

Ethical guidelines

The experiment for the internal assessment must adhere to the ethical guidelines outlined below.

- Any experimental study that creates anxiety, stress, pain or discomfort for participants is not permitted. Experiments involving deception, conformity, obedience, or any other form of harm are not permitted. The experiment must be appropriate to the sensitivities of the particular school, community and country.
- Any experimental study that involves unjustified deception, involuntary participation or invasion of privacy, including the inappropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT), email and the internet, must be avoided. There may be rare occasions when such infringements cannot be avoided, in which case the approval of other experienced psychologists should be sought before proceeding.
 - Partial deception may be allowed for some experiments where full knowledge of the experiment would fundamentally affect the outcome—such experiments are permissible provided they do no harm and participants are fully debriefed at the end. Participants retain their right to withdraw their data at this point. The only exception is a conformity or obedience study; these are not permitted under any circumstances. The teacher should be ready and willing to explain why conformity and obedience experiments are not appropriate for students at this level of study.
- Consent must be explicitly gained from participants through the use of a consent form. Implied consent is not acceptable.
- All participants must be informed of the aims and objectives of the experiment.
- All participants must be informed before commencing the experimental study that they have the right to withdraw at any time. Pressure must not be placed on any individual participant to continue with the investigation.
- Young children (under 12 years) must not be used as participants as they cannot give informed consent. Experimental studies involving older children (from 12 years up to 16 years) need the written consent of parent(s) or guardian(s). Students must ensure that parents are fully informed about the implications for children who take part in such research. Where an experimental study is conducted with children in a school, the written consent of the teachers concerned must also be obtained.
- Participants must be debriefed and given the right to withdraw their own personal data and responses. Anonymity for each participant must be guaranteed even after the experiment has finished.
- Participants must be shown the results of the research and if reasonable deception was involved, the participants must have the deception explained and justified to them.
- Teachers and students must exercise the greatest sensitivity to local and international cultures.
- Students must not conduct research with any participant who is not in a fit state of mind and cannot respond freely and independently.
- If any participant shows stress or pain at any stage of an experimental study, the investigation must finish immediately, and the participant must be allowed to withdraw.
- Non-human animals must not be used for the experimental study.

- All data collected must be kept in a confidential and responsible manner and not disclosed to any other person.
- Data must not be used for purposes other than that agreed to by the participants.
- Students must regard it as their duty to monitor the ways in which their peers conduct research, and to encourage public re-evaluation of any research practices that breach these guidelines.
- Experimental studies that are conducted online are subject to the same guidelines. Any data collected online must be deleted once the research is complete. Such data must not be used for any purpose other than the conduct of the experimental study.
- Teachers who feel the need for more guidance on whether an experiment is ethical should consult other teachers via the OCC who may offer additional expertise and critical distance.

For the experiment to be considered ethical, it must do no harm to anyone (also see section “Approaches to the Independent Variable” above). This includes participants, researchers, bystanders, teachers/supervisors, moderators, and eventual readers. Teachers should be prepared to discuss and explain what “harm” means. It can mean a number of things: hurt, injure, torment, tease, torture, traumatize, impair, wound, mistreat, punish, maltreat, misuse, abuse, molest, damage, or adversely affect. Harm manifests in many ways, not only in a physical sense. High standards of ethical practice are central to the IB philosophy and should therefore be promoted and supported by the entire IB community.