

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARING RESEARCH CONSENT FORMS

- 1. Use plain language.** The consent form should be in a language that is understandable to someone without a scientific background. If your subjects are recruited among the general population, the consent form should be written at an 8th grade reading level, or lower. Please use the Microsoft Readability Statistics tool as needed when writing your consent form.
- 2. Speak directly to the reader.** Use “you” when referring to the subject. For example, “You will participate in an interview....” Rather than, “Subjects will....”
- 3. Use the active voice to make it clear who will do what.** For example, write, “I will ask you to participate in an interview...” rather than the passive voice, “You will be asked...”
- 4. Use words with the fewest number of syllables.** For example, use “drug” rather than “medication,” “take part” rather than “participate.”
- 5. Use short, declarative sentences to deliver a clear message.** Break long sentences into several shorter ones. Express only one major idea in each sentence. Avoid complex sentences loaded with dependent clauses and exceptions.
- 6. Break lengthy paragraphs or passages into multiple, shorter paragraphs.** Whenever possible, use a separate, short paragraph for each topic. Express only one major idea in each paragraph.
- 7. Avoid unfamiliar or confusing words and phrases.** Avoid jargon. Use lay (non-technical) language in place of scientific terminology, “study that uses photographs” rather than, “study that uses photovoice method.” If it is necessary to use a technical term, explain it in lay language.
- 8. Use the same term consistently** to identify a specific concept or object, e.g., use “research study” throughout, not a variety of terms such as “study,” “investigation,” “clinical trial,” etc.
- 9. Define an abbreviation** the first time you use it, e.g., MRI (magnetic resonance imaging); then use the abbreviation alone. Limit use of unfamiliar abbreviations.
- 10. Don’t use Latin abbreviations**, such as i.e., e.g., and b.i.d, or symbols such as \leq or

Adapted from [“PARTNERS HUMAN RESEARCH COMMITTEE INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARING RESEARCH CONSENT FORMS”](#)

≥. Instead, use words (“less than or equal to”).

- 11. Avoid misinterpretations.** Place words carefully to avoid misinterpretations or muddled meanings.
- Keep subjects and objects close to their verbs.
 - Make sure pronouns clearly refer to specific nouns.
 - Put conditionals, such as “only” and other modifiers, next to the words they modify, whenever possible.
 - Use contractions when appropriate. For example, write “don’t take” rather than “do not take.” Some readers may see the “do” and skip over the “not.”

- 12. Use vertical lists (“bullets”) to highlight important information.** Use vertical lists of points/items to help your reader focus on important information in a visually clear way. Always use a lead-in sentence or phrase to explain your list of points or items.

For example, vertical lists are useful for:

- highlighting levels of importance;
- helping the reader understand the order in which things happen;
- making it easy for the reader to identify all necessary steps in a process;
- setting apart items in a long list for easier reading.

It’s easy to over-use vertical lists. Use them to highlight important information, not to over- emphasize trivial matters. Limit vertical lists to 10 items or less. Be sure they make sense grammatically and are punctuated consistently.

- 13. Don’t use “You understand...”**

Beginning a sentence with “You understand...” assumes that the individual reading the consent form understands what is being written, but this may not be the case. Many prospective subjects won’t “understand” the scientific and medical significance of all of the statements and will require further explanation.

- 14. Always print and proofread** the consent form for grammatical, typographical, and formatting errors, and for readability.