



The British Association for Applied Linguistics

Recommendations for good practice in Applied Linguistics student projects

BAAL (The British Association for Applied Linguistics) has developed guidelines for applied linguists in their relation to the profession, colleagues, students, informants, and sponsors. The recommendations are relevant to professional applied linguists, and the core recommendations identified here apply as much to a student doing an essay for an undergraduate course as they do to a professor managing a large funded project. The numbers at the end of each section of this document refer to the corresponding section in the full "Recommendations", available at <http://www.baal.org.uk/goodprac.pdf>.

1. **General responsibility to informants.** You should respect the rights, interests, sensitivities, and privacy of people who provide you with your data ("informants"). You should think about and respect all aspects of identity including their culture, gender, and age. On the basis of this, try to anticipate any harmful effects or disruptions to informants' lives and environment, and to avoid any stress, intrusion, and real or perceived exploitation. [6.1]

2. **Obtaining informed consent.** You must get permission from anyone who provides you with data, whether spoken or written. To do this, you should let informants know anything about your project that might affect their willingness to participate: what your objectives are, what you will need from them, how much time it will take, and how you will keep their identities confidential, if that is necessary. When informants are under 16, you also need their parents' permission too. [6.2]

3. **Respecting a person's decision not to participate.** Informants have a right to refuse to participate in research, even if they said at the outset that they would. It is best to plan your project so that it does not depend entirely on the consent of one or two people. (6.3)

4. **Confidentiality and anonymity.** If you have not been given the right to identify participants, they must not be identifiable in any way (confidentiality) and in particular you must not use real names (anonymity). You should try to anticipate ways identities might accidentally be revealed: by including identifying details, pictures, or moving images, playing voices, or allowing unauthorized access to data on your computer or in your files. (6.4)

5. **Deception and covert research.** Deception is unacceptable because it violates the principles of informed consent and the right to privacy. When linguists do not want informants to alter their usual style of speech, and anticipate they might do so if they know the purpose of the study, it may be defensible

- to tell them the general purpose of the research without revealing specific objectives
- to ask them to agree to be deceived at some unspecified time in the future (for instance, if there is going to be a role play)
- (if there is no alternative) to explain the research immediately after gathering the data, and ask for permission then. But if they do not give permission then, you will have to destroy the data without using it (and they may be very angry).

While deception is unacceptable, distraction is generally ethical. Distraction might involve introducing multiple activities into a study to prevent informants monitoring themselves, or asking them to tell about an event in their lives, when what you are interested in is not the story but its form. (6.5)

6. **Sponsors and users.** If your academic project is done in co-operation with an agency, group, or company in the community, you must usually provide an account of your work that is useful to the user. In turn, they must understand that you have to be evaluated on your work as an academic product, and must meet academic deadlines and standards. (7)

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