

Student research & personal data in your research

As a student at Tilburg University, you may need to work with personal data for research projects that are part of your Bachelor's or Master's thesis or for courses you follow. Working with personal data can mean any action such as collecting, analyzing, handling, or using this type of data.

If you use personal data, these have to be handled with care. In addition, you need to comply with the rules set out by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, in Dutch: *Algemene Verordening Gegevensbescherming* or AVG). Not complying with the GDPR may lead to reputation damage and claims by those involved.

This document describes how you can process personal data in a safe and secure way.

What is personal data?

Personal data refers to all information relating to a natural person. This includes information such as names and addresses, bank account numbers, IP addresses, and various background information about persons (e.g. race, health condition, political preference, sexual preference, and study progress).

Due to the sensitive nature of these data, you cannot process these as if they were ordinary information.

You should take the following four basic rules into account when working with personal data:

1. Provide information and ask consent

When you conduct interviews or use questionnaires, you should provide your respondents or data subjects with all information about your research they need to decide on participation. Further, you need their permission (consent) for using the information they provide. Your respondents need to fill out or digitally agree to an information and consent form. In this form, you explain the purpose of your research, why and how you collect personal data, that you will only use these data for your research, and who has access to the data. A checklist with elements that should be included in your information and consent form can be found on page 3.

When using existing (secondary) personal data, be sure the organization providing the data is allowed to share the data. When collecting personal data without the involvement of the person(s) (for example by extracting data from websites or social media), you have to weigh the privacy rights of the person(s) and your own legitimate interest and make a balanced decision. Your thesis supervisor or teacher can help you with this.

2. Collect as little personal data as possible

Always ask yourself what personal data are necessary for your research. For example, do you really need to collect personal data that can be traced back to a natural person? Do you really need to make recordings? The less personal data you collect, the better.

Once your research is finished and the data are no longer needed, delete all data that are traceable to individuals from all your storage locations. The remaining anonymous data should be stored and accessible by your supervisor until your graduation.

3. Work securely: control access to your data

Make sure no one but you has access to the personal data. Store it safely, for example by pseudonymizing the data (i.e., removing or replacing identifying information), using encryption, or protecting your computer/usb stick with a strong password.

Do NOT use your personal Google Drive, iCloud, Dropbox, Gmail, etc. for sharing and storing personal data. Instead, only use software and storage provided by the university, preferably TiU Google Drive.

You cannot just use any software to collect or analyze personal data. You are allowed to use programs to analyze personal data on your own computer such as SPSS, R, Stata or Atlas.ti (in which case you are not sharing the data). For online surveys, you can use Qualtrics.

Some personal data are more sensitive than others. If you process any of the data from the following list, you also need to encrypt the data files using 7Zip or your storage device using BitLocker. You should treat these data with extra care and only use them when strictly necessary for your project.

Special categories of personal data

All data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and all genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation. (Source: GDPR, Article 9)

4. Do not include personal data in your thesis

When writing your thesis or paper, make sure not to include any personal data in it unless you have received explicit consent from the respondent for this (e.g., a quote from an interview). Always pseudonymize data and sources or use aggregated data, so no persons can be identified in your thesis.

In some cases, using personal data in your paper is inevitable. In this case, only share your paper or thesis with your supervisor. Please note that most Master's theses are sent to the university library for online publishing. If you do not want this, discuss this with your supervisor at an early stage.

Questions? Please contact your thesis supervisor or teacher.

Further information:

Tilburg University Privacy Statement, including the thematic policy 'Scientific research - The Use of Personal Data': <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/privacy>

Checklist information and consent form

As mentioned previously, when you conduct interviews or use questionnaires, you should provide information about your research, and you need the permission (consent) of the respondents for using the information they provide.

In the information and consent form you:

- explain the purpose of your research;
- explain why and how you collect personal data. Also, explain that these data will only be used for your research and explain who has access to the data;
- explain that the anonymous/coded data is stored until you graduate;
- explain that the respondent can always withdraw his/her consent;
- are transparent about any risks that might be part of your data collection.

The information and consent form contains the following required elements:

- The title of your study.
- Confirmation that the information and consent form is read.
- Confirmation that there was room for questions by the respondents.
- Reminder on the voluntariness of participation. The right to decline to participate and withdraw from the research once participation has begun, without any negative consequences, and without providing any explanation.
- The right, in principle, to request access to and rectification, erasure, restriction of or object to the processing of the personal data. For more information: www.tilburguniversity.edu/privacy.
- Permission for participation in the study. This permission must be voluntary and unambiguous.
- Date, name, and signature of the participant.

The information and consent form is typically used for respondents that are at least 17 years old and mentally competent. When you work with people under the age of 17 or mentally incompetent adults, contact your supervisor or teacher for advice.

