



What counts as research data?

According to the [Australian Privacy Principles](#), anything that contains **personal information collected during a research project** needs to be securely stored and destroyed (APP 11).

"Personal information" is a legal definition encompassing any information (**fact or opinion**) that could potentially **identify the person it is about**. For more information, see [Office of the Australian Information Commissioner](#).

Research data can be stored in many forms:



Paper documents - e.g. notebooks, completed surveys, contact details



Media recordings - e.g. cassette tapes, CDs, photo negatives or film



Digital files - e.g. on USBs, hard drives, storage disks

Secure data destruction

When you are no longer using the data, it should be destroyed (or, with participants' consent, de-identified and archived). **All identifying details should be made irretrievable**. Shred paper or dispose in secured bins. Permanently delete files - do not keep copies 'in case'. Contact Facilities & Services for bins to securely destroy multimedia or digital data.

Improper data disposal: what are the risks?

Researchers should always treat participants' data in accordance with the [National Statement principle of respect](#). Good data practice also helps ANU avoid complaints and possible legal actions in future.

If research data is not securely stored or destroyed there is a risk of:



Unauthorised access - other people might be able to access personal information without that person's consent



Unauthorised modification - information about participants might be altered in a way that is not permitted under the Privacy Act.



Unauthorised disclosure - information about someone might be used or released without their consent.

For more information, visit [our website](#) or contact the Ethics Office:

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