



HÖGSKOLAN  
DALARNA

# **Ethical Guidelines for Research Theses and Essays at Dalarna University**

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Related documents: -

Responsible for updates: Chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee

## Ethical Guidelines for Research Theses and Essays at Dalarna University

When you are conducting research that involves people, it is vitally important that you do so in an ethically sound manner. For this reason, Dalarna University has a Research Ethics Committee (FEN), which has the job of reviewing academic research at both the first cycle (Bachelor's) and second cycle (Master's) levels to ensure that it is conducted according to the principles and demands of fundamental research ethics.

As a student, you need to consider a number of factors before you start your research, while you are conducting your research, and after you have completed your research. If you are writing your paper as a research project, you also need to follow the *Act on Ethical Examination of Research Involving Humans* and the *Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)*. Information on these pieces of legislation is available on the committee's webpage.

### Before you start your research

Before you start your research, you need to familiarise yourself with the principles of research ethics and the requirements set by Dalarna University. Your research supervisor can help you with this. There is also a recorded lecture on FEN's webpage that you can download.

If you and/or your supervisor judges your work to be ethically problematic, or if you and/or your supervisor thinks that it may involve an ethics problem, a research ethics assessment needs to be carried out. This involves you having to submit an application to FEN, which will then assess the study and decide if it may be conducted or not, as well as what is required so that it can proceed.

**Use the checklist of ethical issues to consider that is available on the FEN webpage to help you decide if you need to submit an ethics application FEN or not. If you answer any of the questions 1-8 with "Yes" or "Unsure", you must discuss with your supervisor whether or not you need to make an ethics application.**

Application forms, along with instructions on how to write an application, can be found on the FEN webpage. Be sure to submit your application in good time; the dates for FEN meetings are published on the FEN webpage.

When considering an application, the committee focuses on three primary issues: Is the research scientifically sound? Do the potential benefits (knowledge gain) outweigh any potential damage that may be caused? Are the information issued to study participants and the method used to gain consent adequate? Is personal information and sensitive personal information treated according to current relevant regulations?

### While you conduct your research

As part of your research, you may have to approach people and ask if they want to participate in your study. This can involve the need to handle personal information that directly or indirectly can be linked to a living, physical person. For example, it could involve direct information such as names, email addresses, social security numbers, or indirect information such as a computer's IP address, a mobile phone's location data, or coded personal information. A picture or an audio recording can be a piece of personal information. What is decisive is if information, either in isolation or in combination with other information, can be linked to a living person.

If this is the case, it must be reported to the university's Data Protection Officer ([data-skydd@du.se](mailto:data-skydd@du.se)) by submitting the form “Anmälan behandling av personuppgifter”. This also means that you will need to handle consent (more information is available on the link “Personal information and data protection” on FEN’s webpage).

What you also need to think about is that participants must be given complete information on the project and what participation involves. If it is necessary to write an information letter, it must be written using language that is clear and easily understood. It must not include any coercive or persuasive language regarding participation. You can find templates for information letters on FEN's webpage.

Remember that all participation in a study is voluntary, and this must be clearly stated in the information letter. If a participant wants to discontinue participation while the study is being conducted, you may not use any form of persuasion or exercise any kind of influence to try to affect his/her decision.

An information letter may not be distributed in a manner that can be experienced as misleading. For example, an information letter may not be sent out in an envelope giving the impression that it is anything but a letter to do with a student research project.

If you are including children aged under 15 years in your study and want to include ethically sensitive questions, your study must be assessed. In these cases, you must also get consent and permission from each child's legal guardian as well as consent from each child. If your research is taking place at a school or other organisation, you will also need permission from the principal/operations manager.

If you are planning on handling sensitive personal information<sup>1</sup> in your research, or personal information on violations of the law<sup>2</sup>, you will need consent from research participants. Click on the link “Personal information and data protection” on FEN’s webpage where you can read more about how to handle personal information while working on your research.

### **After you have completed your research**

Once your research has been examined, you should inform your research participants about the results of your study. You are responsible for ensuring that any empirical material (questionnaires, audio and video recordings, etc.) is destroyed. If the material is part of a research project, please refer to “Dalarna University’s guidelines for documentation and archiving of research material” (DUC2008/1279/90).

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If there is anything that you are unsure about and that your supervisor is unable to help you with, please contact the FEN committee’s chairperson: [fen@du.se](mailto:fen@du.se).

The link to the FEN webpage is [www.du.se/forskningsetik](http://www.du.se/forskningsetik)

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. that concerns ethnicity, political opinions, religious or philosophical persuasions, trade union membership status, health or sex life, genetic and biometric information.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. that concerns crimes committed, criminal convictions, pre-trial supervision, or administrative detention.