymous**, unless they are debriefed in time to withdraw from the study (e.g., before submitting their data).

When deception is used, a debriefing procedure should be followed as soon as practicable after the deception has occurred. Debriefing should give participants ample time and opportunity to ask questions and to consider, without undue influence, their decision of whether to withdraw.

Debriefing Form: In studies involving deception, provide a written Debriefing Form to each participant with **a copy that they can keep and refer to later.** As with informed consent, the

Debriefing Form should be written in language the participant can understand and without any coercive or exculpatory language. It must accurately explain the following:

- the nature of the deception
- the study's actual purpose and methods
- the justification for and necessity of the deception
- the procedures for orderly withdrawal from the study
- if appropriate, a space for signatures of participant and researcher

The Debriefing Form must include **contact information** for the primary investigator and the IRB chair, and a copy should be given to participants in a form that they can keep.

When use of deception involves procedures designed to induce psychological, social or physical discomfort, the debriefing should minimize these risks; for example, by providing a cooling-down period and/or resources for **counseling**. If the deception includes obtaining **covert recordings** of participants (voice, video, digital, or image), the debriefing must explain exactly what was recorded and allow participants to withdraw the recordings and/or withdraw from the study. If researchers choose, the Debriefing Form may offer participants a means of obtaining the **final study report** or a summary of the findings, or references to additional resources about the topic.

Withdrawal Procedures

Participants should be told in their original Informed Consent process how and when they can withdraw from the study. They should also be told the consequences of withdrawal, including whether any **previously collected data** about them will be retained or discarded. If the research involves deception, the offer to withdraw should be given during debriefing. If the research is conducted **anonymously**, the debriefing (if any) and option to withdraw must occur before participants submit any data, for example with an "opt out" option at the end of an online survey.

Signatures are not necessarily needed on a Debriefing Form. However, in studies involving deception, where the Debriefing Form alters the original terms of consent, a written record of a participant's decision to withdraw is needed, and the IRB may require the participant's signature on the Debriefing Form, depending on the level of risk or on limitations to the participant's autonomy.

Educational Debriefing

Even in research involving no deception, researchers may choose to provide additional information to participants beyond what was contained in the Informed Consent Form. An Educational Debriefing form is the appropriate method. Signatures would not be necessary on an Educational Debriefing form. If participation in the study poses **risk of psychological, social or physical discomfort**, information to help the participant better understand the context for their upsetting experience can be provided, as well as available counseling or other services. It should be **provided in a format that they can keep** for future reference.

If the researchers choose, an Educational Debriefing Form may offer participants a means of obtaining the **final study report** or a summary of findings, and/or references or links to additional resources about the research topic. An Educational Debriefing Form could also be used to explain how a participant might receive or become eligible for an **incentive or reward** for participating (such as obtaining their email address). Educational debriefing does not require participants' signatures and could be provided by email or other electronic means.

In case researchers discover **additional potential risks** to participants after the initial informed consent process, an Educational Debriefing notice should be used to inform participants of these additional risks and to provide information about what to do if they experience those risks. Since this debriefing would be a change to the research after obtaining initial IRB approval, the new or revised debriefing form **should be sent to the IRB for approval** before being sent to participants. (For additional instructions, see the Adverse Events Reporting Form at <https://provost.umw.edu/irb/instructions-and-forms/>)

For additional information see the American Psychological Association's "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" (2017) at <https://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>

DEBRIEFING FORM

Make the appropriate revisions as needed for your study, following the instructions above.

Remove the brackets and the wording in italics.

The sample wording is appropriate for studies involving deception.

If your study involves no deception, remove wording that would be irrelevant, such as the section on withdrawing data, the request for signatures, etc.

Thank you for taking part in this research on _____ [title or topic]!

Please read the material on this form carefully to learn important information about your experience in this study, and ask me any questions that you have. After this debriefing, you may choose to have information I collected about you removed from this research study.

For this study, it was important that I withhold some information from you [or provide you with incorrect information] about some aspects of the study. Now that your participation is completed, I will describe what information was withheld [or incorrect] and why. I will also answer any of your questions, and give you the opportunity to decide whether you would like to have your data included in this study or removed from it.

What You Should Know About This Study

Before you started participating in this research, you were told that the purpose of the study was to _____ [or that I would collect _____ data about you]. However, the actual purpose of the study was to _____ [or the actual data collected about you was _____ (add details as appropriate)]. I did not tell you the true purpose of the study [or what data I would actually collect about you] because _____ [e.g., it was important that your responses were spontaneous and not influenced by having this information].

Your Right to Withdraw Data

Now that you know the true purpose of this research study [or what data I actually collected about you], you may decide whether you want to have your data removed from the study or not. If you choose to have your data removed, _____ [explain precisely what data will be withdrawn and the procedures to be followed]. There will be no penalties or negative consequences for you if you withdraw from the study. [If compensation, reward, etc. was offered to participants, add a sentence such as: Even if you withdraw from the study, you are still entitled to _____ (describe the benefit and how they will receive it)]. **Before making your decision, please ask me any questions you have.**

Confidentiality

Whether you allow your data to be used in this study or not, please remember that the integrity of this research depended on keeping some of the details from you and the other participants. Therefore, it is important that you do not tell anyone else about the details of this study until after

_____ [date], when my collection of data from other participants will be complete. Although the purpose of [or the procedures used in] this study is [are] different from what was originally explained to you, everything else on the consent form is correct. I will keep all information I have about you completely confidential, including your decision about whether to withdraw from the study.

If You Have Any Questions or Concerns

Please keep a copy of this Debriefing Form for future reference. If you have any questions or concerns about this study and the research procedures used, you may contact me, _____, [name] at _____ [email], or my UMW faculty supervisor, _____ [name] at _____ [email]. [Optional: If you would like to receive a copy of the final report of this study or a summary of the findings when it is complete, please feel free to contact me.] If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Chair of the UMW Institutional Review Board, _____ [name] at _____ [email]. In case you experience any adverse effects that you feel result from being in this study, please contact my faculty supervisor (above) [or give name of primary investigator if not a student]. I am also giving you a list of counseling services where you may obtain help with any anxiety or discomfort you might experience.

To be completed by Participant [optional; see instructions]

My signature below indicates that I have read and understand the information in this debriefing form, and (select one)

___ I give permission for the data collected from or about me to be included in the study.

___ I DO NOT give permission for the data collected from or about me to be included in the study.

Print name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

To be completed by Researcher [optional; see instructions]

I confirm that the participant named above has been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered to the best of my knowledge and ability. A copy of this Debriefing Form has been provided to the participant.

Print name of investigator

Signature of investigator

Date