

Ten Top Tips

To get your ethics application approved first time

1. **Think through the process of what you intend to do**, and make sure you describe it as clearly as you can. Go through it step by step and remember that your reviewers will not know your research like you do.
2. **Watch out for jargon, acronyms, technical language**. Your application should be accessible to a lay person, and so should any documents you plan to give to participants (unless you will be interviewing experts in the field).
3. **Is your research realistic?** Can you achieve what you say you will achieve? Do you have the skills and knowledge to do this research? Will you have enough time?
4. **Think about your participants**. How are you going to recruit them? Who will be included or excluded? How will you tell them about your research? How will prospective participants be able to reach an informed decision on whether or not take part in your research – i.e. be able to give ‘informed’ consent? If you will not be gaining informed consent is this justified and appropriate? How will this be recorded? Is this appropriate to the situation? Are they able to withdraw from the research at any point? Is that practicable?
5. **Think about the risks**. Almost all research involves some level of risk(s), to the participants and maybe to you as the researcher. Explain what the risks are and what you intend to do to minimise the risks or to manage the impacts. In certain research projects the risks will be low, or very low, but give the ethics reviewers confidence by at least pointing out what those risks are and what you will do to minimise them from occurring.
6. **Consider whether you can make promises** of anonymity and/or confidentiality to your participants. Is this realistic, or will they be identifiable in some way? Make sure that this is clearly communicated to your participants.
7. **Think about all of the ways you plan to use your data** – will you be publishing or presenting your results? Is this likely to inform future research projects? Do you want to share your datasets with others or make them available through open access? In which case don’t make sweeping promises such as ‘after the project we will destroy the data within 3 years’; if you anticipate potential re-use of data for future research then make prospective participants aware of this intention.
8. **Have you included everything?** What about the paperwork that you will show to prospective participants – e.g. information sheets, consent forms, interview schedules, questionnaires, access letters?
9. **Make sure you are complying** with any other legislation that is relevant to your research. Have you thought about your funder’s requirements? The Data Protection Act? Do you have to comply with the healthcare governance procedure? Outside factors may affect what you can do with your research and any data you collect, so make sure you don’t commit to anything you can’t do.
10. **Give yourself plenty of time**. An ethics application can be processed in ten working days, but there is no guarantee you will automatically be given approval. Allow yourself time to make any changes required by the reviewers.