

Category 1 Exemption: Educational Practices

Guidance for researchers

What research qualifies for a Category 1 exemption?

Research conducted in established or **commonly accepted educational** settings that involve **normal educational** practices, such as

- a. research on regular and special education instructional strategies OR
- b. research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among institutional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

What is considered a “commonly accepted educational setting”?

Such settings include but are not limited to K-12 schools and college classrooms. They may also include after-school programs, preschools, vocational schools, alternative education programs, and other sites where educational activities regularly occur.

What is considered a “normal educational practice”?

Such practices include established teaching methods, curriculum content and commonly accepted classroom management techniques that are planned and implemented by the classroom teacher. Normal educational practices are activities that would occur regardless of whether the research is conducted. Thus, a study that evaluates a radically new instructional strategy or curriculum, or that randomly assigns students to different instructional strategies/curricula for comparison, would probably not be exempt, since these are not “normal educational practices.” Studies that involve surveys and interviews with minors that are outside of “normal educational practices” also do not qualify for exemption.

Examples of Research Exempt under Category 1:

- A study evaluating the effectiveness of a commonly accepted science curriculum. For the study, researchers will observe classroom instruction and collect quizzes and class evaluations that are part of the curriculum and classroom practices.
- A study comparing two curricula that are currently being implemented in a school. Researchers will observe classrooms as well as interview instructors about their experiences implementing the instructional materials (but not about specific students).
- A study comparing driver’s education curricula offered by area driving schools. The researcher will observe classes and compare driving test scores at the end of the courses.

Examples of Research NOT Exempt under Category 1:

- A researcher wants to determine whether providing tangible reinforcement or verbal reinforcement will lead to greater increases in appropriate behavior and decreases in problem behavior for students identified with a serious behavior disorder. Individual students will be chosen for participation from classrooms of the same grade in consultation with the teachers. The students will be as closely matched for age and nature of the disorder, and then randomly assigned to an intervention condition. For example, one student will receive tangible reinforcement, one will receive verbal reinforcement, and the third will be the control.
- Researchers are interested in developing a new assessment for math skills that involve both scoring of written prompts as well as responses involving use of manipulatives. It is expected that a new standardized, norm-referenced product will result. According to the

school, the planned assessment is aligned with current curriculum and will not require students to respond to questions that would be unfamiliar. However, the development process entails having students respond to more assessment items than would be expected. In addition, in order to validate the new assessment, additional tests not currently used in the school will be administered for comparison, thus extending total testing time and number of items beyond what would be considered normal educational practice.

What if my research involves videotaping classroom lessons?

The exemption criteria says nothing specific about videotaping. Videotaping is permissible in a Category 1 exemption, so long as the research will be taking place in a commonly accepted educational setting and will be examining normal educational practices. However, if the videotape will be shared with others (e.g., even if the videographer/researcher is a student teacher who is going to share the tape with his/her supervisor), then the researcher needs to get permission for videotaping.

For further information regarding the use of releases for images and recordings:

<https://ors.duke.edu/orsmanual/photograph-and-film-releases>

Is a separate consent form for video-taping Category 1 research necessary if a general consent form authorizing video-taped lessons was sent home at the beginning of the year?

Researchers need to follow the policy of the school where the research will be conducted. If the researcher does want or need to get a separate consent form

DEFINITIONS:

Commonly accepted educational setting: includes, but is not limited to K-12 schools and college classrooms. They may also include after-school programs, preschools, vocational schools, alternative education programs, and other sites where educational activities regularly occur.

Normal educational practice: established teaching methods, curriculum content, and commonly accepted classroom management techniques that are planned and implemented by the classroom teacher. Normal educational practices are activities that would occur regardless of whether the research is conducted.

(e.g., the general release form from the school may not apply to the video taping of classrooms by an outside person for research), then these sites have some useful templates:

<http://rsp.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/PhotoRelease.docx>

<http://rsp.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/VideoRelease.docx>

<http://inside.bard.edu/irb/consent/VideoRelease.shtml>

What if my research involves student focus groups?

A focus group led by the researcher may or may not meet the criteria for a Category 1 exemption. Although a researcher-led focus group would not meet the criteria for "normal educational practices", as normal educational practices are activities that are planned and implemented by the classroom teacher and would take place whether or not the research occurs, it may be permissible within the constraints of a Category 1 exemption for a researcher to ask students questions regarding the "normal educational practice" being studied. So, if the focus group was designed for the researcher to ask students questions about the "normal educational practice" being studied, then it could be permissible under the exemption.

What if my research involves parent focus groups?

Again, a parent focus group may or may not meet the criteria for a Category 1 exemption. If the focus group is being planned and implemented by the classroom teacher and would take place whether or not the research occurs, then the research could include the parent focus groups and still meet the criteria for the Category 1 exemption.

If the parent focus group is being led by the researcher and would *not* be taking place if the research was not occurring, then the research may not meet the criteria for a Category 1 exemption. It may be the case, however, that the parent focus group portion of the research could qualify for a Category 2 exemption (See Category 2 FAQ).

Category 2 exemptions do not apply to minors, but might apply to a parent focus

group, where the information being collected would likely be very low-risk.

What if I'm still not sure whether or not my research qualifies for a Category 1 exemption?

If you have any doubts about whether your research qualifies for an exemption, it is preferable to err on the side of caution and apply as a full protocol. You can also contact the Office of Research of Compliance (orca@ucsc.edu) for further guidance.

Anything else I should know if I'm doing research in a classroom setting?

Yes. FERPA and PPRA may apply to your research. Be sure to consult the FERPA/PPRA FAQ for more information.