

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

Locke, L. E., Spirduso, W. W., & Silverman, S. J. (2000). *Proposals that work: A guide for planning dissertations and grant proposals* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lawrence Locke, Waneen Spirduso, and Stephen Silverman describe 15 steps in the process of developing a review of literature. These 15 steps involve three stages: developing the concepts that provide the rationale for the study, developing the subtopics for each major concept, and adding the most important references that support each subtopic. These steps involve stages such as identifying the concepts that provide the rationale for the study, selecting the subtopics for each major concept, and adding the most important references that support each subtopic. They also provide a "diagrammatic overview of the related literature" as a model for visualizing the literature.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sharan Merriam provides an extensive discussion about the use of literature in qualitative studies. She identifies steps in reviewing the literature and poses useful criteria for selecting references. These include checking to see if the author is an authority on the topic, how recent the work was published, whether the resource is relevant to the proposed research topic, and the quality of the resource. Merriam further suggests that the literature review is not a linear process of reading the literature, identifying the theoretical framework, and then writing the problem statement. Instead, the process is highly interactive among these steps.

Punch, K. F. (1998). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. London: Sage.

Keith Punch provides a guide to social research that equally addresses quantitative and qualitative approaches. He conceptualizes key differences between the two approaches in several ways. When writing a literature review, Punch notes that the point to concentrate on in the literature varies in different styles of research. Factors that affect when to concentrate on the literature will depend on the style of research, the overall research strategy, and how closely the study will address the directions in the literature.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Writing Strategies and Ethical Considerations

Before designing a proposal, it is important to consider how to write it. Those considerations should include which topics will convey the best argument for the need and quality of the study. Now is the best time to adopt writing practices that will ensure a consistent and highly readable proposal (and research project). It is also timely to anticipate the ethical issues that will surface during a study and to incorporate good practices into the research proposal. This chapter focuses on arguments and topics to include in a proposal, the adoption of writing strategies for the process of research, and anticipating ethical issues likely to arise in a study.

## WRITING THE PROPOSAL

### Central Arguments to Make

It is helpful to consider the topics that will go into a proposal. All the topics need to be interrelated so that they provide a cohesive picture of the entire proposed project. An outline of topics will be helpful, but the topics will differ depending on whether the proposal is for a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods study. Overall, however, there are central arguments that frame any proposal. They are introduced as nine central arguments by Maxwell (1996). I pose them here as questions to be addressed in a scholarly proposal.

1. What do we need to better understand your topic?
2. What do we know little about in terms of your topic?
3. What do you propose to study?

4. What are the setting and the people that you will study?
5. What methods do you plan to use to provide data?
6. How will you analyze the data?
7. How will you validate your findings?
8. What ethical issues will your study present?
9. What do preliminary results show about the practicability and value of the proposed study?

These nine questions, if adequately addressed in one section for each question, constitute the foundation of good research, and they could provide the overall structure for a proposal. The inclusion of validating findings, ethical considerations (to be addressed shortly), the need for preliminary results, and early evidence of practical significance of the proposed study focus a reader's attention on key elements often overlooked in discussions about proposed projects.

### Format for a Qualitative Proposal

Besides these nine questions, it is often helpful to conceptualize in more detail the topics that are included in proposals. Knowledge of these topics is useful at the beginning of proposal development so that you can conceptualize the entire process.

No commonly accepted format exists for a qualitative proposal, although authors such as Berg (2001), Marshall and Rossman (1999), and Maxwell (1996) advance recommendations for topics. A fundamental characteristic should be that the design is consistent with the constructivism/interpretive and advocacy/participatory knowledge claims as mentioned in Chapter 1. With qualitative research now represented by distinct strategies of inquiry, the proposal should also contain the type of inquiry being used as well as detailed procedures of data collection and analysis.

In the light of these points, I propose two alternative models. Example 3.1 is drawn from a constructivist/interpretivist perspective, whereas Example 3.2 is based more on an advocacy/participatory model of qualitative research.

---

#### Example 3.1 *A Qualitative Constructivist/Interpretivist Format*

##### Introduction

Statement of the problem (including existing literature about the problem)

Purpose of the study

The research questions

Delimitations and limitations

##### Procedures

Characteristics of qualitative research (optional)

Qualitative research strategy

Role of the researcher

Data collection procedures

Data analysis procedures

Strategies for validating findings

Narrative structure

Anticipated ethical issues

Significance of the study

Preliminary pilot findings

Expected outcomes

Appendices: Interview questions, observational forms, timeline, and proposed budget

---

In this example, the writer includes only two major sections, the introduction and the procedures. A review of the literature may be included, but it is optional, and, as discussed in Chapter 2, the literature may be included to a greater extent at the end of the study or in the expected outcomes section. This format does include a special section on the researcher's role in the study. As described by Marshall and Rossman (1999), this section would address decisions about gaining access to the participants and site and negotiating entry to the site and/or participants. It also includes mentioning the interpersonal skills the researcher brings to the project and the researcher's sensitivity to reciprocity or giving back to the people in the study.

---

#### Example 3.2 *A Qualitative Advocacy/Participatory Format*

##### Introduction

Statement of the problem (including existing literature about the problem)

The advocacy/participatory issue

Purpose of the study

The research questions

Delimitations and limitations

##### Procedures

Characteristics of qualitative research (optional)

Qualitative research strategy

Role of the researcher

- Data collection procedures (including the collaborative approaches used with participants)
- Data recording procedures
- Data analysis procedures
- Strategies for validating findings
- Narrative structure
- Anticipated ethical issues
- Significance of the study
- Preliminary pilot findings
- Expected advocacy/participatory changes
- Appendices: Interview questions, observational forms, timeline, and proposed budget

This format is similar to the constructivist/interpretivist format except that the inquirer is specific about the advocacy/participatory issue being explored in the study (e.g., marginalization, empowerment), advances a collaborative form of data collection, and mentions the anticipated changes that the research study will likely bring.

### Format for a Quantitative Proposal

For a quantitative study, the format conforms to standards easily identified in journal articles and research studies. The form generally follows the model of an introduction, a literature review, methods, results, and discussion. In planning a quantitative study and designing a dissertation proposal, consider the following format to sketch the overall plan.

#### Example 3.3 A Quantitative Format

- Introduction
  - Statement of the problem
  - Purpose of the study
  - Theoretical perspective
  - Research questions or hypotheses
  - Definition of terms
  - Delimitations and limitations
- Review of the literature
- Methods
  - Type of research design
  - Sample, population, and participants

- Data collection instruments, variables, and materials
- Data analysis procedures
- Anticipated ethical issues in the study
- Preliminary studies or pilot tests
- Significance of the study
- Appendixes: Instruments, timeline, and proposed budget

Example 3.3 is a standard format for a social science study, although the order of the sections, especially in the introduction, may vary from study to study (see, for example, Miller, 1991; Rudestam & Newton, 1992). It presents a useful model for designing the sections for a plan for a dissertation or sketching the topics for a scholarly study.

### Format for a Mixed Methods Proposal

In a mixed methods design format, the researcher brings together approaches that are included in both the quantitative and qualitative formats (see Creswell, 1999). An example of such a format appears in Example 3.4.

#### Example 3.4 A Mixed Methods Format

- Introduction
  - Statement of the problem
  - Purpose of the study (include both qualitative and quantitative statements and a rationale for mixing methods)
  - Research questions (include both qualitative and quantitative)
  - Review of the literature (separate section, if quantitative)
- Procedures or methods
  - Characteristics of mixed methods research
  - Type of mixed methods design (including decisions involved in its choice)
  - Visual model and procedures of the design
  - Data collection procedures
    - Types of data
    - Sampling strategy
  - Data analysis and validity procedures
  - Report presentation structure
- Role of the researcher
- Potential ethical issues

Significance of the study  
 Preliminary pilot findings  
 Expected outcomes  
 Appendixes: Instruments or protocols, outline for chapters, and proposed budget

---

This format shows that the researcher poses both a purpose statement and research questions for quantitative and qualitative components. Further, it is important to specify a rationale for the mixed methods approach in the study. The researcher also identifies key elements of this design, such as the type of mixed methods study, a visual picture of the procedures, and both the quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures and analysis.

## WRITING TIPS

### Writing as Thinking

Beyond the more general format, proposal developers need to consider the writing process involved in research. One sign of inexperienced writers is that they prefer to discuss their proposed study rather than write about it. All experienced writers know that writing is thinking and conceptualizing a topic. I recommend the following:

- Early in the process of research, write ideas down rather than talk about them. Writing specialists see writing as thinking (Bailey, 1984). Zinsser (1983) discusses the need to get words out of our heads and onto paper. Advisers react better when they read the printed text on paper than when they hear and discuss a research topic with a student or colleague. When a researcher renders ideas on paper, a reader can visualize the final product, actually "see" how it looks, and begin to clarify ideas. The concept of working ideas out on paper has served many experienced writers well.
- Work through several drafts of a paper rather than trying to polish the first draft. It is illuminating to see how people think on paper. Zinsser (1983) identified two types of writers: the "bricklayer," who makes every paragraph just right before going on to the next paragraph, and the "let-it-all-hang-out-on-the-first-draft" writer, who

writes an entire first draft not caring how sloppy it looks or how badly it is written. In between would be someone like Peter Elbow (Elbow, 1973), who recommends that one should go through the iterative process of writing, reviewing, and rewriting. For example, he cites this exercise: With only 1 hour to write a passage, write four drafts (one every 15 minutes) rather than one draft (typically in the last 15 minutes) during the hour. Most experienced researchers write the first draft carefully but do not work for a polished draft; the polish comes relatively late in the writing process. I use Franklin's (1986) three-stage model in my writing:

1. Develop an outline—it could be a sentence or word outline or a visual map of ideas.
2. Write out a draft and then shift and sort ideas, moving around entire paragraphs in the manuscript.
3. Finally, edit and polish each sentence.

### The Habit of Writing

Establish the discipline of writing on a continuous and regular basis. Setting the manuscript aside for a long period results in a loss of concentration and effort. The actual writing of words on a page is only part of a more extended process of thinking, collecting information, and reviewing that goes into manuscript production.

Select a time of day to work that is best for you, then use discipline to write at this time each day. Choose a place free of distractions. Boice (1990, pp. 77-78) offers ideas about establishing good writing habits:

- With the aid of the priority principle, make writing a daily activity, regardless of mood, regardless of readiness to write.
- If you feel you do not have time for regular writing, begin by charting your daily activities for a week or two in half-hour blocks.
- Write while you are fresh.
- Avoid writing in binges.
- Write in small, regular amounts.
- Schedule writing tasks so that you plan to work on specific, manageable units of writing in each session.

- Keep daily charts. Graph at least three things: (a) time spent writing, (b) page equivalents finished, and (c) percentage of planned task completed.
- Plan beyond daily goals.
- Share your writing with supportive, constructive friends before you feel ready to go public.
- Try to work on two or three writing projects concurrently.

In addition to these thoughts, one needs to acknowledge that writing moves along slowly and that a writer must ease into writing. Like the runner who stretches before a road race, the writer needs warm-up exercises for both the mind and the fingers. Some leisurely writing activity, such as writing a letter to a friend, brainstorming on the computer, reading some good writing, or studying a favorite poem, can make the actual task of writing easier. I am reminded of John Steinbeck's (1969) "warm-up period" (p. 42) described in detail in *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters*. Steinbeck began each writing day by writing a letter to his editor and close friend, Pascal Covici, in a large notebook supplied by Covici.

Other exercises may prove useful. Carroll (1990) provides examples of exercises to improve a writer's control over descriptive and emotive passages:

- Describe an object by its parts and dimensions, without first telling the reader its name.
- Write a conversation between two people on any dramatic or intriguing subject.
- Write a set of directions for a complicated task.
- Take a subject and write about it three different ways. (Carroll, 1990, pp. 113-116)

This last exercise seems appropriate for qualitative researchers who analyze their data for multiple codes and themes (see Chapter 10 for qualitative data analysis).

Consider also the implements of writing and the physical location that aids the process of disciplined writing. The implements of writing—a computer, a yellow legal-sized pad, a favorite pen, a pencil, even coffee

and Triscuits (Wolcott, 2001)—offer the writer options for ways to be comfortable when writing. The physical setting for writing can also help. Annie Dillard, the Pulitzer prize-winning novelist, avoided appealing workplaces:

One wants a room with no view, so imagination can meet memory in the dark. When I furnished this study seven years ago, I pushed the long desk against a blank wall, so I could not see from either window. Once, fifteen years ago, I wrote in a cinder-block cell over a parking lot. It overlooked a tar-and-gravel roof. This pine shed under trees is not quite so good as the cinder-block study was, but it will do. (Dillard, 1989, pp. 26-27)

### Readability of the Manuscript

Before beginning the process of writing a proposal, consider how you will enhance the readability of it for other people. It is important to use consistent terms, a staging and foreshadowing of ideas, and coherence built into the plan.

- Use *consistent terms* throughout the manuscript. Use the same term each time a variable is mentioned in a quantitative study or a central phenomenon is mentioned in a qualitative study. Refrain from using synonyms for these terms, a problem that causes the reader to work at understanding the meaning of ideas and to monitor subtle shifts in meaning.
- Consider how narrative "thoughts" of different types guide a reader. This concept was advanced by Tarshis (1982), who recommended that writers stage "thoughts" to guide readers. These were of four types:
  1. Umbrella thoughts—the general or core ideas one is trying to get across
  2. Big thoughts—specific ideas or images that fall within the realm of umbrella thoughts and serve to reinforce, clarify, or elaborate upon the umbrella thoughts
  3. Little thoughts—ideas or images whose chief function is to reinforce big thoughts
  4. Attention or interest thoughts—ideas whose purposes are to keep the reader on track, organize ideas, and keep an individual's attention

Beginning researchers, I believe, struggle most with “umbrella” thoughts and “attention” thoughts. A manuscript may include too many “umbrella” ideas, with the content not sufficiently detailed to support large ideas. A clear mark of this problem is a continual shift of ideas from one major idea to another in a manuscript. Often, one will see short paragraphs, like those found written by journalists in newspaper articles. Thinking in terms of a detailed narrative to support “umbrella” ideas may help this problem. Goldberg (1986) not only talks about the power of detail but also illustrates it using the example of the Vietnam memorial in Washington, D.C., where names—even middle names—of 50,000 killed American soldiers are listed.

Lack of “attention” thoughts also derails a good narrative. Readers need “road signs” to guide them from one major idea to the next (Chapters 5 and 6 of this book discuss major road signs in research, such as purpose statements and research questions and hypotheses). Readers need to see the overall organization of the ideas through introductory paragraphs and to be told, in a summary, the most salient points they should remember.

- Use *coherence* to add to the readability of the manuscript. In presenting the topics in this book, I introduce components of the research process to present a systematic whole. For example, the repetition of variables in the title, the purpose statement, the research questions, and the review of the literature headings in a quantitative project illustrates this thinking. This approach builds coherence into the study. Furthermore, emphasizing a consistent order of variables whenever independent and dependent variables are mentioned in quantitative studies also reinforces this idea.

On a more detailed level, coherence builds through connecting sentences and paragraphs in the manuscript. Zinsser (1983) suggests that every sentence should be a logical sequel to the one that preceded it. A useful exercise is the “hook-and-eye” exercise (Wilkinson, 1991) for connecting thoughts from sentence to sentence (or paragraph to paragraph).

The following passage from a draft of a student’s paper shows a high level of coherence. It comes from the introductory section to a draft of a qualitative dissertation project about at-risk students. In this passage, I have taken the liberty of drawing “hooks” and “eyes” to connect the ideas from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph. The objective of the “hook-and-eye” exercise (Wilkinson, 1991) is to connect major thoughts of each sentence and paragraph. If such a connection

cannot easily be made, the written passage lacks coherence and the writer needs to add transitional words, phrases, or sentences to establish a clear connection.

### Example 3.5 A Sample Passage Illustrating the Hook-and-Eye Technique

They sit in the back of the room not because they want to but because it was the place designated to them. Invisible barriers that exist in most classrooms divide the room and separate the students. At the front of the room are the “good” students who wait with their hands poised ready to fly into the air at a moment’s notice. Slouched down like giant insects caught in educational traps, the athletes and their following occupy the center of the room. Those less sure of themselves and their position within the room sit in the back and around the edge of the student body.

The students seated in the outer circle make up a population whom for a variety of reasons are not succeeding in the American public education system. They have always been part of the student population. In the past they have been called disadvantaged, low achieving, retards, impoverished, laggards and a variety of other titles (Cuban, 1989; Presseisen, 1988). Today they are called students-at-risk. Their faces are changing and in urban settings their numbers are growing (Hodgkinson, 1985).

In the past eight years there has been an unprecedented amount of research on the need for excellence in education and the at-risk student. In 1983 the government released a document entitled *A Nation At-Risk* that identified problems within the American education system and called for major reform. Much of the early reform focused on more vigorous courses of study and higher standards of student achievement (Barber, 1987). In the midst of attention to excellence, it became apparent the needs of the marginal student were not being met. The question of what it would take to guarantee that all students have a fair chance at a quality education was receiving little attention (Hamilton, 1987; Toch, 1984). As the push for excellence in education increased, the needs of the at-risk student became more apparent.

Much of the early research focused on identifying characteristics of the at-risk student (OERI, 1987; Barber & McClellan, 1987; Hahn, 1987; Rumberger, 1987), while others in educational

research called for reform and developed programs for at-risk students (Mann, 1987; Presseisen, 1988; Whelage, 1988; Whelege & Lipman, 1988; Stocklinski, 1991; and Levin, 1991). Studies and research on this topic have included experts within the field of education, business and industry as well as many government agencies.

Although progress has been made in identifying characteristics of the at-risk students and in developing programs to meet their needs, the essence of the at-risk issue continues to plague the American school system. Some educators feel that we do not need further research (DeBlois, 1989; Hahn, 1987). Others call for a stronger network between business and education (DeBlois, 1989; Mann, 1987; Whelege, 1988). Still others call for total restructuring of our education system (OERI, 1987; Gainer, 1987; Levin, 1988; McCune, 1988).

After all the research and studies by the experts, we still have students hanging on to the fringe of education. The uniqueness of this study will shift the focus from causes and curriculum to the student. It is time to question the students and to listen to their responses. This added dimension should bring further understanding to research already available and lead to further areas of reform. Dropouts and potential dropouts will be interviewed in depth to discover if there are common factors within the public school setting that interfere with their learning process. This information should be helpful to both the researcher who will continue to look for new approaches in education and the practitioner who works with these students everyday.

### Voice, Tense, and "Fat"

From working with broad thoughts and paragraphs, I move on to the level of writing sentences and words. In Franklin's (1986) terms, one is now working at the "polish" level of writing, a stage addressed late in the writing process. One can find an abundance of writing books about rules and principles to follow concerning good sentence construction and word choice. Wolcott (2001), for example, talks about honing editorial skills to eliminate unnecessary words, delete the passive voice, scale down qualifiers, eliminate overused phrases, and reduce excessive quotations, use of italics, and parenthetical comments. The following

additional ideas about active voice, verb tense, and reduced "fat" can strengthen and invigorate scholarly writing.

- Use the active voice as much as possible in scholarly writing. According to Ross-Larson (1982), "if the subject acts, the voice is active. If the subject is acted on, the voice is passive" (p. 29). In addition, a sign of passive construction is some variation of an auxiliary verb, such as "was." Examples include "will be," "have been," and "is being." Writers can use the passive construction when the person acting can logically be left out of the sentence and when what is acted on is the subject of the rest of the paragraph (Ross-Larson, 1982).
- Use strong verbs and verb tenses appropriate for the passage in the study. Lazy verbs are those that lack action ("is" or "was," for example) or those used as adjectives or adverbs.
- A common practice is to use the past tense to review the literature and report results of a study. The future tense would be appropriate at all other times in research proposals and plans. For completed studies, use the present tense to add vigor to a study, especially in the introduction.
- Expect to edit and revise drafts of a manuscript to trim excess words, the "fat," from the prose. Writing multiple drafts of a manuscript is standard practice for most writers. The process typically consists of writing, reviewing, and editing. In the editing process, trim excess words from sentences, such as piled-up modifiers, excessive prepositions, and "the . . . of" constructions (for example, "the study of"), that add unnecessary verbiage to a study (Ross-Larson, 1982). I was reminded of the unnecessary prose that comes into writing by the example mentioned by Bunge (1985):

Nowadays you can almost see bright people struggling to reinvent the complex sentence before your eyes. A friend of mine who is a college administrator every now and then has to say a complex sentence, and he will get into one of those morasses that begins, "I would hope that we would be able . . ." He never talked that way when I first met him, but even at his age, at his distance from the crisis in the lives of younger people, he's been to some extent alienated from easy speech. (Bunge, 1985, p. 172)

Begin studying good writing that uses qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs. In good writing, the eye does not pause and the

mind does not stumble on a passage. In this present book, I have attempted to draw examples of good prose from human and social science journals such as the *American Journal of Sociology*, *The American Cartographer*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *American Educational Research Journal*, *Sociology of Education*, and *Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship*. In the qualitative area, good literature serves to illustrate clear prose and detailed passages. Individuals who teach qualitative research assign classical literature such as *Moby Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *The Bonfire of the Vanities* as reading assignments in qualitative courses (Webb & Glesne, 1992). Journals such as *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Qualitative Research*, *Symbolic Interaction*, *Qualitative Family Research*, and *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* represent good, scholarly journals to examine. In mixed methods research, examine journals that report studies with combined qualitative and quantitative data, including many social science journals, such as *Field Methods*. Examine the numerous journal articles cited in the *Handbook of Mixed Methods in the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2002).

## ETHICAL ISSUES TO ANTICIPATE

In addition to conceptualizing the writing process for a proposal, researchers need to anticipate the ethical issues that may arise during their studies. As mentioned earlier, writing about these issues is required in making an argument for a study as well as being an important topic in the format for proposals.

In the literature, ethical issues arise in discussions about codes of professional conduct for researchers and in commentaries about ethical dilemmas and their potential solutions (Punch, 1998). Many national associations have published standards or codes of ethics on their Web sites for professionals in their fields. For example, see

- The American Psychological Association's *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*, written in 1992, available at [www.apa.org/ethics/code.html](http://www.apa.org/ethics/code.html)
- The American Sociological Association Code of Ethics, adopted in 1997 and available at [www.asanet.org/members/ecoderev.html](http://www.asanet.org/members/ecoderev.html)
- The American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics, approved in June 1998, available at [www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm)

- The American Educational Research Association Ethical Standards, updated in November 2001, available at [www.aera.net/about/policy/\\_vti\\_cnf/ethics.htm](http://www.aera.net/about/policy/_vti_cnf/ethics.htm)
- The American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses—Provisions, approved in June 2001, and available at [www.ana.org/ethic/chcode.htm](http://www.ana.org/ethic/chcode.htm)

In addition to these codes of ethical practice, writers detail ethical dilemmas for investigators and inquirers (e.g., see Berg, 2001; Punch, 1998; and Sieber, 1998). These issues apply to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research. Moreover, proposal writers need to anticipate them and specify them in their research plans. In the chapters to follow, in Part II, I refer to ethical issues in many stages of the process of research. By foreshadowing them at this point, I hope to encourage the proposal writer to actively design them into sections of a proposal. Although this discussion will not comprehensively cover all ethical issues, it addresses major ones. These issues arise primarily in specifying the research problem (Chapter 4), identifying a purpose statement and research questions (Chapters 5 and 6), and collecting, analyzing, and writing up the results of data (Chapters 9, 10, and 11).

## Ethical Issues in the Research Problem Statement

In writing an introduction to a study, the researcher identifies a significant problem or issue to study and presents a rationale for its importance. During the identification of the research problem, it is important to identify a problem that will benefit individuals being studied. A core idea of action/participatory research is that the inquirer will not further marginalize or disempower the study participants. To guard against this, proposal developers can conduct a pilot project to establish trust and respect with the participants so that inquirers can detect any marginalization before the proposal is developed and the study begun.

## Ethical Issues in the Purpose Statement and Research Questions

In developing the purpose statement or the central intent and questions for a study, proposal developers need to convey the purpose of the study that will be described to the participants. Deception occurs when participants understand one purpose for a study but the researcher has

a different purpose in mind. It is also important for researchers to specify the sponsorship of their study. For example, in designing cover letters for survey research, sponsorship will be an important element in establishing trust and credibility for a mailed survey instrument.

### Ethical Issues in Data Collection

As researchers anticipate data collection, they need to respect the participants and the sites for research. Many ethical issues arise during this stage of the research.

- Do not put participants at risk, and respect vulnerable populations. Researchers need to have their research plans reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on their college and university campuses. IRB committees exist on campuses because of federal regulations that provide protection against human rights violations. For a researcher, the IRB process requires assessing the potential for risk, such as physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal harm (Sieber, 1998) to participants in a study. Also, the researcher needs to consider the special needs of vulnerable populations, such as minors under the age of 19, mentally incompetent participants, victims, persons with neurological impairments, pregnant women or fetuses, prisoners, and individuals with AIDS. Investigators file research proposals containing the procedures and information about the participants with the IRB campus committee so that the boards can review the extent to which the research being proposed subjects individuals to risk. In addition to this proposal, the researcher develops an *informed consent form* for participants to sign before they engage in the research. This form acknowledges that participants' rights have been protected during data collection. Elements of this consent form include the following (Creswell, 2002):
  - The right to participate voluntarily and the right to withdraw at any time, so that the individual is not being coerced into participation
  - The purpose of the study, so that individuals understand the nature of the research and its likely impact on them
  - The procedures of the study, so that individuals can reasonably expect what to anticipate in the research

- The right to ask questions, obtain a copy of the results, and have their privacy respected
  - The benefits of the study that will accrue to the individual
  - Signatures of both the participant and the researcher agreeing to these provisions
- Other procedures during data collection involve gaining the permission of individuals in authority (e.g., gatekeepers) to provide access to study participants at research sites. This often involves writing a letter that identifies the extent of time, the potential impact, and the outcomes for the research.
  - Researchers need to respect research sites so that the sites are left undisturbed after a research study. This requires that inquirers, especially in qualitative studies involving prolonged observation or interviewing at a site, be cognizant of their impact and minimize their disruption of the physical setting. For example, they might time visits so that they intrude little on the flow of activities of participants.
  - In experimental studies, investigators need to collect data so that all participants, and not only an experimental group, benefit from the treatments. This issue may require providing *some* treatment to all groups or staging the treatment so that ultimately all groups receive the beneficial treatment.
  - Means need to be considered for reciprocating between the researcher and the participants. In some research situations, power can easily be abused and participants can be coerced into a project. Involving individuals collaboratively in the design and research questions prior to data collection, as well as actively seeking their support during all phases of the research, can help reduce these issues.
  - Researchers also need to anticipate the possibility of harmful information being disclosed during the data collection process. For example, a student may discuss parental abuse or prisoners may talk about an escape. In these situations, the ethical code for researchers is to protect the privacy of the participants and to convey this protection to all individuals involved in a study.

## Ethical Issues in the Data Analysis and Interpretation

When the researcher analyzes and interprets both quantitative and qualitative data, issues emerge that call for good ethical decisions. In anticipating a research study, consider the following:

- How the study will protect the anonymity of individuals, roles, and incidents in the project. For example, in survey research, investigators disassociate names from responses during the coding and recording process. In qualitative research, inquirers use aliases or pseudonyms for individuals and places to protect identities.
- Data, once analyzed, need to be kept for a reasonable period of time (e.g., Sieber, 1998, recommends 5-10 years). Investigators should then discard data so that it does not fall into the hands of other researchers who might appropriate it for other purposes.
- Who owns the data once it is collected and analyzed also can be an issue that splits research teams and divides individuals against each other. A proposal might mention this issue of ownership and discuss how it will be resolved, such as through the development of a clear understanding between the researcher, the participants, and possibly the faculty advisors. Berg (2001) recommends the use of "personal agreements" to designate ownership of research data. An extension of this idea is to guard against sharing the data with individuals not involved in the project.
- In the interpretation of data, researchers need to provide an accurate account of the information. This accuracy may require "debriefing" between the researcher and participants in quantitative research (Berg, 2001). It may include, in qualitative research, using one or more of the strategies (see validation strategies in Chapter 10) to check the accuracy of the data with participants or across different data sources.

## Ethics in Writing and Disseminating the Research

The ethical issues do not stop with data collection and analysis; they also extend into the actual writing and dissemination of the final research report. For example:

- Discuss how the research will not use language or words that are biased against persons because of gender, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic group, disability, or age. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.) (American Psychological Association, 2001) suggests three guidelines. First, present unbiased language at an appropriate level of specificity (e.g., rather than say, "the client's behavior was typically male," state, "the client's behavior was \_\_\_\_\_ [specify]"). Second, use language that is sensitive to labels (e.g., rather than "400 Hispanics," indicate "400 Mexicans, Spaniards, and Puerto Ricans"). Third, acknowledge participants in a study (e.g., rather than "subject," use the word "participant," and rather than "woman doctor" use "doctor" or "physician").
- Other ethical issues in writing the research will involve the potential of suppressing, falsifying, or inventing findings to meet a researcher's or an audience's needs. These fraudulent practices are not accepted in professional research communities, and they constitute scientific misconduct (Neuman, 2000). A proposal might contain a proactive stance by the researcher to not engage in these practices.
- In planning a study, it is important to anticipate the repercussions of conducting the research on certain audiences and not to misuse the results to the advantage of one group or another.
- Finally, it is important to release the details of the research with the study design so that readers can determine for themselves the credibility of the study (Neuman, 2000). The emphasis on detailed procedures for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research will be emphasized in the chapters to follow.

## SUMMARY

It is helpful to consider how to write a research proposal before actually engaging in the process. Consider the nine arguments advanced by Maxwell (1996) as the key elements to include and then use one of the four topical outlines provided to craft a thorough qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods proposal.

During the writing process, begin putting words down on paper to think through ideas, establish the habit of writing on a regular basis, and use strategies such as applying consistent terms, different levels of narrative thoughts, and coherence to strengthen writing. Writing in the active voice, using strong verbs, and revising and editing will help as well.

Before writing the proposal, it is useful to consider the ethical issues that can be anticipated and described in the proposal. These issues relate to all phases of the research process. With consideration for participants, research sites, and potential readers, studies can be designed that contain ethical practices.

## Writing Exercises

1. Develop a topical outline for a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods proposal. Include the major topics in the examples included in this chapter.
2. Locate a journal article that reports qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research. Examine the introduction to the article, and, using the "hook-and-eye" method illustrated in this chapter, identify the deficiencies in the flow of ideas from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph.
3. Consider one of the following ethical dilemmas that may face a researcher. Describe ways you might anticipate the problem and actively address it in your research proposal.
  - a. A prisoner you are interviewing tells you about a potential breakout at the prison that night. What do you do?
  - b. A researcher on your team copies sentences from another study and incorporates them into the final written report for your project. What do you do?
  - c. A student collects data for her project from several individuals she has interviewed in families in your city. After the fourth interview, she tells you that she has not received approval for the project from the Institutional Review Board. What do you do?

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

**Maxwell, J. (1996).** *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Joe Maxwell provides a good overview of the proposal development process for qualitative research that, in many ways, is applicable to quantitative and mixed methods research as well. He states that a proposal is an argument to conduct a study and presents an example that describes nine necessary steps. Moreover, he includes a complete qualitative proposal and analyzes it as an illustration of a good model to follow.

**Sieber, J. E. (1998).** *Planning ethically responsible research*. In L. Bickman & D. J. Rog (Eds.), *Handbook of applied social research methods* (pp. 127-156). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Joan Sieber discusses the importance of ethical planning as integral to the process of research design. In this chapter, she provides a comprehensive review of many topics related to ethical issues, such as Institutional Review Boards, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity, as well as elements of research risk and vulnerable populations. Her coverage is extensive, and her recommendations for strategies are numerous.

**Wolcott, H. F. (2001).** *Writing up qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Harry Wolcott, an educational ethnographer, has compiled an excellent resource guide addressing numerous aspects of the writing process in qualitative research. It surveys techniques useful in getting started in writing; developing details; linking with the literature, theory, and method; tightening up with revising and editing; and finishing the process by attending to such aspects as the title and appendices. For all aspiring writers, this is an essential book, regardless of whether a study is qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.