

Good documentation is an essential component of data management that ensures information can be accessed, understood, and used over time.

Purpose

Documentation should be sufficient to answer questions about research data - the information it contains, context in which it was acquired, purpose it serves in the research, processing performed, and how it may be used in new investigations.

Many documents produced as part of the research study have ongoing value when repurposing data for use in new research. These include:

- Study protocols and Standard Operating Procedures that outline practices applied
- Questionnaires and interview guides that outline the information collected
- Participant information sheets and consent forms that establish ethical permissions
- Data dictionaries that describe the content and structure of a dataset

It is beneficial to make these, and other types of documentation available alongside the research data so that the broader context of the research can be understood.

Documentation standards

Many research disciplines apply common practices and standards that indicate the information that should be recorded and form in which it should be stored for use by specific audiences. Examples of domain-specific data standards can be found at:

- [FairSharing.org](https://fairsharing.org): a searchable database of standards for health and other domains
- [EQUATOR Network](https://equator-network.org): reporting guidelines for research manuscripts
- [LSHTM Standard Operating Procedures](https://lshtm.ac.uk/research-data-management) (SOPs): Procedural documents that should be applied by LSHTM research studies.

LSHTM support

- Documentation advice is available on the LSHTM [Research Data Management](https://lshtm.ac.uk/research-data-management) page.
- Staff/student training on data management are delivered in the LSHTM Doctoral Transferable Skills and Talent and Education Development (TED) programme.

Book an appointment

For advice on documentation standards that may apply to your research study, contact the LSHTM Research Data Manager at researchdatamanagement@lshtm.ac.uk.