

# When is a protocol too specific??? When is it too vague???

## Tips for Writing the “perfect” Protocol

It can be a difficult process to determine how much detail is the right amount of detail. Provide too much detail and you may have to submit additional amendments in the future to update this information. Provide too little and you'll end up with contingencies requesting clarification. So, what is the right amount???

Here are a few tips:

- Telling researchers to "be more vague" doesn't mean that we want less information. It means that we want less detail. One good example is that we will always want to know who will obtain consent and when and where consent will take place.
  - Too vague: Consent will be obtained from all participants using the attached form.
  - Too specific: Sara Smith will obtain consent in room 115 before administration of the demographic questionnaire.
  - ✓ Right amount: Consent will be obtained by an RA in the lab before the study begins.
  
- Don't lock yourself into dates or deadlines
  - Don't say that the key/audiotapes will be destroyed in May 2015.
    - ✓ Do say that the key/audiotapes will be destroyed 2 years after data collection is completed.
  - Don't say that an online survey will be available to potential participants for 30 days.
    - ✓ Do say that the online survey will be available until you obtain at least 100 responses.
  
- Expect details to change during the course of a study
  - Don't use the names of study team members when outlining what jobs will be completed by whom. Study team members graduate, find new jobs, or their responsibilities change. Rather, use titles...
    - ✓ Do say: The undergraduate RA will obtain consent.
    - ✓ Do say: A graduate student in clinical psych will administer the interview.
  - Don't say that experimental stimuli will be shown to participants for 500 ms with an ISI of 200ms.
    - ✓ Do say that participants will view stimuli on a computer.
  - Don't say that participants will complete 30 trials with 10 words per trial and will be asked to rate the pleasantness of the word on a 10 point Likert-type scale.
    - ✓ Do say that in each trial participants will be asked to rate the pleasantness of each word using a likert-type scale. Participation will last no more than 1 hour.