# Online Survey Guidelines

1. Project must be minimal risk in order to conduct an online survey.
2. The IRB recommends that for online data collection a professionally administered survey server be used (e.g., Qualtrics, Survey Monkey, Zoomerang, etc.).
3. The fundamentals of informed consent for face-to-face data collection must also be observed for internet & online survey research. Prior to the start of the survey, an adequate informed consent document should be displayed to the participants.
4. The IRB recommends the use of a phrase at the bottom of the electronic consent document that indicates the participants’ voluntary participation. This can be a phrase with a YES check box that  
   will take the participant to the survey and a NO checkbox to exit the survey.  
   YES, I voluntarily agree to participate in this research.  
   NO, please exit me from this survey.
5. A forced response that requires participants to answer all the questions before submitting the survey or before moving to the next question is not allowable and is seen as a violation of the research principles of voluntary participation. Use an N/A response or “Prefer not to Respond” as an option, if necessary.
6. **Confidentiality & Data Storage:**
   1. The IRB recommends that all data be stored in encrypted format.
   2. Do not promise absolute confidentiality with an electronic medium. The IRB suggests using a sentence such as “Your confidentiality is only as secure as your equipment. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.”
   3. The IRB recommends that researchers use SSL (Secure Socket Layer protocol) to ensure that survey responses will be encrypted when submitted (similar to when a shopper provides credit card information when purchasing a product online). If SSL will not be used, researchers should warn participants that “Transfer of information across the Internet is not secure and could be observed by a third party.”
   4. If IP addresses will be collected/stored or if cookies will be used (e.g., so that only the participants who have not responded to a survey are reminded), state this in your protocol, let the participant know that this data is being collected, and when it will be deleted from the dataset. The participant should be informed up front that s/he will receive reminders if s/he does not respond in a specific amount of time.
   5. If using an existing service to conduct your online survey (SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics, Zoomerang), provide information in the protocol regarding the services’ security and confidentiality policies, data security, and how long the data will be stored and backed up.
7. **Surveys completed via Email:**
   1. Instead of recruiting with a group email, send individual recruitment emails to participants to avoid any confidentiality breach. If this is not possible, maintain confidentiality by emailing the group emails in the BCC (blind carbon copy) section of the email.
   2. Avoid asking for participants’ personal information via email (e.g., asking for home address phone number and birthdate in the same email).
   3. Participants should be informed that complete anonymity may not be possible. The IRB suggests the use of a phrase such as “Although it is unlikely that anyone will try to gain access to your email, you have the right to know that email transmissions are not private and therefore transmission of information through this form cannot be guaranteed to remain confidential.”
8. If minors will be recruited or possibly in the recruitment pool, parental permission must be addressed. Of special consideration is that researchers working with children online are subject to the [Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)](http://www.ftc.gov/ogc/coppa1.htm) in addition to the human subjects’ regulations. Researchers are prohibited from collecting personal information from a child without posting notices about how the information will be used and without getting verifiable parental consent.
9. If your research can be accessed by anyone on the internet, please address how you will you confirm that only adults 18 and older are replying or that participants are of a certain age; 45-65. Although there are no reliable methods for determining the age of internet users, some suggestions would be to ask age-related questions in multiple ways (e.g., date of birth, age, and age range). Another suggestion to screen out minors is to check for internet monitoring software such as SafeSurf.
10. To include college-aged participants who are < 18, the requirement for parental permission for lowrisk online studies can be waived if the study meets the requirements for a waiver of parental permission. To request a waiver of parental permission for students < 18, select “waiver of consent” in the consent section in eProtocol, and answer the questions that appear below the drop-down menu. If this waiver is not requested, participants who are < 18 must obtain their parents’ signed permission to participate.