

## Electronic Signatures in Qualtrics

Electronic signatures can be confusing and quite complex today in our digital world. The university recognizes and accepts electronic signatures if they are in accordance with our electronic signature policy and guide to implementing electronic signatures. The university's policy is in align with the State of Ohio's revised code regarding electronic signatures. The university's policy requires the bare minimum from the State of Ohio's revised code which includes: Authenticity, Nonrepudiation, Integrity, Recipient Copy, and Opt-out.

If we break each of these requirements down as they relate to Qualtrics, you will find it's quite cumbersome to configure properly. Authenticity and Nonrepudiation requirements consist of collecting two-factor authentication for signers. Signers must be required to provide some sort of verification that they are in fact the person that we think they are. This can be done by setting a unique password for each signer that is required in order to sign, or, to put SMS (text message) authentication before collecting the signature. Two-factor authentication ensures that we have verified the signers identity and that they cannot make a claim that they did not sign the document.

Signature integrity is also an important part of the Ohio revised code as well as the university's electronic signature policy. Signatures must be tamper proof (and tamper evident) and provide an audit trail. For example, each signature should include a digitally sealed PDF certificate indicating the authentication method, date and time of signature, and the intention of signing. In short, we must be able to prove that the signed document was not altered in anyway after signature.

Recipient copy and opt-out are relatively easy and straight forward requirements to meet. You must be able to provide the signer with a copy of the signed document. Signers must also be able opt-out of signing electronically. This requirement can be met by simply having a paper version of the form and having the person physically sign.

Collecting participant consent to participate in a research study can have different requirements depending on the level of risk associated with the study. The IRB may require that participants complete a consent form by collecting a legally binding signature. If the intent is to collect an electronic signature for this consent, it would need to meet the requirements of the university's electronic signature policy. On the other hand, some studies are considered low risk and may not require a legally binding signature. In low risk cases, it may be alright to collect a participants *acknowledgement* rather than a legally binding signature on a consent form. This can be done using the Qualtrics signature question without any special configurations in place to catch authenticity or nonrepudiation. You should consult with the IRB to determine if your study requires a legally binding signature or if an *acknowledgement* is sufficient.

Please note that Qualtrics's eSignature question is not accessible to respondents who use screen readers.

### Need more info or help with electronic signatures?

- Visit [OSU's eSignature Project site](#) for important information on the use of these types of questions at Ohio State
- Contact [esignature@osu.edu](mailto:esignature@osu.edu) for questions on electronic signatures