Managing your Dissertation Data

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Thinking Ahead - Sociology Class
30th January 2018
Overview of this session

● Managing your data – why and how
  ● Assessment
  ● Consent
  ● Anonymisation
  ● Documentation
  ● Storage (security, backups, encryption, formatting, etc.)

● Resources available

● Your questions
Why is it important to manage research data well?

- Good quality data leads to good quality research
- Data underpins published findings
  - Documentation can be used in dissertation write-up
  - Documentation can be used in a viva
- Helps fodder discussion in dissertation supervision about how to collect and analyse data
- To protect data from loss, destruction and potential exposure
- Enables compliance with ethical codes, and data protection laws*
- Enhances transparency of research and can authenticate your dissertation progress

*As you go on to further research, journals and funders often have requirements and/or policies about data management.
Meet the scientist whose ideas were stolen at least three times

Jeff Offutt, a professor of software engineering at George Mason University, has some stories to tell. He says that when one of his students wrote his first paper, the student reused four paragraphs from another source, not knowing he couldn’t do that.

Dear Everyone,

I am a second year PhD student and I wanted to ask if anyone has experienced someone else stealing your ideas? Basically, I wrote a grant proposal 9 months ago and emailed it to someone who said they might be able to help me. A few weeks later I emailed to ask if I had been successful and I had a one sentence email to say that 'sorry, I do not have the funds'. I have just found out, by chance, they the same study is now being carried out by this person, who is not academic, but has recruited several academics to do analysis etc. It is the same work I was going to do (and have started) and would comprise 2 chapters of my thesis. The people that are involved with his study and the funds he has for equipment means that it is impossible for me to compete and get a paper out before his.

Has anyone else experienced this second year now? :-(

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A professor may have stolen an idea I discussed with him: how to proceed?

I'm really not sure how to proceed from here.

I'm an undergraduate Computer Science student, planning to earn my MSc in the next couple of years.

A couple of weeks ago, I spoke with a professor (I'll call him A) on an informal setting, and, since he was my teacher on an area relevant to the subject, I discussed with him an idea I had, and about how I was trying to make it my own thesis project.

I have also previously "pitched" this idea to another professor (B). He liked it, and we agreed that once I graduated, he was willing to be my advisor, and I could work on it.

However, I was recently shown the list of thesis proposals for current students, and my idea was among them - being supervised by prof. A, and an unrelated professor, G.

The details are so close to what we have discussed that this is almost surely no coincidence.

Now, I can't say I'm 100% sure he stole my idea, but he didn't mention any of this when we talked, and this thesis list was made after our conversation.

Anything could have happened: either I'm right, or prof. C actually came up with the same idea, or prof. A had a similar idea in the past but didn't tell me about it.
Practical steps you can take

- Consider how to manage your data early

- Make sure you can understand your data and it is protected:
  - obtain consent to share data with your supervisor
  - do not disclose identities without consent
  - provide clear documentation
  - create a datalist
  - store your data safely at all stages
Assessment

Before undertaking data collection always check…

● Is there evidence that secondary sources of data have been considered and evaluated?

● Is there evidence presented that the project is not creating new data when there are existing resources that could be re-used?

● If existing data are used, have issues such as copyright or IPR of such data been considered and possible copyright clearance obtained to be able to share data or data derived thereof?
UK Data Service Discover

- One-stop-shop for social science data

- https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/
Consent

- Yes
- No
Obtaining consent from participants

- It is important to gain informed consent from participants

- Consent should be:
  - freely given
  - informed
  - unambiguous
  - specific
  - clear affirmative action
In practice: wording in consent forms / information sheets

Consent Form for [name of project]

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Taking Part
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY and have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded (audio or video).

I understand that my taking part is voluntary, I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.

Use of the information I provide
I understand my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the project.

I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.

I understand that the researcher’s supervisors will have access to [anonymised] data.

Please choose one of the following two options:
I would like my real name used in the above.
I would not like my real name to be used in the above.

So we can use the information you provide legally
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials related to this project.

[boxes for Yes and No to be ticked]
In practice: wording in consent forms / information sheets

Any personal information that could identify you will be removed or changed before files are shared with research supervisors or results are made public.

ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data/legal-ethical/consent-data-sharing/consent-forms.aspx
Anonymisation
In practice: example anonymisation

Ex 1. Health and Social Consequences of the Foot and Mouth Disease Epidemic in North Cumbria, 2001-2003 (study 5407 in UK Data Archive collection) by M. Mort, Lancaster University, Institute for Health Research.

Date of Interview: 21/02/02

Interview with: [Lucas Roberts] DEFRA field officer
Date of birth: 2 May 1965
Gender: Male
Occupation: Frontline worker
Location: Plumpton, North Cumbria

Lucas was living at home with his parents, "but I'm hoping to move out soon" so we met at his parents' small neat house. We sat in a very comfortable sitting room with an open fire and Lucas made me coffee and offered shortbread. Although at first Lucas seemed a little nervous, quick to speech and very watchful he seemed to relax as we spoke and to forget about the tape.

I will just start by asking you to tell me a little bit about yourself and your background.

Well it is an agricultural background. I grew up on the farm where my brother is now. After I left school I did work on the farm but went to college and did exams, did land use recreation, sort of countryside/environmental management course. So I obviously left agriculture, did the course and came back [to the farm] at weekends.
Anonymising qualitative data

- plan or apply editing at time of transcription
- avoid blanking out; use pseudonyms or replacements
- identify replacements, e.g. with [brackets]
- avoid over-anonymising – removing / aggregating information in text can distort data or make it misleading
- consider keeping an anonymisation log of all replacements, aggregations or removals made and keep it separate from anonymised data files*
Anonymising quantitative data

- remove direct identifiers
e.g. names, address, institution and photos

- reduce the precision / detail of a variable through aggregation
e.g. birth year instead of date of birth; occupational categories rather than job; and, area rather than village

- generalise meaning of detailed text variable
e.g. occupational expertise

- restrict upper lower ranges of a variable to hide outliers
e.g. income and age

- combining variables
e.g. creating non-disclosive rural / urban variable from place variables
Audio-visual data

Digital manipulation of audio and image files can remove personal identifiers

e.g. voice alteration and image blurring (e.g. of faces)

Labour intensive, expensive, may damage research potential of data

Better alternatives:

- obtain consent to use and share data unaltered for research purposes
- avoid mentioning disclosive information during audio recordings
Documentation

● Enables you to understand data when you return to it

● If someone else was looking at your data for the first time, what would they need to know to make sense of it?

● Different documentation may be needed for data-level and project-level

● Every project will have different kinds of documentation
Include as documentation

- Data collection methodology and processes: sampling methods, sampling size, fieldwork protocol and interviewer instructions
- Information sheet / consent form
- Fieldwork tools: questionnaire, showcards and interview schedule
- Data list: overview of key information about each interview, as ‘at-a-glance’ summary of the data collection
- Analysis tools: codebook, memos, variable listing
### Embedded metadata for a quantitative study in SPSS file

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Width</th>
<th>Decimals</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Missing</th>
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<td>Which of the qualifications on this card do you have? 10</td>
<td>[9, No ans...]</td>
<td>-99 -1</td>
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<td>activb</td>
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<td>Activity status for last week</td>
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<td>-99 -1</td>
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<td>How long have you been looking</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>-99 -1</td>
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<tr>
<td>nemplee</td>
<td>Numeric</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Number employed at place of work</td>
<td>[9, No ans...]</td>
<td>-99 -1</td>
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<tr>
<td>nssel</td>
<td>Numeric</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NS-SEG - long version (harmonised)</td>
<td>[9-0, No ans...]</td>
<td>-99.0 - -1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>othpaid</td>
<td>Numeric</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>Ever had other employment (waiting to start work)</td>
<td>[9, No ans...]</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Self employed, how many employees</td>
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<td>-99 -1</td>
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<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>Numeric</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Age last birthday</td>
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<td>-99 -1</td>
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</table>
Documenting metadata for a qualitative study in Excel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>Qualifications</td>
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<td>PE</td>
<td>Specialisation</td>
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<td>Essay</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>Just left school - no qualifications mentioned</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>No further education or not mentioned</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>A levels and University degree</td>
<td>Degree (e.g. BA, BSc)</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Archeology</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>99 Missing</td>
<td>No further education or not mentioned</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>GCE'O level/GCSE</td>
<td>'O' levels</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>Apprenticeship exam</td>
<td>Apprenticeship exam</td>
<td>Apprenticeship exam</td>
<td>Motor mechanic</td>
</tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>Apprenticeship exam</td>
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<td>Mechanics?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Essay</td>
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<td>Sex</td>
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<td>Age 2</td>
<td>99 Missing</td>
<td>No further education or not mentioned</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>'I failed everything, but I got a good grade in art. Which wasn't much use.'</td>
<td>No Qualifications/failed</td>
<td>No further education or not mentioned</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>6th form for 1 year</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>Other</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Documenting metadata on interviews

Information about interviewee

Date of birth : 1902
Gender : M
Marital status : Married
Occupation : Postman
Geographic region : Colchester, Essex

I : I'd like to start, if I may, by asking you your birth date.
K : November 9th, 1902.
I : Could you tell me how many children there were in your family?
K : There were 11 of us. I was the eldest.
I : Could you tell me, if you remember, how they went after that and roughly the space between them and whether they were boys or girls.
K : Well, the first 3 of us were boys, then I had a sister, another brother, three more sisters and twin brothers at the end.
I : So you were approximately 7 boys, is that right, and 4 girls?
K : That's right, yes.
I : And do you know approximately how old your parents were when you were born?
K : Oh, maybe 21, 22.
I : And when the last child was born?
K : Oh, I suppose they were 45.
I : Did they lose any?
Transcription template

Should:
- possess a unique identifier
- adopt a uniform layout throughout the research project
- make use of speaker tags - turn-taking
- carry line breaks
- be page numbered
- carry a document header giving brief details of the interview: date, place, interviewer name, interviewee details, etc.

Other considerations:
- cover page or header
- compatibility with import features of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)
In practice: user guide and documentation

- A user guide could contain a variety of documents that provide context: interview schedule, transcription notes, even photos
In practice: data list

- Data listing provides an at-a-glance summary of interview sets

| Study Number 5407 | Health and Social Consequences of the Foot and Mouth Disease Epidemic in North Cumbria, 2001
| Mort, M. |

The panel respondents for the study were divided into six population groups. The data list for the diary and interviews has been colour-coded accordingly for clarity, using the depositor's original colours:

|------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------|

1. Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent ID</th>
<th>Population Group</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Interview summary</th>
<th>Place of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PM02</td>
<td>Group 6: Animal / Human Health Professionals</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Veterinary Surgeon</td>
<td>Family and background, career and work arrangements during FMD, epidemic and perceptions of situation</td>
<td>North Cumbria, respondent home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM03</td>
<td>Group 6: Animal / Human Health Professionals</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Veterinary Surgeon</td>
<td>Family and background, career and work arrangements during FMD, epidemic and perceptions of situation</td>
<td>North Cumbria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM07</td>
<td>Group 6: Animal / Human Health Professionals</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Veterinary practice manager</td>
<td>Family and background, career and work arrangements during FMD, epidemic and perceptions of situation</td>
<td>North Cumbria, respondent home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Storing your data
File formats

Choice of software format for digital data:

- software availability / cost
- hardware used – e.g. audio capture
- discipline-specific standards and customs

Best formats for long-term preservation:

- standard, interchangeable and open
- e.g. tab-delimited, comma-delimited (CSV), ASCII, RTF, PDF/A, OpenDocument format and XML

- [UK Data Service optimal file formats](https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-do/safeguarding-data/long-term-preservation/)
- [Digital Preservation Coalition](https://www.dpconline.org/) guidance on preservation formats

University of Essex
Organising data

- Plan in advance how best to organise data
- Use a logical structure
- Use logical names and version control e.g. V1.0, V2.1, ‘FINAL’
- 2018-01-30_Interview_01

Examples:
- Hierarchical structure of files, grouped in folders, e.g. audio, transcripts and annotated transcripts
- Survey data: spreadsheet, SPSS, relational database
- Interview transcripts: individual well named files
Data security and storage

Protect data from unauthorised:
- access
- use
- change
- disclosure
- destruction

Who knows who is watching, listening or attempting to access your data…
Stuff happens: data loss

- What would happen if you lost your data?
- Imagine if you left your bag on a train, containing your laptop (with all your digital research notes on) and your paper based notes too – this situation happened to Andrew Penson

![Twitter post](https://twitter.com/ADPenson/status/883637257323896832)

Source:
https://twitter.com/ADPenson/status/883637257323896832
Stuff happens: data theft

● What would happen if you data was stolen?
● Imagine if seven years worth of your Ebola research was stolen – this situation happened to Dr Fitzgerald

Source:
Stuff happens: data theft

- Imagine if you lost four years worth of research data – this situation happened to Billy Hinchen.

- From Figshare (2014): “Biologist Billy Hinchen returned one afternoon to find that his laptop and all backup hard drives had been stolen. All that remained was a disparate collection of data, spread across numerous flash drives, email attachments and scribbled drawings.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xIax_lin0Y

Source:
https://figshare.com/blog/The_stuff_of_nightmares_imagine_losing_all_your_research_data/121
Digital back-up strategy

Consider:
- **What’s backed-up?** - all, some or just the bits you change?
- **Where?** - original copy, external local and remote copies
- **What media?** - DVD, external hard drive, USB, Cloud?
- **How often?** - hourly, daily, weekly? Automate the process?
- **How many copies?** - minimum of three copies!
- **What method/software?** - duplicating, syncing or mirroring?
- **For how long is it kept?** - data retention policies that might apply?
- **Verify and recover** - never assume, regularly test and restore

Back-up need not be expensive
- 2Tb external drives are around £70, with back-up software

Also consider non-digital storage options too!
Data security strategy

- Control access to computers:
  - use passwords and lock your machine when away from it
  - run up-to-date anti-virus and firewall protection
  - power surge protection
  - utilise encryption
    - on all devices: desktops, laptops, memory sticks and mobile devices
    - at all locations: work, home and travel
  - restrict access to sensitive materials e.g. consent forms and patient records
  - personal data need more protection – always keep them separate and secure

- Control physical access to buildings, rooms and filing cabinets

- Properly dispose of data and equipment once the project is finished
Passwords

- Strong passwords are crucial

- Avoid using weak or easy to guess passwords and reusing passwords

- Consider password managers, complex passwords or stringing words together to create stronger passwords

- But, remember that you need to be able to remember the passwords!

Why does this matter?

- No matter how good the encryption is that you use if you use a weak password the encryption will offer little protection

https://howsecureismypassword.net (*Never use real passwords)
Password security

HOW SECURE IS MY PASSWORD?

Your password would be cracked

“Password” INSTANTLY

Why not try Dashlane to create and remember stronger passwords? It's free!
Password security

HOW SECURE IS MY PASSWORD?

It would take a computer about 27 UNDECILLION YEARS to crack your password.

Dashlane can help you remember all of your secure passwords - and it's free!
Encryption

Encryption is the process of encoding digital information in such a way that only authorised parties can view it.

Encryption software can be easy to use and offers the ability to: encrypt hard drives, partitions, files, folders and portable storage devices such as USB flash drives.

- VeraCrypt
- BitLocker
- Axcrypt
- FileVault2
Data disposal

● When you delete a file from a hard drive, it is likely to still be retrievable (even after emptying the recycle bin)

● Even reformatting a hard drive is not sufficient

● Files need to be overwritten multiple times with random data for best chances of removal

● The only sure way to ensure data is irretrievable is to physically destroy the drive (using an approved secure destruction facility)
File sharing and cloud storage services

Think about the best way to share data (personal/sensitive) between yourself and your supervisor(s)

- Too often sent as insecure email attachments
- Physical media?
- Online or 'cloud' services are becoming increasingly popular (e.g. Google Drive, DropBox, Microsoft OneDrive and iCloud)

Benefits:
- Very convenient
- Accessible anywhere
- Background file syncing
- Mirrors files
- Mobile apps available

But,
- These are not necessarily secure
- Potential DPA issues
- Limited control over where data is stored
- Not necessarily permanent
- Intellectual property right concerns?

WHAT IF I TOLD YOU
THERE IS NO CLOUD,
IT'S JUST SOMEONE ELSE'S COMPUTER

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Conclusion

- Documentation gaining new importance: transparency has become a new revolution in qualitative research
  - Obligation to share details about data, methods and theory – specified in academic misconduct policies
  - Better, more complete documentation = more transparency

- Legal and ethical obligation to protect data
  - Protects participants, protects you
  - “Protection” is not as simple as a password
Our data management guidance

- online best practice guidance: ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data.aspx
- Managing and Sharing Research Data – a Guide to Good Practice: (Sage Publications Ltd)
- helpdesk for queries: ukdataservice.ac.uk/help/get-in-touch.aspx
- training: www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/news-and-events/events
Tools & templates

- Model consent form: [http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/media/112638/ukdamodelconsent.pdf](http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/media/112638/ukdamodelconsent.pdf)
- Survey consent statement: [http://data-archive.ac.uk/media/147338/ukdasurveyconsent.doc](http://data-archive.ac.uk/media/147338/ukdasurveyconsent.doc)
- Transcription template: [http://data-archive.ac.uk/media/136055/ukdamodeltranscript.pdf](http://data-archive.ac.uk/media/136055/ukdamodeltranscript.pdf)
- Transcription instructions: [http://data-archive.ac.uk/media/285633/ukda-example-transcription-instructions.pdf](http://data-archive.ac.uk/media/285633/ukda-example-transcription-instructions.pdf)
- Transcription confidentiality agreement: [http://data-archive.ac.uk/media/285636/ukda-transcriber-confidentiality-agreement.pdf](http://data-archive.ac.uk/media/285636/ukda-transcriber-confidentiality-agreement.pdf)
- Data list template: [http://data-archive.ac.uk/media/2989/UK%20Data%20Archive%20Example%20Data%20List.pdf](http://data-archive.ac.uk/media/2989/UK%20Data%20Archive%20Example%20Data%20List.pdf)
- RDM costing tool: [www.data-archive.ac.uk/media/247429/costingtool.pdf](http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/media/247429/costingtool.pdf)
- Encryption tutorials: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4Iosu-Yfsw&list=PLG87Imnep1SmnFGhAjFVHonQSVmMlpHkV](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4Iosu-Yfsw&list=PLG87Imnep1SmnFGhAjFVHonQSVmMlpHkV)
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