Tips on Writing Clear Consent Forms/Scripts

What is meant by "consent" in the context of research and why is it important?
In relation to research ethics, informed consent is when someone agrees to take part in a research project having been provided clear information outlining what participation entails. Consent must be informed, voluntary and on-going (TCPS 2 (Chapter 3)). In order for a participant to ethically engage as a voluntary participant in research, they must clearly understand what the purpose of the research is, their role in the research along with information related to risks and benefits in participating.

Language and Audience: Draft your consent form or script with your participant in mind.
Consider the best way to explain your research project to potential participants. How can you inform participants about the project and their involvement to ensure they are presented with clear and accurate information before agreeing to participate? It is important to use clear, accessible and appropriate language that is relevant to your participant group. For example, participants recruited from the general population require a different explanation compared to an upper level sociology class.

Right to Withdraw
Consent must be on-going which means participants must have an opportunity to stop taking part in the research. You must make it clear how participants can withdraw from their research and any limitations there might be to withdrawing. For example, you might say that a participant can choose to skip a question during an interview. However, you would need to indicate that once your final paper was written a participant would no longer be able to remove their data from the research.

What to Include?
You may ask for consent through a form or you may ask for consent orally by reading a script. In both cases, you will want to provide:

- an overview of what your research is about including your research question
- a clear outline of what their participation will look like including estimated time commitment (e.g. an individual interview, approximately 10 minutes)
- an outline of the possible risks and benefits of taking part in the research
- how confidentiality and anonymity will be addressed including how data will be collected and kept safe and what type (if any) of identifiable information will be retained
- any other information that you feel is relevant

A template is provided at the end of this document for reference and should be modified to fit the requirements of the researcher(s). Do not simply copy and paste. This template is simply a suggestion to aid in the creation of your informed consent form. Other formats containing all relevant information will be accepted.

Tips for Student Researchers

- Do not copy and paste information from your REB protocol or course/thesis proposal. Language used in academic settings might not be appropriate for the participants in your study.
- Speak to your supervisor if there is a heightened power dynamic between you and the participant that may cause undue influence (example: a teacher whose participants are their students)
- It is important to be honest during the consent process and make sure you are not making promises you cannot keep. For example, it is often difficult to guarantee complete anonymity when working with a small population in an organization.
- Remember: the intent of the consent form or script is to provide the participant with enough information to make an informed choice about participating in your research.
- Ensure you have contact information from the CBU REB listed on your consent form.
- Ensure you have contact information from both your supervisor and the principal research included on your consent form.

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NOTE
Remember to use language that is appropriate for your audience. For example, avoid using acronyms or jargon that is specific to your discipline. The intent of an informed consent letter is to provide enough information so participants are able to make an informed choice about participating in your research project.

This template is a sample of the content you may wish to provide in a consent letter. Please note the prompts below are not necessarily exhaustive and a researcher may opt to add or remove information as is appropriate to their study. For more information, review The Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, Section 2, "Free and Informed Consent".

INFORMED CONSENT
[Research Project Title]

Research Purpose
[Briefly describe the purpose of the research]

Researcher(s)
[List researcher/research team and contact information]

Supervisor (s)
[List supervisor(s) and contact information]

Research Description
[Describe the research tool to be used (survey, interview, etc) and discuss issues such as confidentiality, data security, possible risks and participants right of refusal. Sample text in italics below]

All information collected is confidential and will only be used as part of research work being carried out by researcher/research teams at Cape Breton University.

All data collected will be stored in a secure location. Access to questionnaires will only be granted to the researchers listed above or assistants working directly for them. Data, when reported, will be in aggregate form. No personally identifiable information will be given out at any time.
You may choose to cease your participation in this research at any time.

Informed Consent
I _____ have been informed of the purpose of this research and agree to participate in this survey.

If you have any questions that have not been answered satisfactorily by the researcher(s) or supervisor(s) named above, please contact:

- Co-chair of the Research Ethics Board at CBU, Dr. John Hudec at (902) 563-1982, email: john_hudec@cbu.ca.
- (Interim) Co-chair of the Research Ethics Board at CBU, Dr. Sandra Jack-Malik, at (902) 563-1339, email: sandra_jack-malik@cbu.ca
- REB Administrator, Nicole MacDougall at (902) 563-1107, email: ethics@cbu.ca

Note: Participants are to be informed of the researcher(s)' "Duty to disclose" suspected abuse or neglect of a child or an adult in need of protection. Under section 23(1), Nova Scotia Children and their Family, The Protection of Children and Adoption (1990) states that "Every person who has information, whether it is confidential or privileged, indicating that a child is in need of protective services shall forthwith report that information to an agency." Agency is defined as "an agency continued by or established and incorporated pursuant to the act…" that is, Nova Scotia Department of Community Service Child Welfare. This may vary across provinces within Canada and different regions outside of Canada.