Deception and the Debriefing Process

Answers to your Questions

- When is debriefing required? ............................................................ 1
- What information must be provided to subjects?
  The Debriefing Checklist ................................................................. 2
- What must I consider before including deception in my research? ..... 2

Examples and Templates

- Debriefing Statement Template ......................................................... 3
- Debriefing Statement Example........................................................... 4

When is Debriefing Required?

Sometimes, in order to accomplish research objectives, investigators must deliberately mislead subjects during the research by withholding information or even providing false information. As a result, subjects are not fully informed about the research when they consent to participate. For example, you might:
- stage an emergency, assault, or other situation
- provide false feedback about a subject’s performance
- hide the true purpose of the research
- conceal the identity of another researcher

When research involves a deceptive technique like those mentioned above, you are required to “debrief” subjects after their involvement in the research.
What Information Must Be Provided to Subjects?
The Debriefing Checklist

To dispel the deception, the following information must be explained to subjects either orally or in writing:

1. **purpose** of the research
2. your **hypotheses**—what you expect to find
3. existence of **deception** in your study—what subjects were led to believe contrasted with reality
4. **reasons** for deception
5. **whom to contact** for answers to questions and **how** to contact them (typically, you as researcher; a student must include contact information for an advisor as well)
6. the subject’s **right to withdraw data** (if the data includes identifying information that enables the researcher to distinguish and eliminate an individual’s responses)

What Must I Consider Before Including Deception in my Research?

Consider the following questions:

- **Is deception essential to the research?**
  You should use deception only when no other methodology will accomplish the research objective(s).

- **Will the deception present more than minimal risk to subjects?**
  You may not expose subjects to risks that they have not agreed to incur.

- **Will the deception adversely affect the rights and welfare of subjects?**
  You may not use a deceptive technique as part of the research if it compromises subjects or their rights.

- **Will the information withheld or falsely provided influence the willingness of subjects to participate in the research?**
  You may not withhold information that—if known—might result in subjects refusing to participate:
  You may not provide false information that might result in subjects agreeing to participate when they may not have otherwise.
Debriefing Statement Template

The following template is provided for your convenience. Feel free to modify the language as necessary to fit your research activity, but be sure to include all the required elements of debriefing as outlined in the checklist above.

(Your Research Project Title)
Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation in this research on state what is being studied.

Activities, Purpose, and Hypotheses
During this research, you were asked to describe the activities that subjects were asked to complete. The purpose of this research is in general terms, explain what the study is designed to discover or establish. It is expected that describe your hypotheses—what you expect to find and why—citing references as necessary.

Deception
Explain the existence of deception in the research by contrasting what subjects were led to believe with reality and give reasons for the deception.

For example:
- You were led to believe that the purpose of this study was…; however, in reality, the purpose was…. This deception was necessary because….
- During the research, information about…was withheld so that….
- The emergency (or argument, assault, etc.) you just witnessed wasn’t real. It was staged in order to….

Additional Resources
The presence of deception in your research may have prevented you from suggesting resources to your subjects in the informed consent document. If applicable, suggest those resources here.

For example:
- If you’d like to know more about state the topic of your study, you may be interested in the following: cite books, articles, etc.
- If you need assistance or would like to talk with someone about state the topic of your study, the following services are available: (For on-campus studies, list appropriate SCSU services or centers, such as the Counseling Center, the Center for International Studies, or the Non-Traditional Student Office. For off-campus studies, list local service agencies or organizations and indicate whether subjects will incur a cost for their services.)

Contact Information
If you have questions right now, please ask. If you have additional questions later, you may contact me at phone number or email address. You may keep this document for your records.

Note: Students researchers must include the name and contact information of a faculty adviser as well.
Right to Withdraw Data

*If data includes identifying information that enables the researcher to distinguish and eliminate an individual's responses, subjects must be informed of their right to withdraw their data from the research.*

Your decision whether or not to withdraw your data will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, the researcher, or *name any cooperating professor or organization/group.*

### Debriefing Statement Example

#### Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation in this research on the effect of proximity and interview techniques on eyewitness memory. Two types of questions were used in this experiment. One was the cognitive interview and the other was a control interview similar to police questions. The cognitive interview uses four retrieval techniques to bring out the memory of an event. These techniques allow a person to express how they felt at the time of the event, recall the event in different orders, mentally change their perspective about the event, and finally report all information they remember—even if it seems unimportant (Geiselman et al., 1984). It was hypothesized that when testing eyewitness memory, the cognitive interview would elicit more accurate responses when compared to the control interview. It was also hypothesized that even if the participant was farther away from the event, they would still report more accurate information with the cognitive interview. If you would like to learn more about the cognitive interview, please see Geiselman et al. (1984).

**It was required for the experimenter to deceive you about the event**—that is the person did not actually win a prize—because it more closely approximates an event in which an eyewitness would be necessary. Eyewitnesses often do not know they are hearing and seeing events that others will want them to remember. When we are trying to remember something, we often act differently. See Myers (1998) for a discussion of memory.

Your participation was important in helping researchers learn whether the cognitive interview is better for obtaining more accurate information in eyewitness situations. The findings in this study should help to improve the accuracy of eyewitness interview techniques. Improved eyewitness interviewing techniques may aid in solving future crimes in which an eyewitness is present. Also, by participating in this study you have first hand knowledge of what it is like to be in a psychology experiment.

Final results will be posted on the bulletin board outside of Stewart Hall 213 by the week of December 11. All results are grouped together; therefore, individual results are not available. Your participation will remain confidential.

If you have any additional questions regarding this research, please contact Jessica Seaton (scsugal@aol.com) or Dr. Leslie Valdes (valdes@stcloudstate.edu or 255-3092).

### References
