Guidelines on Use of Brief Consent

Why might I use brief consent?
Whilst a standard information sheet and consent form should be considered the default option for research, there are instances in which these may be disproportionately lengthy and complex relative to the amount and type of data being collected.

What does the BPS say about brief consent?
The BPS states that:
1. All participants should consent freely on the basis of adequate information.
2. The way in which consent is sought should be appropriate to the research topic and design. Procedures for consent should be proportional to the nature of participation and the risks involved.
3. For anonymised-at-source, non-sensitive data, consent may be considered to have been given by the act of participation or by ticking a box.

When may it be appropriate to use brief consent?
It may be appropriate where the following conditions are met:
1. Participation involves minimal effort and time (typically less than 10 minutes).
2. Data is collected anonymously and there is no way of identifying any individual from the data.
3. The questions asked are of a non-sensitive nature.

How should I provide ‘adequate’ information in such cases?
Information may be provided verbally. At a minimum we would recommend that this include:
1. Details of what the participant needs to do (e.g. rate 10 words for familiarity).
2. An indication of why the data is being collected (e.g. as part of a psychology lab class).
3. An opportunity for the participant to obtain further information should they wish. Here we would recommend the researcher has copies of an information sheet to hand that provides further details about the study, the name(s) and contact details of the researcher(s), and information about ethics approval and complaints procedures. A copy can be handed to any participant who requests further information.

How should I collect consent?
Written consent is not necessary. Consent may be considered to have been given by the participant verbally agreeing to take part or by the act of participation. However, it is important to ensure that participants feel under no obligation to participate.
What are the implications of the Data Protection Act for obtaining consent in this way?
The Data Protection Act applies to 'personal data'. Personal data is defined as 'data relating to a living individual who can be identified from the information, or any other data likely to come into the possession of the data controller'. Thus data that is collected anonymously, and contains no information that could be used to identify an individual is exempt from the Data Protection Act.