

The Standard Application Form: -

E2.3 (a) Would you class the data collected in this study as anonymous, irrevocably anonymised, pseudonymised, coded or identifiable data?

(Please note that different media may be classed differently. Questionnaires for example may be completely anonymous rendering it impossible to ascertain which research participant completed an individual questionnaire. In a research study involving an anonymous questionnaire it would be impossible for a research participant to withdraw from the study once data collection has occurred. Images may be identifiable in particular where images are clearly marked with a patient's name or medical record number. Photographs of the face and video-recordings, for example, are identifiable. The term 'irrevocably anonymised' applies when the data which was originally identifiable has been rendered 'anonymous' by the researcher e.g. to delete the patient name, medical record number from an 'x-ray' would irrevocably anonymise the X-Ray. It should be noted that it can be more difficult to successfully de-identify photographs of the face and video-recordings. The term 'pseudonymised' is a form of anonymisation wherein duplication is avoided by the use of 'initials / year of birth' for example. Finally, data is often coded i.e. it is possible to identify the participant from the data via a code which is retained by the researcher.)

[CHOOSE ANSWER]

Identifiable	Coded	Pseudonymised	Irrevocably Anonymised	Anonymous
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E2.3 (b) If 'coded' please confirm who will retain the 'key' to re-identify the data? (It is recommended that the key to re-identify 'coded' data remain at the site of origin of the data. It is further recommended that the person who holds the 'key' to re-identify be the lead investigator at the site.)

[TYPE ANSWER]

Commentary: -

It is common for researchers applying for ethical approval to use the terms 'anonymous' and 'anonymised' in a vague sense, which can make it difficult for the ethics committee. Dictionary definitions themselves are broad, often pre-dating the digital age.

ANONYMOUS: Adjective (of a person), Not identified by name; of unknown name

Oxford Dictionary

TO ANONYMISE / ANONYMIZE: Verb, To remove the name / to make nameless

Medterms.com

- More often than not when a researcher uses the term 'anonymised' s/he actually means 'coded'
- A good rule of thumb is that if there is any way back of finding out the identity of the research participant, while the data may be 'anonymised' it is not [IRREVOCALLY] 'anonymised'
- As the usual method back is to break the code, it is simpler and clearer to state from the outset that the data will be 'coded'

The Visual Approach:

You may agree that all research involves data collection and analysis.

Researchers who use spreadsheets to collect and analyse their data may find it helpful to visualize the difference between different types.

A ANONYMOUS

MRN NO.	??
NAME	??
DATE OF BIRTH	??

B. CODED = MOST COMMONLY COLLECTED DATA TYPE IN RESEARCH

	CODE
MRN NO.	001
NAME	
DATE OF BIRTH	
MRN NO.	002
NAME	
DATE OF BIRTH	

C. IDENTIFIABLE

MRN NO.	MRN2350001743
NAME	John Murphy
DATE OF BIRTH	04/01/1956

D. PSEUDONYMISED – DO NOT CONFUSE WITH ‘CODED’

DEFINITION = THE TEMPORARY COLLECTION OF LIMITED IDENTIFIERS TO PREVENT DUPLICATES DURING DATA COLLECTION

	(e.g. Initials / Year of Birth)
MRN NO.	JM56
NAME	
DATE OF BIRTH	

E. IRREVOCABLY ANONYMISED

MRN NO.	??
NAME	??
DATE OF BIRTH	??