

What's in the mandatory USENIX Security 2025 ethics sections? Results from a meta-analysis.

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Ethical decision making in security research is harder than you'd think

On the Feasibility of Stealthily Introducing Vulnerabilities in Open-Source Software via Hypocrite Commits

Princeton privacy study halts GDPR/CCPA research over ethics concerns and industry blowback

NEWS | SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

'Unethical' AI research on Reddit under fire

Ethics experts raise concerns over consent, study design



Our prior work* found that published papers do not explain ethical considerations in detail—often due to lack of space.

Extended version
of the paper



* Sri Ramulu, H., Schmitt, H., Rerich, B., Gonzalez Rodriguez, R., Kohno, T. and Acar, Y., 2025, November. **Ethics in Computer Security Research: A Data-Driven Assessment of the Past, the Present, and the Possible Future.** In *Proceedings of the 2025 ACM SIGSAC Conference on Computer and Communications Security*.



Community efforts to strengthen ethics considerations in security research

IEEE S&P 2025

Research Ethics Committee

Similar to 2024, IEEE S&P 2025 has a research ethics committee (REC) that will check papers flagged by reviewers as potentially including ethically fraught research. The REC will review flagged papers and may suggest to the PC Chairs rejection of a paper on ethical grounds. The REC consists of members of the PC. [Authors are encouraged to review the Memo Report for general ethical guidelines for computer and information security research.](#)

USENIX Security 2025

Summary of main changes from previous editions

1. Two submission cycles instead of three.
2. New open science policy: Research results should be available to the public or explain why this is not possible. The artifact evaluation process is adjusted to accommodate this.
3. [New guidelines for ethics considerations.](#)
4. [Extra page for mandatory discussion of ethics considerations and compliance with open science policy.](#)
5. Revisions are reviewed within the same submission cycle instead of the next.
6. New approach to presenting accepted papers (see the [public RFC](#) about the plans for this new model).

USENIX Security 2026

- All papers MUST have a discussion of research ethics. This MUST be in a separate appendix called "Ethical Considerations" (provided after the main body, but before the references or any optional appendices).

ACM CCS 2026

Ethical Considerations

Authors are expected to consider the ethical implications and potential societal impact of their work. Papers that raise ethical concerns, such as those involving human subjects, user data, or real-world vulnerability analysis, must include a dedicated "Ethical Considerations" section. This section should discuss the balance of risks vs. benefits and the steps taken to minimize potential harm (e.g., responsible disclosure, data anonymization). Note that institutional (IRB/ERB) approval is neither strictly necessary nor always sufficient to demonstrate ethical conduct; we expect authors to reason about the ethics of their work beyond ensuring institutional compliance. [For detailed guidance on community standards, we follow the USENIX Security'26 Ethics Policy.](#) This section does not count toward the page limit and must be placed after the 12-page main content and bibliography.

IEEE S&P 2026

Call for Papers

! The CFP has been updated since Cycle 1 !

- Change of rebuttal period and acceptance notification dates
- Clarification on paper resubmissions
- Clarifying the absence of a conditional acceptance outcome
- Changes to information required by the abstract registration deadline
- Clarification on the rebuttal process
- Clarifications on the desk reject outcome
- Addition of the section on Artifacts
- An updated section on Conflicts of Interests
- An updated section on Vulnerability Disclosure
- [Addition of the section on Ethics Consideration](#)
- Clarifications on page limits
- An updated section on the Authorship Policy
- Clarification around server crashes around the submission deadline
- Addition of the section on Author Responsibility
- Addition of the section on the LLM Policy

NDSS 2026

Ethical Considerations

Each paper may optionally include an "Ethics Considerations" section immediately preceding the reference section. In this section, the authors may discuss if they believe the work poses any ethical risk and the steps that are taken to mitigate such risk. If the authors believe that their work does not pose any ethical considerations, this section is not necessary.

Does additional space for ethics sections in research papers improve ethics reporting?



Our Focus: USENIX Security 2025

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Research Questions

RQ1: To what extent do research papers published in USENIX Security 2025 use the **additional space for ethics considerations**?

RQ2: **What is discussed** in these new, mandatory ethics sections?



Methods

Paper collection

Total USENIX Security 2025 papers:
425* papers

Cycle 1 + Cycle 2
232 papers + 193 papers

* 14 papers had no ethics section

Analysis

Manual content analysis of 411 papers:

Length of ethics sections,
Topics from the USENIX 2025 call for papers,
and the Menlo report principles.

Our focus is only on USENIX Security 2025. To avoid deidentification and finger pointing, we do not quote or share the coded data. We only present aggregate findings.



Only 31% of papers make significant use of the extra space!

Length	Less than a quarter column	Quarter to half a column	More than half a column	More than one column	Total
# papers (percentage of all papers with ethics sections)	150 (36%)	132 (32%)	79 (19%)	50 (12%)	411 (100%)
Of those, compliance only	60 (40%)	18 (14%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	80 (19%)

"Our study followed the ethical guidelines required by USENIX Security."



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Many ethics sections mentioned Menlo principles.

Menlo principles	# of papers	Example (paraphrased)
Consent	58 (14%)	"Participants completed a consent form that explained the study"
Adhering to Laws	21 (5%)	"We adhere to data protection laws"
Justice	18 (4%)	"We adhere to this principle because we avoid bias"
Respect for Persons	21 (5%)	"Our data is anonymized"
Beneficence	24 (6%)	"Our research will benefit users"



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Harms and benefits to different actors were discussed.

Category	Harm (# of papers)	Benefit (# of papers)
Society	120 (29%)	150 (36%)
Participant	25 (6%)	5 (1%)
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Study	89 (22%)	2 (0.5%)



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171 papers (42%) discussed mitigating their study's potential harms.



Some topics from the USENIX 2025 Ethics Guidelines were discussed.

Category	# of papers
Experiments with live system	15 (4%)
Deception	10 (2%)
Wellbeing (team members)	9 (2%)
Disclosures	111 (27%)
Terms of service	23 (6%)
Power dynamic within team	0 (0%)
Deontology and Consequentialism*	8 (2%) *always mentioned together



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Prior work* found that papers do not explain ethics enough—often due to lack of space.

Overall that Usenix 2025 Ethical Guidelines addressed the concerns from prior research by extending the amount of space that could be used for ethical discussion and providing guidance for the content.

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So, did the new USENIX guidelines help?

RQ1: To what extent do research papers use the additional space for ethics considerations?

→ **31% of papers** make significant use of this extra space!

RQ2: What is discussed in these new, mandatory ethics sections?

→ **Harms** (mostly to society) and **Benefits** (mostly to society) of the research are discussed widely.

→ Themes from the **Menlo Report** and the **USENIX Security Ethics Guidelines** are picked up at a much lower rate.

→ More **structured advice and examples** may help here in the future for the community.



What's in the mandatory USENIX Security 2025 ethics sections? Results from a meta-analysis.

Research questions

1. To what extent do research papers use the additional space for ethics considerations?
2. What is discussed in these new, mandatory ethics sections?

Methodology

- Qualitative analysis of 411/425 papers (14 papers did not have an ethics section)
- 232 from cycle 1 and 193 from cycle 2
- We conducted a manual content analysis

Results

1. 31% of papers make significant use of this extra space
2. Harms and Benefits (mostly to society) of the research are discussed widely.

- Overall, the Usenix Security 2025 Ethical Guidelines addressed concerns from prior research by mandating ethics discussions, *extending the amount of space and providing guidance for the content.*
- *We found an improvement* in documentation of ethical considerations compared to previous years.

