Checklist
(last amended 22.11.2021)

Checklist for self-evaluation of ethical permissibility of studies

Individuals with responsibility for a study should complete this checklist before beginning with data collection. They should then decide whether or not to apply to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Working title of study:

Project manager(s):

Responsible individual:

		Ja	Nein
1	Is there any danger that participants could be disadvantaged through their behavior in your study, or by not participating in your study?	☐	☐
2	Is it possible or planned for persons with restricted discriminatory powers, no discriminatory powers, or who are legally incompetent to participate?	☐	☐
3	Will it be necessary for persons to participate in the study without their knowledge and without having given their prior informed consent (e.g. for the purposes of covert observation)?	☐	☐
4	Will the study involve the collection and processing of personal data?	☐	☐
5	Will participants deliberately be informed about the study aims and/or procedure incompletely or incorrectly (e.g. as manipulated performance feedback)?	☐	☐
6	Will participants be asked to disclose personal (e.g. incriminating) experiences, sensitive information (e.g. sexual practices, drug-taking) or leanings (e.g. political or religious preferences)?	☐	☐
7	In cases impacting the *physical* integrity of participants (e.g. the administering of medication, the taking of blood): Can this have negative physical consequences?	☐	☐
8	In cases impacting the *mental* integrity of participants (e.g. ability to concentrate, induction of negative emotions): Can this have negative mental consequences?	☐	☐
9	In cases impacting the *social* integrity of participants (e.g. a group experiment): Can this have negative social consequences (e.g. a «reputation» acquired within the group)?	☐	☐
10	Will participants be offered a financial incentive to participate in the study which ex-	☐	☐

ceeds the usual level of compensation?

11	Are any or all of the participants particularly vulnerable persons (e.g. relationship of dependence, member of a fringe group, impaired cognitive faculties)?	☐	☐
12	Does the provider of research funding require approval from an ethics committee or ethical review board?	☐	☐
13	Does the provider of research funding or the legislator require registration of the proposed study?	☐	☐
14	Has the study already been submitted to an ethics committee or ethical review board for approval?	☐	☐

Name of committee:
Date of submission:
Approval reference number (if known):

If the answer to one or more of questions 1-14 is YES, an application must be submitted to the Faculty of Theology Ethics Committee for approval of the study.

Explanatory remarks

Question 1: Participants in studies are often students who are dependent on the study leader or his/her superior (because of examinations to be taken or a contract signed for tutorage or research assistance). In such cases, it must be ensured that the test persons will not be disadvantaged through their participation in the study – e.g. by a poorer grading of their overall performance if their participation in the study is not satisfactory. This can be achieved by guaranteeing the anonymity of test persons for the person(s) on whom they are dependent. For example, lecturers who grade the performance of students should not learn the identities of any of their own students participating in the study. If anonymity is guaranteed, Question 1 can be answered with NO.

Question 2: Examples of persons without full discriminatory powers may be children, persons with mental disabilities, persons with dementia, persons with mental illnesses.

Question 3: This question refers to investigations where the behavior of test persons is observed or influenced during experiments without their knowledge.

Question 4: All forms of personal data collection must be taken into account. Even handwritten information noted down about a person counts as the collection and processing of personal data, requiring ethical reflection and justification.

Question 5: This question refers to investigations involving an intentional deception of the participants. This means that participants are deliberately left in the dark about essential aspects of the study, or are deliberately misled, so that when they later discover the truth they will inevitably feel

deceived. This includes, for example, incorrect feedback about their performance, incorrect information about the aims of the study, or interaction with another alleged «test person» who has really been planted by the researcher. This question does not refer to the fact that test persons are not usually fully informed about all the background details of a study and the scientific hypotheses it seeks to prove or disprove.

Question 6: This question refers to the collection of information which is sensitive for one of two reasons. Firstly, information which could be disadvantageous for the test person if passed on to a third party (e.g. political leanings) must be treated with utmost confidentiality. Secondly, information can be very sensitive because it could, if passed on to a third party, provoke an extreme emotional reaction, meaning that the data collection could amount to an unacceptable emotional burden (e.g. traumatic experiences).

Question 7: This question refers to physical interventions such as the taking of medication or drugs (including alcohol), as well as invasive measures such as the taking of blood or injection of contrast medium. It does not refer to non-critical physical interventions, such as the drinking of non-alcoholic beverages, moderate exercising or the measuring of blood pressure.

Question 8: As for Question 7, important here is whether or not the consequences of the intervention are critical. For example, mood induction through the playing of happy or sad music is non-critical because music is omnipresent in our everyday lives and is therefore not expected to lead to severe consequences. In contrast, the showing of pictures depicting war and maiming can be critical – their showing might also be a frequent occurrence in our everyday lives, but normally we are not forced to look at them, and they could provoke an extreme emotional reaction.

Question 9: Not every group experiment is ethically critical, but under some circumstances group experiments harbor the inherent danger that persons can be put in social settings which they find unpleasant, for example when an experiment creates a competitive situation where certain participants are obviously inferior, where aggression is induced, or where persons find the situation embarrassing. Here, too, as with the two previous questions, a line must be drawn between small unpleasantries which are common and acceptable (e.g. nervousness, which some people always feel when speaking to a group) and unpleasantries which cross the line and are unacceptable (e.g. shouting at participants).

Question 10: Here a distinction must be made between a small fee, usually paid in the research field in question for participation in a study, and a financial incentive which is specifically planned as part of the study in order to achieve a particular goal (e.g. especially high motivation to perform).

Question 11: Particularly vulnerable refers to e.g. persons who are in relationships of dependency which expose them to the danger of being exploited, persons who belong to fringe groups (e.g. migrants, the unemployed), or any other persons whose situation for whatever reason exposes them to the danger of being exploited.

Questions 12 & 13: If the provider of research funding requires approval from an ethics committee or ethical review board, then the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Theology must be consulted first,

provided that no other ethics committee is explicitly stated. This does not impact any obligation to register the study.

Question 14: This question refers to ethics committees or ethical review boards outside the Faculty of Theology, e.g. non-cantonal ethics committees for multicenter studies.

As a general rule: if there is any doubt, please consult a member of the Faculty of Theology Ethics Committee.