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CCCC Position Statement

A statement on an education issue approved by the CCCC Executive Committee

CCCC Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Research in Composition Studies

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Preamble

The CCCC represents teachers and researchers of composition and communication in all possible genres, media, contexts, and exigencies; for the purpose of these guidelines, “writers” and “writing” will be all-encompassing, and the term “researcher” will refer to anyone who undertakes a study. We embrace numerous subfields, many of which have also issued their own ethical statements and have published commentary about conducting research that should be consulted. As members of the CCCC, we share a commitment to protecting the rights, privacy, dignity, and well-being of the persons who are involved in our studies, whether as participants or co-researchers. These guidelines are intended to assist researchers in fulfilling this commitment.

The following guidelines have been informed by U.S. Federal policies, regulations, and laws on the ethical conduct of research;¹ however, they do not replace or supersede them. Researchers who conduct studies outside of their home countries should also refer to the policies, regulations, and laws that govern the locales where the research takes place. The U.S. Office of Human Research Protections maintains a listing of international standards that may be consulted.²

The following guidelines apply to all efforts by scholars, teachers, administrators, students, and others that are directed toward publication of a book or journal article, presentation at a conference, preparation of a thesis or dissertation, display on a website, or other general dissemination of the results of research and scholarship. The guidelines apply to formally planned investigations. They likewise apply to emergent studies that discuss the writers and unpublished writing that researchers encounter in other ways, such as when teaching classes, holding student conferences, directing academic programs, conducting research in nonacademic settings, or going about their professional, civic, and personal lives.

U.S. Federal policy allows an exception for studies that researchers conduct solely for the purpose of improving their own practice, or solely for discussion within their own institution. To confirm that a study falls under the exception, researchers should follow local review processes. Moreover, even in studies confirmed as exceptions (granted an exemption), CCCC members carefully protect the rights, privacy, dignity, and well-being of their participants and co-researchers. These guidelines suggest ways to accomplish this goal.

Compliance

As researchers, we learn about and comply with all policies, regulations, and laws that apply to our studies. Many institutions have an Institutional Review Board (IRB)³ or alternative review process to which we submit our plans for advance review and approval. We then

conduct our studies in accordance with the approved research plans. We also confirm with the IRB or alternative review committee if we believe a proposed study should be allowed an exception (granted an exemption). If we work at or are students at an institution without an IRB or alternative review process, then we contact colleagues at other institutions so we can learn about and follow procedures that IRBs require.⁴

Although we comply with the final decision of our IRBs or alternative review processes, we recognize that members of the review committee may need to be educated about the particular methods and methodologies of writing research. As researchers, we negotiate with committees about IRB requirements or restrictions that hamper research unnecessarily and without benefit to participants. Moreover, we engage in ongoing conversations with regulatory agents to advise them in developing policies, regulations, and laws that take into account the methods and methodologies of writing research.

We acknowledge that mere compliance with policies, regulations, and laws does not necessarily guarantee the ethical conduct of research (see Maintaining Competence).

Maintaining Competence

As researchers, we strive to refine our competence and to keep apprised of ongoing ethical discussions for several reasons:

1. Understandings of and definitions of ethical research practices are constantly negotiated among members of a discipline or subfield;
2. New experiences among researchers and participants may raise new ethical issues; and
3. Formal policies, regulations, and laws continually evolve (See the “Selected Bibliography” section).

We assure that we are appropriately trained and prepared to conduct the studies we undertake, and we likewise assure that our co-researchers and assistants are appropriately trained and prepared. Training and preparation may include activities such as enrollment in classes, review of relevant published research and methodological discussions, and consultation or collaboration with other experienced researchers.

Researchers who are supervisors of and/or collaborators with novice researchers (such as undergraduates, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, colleagues new to a discipline/subfield, and participant-researchers) should maintain frequent and open discussion of research procedures with those in their charge as the studies are conducted and disseminated.

Recruiting

Some studies may include populations who may be considered vulnerable and protected, including but not limited to children and adolescent minors, students, prisoners, pregnant women, military veterans, disenfranchised groups, persons with disabilities, and adults with legal guardians. In these cases, as researchers, we consult carefully with the IRB/reviewing agencies, colleagues, and (when allowed) with prospective participants to develop a protocol that protects their rights, privacy, well-being, and especially, dignity.

When conducting studies with individuals who are perceived to have less institutional power or others whose well-being depends on the researcher's opinions, decisions, or actions, we take special care to protect prospective participants from adverse consequences of declining or withdrawing from participation.⁵

To avoid situations in which students feel that their decision to participate (or not) in a study might affect their instructor's treatment of them, we recruit participants from other classes or other sources. If the topic of the research or other special circumstances require that the study involve our own students, then we use measures to avoid coercion or perceived coercion, such as confirming students' voluntary participation after grades are submitted or asking colleagues to conduct the actual data collection.

Obtaining Informed Consent

When asking people to volunteer to participate in (or in the case of co-researchers or novice researchers, collaborate in the design and execution of) a study, we provide participants a

copy of the consent document and explain the study in a way that enables the participants to understand the following points:

1. The purpose of the research and its possible benefits.
2. Why the participant was recruited.
3. What the participant will be asked to do and how long it will take.
4. What we plan to do with the information or data obtained from participants.
5. Any potential discomforts, harms, or risks one might incur as a result of participating and how we plan on minimizing any potential discomforts, harms, or risks.
6. Any potential benefits (separate from compensation, if any) participants may experience from the study.
7. Whether or not we intend to include data in research reports that would render participants identifiable. (We always honor participants' requests that disseminated reports contain no personally identifiable information, including data that would make them identifiable to persons familiar with the research site. We acknowledge that sometimes a conflict may emerge when some participants want to remain anonymous and others want to be recognized, and we resolve the issue before presenting, publishing, or reporting on the study.)
8. How confidential data will be stored and who will have access to confidential data and materials, particularly in the case of research teams/co-researchers. If data and materials are to be included in an archive, we receive explicit consent (see "Conducting Studies Involving Archival Work").

In addition, we emphasize the following points:

1. Participation is completely voluntary.
2. Participants can decline to answer any questions instead of withdrawing from the study.
3. Participation is an ongoing and constantly negotiated process between the participants and the researcher or research team.
4. If anonymity for participants is not possible, then we are explicit about this constraint.
5. Participants may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

For studies involving vulnerable populations who have parents or legal guardians, we obtain written permission from the parents or legal guardians in addition to the assent of the prospective participant or we seek permission from IRBs for a waiver of consent. If required, we also gain the permission of sponsoring institutions, such as public schools or private workplaces. We are careful to determine that whatever terms of access we agree to are consistent with the stipulations of applicable IRB regulations and the provisions of these guidelines.

We always provide those invited to participate in a study an opportunity to ask questions. When asked questions by participants during or after a study, we reply in a timely manner.

In the case of classes in which undergraduate and graduate students are collaborators in research projects, we guide their work toward best practices and acknowledge their collaboration in any presentation, publication, or report.

These guidelines concerning informed consent are intended to complement (not replace) any additional requirements of applicable policies, regulations, and laws.

Conducting Studies Involving Classes

When conducting studies involving classes, we give primary consideration to the goals of the course and fair treatment of all students. Toward that end, we take the following measures, whether the students are members of our own classes or are from classes taught by colleagues:

1. We design our studies so that participation is completely voluntary.
2. We assure that volunteering, declining to volunteer, or deciding to withdraw after volunteering will not affect a student's grade.

3. We assure that pursuit of our research goals will not hinder achievement of the course's educational goals.
4. We assure that all students will receive the same attention, instruction, support, and encouragement in the course. For example, studies may be conducted so that instructors do not know who participated or not until the class is over.
5. We assure that reports on the research do not include information about students who did not volunteer.
6. If there is a possibility that one or more of the volunteering students have changed their minds since the study began, we obtain confirming consent at the end of the course.
7. In the case of classes in which undergraduate and graduate students are collaborators in research projects, we guide our work toward best practices and acknowledge their collaboration in any publication.

Conducting Studies Outside the Classroom

When conducting studies in sites outside the classroom, we give primary consideration to the contexts of our research and to the fair treatment of all participants. Toward that end, we take the following measures:

1. We design our studies so that participation is completely voluntary.
2. We assure that volunteering, declining to volunteer, or deciding to withdraw after volunteering will not affect participants or a participant's standing at the research site.
3. We assure that pursuit of our research goals will not hinder achievement or operation at our research site.
4. We coordinate and discuss our research plan with site leaders/administrators before proceeding with research.
5. We assure that reports on the research do not include information about participants who did not volunteer.
6. In the case of research projects in which participants, undergraduate, and/or graduate students are collaborators, we guide our work toward best practices and acknowledge their collaboration in any publication.
7. When conducting research with protected/vulnerable populations, we follow federal guidelines to ensure our research is ethical and legal.

Conducting Studies Involving Digital/Online Media

When conducting studies involving digital/online media, we are particularly aware that researchers' and participants' expectations regarding the public/private, published versus unpublished documents, informed consent, sensitivity of the data, vulnerability of the participants, identifiability of the data, and other aspects of the research study must be negotiated.⁶ We recognize that these expectations are often contingent and may shift in response to revised trajectories in disciplinary research practices; newly introduced, innovative technologies; and the multifaceted histories that specific digital/online communities have experienced. As a result, we should explicitly justify our research choices and our positioning as researchers when we plan, conduct, and publish our studies.

We do not assume, for example, that all digital/online communications are available for research studies simply because they can be accessed. Nor do we assume that we must always receive express permission from authors before citing their digital/online materials. A balance must be struck between these extremes, a balance that is informed by institutional regulation, consultation with published research and other researchers, discussion with members of the online communities themselves, and sensitivity to and understanding of the expectations that authors (including student authors) may have had in posting their materials.

We are also aware that promising anonymity to participants may be impossible when conducting certain digital/online studies. Communication technologies may not be secure enough for discussing sensitive topics. Likewise, search engines have become increasingly powerful in their capacity to locate text strings. Materials that are protected behind a firewall or password today may become readily available tomorrow as passwords are compromised, the mode of access changes, a database is archived, or other modifications in technology

occur that are beyond the researcher's control. Instead, we may need to integrate practices that take into account these possibilities, such as finding alternate means of communicating with participants; turning off the collection of IP addresses in online survey services; asking participants' permission to use real names; allowing participants to review interview data before employing them; and so on.

Researchers interested in digital/online media are encouraged to consult the more extensive ethical guidelines published by researchers in these subfields, including those by the Association of Internet Researchers. In addition, they are encouraged to consult the many and lengthy discussions found in the provided Bibliography.

Conducting Studies Involving Archival Work

Conducting Studies Involving Archival WorkAs researchers, we often consult library resources, museums, and other archival materials. These already collected materials are not governed by IRB review. However, we are aware that some archival materials may have been assembled without ethical consideration for all cultural stakeholders involved, and that understandings of ethical standards may shift over time. As researchers, we are alert to these concerns and debates, and when we choose to use these archival materials, we strive to represent them and their multilayered, multivoiced contexts accurately and fairly.

The following guidelines speak to studies that involve living participants, plus the intent to generate, construct, and curate an archive. Such a study typically requires an IRB's/review committee's approval. For example, as researchers, we may collect and analyze a large sample of student or professional documents, and then make the documents available for use by other researchers. When we plan to build a new archive as a component of a study, we need to negotiate several considerations:

1. As researchers, we are sensitive to our participants as cultural stakeholders in a long-term archive of materials. We explicitly ask for permission to include a participant's materials in an archive. In some cases, stakeholders may actively collaborate on building the archive. Negotiations over what materials to include and exclude should be explicit, and they may need to consider the archival materials' impact on the descendants of those whose work is included.
2. Libraries and other institutional repositories may not be able to accept materials from studies involving human participants unless their own versions of permission forms are collected in addition to informed consent letters. (These additional permissions often address intellectual property and access issues.) As researchers, we consult early in the process with the intended host to determine what conditions may apply and what procedures to follow.
3. We must balance accessibility to the archive with both the participants' and the future researchers' rights to privacy. When we create archives, we organize the artifacts and the information about their provenance so that the organization is clear and consistent. If we create or adopt data-mining tools for digital archives, we facilitate access to the artifacts without violating the researchers' privacy. When we compile culturally sensitive records, we are careful to follow procedures to maintain participants' anonymity when permission to use real names is not granted (for example, by removing identifying information and/or by embargoing materials until an agreed-upon date).
4. We acknowledge the impact that different cataloging, data-mining, coding, and other software may have in shaping our access to and interpretation of archival information. When building an archive, and when reporting on materials in an archive, we explicitly name and justify the relevant software used.
5. We strive to ensure the proper long-term storage and preservation of artifacts, whether they are physical or digital materials.

Conducting Studies Involving Assessment Data

Studies involving assessment data may include outcomes data, portfolio evidence, survey data, directed self-placement scores, interviews, and so on. According to U.S. Federal policy, if such studies are conducted solely for the purpose of internal assessment (e.g., placement testing, improving a program), they are typically considered exceptions. As

researchers, we confirm the exception (request an exemption) as well as any local requirements (e.g., anonymity of data) with our IRB/review committee.

If we plan to present, publish, or report on assessment data beyond the local institution, then we submit a protocol for advance review and approval by the IRB/review committee.

Using Unpublished Writing Collected Outside of an IRB-Approved Study

When studying unpublished writing samples that have been collected outside of a study approved by an IRB or other process, we, (and, when applicable, our undergraduate/graduate researchers, collaborators, and colleagues), determine whether our planned use of these samples is consistent with the policies governing research at our institutions and, if different, the institution at which the samples were collected.

When using unpublished writing samples for reasons outside of research purposes (e.g., textbook samples, writing samples collected for writing consultant or teacher training), we determine whether our use of these samples is consistent with the policies governing student privacy at our institutions, and, if different, the institution at which samples were collected.

We continue to apply to these materials the same ethical guidelines we employ when analyzing and reporting on data collected under the auspices of an IRB-approved study. We are also mindful that copyright regulations may apply to these materials.

Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Reporting Statements

In our publications, presentations, and other research reports, we quote, paraphrase, or otherwise report unpublished written statements only with the author's permission. That permission may be indicated by written consent, or (in digital/online research) through click-through approval on a form, and/or through another procedure approved by an IRB or alternative review process. We likewise seek permission to quote, paraphrase, or otherwise report a spoken statement that a participant has made with the expectation that it will remain private. U.S. Federal policy allows an exception to be made for spoken statements made while participants are speaking in or attending a public forum (the definition of which may be contingent upon institutional regulation, previously published research, and the expectations of the participants involved).

When quoting, paraphrasing, or reporting unpublished writing and when reporting (with permission) oral statements made in private, we respect the writer's or speaker's wishes about whether or not to include the writer's or speaker's name or identifying information. When the writer or speaker is a member of a vulnerable/protected population with a parent or legal guardian, we obtain permission from a parent or legal guardian in addition to the assent of the prospective participant. When we use an informed consent process approved by an IRB or similar committee, we have obtained the necessary permission.

We do our best to represent language/meaning accurately, understanding that meaning-making is often negotiated, shifting, multivoiced, and changeable over time. We report written and spoken statements in ways consistent with the collected data, and avoid deliberately misrepresenting participants' words. We provide contextual information that will enable others to understand the statements the way the writer or speaker intended. When in doubt, we check the accuracy of the reports and interpretations with the writer or speaker. We are especially sensitive to the need to check interpretations when the writer or speaker is from a cultural, ethnic, or other group different from our own.

When discussing the statements that we quote, paraphrase, or otherwise report, we do so in ways that are fair and serious, and that avoid harm.

Describing Individuals and Groups

We describe individuals and groups fairly and accurately, in ways that are accountable to the data, observation, or other evidence on which the descriptions are based. We describe people in ways that are fair and serious, avoid harm, and protect privacy.

Using Video, Audio, Photographs, and Other Identifiable Representations of Participants

Because video, audio, photographs, and other representations (e.g., cartoons) of participants in the studies that we conduct allow individuals to be identified, we include them in conference presentations, publications, or other public displays only with written consent (or other approved procedure for receiving consent) from all persons whose voices and/or images were recorded or shown. When the person recorded is a member of a vulnerable/protected population with a parent or legal guardian, then we obtain permission from the parent or legal guardian in addition to the assent of the prospective participant. When we use an informed consent process approved by an IRB or similar committee, we have obtained the necessary permission.

One exception allowed by U.S. Federal policy are instances when the recording was made while participants were speaking in or attending a public forum (the definition of which may be contingent upon institutional regulation, previously published research, and the expectations of the participants involved).

Working with Co-Researchers and Co-Authors

Research studies often rely upon the assistance of many people, not only the participants, but also those who organize and perform data collection, those who assist with coding, those who analyze information, and so on. We are generous in acknowledging these contributions, whether by name or general category (e.g., reviewers of the manuscript).

In some cases, participants in and/or other contributors to a study should be considered co-researchers and/or co-authors. Determining who should be a co-researcher and/or co-author depends on disciplinary convention, institutional regulation, and local expectations. Ideally, participants who become co-researchers and/or co-authors benefit, learn, and gain insight/knowledge through the collaborative process. We strive for reciprocal relations. Participants who become co-authors should be made aware that a designated “author” on a publication has legal privileges (e.g., copyright) and ethical obligations for the acceptable conduct, representation, and/or dissemination of the study.

Co-researcher status and/or co-authorship may be determined at the beginning of the study, or they may emerge during the course of the study. In either case, expectations about who can use what data, and under what circumstances, should be negotiated and made explicit. Many institutions have a representative, committee or office (such as the IRB office or Ombuds Office) that can assist in negotiating these expectations to avoid conflicts.

Working with Editors/Publishers

When accepting manuscripts for publication or other public display, editors and publishers should assist in maintaining ethical standards without unduly burdening the researcher. For example, editors/publishers should doublecheck for occasions where identifying information has been incorporated accidentally into a manuscript, or for representations of participants that may be misunderstood.

Publishers also recognize the difference between informed consent letters (as approved by an IRB or other reviewing committee) and copyright release permissions. If anonymity has been promised to participants, it is inappropriate to demand copies of the signed informed consent letters.

Indicating Possible Financial Conflicts of Interest

In accordance with U.S. Federal guidelines, for any presentation, publication, or report on a study, the researcher(s) shall make full disclosure of all possible financial conflicts of interest with an entity connected to the research topics. (Research conducted under the auspices of other nations should accommodate those nations' regulations regarding conflicts of interest as well.) The following exceptions are allowed:

1. Amounts less than \$5,000 per calendar year per entity and associated entities
2. Book royalties
3. Instances when an author's or speaker's stated affiliation is with the entity or associated entities.

This policy applies to all researchers associated with the study. Presenters at a conference will also disclose if an interested entity has paid some or all of the expenses related to

performing the study and/or attending the conference.

Full disclosure can consist of statements in the methods section, acknowledgements, footnotes/endnotes, or, in the case of a presentation, a statement on a slide or handout. The exact amount of financial remuneration need not be disclosed, but, except for the cases indicated above, the fact that remuneration was received must be stated.

Selected Bibliography

CCCC has compiled a selected bibliography of sources on the ethical conduct of research involving human participants. It is available at [/cccc/resources/positions/ethicalconductbiblio](http://cccc/resources/positions/ethicalconductbiblio).

Notes

¹Information about these policies, regulations, and laws can be found at the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Human Research Protections, <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/>

²The International Compilation of Human Research Standards, <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/international/index.html>

³An institutional review board is a committee established under the federal regulation for the protection of research participants (45 CFR 46). Each IRB is legally responsible for assuring that all research involving human participants that is conducted under the aegis of its institution complies with this regulation. For more information, visit the website of the federal Office for Human Research Protections: <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/>

⁴In several cases, institutions without IRBs have made arrangements with a local institution with an IRB to conduct the reviews.

⁵This sentence is adapted from the American Psychological Association Ethics Code, 3.08. <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>

⁶This section has been informed by work by Heidi McKee & James E. Porter. "The Ethics of Digital Writing Research: A Rhetorical Approach." *College Composition and Communication* 59.4 (2008): 711–749, and by the Association of Internet Researchers' 2002 and 2012 reports, *Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee*, located at <http://aoir.org/ethics/>. Researchers may also be interested in the *Statement of Principles and Best Practices* by the Oral History Association, located at <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>

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