

# Confidentiality vs. Anonymity

## Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that the information is private, secret, not universally available, or known to only a select few. According to the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2, 2022, confidentiality is the “obligation of an individual or organization to safeguard entrusted information ... [and] includes obligations to protect information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss or theft” (TCPS2, 2022, p.78). To learn more, see Chapter 5 of the [TCPS2, 2022](#).

## Anonymity

Anonymity means that information is not identifiable by name to a specific participant, even to the researcher. The TCPS defines anonymous information as that which “never had identifiers associated with it” (TCPS2, 2022, p.80).

## Considerations

Researchers have a responsibility to safeguard information entrusted to them and not to misuse or wrongfully disclose it (TCPS2, 2022). Researchers should consider the following when making decisions about data access and storage.

- 1) Contact data of participants
- 2) Access to raw data (including audio or video files)
  - a. How will data be stored? How long will it be stored? Will it be public? What security measures have been put into place to safeguard the information?
  - b. How will the data be destroyed or archived?
  - c. Note: There is a five-year minimum for data storage
- 3) How will the participant's privacy be respected (for data storage and report write-up)?
- 4) Write-up of the results:
  - a. qualitative (e.g., with names, quotes) vs. quantitative (aggregated data)
  - b. use of pseudonyms vs. real names
  - c. participant review of data before publication
- 5) Size of sample – small samples may be more identifiable even with anonymized information
- 6) Possible identification of participants due to uniqueness or recognizability (are there precautions to alleviate this?)



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- 7) Is the researcher under any obligation to report on specific findings (e.g., child abuse, risk of suicide, safety, etc.)?
- 8) For group settings, how will the researcher manage confidentiality for the participants? How will confidentiality guidelines be described to the participants?
- 9) If anonymity is optional, include a provision in the consent form to have the participant allow the use of his/her name.