



CHRISTIAN HERITAGE COLLEGE

# Academic writing and ethics

## Academic Writing and Ethics

There are a few situations in which students will need to consider ethical issues in their assignment or dissertation writing. Students writing about other people and their behaviour or opinions, and students who collect data from or about other people must be careful to conduct themselves in an ethical manner, before, during and after the data collection phase.

Types of research highly likely to require ethics approval include (but are not limited to) projects which involve:

- Surveys, interviews or focus groups;
- Psychological, physiological or medical testing or treatment;
- Observation by researchers;
- Access to personal information through databases, medical records, documents or other materials.

## Privacy and Data Collection

The basic principle of privacy legislation in Australia is that information collected for a purpose may not be used for any other purpose, unless permission is given by the person to whom the information relates. Regarding collection of data for academic purposes, data may only be used for that purpose, and must not be shared with others or used in any other way.

In general, do not reveal the identity of individuals who have provided data for your writing. Use pseudonyms to refer to individuals, and provide other information, such as the school they attend or the company they work for, only if it could not be used to identify them. If you feel

that including the identity of an interviewee is important, seek that person's permission in writing before submitting an assignment. Check with your lecturer or project supervisor if you have questions about these principles in specific cases.

## **Interviews**

Note that care must be taken to meet the ethical requirements of interviewing, including the requirements of the college and the subject. Remember that those who are being interviewed must be fully informed of the nature of the interview, the proposed use and storage of interview materials, audio and video recordings and transcripts, and ways in which concerns can be expressed if they arise.

Interviews may be conducted as part of the assessment for an undergraduate unit. In such cases, ethical considerations should be addressed prior to the collection of any data via discussion with the lecturer. Note that interviews that are likely to be of a controversial nature may not be approved, for ethical reasons.

Interviews which are part of research in postgraduate study should not be commenced until approval for the study has been given by the Human Research Ethics Committee, or the Expedited Ethics Panel (as appropriate) of the college. This is a general requirement for all postgraduate research; guidelines will be provided by the relevant Course Coordinator.

## **Disclosure of Information**

Information collected as part of a research study or for other academic writing may only be disclosed where that disclosure is required by law, or if it is necessary for the health and safety of either the person from whom the data was collected, or of another person (see *National Statement*

*on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, 2007; *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, 2007). A student who believes that such a situation exists should discuss it with the lecturer immediately, whilst maintaining the confidentiality of the information collected.

Assignments which are of a reflective or personal nature will sometimes require students to write about their personal lives and opinions. The confidentiality of such information will be maintained by the lecturer. The information would only be disclosed to others in rare situations, such as those described in the previous paragraph.

## **Ethics Committee Approval**

All research conducted at CHC must comply with established Australian ethical regulations including the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007– updated May 2013)(available at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e72>); the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (2007) (available at [http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/\\_files\\_nhmrc/publications/attachments/r39.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/r39.pdf)); and the *Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes* (8th ed.)(2013) ([http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/\\_files\\_nhmrc/publications/attachments/ea28\\_code\\_care\\_use\\_animals\\_131209.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/ea28_code_care_use_animals_131209.pdf)). Students conducting research at CHC must also comply with the CHC *Research Code of Conduct*. All these statements and policies are available from the lecturer or supervisor.

Additionally, approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) OR the Expedited Ethics Panel of the college is required for postgraduate research conducted as part of a course of study. Details of the procedures and policies regarding this are provided by lecturers and supervisors. Undergraduate students collecting data and writing research-based assignments as part of their coursework studies do not normally require HREC or Expedited Ethics approval. Postgraduate students undertaking a research project, dissertation or thesis of greater than 20

credit points generally do require ethics clearance. These matters are overseen by the relevant lecturer or supervisor.