
Ethical guidelines

Video is a powerful medium and easy to misuse. When you ask to videotape people, it is important that they not only agree, but that they understand what they are agreeing to. This is called "informed consent". The goal is to ensure that people do not give their permission for something without understanding the consequences. Getting a signature on a piece of paper is not sufficient. The person requesting consent is responsible for explaining the procedures and ensuring that these procedures, as well as the subsequent use of any resulting information, are fully understood. If the person you would like to videotape says "no", accept his or her answer without argument and find someone else to videotape.

The following basic ethical guidelines are derived from Mackay (1995). The "producer" is the person conducting the interview. The "user" is the person interviewed.

A. Prior to Recording

1. Establish what constitutes informed consent

Prior to recording, obtain *informed consent*¹: make sure the user understands the implications of being videotaped. The producer must define what constitutes informed consent. This may be difficult. Explain your purpose in videotaping, what will be shot, who will have access to the resulting video, where and in what context it will be shown, and that their permission will be asked again if the video will be used for a new purpose.

2. Inform people of the presence of live cameras

If a camera is left on, e.g., in a media space or to record an event, let people know when they are on camera and give them the opportunity to avoid being in the camera's view. A sign should state whether or not the video is being recorded. For example, EuroPARC's media space uses a camera in the commons area. A mannequin holds the camera and a sign to let visitors know they are on camera.

3. Ask for permission before videotaping

Tell users that a videotape record will be made and give them the opportunity to speak off the record or stop the recording altogether. Consider if the user feels social pressure to agree and make it clear that saying no is legitimate. Avoiding social consequences may be difficult, e.g., when a meeting is taped and only one person objects.

4. Explain the purpose of the video

Tell users the expected purpose and other potential uses of the video. For example, videotapes from usability studies are sometimes re-used for advertising. Tell users whether separate video clips or the entire session could be used.

5. Explain who will have access to the video

Tell users if anyone other than the producer will view the video. Users may not mind a researcher seeing a tape, but may feel uncomfortable if it is shown to colleagues, managers or general audiences, e.g. at a CHI conference.

6. Explain possible settings for showing the videotape

Tell users where the videotape could be shown. For example, at CHI conferences, videotapes may be shown to large audiences during talks, in small videotape viewing rooms, or on the hotel cable TV. In some corporate settings, some video clips may be used for advertising.

7. Explain possible consequences of showing the video

Producers may find it difficult to adequately convey how a user might feel if the video were shown in a certain setting. For example, a video clip shown on a television monitor to colleagues might be acceptable, but highly objectionable when projected on a 40 foot screen to a large audience.

8. Describe potential ways video might be disguised

If the video will be used in unpredictable settings, describe how the user's image will be disguised, e.g., through blur-ring the user's face. Mantei's (1990) "Strauss Mouse" video is a clever example of avoiding potentially embarrassing use of research videos; she used actors' hands to demonstrate the ways executives misunderstood a 'simple' computer mouse.

B. After Recording

1. Treat videotapes of users as confidential

Do not allow others to view videotapes casually and restrict access to them. This protects producers as well, e.g., if a manager decides to reuse video in ways that violate the original agreement between the user and producer.

2. Allow users to view videotapes

Ideally, give the user the opportunity to view the completed video. If this is not possible, the producer should consider ways in which people can be disguised. For example, some video editing systems can blur or distort a face.

3. If use of the videotape changes, obtain permission again

Asking permission is not a simple matter. Permission can be given before recording or after the user has been taped, or after the user has seen the tape, or just prior to an event in which it will be shown. The user can give blanket approval or approve individual events.

Give users sufficient information to make an informed choice and let them change their minds. For example, in the CHI'89 Kiosk (Soloman, 1990), users who contributed their images for the conference were again asked for their permission when the database was printed on a CD-ROM.

C. Editing Video

1. Avoid misrepresenting data

Producers are responsible for editing videos so as not to imply that particular events are representative if they are not. If video is presented as data, distinguish between anecdotal and representative clips of "typical" events.

2. Distinguish between envisionments, working prototypes and finished products

Clearly label presentations of technology as envisionments, working prototypes or finished products. Envisionments propose or illustrate ideas that have not been fully implemented. Working prototypes have been implemented and should not resort to tricks to make them look more complete. Products are completed commercial systems and must avoid misrepresenting their performance or features. For example, Wellner's (1992) videotape includes clearly-labelled envisionments of future ideas contrasted with working software.

3. Label any changes made to enhance technology

Show the actual time it takes for a particular operation or else clearly label cuts designed to improve the pacing of a video presentation. Do not simply cut out the slow sections to make your system appear faster.

D. Presenting Video

1. Protect users' privacy

Hide individuals when possible. For example, shoot over the user's shoulder to see the screen, rather than the user's face. Obviously, this only works if specific characteristics of the user, such as facial expressions, are not an essential part of the record. Consider disguising the user's voice.

2. Do not highlight clips that make users look foolish

Do not show "funny" clips to make users look foolish. This does not mean avoiding all amusing video clips; just be sure that the joke is not at the user's expense.

3. Educate the audience

When giving a presentation, educate the audience: do not at the user, explain how misconceptions about the technology can lead to breakdowns.

4. Do not rely on the power of video to make a weak point

Be careful when showing video clips to support arguments in favor of particular technology changes. Some video clips may magnify small problems or present a distorted picture.

5. Summarize data fairly

Clearly state the purpose of summaries of video data. Video data can be compressed in a variety of ways. Video clips can provide a shortened version of what occurred in the session or can be used to "tell a story". If clips are presented in random order, they can be combined to show "typical" interactions, highlight unusual or important events, or present collections of interesting observations.

D. Distributing Video

1. Do not use videos for purposes for which they were not intended

Do not allow video of users to be used for purposes that they are not aware of, e.g. for an advertisement.