



University Ethics Committee

RESEARCH ETHICS DEBRIEF

There is no template for the debrief as they vary so much, but there below is some guidance on why a debrief is important and some of the information you need to include.

Why is the debrief needed?

Having taken the time and trouble to participate in your study, people are entitled to an explanation of what the study is about, what it was based on, what you are going to do to analyze the data, what you are expecting to find, and what value this might have.

How should the debrief be written?

In providing information about the study, you should avoid using language that is too technical or jargon laden. As in the Information Sheet, you should write in such a way that someone who is not familiar with discipline or subject specific terms could understand. You do not need to provide detailed description of relevant studies, but you should provide a brief explanation, in general terms, of what has been found before and how this led to your study.

What information should be included?

Hypotheses: The debrief is an opportunity to explain your study's hypotheses to participants, if it had one. In an experimental study, you should explain what all the conditions involved so that the participant understands how their participation fits into the experiment. You should, however, avoid using technical terms such as 'independent variable' or 'discursive'. It is also a good idea to explain why you could not share the full design and the hypotheses with participants prior to their taking part (if applicable). People will, generally, understand why you have had to withhold some information if you take the trouble to explain it to them and make it apparent that you are treating them with the respect that they deserve.

Aims of study: If you do not want other participants to know what the study's aims are before they take part, it is a good idea to ask participants not to discuss the study or show the debrief sheet to other people who may yet be asked to participate.

Reassuring participants: If the study involved participants performing a particular task, use the debrief to reassure them that the task was one that some, or many, people find difficult. If, for example, you have used a memory task, you could reassure participants that there are many ways of measuring memory and that this task is just one. If they found it difficult, it does not mean that there is anything wrong with their memory, and they shouldn't worry about it.

Confidentiality: If the study has involved a focus group, ask participants to respect the

privacy of others and not to discuss what was said (or who said what) during the discussion.

Referral to other agencies: Depending on the nature of the study, there may be a need to provide referral information should participants have experienced any adverse effects of taking part. For example, a study exploring stress might alert participants to how stressed they feel. They might not have thought about it before you interviewed them. You might need to provide contact details for student counselling, the Samaritans, etc.

Withdrawal: You should also remind participants of their right to withdraw from the study and of any timescales by which they must withdraw their data should they wish to do so. Information about who to contact to withdraw or ask further questions of should be given again.

Feedback of results: Participants should be provided with information on how and when they can receive feedback on the results of the study (noting that this is likely to be group rather than individual results).

Complaints: Information about who to contact to make complaints should be provided again, to the relevant Ethics Committee for research conduct issues or the Data Protection Officer for data protection issues