COMPLETING YOUR Qualitative Dissertation

A ROAD MAP FROM BEGINNING TO END

4
EDITION

LINDA DALE BLOOMBERG
MARIE VOLPE

Praise for *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation*

This book is a must-have for all PhD students from their acceptance into a program until they upload their finished dissertation to their institutional library. Forget Agatha Christie; they should keep this on their bedside table until it is dog-eared and they have graduated.

—Shelley K. Taylor, Western University, Canada

The authors are at the top of their game, and have written and updated their text for years now. I will continue to use *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation* until I find a better text, and that just does not seem likely. Their writing is straightforward; they write as academics, from an academic bent, yet write practically for doctoral candidates who need guidance, a "road map" of how to complete their dissertation.

—JoAnn Danelo Barbour, Gonzaga University

An excellent resource for doctoral students! The authors take the fear of writing a dissertation and deliver a breakdown of each component into manageable tasks that once completed will help students deliver a scholarly research project. A project that they will be proud to defend.

—Joe R. Putulowski, California Baptist University

Very readable, very authentic, usable content; a very practical and relevant text. Clearly the authors have worked extensively in qualitative research and have done the work; not just writing about research, but doing 'boots on the ground,' 'sleeves rolled up' research.

—Thomas Sather, University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire

I applaud the authors for taking on the challenge of describing the conceptual/theoretical model. This piece of information alone will meaningfully improve doctoral students' abilities to progress forward with writing their dissertations. The conception/theoretical model is one of the most misunderstood aspects of the dissertation, and yet the most important aspect of *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation* is that the authors make sense of writing a qualitative dissertation in a way that will likely enhance active and inactive students' abilities to complete their dissertations."

—Antonio C. Cuyler, Florida State University

Students interested and/or committed in engaging in qualitative research would find *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation* to be extremely informative and easy to read. Students need resources and tools to help with the thinking, collecting, and analysis of rich qualitative data—which can be found in almost every chapter of this text. This book does not lecture students but provides helpful tools to assist in the collection of rich qualitative data. In addition, in many instances the students are actually able to see the tools and suggestions provided in the text in 'action.' When reading this text, the students are not left figuring out next steps; this book provides a very clear road map.

—Amira Proweller, DePaul University

Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation is well written and clear. There is an enjoyable mix of scholarly and informal tone that should engage students. Figures and tables are useful, appropriate, and well placed or referenced within the manuscript. I especially like the use of related examples and included resources. I also like that the authors enumerate common student errors or mistakes in each chapter.

—Nathan R. Templeton, Texas A&M University

It is with tremendous gratitude I write this note to extend my appreciation for your publication *Completing Your*

Qualitative Dissertation. I successfully defended my dissertation at Penn State—a work for which I continue to receive high praise. Had it not been for your book, I would not have been successful in my doctoral program. There is nothing on the market as comprehensive and user friendly as your book. In fact, I have picked it up again to garner your guidance on publishing my dissertation.

—Marie Carasco Saul, Penn State University

For

Israel Lippert (1902–1974)

Julia Esther Lippert (1906–1997)

Rosalind Ann Diamond (1941–1978)

All a constant source of energy, inspiration, and strength Their spirit lives on.

And for my three children,

Carla, Brent, and Adam Bloomberg,

In the hope that they will strive to realize their individual strengths

And always follow their dreams in the pursuit of fulfillment, peace, and happiness.

And for little Bella, for staying at my side, always.

My love for all of you is never ending.

The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance. It is the illusion of knowledge.

Stephen Hawking (1942–2018)

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Fourth Edition

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A Road Map From Beginning to End

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Preface

Who Should Read This Book?

This book is essentially a *dissertation in action*—an explanation and illustration of content and process. It is geared primarily for doctoral students in the social sciences (education, psychology, sociology, social work, nursing, community development, management, etc.) who are about to embark on or who are already conducting a qualitative research study. This book is for you if

- You are contemplating entering a doctoral program and want to know more about what lies ahead in terms of conducting research and writing a qualitative dissertation.
- You are enrolled in a doctoral program, having difficulty identifying a sound, researchable topic, and hence unable to develop your dissertation proposal.
- You have completed all the course requirements and are about to begin the research but are unsure of how and where to get started.
- You are stuck in some part of the research process and are unable to make progress toward completion of your dissertation.
- You have just about abandoned the idea of ever completing your dissertation for whatever reason.

During most doctoral programs, there is a heavy emphasis on the theoretical concepts that form the basis of research. Having completed all the required research courses, as well as having passed a certification examination, there is an expectation that doctoral students have mastered the various aspects of research design and methodology. However, once students are "out on their own" to complete their dissertations, they are often unclear about appropriate style, content, and/or procedures and are uncertain as to how to proceed. As a result, every university and college has a significant number of what are commonly referred to as all-but-dissertation (ABD) students, those who never manage to complete the dissertation—the culminating product needed to fulfill the requirements to graduate with a doctorate. If you suspect that you might fall into this category, then read on.

We have witnessed and experienced many of the frustrations voiced by students confronted with the academic challenge of writing a dissertation. How do I select a suitable topic? How do I narrow and focus an idea? What exactly is a research problem? How do I go about formulating a research purpose? How and in what ways do the research questions relate to the study's overall purpose? How do I conduct a literature review? How do I manage and analyze my data? In response to these and other challenges, we have developed what we call "road maps" for understanding the content of the dissertation and navigating through the iterative, recursive, and often messy dissertation process, from its inception to its ultimate successful completion.

Completing a dissertation is fraught with many challenges, both personal and professional. These challenges often lead to a sense of confusion and feelings of inadequacy, incompetence, and frustration. Overwhelming feelings such as these can often spiral to despondency and apathy. It is at this level that many of the students with whom we spoke find themselves. Faced with life's demands and compounded with the stresses of academic rigor, students often bow out, putting aside their dissertations, sometimes forever.

This book represents an effort to facilitate an understanding of the dissertation process so that the student feels confident and competent in successfully pursuing its completion. Our experience has been shaped by our work with our own students through the dissertation advisement process. We have been fortunate to draw on and benefit from the feedback and insight of colleagues and students who saw the value of a book such as this.

One challenge in compiling a book of this nature is to acknowledge that institutional requirements vary. There is no universally agreed-on format, and each school has its unique structural regulations regarding the dissertation. Moreover, each academic program differs, and in fact, even each advisor or sponsor usually has her or his own requirements as well. Keep in mind, too, that some of the qualitative traditions or genres may require or be open to somewhat different presentational strategies in order to align with the underlying philosophy and/or theory. Although dissertations can vary in form and length, depending on the institution, they do share basic components. All dissertations must have an introduction, a review of the relevant literature, a review of methodology, a presentation of findings, a presentation of analysis and interpretation, and a presentation of conclusions and recommendations. In this book, although we address each of these components comprehensively as separate chapters, we are aware that in some institutions or programs some of these components might be combined in the same chapter. As such, students should adhere to the guidelines set by their own institutions and be mindful of the preferences of their own advisors.

The Purpose of This Book

Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map From Beginning to End fills an important gap in the qualitative research literature by specifically addressing the fast-growing practice of qualitative postgraduate dissertations in colleges and universities throughout the world. Many students struggle to complete qualitative research projects because the research itself is inherently messy. To address this challenge, the authors have distilled decades of experience into a first-of-its-kind, highly practical reference for graduate students. Students often think that the dissertation writing process is simple. We wish we had a simple answer to the question: How to portray the process as doable without neglecting the complexity? This is what this book hopes to achieve!

Logical and systematic thinking is necessary to successfully complete a qualitative dissertation. Completing the dissertation will depend on your ability to successfully master both the content and the process. Aside from offering clear guidelines as to the necessary content, the intent of this book is to shed light on structure and style, thereby making the dissertation process organized and manageable. The purpose of the book is to assist you at whatever stage you find yourself. You might be right at the beginning of the process, unable to select a topic that is interesting and/or researchable. You might already have a topic but are unsure of how to focus it narrowly and articulate a researchable problem. You might have covered a lot of ground already, even having collected and analyzed some of your data, but are feeling stuck, lost, or adrift.

Writing a dissertation is a process, but not one that is neat, linear, or always completely transparent. As a cautionary note, the structure of this book may suggest that you will proceed from one point to the next in a seamless and logical manner. Please remember that there will be much looping back and forth, with many iterations and curves along the way. Such is the way of qualitative research *and* the way of dissertation development. We trust that you will keep this in mind. The intent is to help you better understand the various elements involved in the qualitative dissertation and be able to address these elements appropriately and effectively, thereby making the process more manageable and doable. Moreover, our hope is that the process is a meaningful one for you. A dissertation is intended to be an academically rigorous process, the completion of which demonstrates that you are qualified to join a research community whose members carry the title "Dr." This is a unique opportunity to choose a topic of your own interest, to learn more about it, and to make a contribution to existing bodies of knowledge in your field. The frustrations and difficulties involved in taking on a project of this magnitude, and the level of commitment required and the sacrifices that you have made to get to this point, are all understandable. It is also understandable how important it is for you to complete your dissertation so that you do not remain ABD forever. Therefore, the goal of this book is that you are able to produce a dissertation, and so we offer this step-by-step guide from inception to completion. Our sincere hope is that this book helps you understand the process, embrace it, and succeed!

The cover illustration of this book abstractly depicts the typical doctoral graduation gown sleeve with three velvet stripes, and doctoral cap—the black velvet tam with the golden tassel. The blue hue represents the color of the graduation gown of Columbia University where both authors obtained their doctorates. (And the orange represents the sun at the end of the long dissertation journey; something to dream of and strive for!) Academic regalia, colloquially known as the "cap and gown" or "graduation robes," are the formal attire worn by degree candidates and holders during various ceremonial occasions. The history of the cap and gown dates back over 800 years to scholars in medieval Europe. Around this time, students and professors began organizing themselves into guilds, and three distinct groups emerged: the apprentices (bachelor of arts), the teachers (master of arts), and the teachers who had completed postgraduate work (doctorate). The style of robes and dress became standardized as a gown with a hood. Today's cap and gown are based on 14th- and 15th-century styles that were particularly popular with students and teachers at Oxford and Cambridge universities in England. American commencement rituals and graduation dress have been in place since colonial times and were standardized by the intercollegiate code in 1895. Doctoral graduates traditionally wear robes with a velvet stripe that extends down the front panel, as well as three velvet stripes across the sleeves in colors indicating the area of study. In addition, instead of the mortarboard that is characteristic of bachelor's and master's degree status, those receiving the doctoral degree traditionally wear a black velvet tam with a small golden tassel. With these images in mind, you have something concrete to aspire to in striving to reach the pinnacle of academic achievement: your doctorate!

How This Book Works

This book offers a series of road maps that are designed to help you steer your way through the various activities that constitute the process of writing a qualitative dissertation. At each juncture of the process, the road maps allow you to clarify your objectives, understand and tackle the task at hand, and check on what you have accomplished before you proceed to the next step.

At the heart of the book is a series of chapters that models the typical progression of a dissertation. Each chapter is illustrated by examples that give the reader an understanding of what the actual write-up would look like. Emphasis throughout the book is on conceptual understanding as it relates to the practical aspects involved in navigating the dissertation process. To begin, we use an actual research problem, which is the problem that confronts you, the reader. You are reading this book because you have not yet managed to complete your dissertation. This same problem is the example that will be addressed as the basis of discussion throughout this book. This problem is referred to insofar as it relates to each step of the dissertation process, and as such, you will see a common thread running throughout each of the chapters. We proceed from articulating the problem statement through developing a research purpose and associated research questions. Based on the research problem, we formulate appropriate data collection methods, analyze and synthesize data, and present conclusions and recommendations. In effect, the problem that is used in this book provides a model for you in conducting and writing up your own dissertation.

As you prepare to navigate the dissertation process, please be aware of three caveats:

First, the approach throughout is to emphasize conceptual understanding as it relates to the practical aspects involved in navigating the dissertation process. As such, this approach bears some caution as it may be seen as an attempt to reduce the complexity and "messiness" of qualitative research by way of a series of simplified "how-to" offerings. The many tables and checklists that are provided in this book might imply that the process is linear. However, this is certainly not the case! It is difficult for many students to understand that even a road map is a guideline only, and sometimes routes must be retraced or detours developed in order to avoid or navigate unexpected roadblocks. Although our intent is to demystify the dissertation process, we do not sacrifice intellectual rigor for the sake of simplification. This book is not intended to be a quick fix, nor do we offer an easy recipe for success. In our experience, completing a dissertation is a rigorous and demanding process. It is iterative, unpredictable, and in many respects, recursive. However, with the development of a clearer understanding, sharpened competencies, and a set of resources to guide you, the dissertation is, in fact, doable.

As a second caveat, the reader is reminded throughout that there are various institutional differences and requirements regarding the structure of a dissertation. Be aware that while most institutions will approach the dissertation in common ways, at the same time there are differences in terms of the organization and presentation, and also distinct differences in terms of what and how qualitative language and terminology are used. Of note is that some universities require a five-chapter dissertation by combining data analysis and interpretation of findings into a single chapter. This book presents information as guidelines that are meant to be flexible per institutional expectations and requirements, and subject to modification depending on your institution, department, and program. As such, this book is meant to be a guide rather than a prescriptive one-fits-all approach.

A third caveat is that although we do offer a general structure regarding the writing of a dissertation, we do not believe this structure should stifle students' creativity. Creativity comes into play through your own initiative in how you design your instruments, develop your conceptual frameworks and related coding schemes, present your findings, and analyze, interpret, and synthesize your data. That said, however, qualitative research must not be viewed as an exercise in creative writing when it is, in fact, an exercise in conducting a research project that is integrative and intellectually rigorous. Rigor and structure are necessary and essential in order to account for subjectivity and keep creative speculation in check.

We realize that readers of this book are at different stages of the dissertation process. We suggest that you start off by finding your own entry point and, depending on where you are in the dissertation process, begin at the chapter that is most relevant to you. If you are just starting out on your research study, with no clearly defined topic, you should start reading this book from the beginning. If you are further along in the research process, choose to focus on those chapters that are most relevant to your unfolding experience. We readily acknowledge that researchers never move in a linear fashion. Conducting research and writing a dissertation are not like following a clearly marked path. Rather, this process is iterative and recursive, looping back and forth, with many unanticipated events along the way. This book is intended, through its road maps, to walk you through that process and through the confusion.

Organization of This Book

This book is organized in three parts:

Part I, "Taking Charge of Yourself and Your Work," is the point of entry and constitutes a broad introduction to the complex task of writing a dissertation. Part I offers an overview of the steps involved in thinking about and preparing for the dissertation process. The objective of Part I is fourfold: (a) demystify and clarify the dissertation process while maintaining intellectual rigor and the highest ethical standards; (b) expand students' understanding and appreciation of both the content and the process pertaining to conducting qualitative research and producing a sound defensible dissertation; (c) demonstrate the *skills* needed to conduct and write up the study; and (d) recognize, appreciate, and adopt the *attitudes* that will contribute to the success of the research project. Part I consists of five chapters:

Chapter 1, "A Complete Dissertation: The Big Picture," provides *a cursory glance* at the constitution of an entire dissertation by way of a comprehensive outline of all key elements for each section of the dissertation. This chapter is a precursor of what is to come, with each element being more fully developed and explained further along in the book. This chapter also addresses evaluating the quality of a qualitative dissertation, and two extensive rubrics are included toward this end.

Chapter 2, "Gearing Up: There Is Method in the Madness," introduces the *mind-set* that is required to create the physical and mental "space" necessary to begin the dissertation process in as methodical a manner as possible. The chapter includes a discussion about the strengths and limitations regarding identification and choice of topic, as well as clarification regarding appropriate advisor–student collegial relationships and mutual responsibility. The chapter also begins the process of thinking about organizing, managing, and securing data, as well as developing the skills that are needed for establishing and maintaining a realistic and doable timeline.

Chapter 3, "Choosing a Qualitative Research Approach," discusses the implications of choosing a qualitative research approach based on the study's problem, purpose, and research questions. The chapter includes an overview of the historical development and current status of the field of qualitative inquiry, illustrates the primary characteristics of qualitative research, and includes an overview of how these characteristics compare and contrast with the characteristics of quantitative and mixed methods approaches. We strive for conceptual understanding of the logic behind choice of research approach including knowledge claims and underlying philosophical principles by clarifying and explaining the most commonly used, current, and cutting-edge qualitative methodologies (genres or traditions), with an emphasis on researcher reflexivity and insights into the critiques of each tradition.

Chapter 4, "Developing Your Proposal," explains the logic and reasoning behind developing a sound and comprehensive research proposal by providing an in-depth understanding of the content of a three-chapter proposal so that students can make direct application to their own research. Included in this chapter is a comprehensive set of guidelines regarding academic writing skills, as well as sections that clarify expectations and issues regarding academic integrity including accidental plagiarism and ways to avoid this offense. The chapter also provides guidelines regarding institutional review board (IRB) application and approval requirements.

Chapter 5, "Achieving Alignment Throughout Your Dissertation," seeks to provide a clear understanding of the concept of alignment in qualitative research, highlights and clarifies the key elements that must be aligned throughout the dissertation, and explains how to ensure and check for alignment throughout the research process. The dissertation should provide clear evidence that you have addressed alignment at every step of the process so that the study is tight in terms of methodological integrity. The chapter begins with a detailed table that serves as an at-a-glance road map and checklist, indicating all the components and elements that should be taken into account vis-à-vis alignment, and for ease of use, includes reference to relevant chapters in this book.

The chapters of Part II, "Content and Process: A Chapter-by-Chapter Road Map," narrow and focus the scope of the discussion, and direct the reader's attention to the discrete aspects involved in conceptualizing and addressing the research and writing process. Each of the chapters of Part II provides comprehensive instructions with respect to the content of a specific dissertation chapter, and how to develop that content. Instructions also pertain to understanding the process involved in setting up each dissertation chapter. The "Application" section of each chapter in Part II demonstrates what a completed chapter of a dissertation should look like by way of a consistent research example that is carried throughout all of the chapters. Although the application section of each chapter represents a model or example of application, in a real dissertation, the reader is reminded that the discussion would need to be elaborated as required.

At the outset of Part II, and throughout the chapters that constitute Part II, we are careful to point out that while most institutions will approach the proposal and dissertation in common ways, at the same time there are differences in terms of the organization and presentation, and distinct differences in terms of what and how qualitative language and terminology are used. This book presents information as guidelines that are meant to be flexible per institutional expectations and requirements and are subject to modification depending on your institution, department, and program.

The chapters that make up Part II are organized in such a way as to reflect and describe the actual chapters of a dissertation. Part II consists of six chapters:

Chapter 6, "Introduction to Your Study," explores the foundational elements that are necessary in the first chapter of a dissertation, which is the introduction to the study. This includes how to identify and develop a researchable problem from a broader topic area, formulate a clear and concise problem statement, and align this with the study's purpose and research questions. Also covered are the additional components of the first chapter of a dissertation, including overview of approach, rationale and significance, researcher assumptions and perspectives, and clarification of terminology used.

Chapter 7, "Developing and Presenting Your Literature Review," provides an understanding of the function, purpose, and structure of a literature review, describes the role of a research-based critical literature review in a dissertation, and outlines the skills related to the various steps involved in conducting and presenting a thorough and systematic review of the literature, including identifying and retrieving relevant and credible material and sources, and analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing ideas found in the literature. This chapter also addresses the theoretical or conceptual framework as an integral element of the research process and provides detailed explanation regarding how to think about developing this framework and how it functions with regard to analysis of research findings.

Chapter 8, "Presenting Methodology and Research Approach," offers a guide for tackling the dissertation's methodology chapter. Key components of the methodology chapter are identified, and explanation is provided regarding how each component of the research methodology must be developed and presented. These components include research sample and population, sampling method, information sources, research design, methods and strategies of data collection, methods of analysis, trustworthiness issues, ethical considerations, and limitations and delimitations of the study. This chapter illustrates how all of the combined components form a logical, interconnected sequence and contribute to the overall alignment and methodological integrity of the research study.

Chapter 9, "Analyzing Data and Reporting Findings," demonstrates how to write and present the findings of a research study, illustrating clearly how the findings address the research problem and provide a response to each of the study's research questions. The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of large amounts of data—reducing raw data, identifying what is significant, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal. This chapter begins with a conceptualization of qualitative data analysis and goes on to identify the specific strategies involved in analyzing qualitative data. Detailed explanations are provided regarding how to organize, reduce, and prepare raw data through coding and categorization; how to formulate clear and precise findings statements based on analysis of the data; and how to report and present findings in a clear, comprehensive, and systematic manner.

Chapter 10, "Analyzing, Interpreting, and Synthesizing Findings," explains how to analyze and interpret the study's findings. This chapter demonstrates how to integrate and synthesize the findings with the literature and ways to go about interpreting and presenting the meaning behind those findings, which is the essence of the research. The chapter offers detailed explanation and description of qualitative analysis and the concept of synthesis as an ongoing process, and how to go about presenting a final integrated synthesis. A key focus is on the reflexivity of the researcher in performing analysis and interpreting the findings. It should be mentioned that some universities and programs adopt an approach that combines this chapter and the previous one, resulting in a five-chapter dissertation format. As such, analysis of data, reporting findings, and analyzing and interpreting those findings are sometimes presented in the same chapter.

Chapter 11, the final chapter of Part II, "Drawing Trustworthy Conclusions and Presenting Actionable Recommendations," presents the ways in which to address the last chapter of a dissertation: your study's conclusions and the recommendations that you provide for practice, policy, and future research. Included is an explanation of what conclusions are as distinct from findings and interpretations, as well as suggestions for thinking about and developing sound conclusions and practical, actionable, and research-based recommendations. Emphasis is placed on the significance of alignment among the study's findings, interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations. The chapter also offers the researcher an opportunity for a final reflection statement.

Part III, "Nearing Completion," addresses the final stages of the dissertation process by explaining all the activities that need to take place when nearing completion of the dissertation and by providing guidelines regarding how to most effectively engage in these final activities, including preparing for a successful defense. Part III is designed to bring a sense of closure to the dissertation process and to offer some suggestions for moving beyond the dissertation, and consists of two chapters:

Chapter 12, "Some Final Technical Considerations," focuses on the technical considerations involved in the final stages of the dissertation process. Here we offer advice and suggestions around the concept of alignment with regard to an entire dissertation and how to check for this. We also provide instruction and guidelines with regard to crafting an appropriate dissertation title, devising a dissertation abstract that conforms to academic standards, proofreading, editing, and comprehensive assembly of the manuscript. This chapter also includes a comprehensive final checklist for all activities (both conceptual and practical) that addresses in the entire research and writing process.

Chapter 13, "Defense Preparation and Beyond," offers guidelines and suggestions regarding pre-defense preparation, including choosing a committee and they preparing for a successful defense. A comprehensive list of possible defense questions is included. These questions are designed to help students begin to think about and prepare for the event, and they address different aspects of the work—the research process itself, the outcomes of the study, and the study's conceptual framework. The chapter also offers guidelines and suggestions regarding post-defense preparation, including possible avenues for the presentation and publication of the research. Recommended resources are provided to assist with publication and presentation of the research.

Defining Features of This Book

Some books on writing a dissertation explain the process in overcomplicated language—the classic textbook scholarly writing style that tends to mystify and overwhelm the reader. Other books on the subject make assumptions that by following a set of instructions the reader will somehow know how to conduct the process and do not take into account the inherent messiness of qualitative research. Still others offer way too many unrelated examples and fail to provide sufficient detail and strong examples of the various elements involved. All these versions are difficult to learn from. Included in *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map From Beginning to End* are a number of useful and reader-friendly features that set this book apart:

- The focus throughout is on conceptual understanding as it relates to the practical aspects involved in navigating the dissertation process.
- Throughout all of the chapters, we reinforce the importance of maintaining alignment among all elements of the dissertation to ensure methodological congruence and, therefore, maintain high academic standards. While this is emphasized at various points throughout, Chapter 5 is dedicated to this matter, highlighting all necessary key components and providing an expanded and detailed discussion. Chapter checklists in each of the chapters of Part II also now include a separate section to address alignment of research components, making the concept of alignment more prominent throughout.
- Because reflection and reflexivity are cornerstones of qualitative research, each chapter of Part II includes a set of reflexive questions to stimulate critical thinking and reflection regarding the potential impact of your methodological choices, and what might be potential inherent researcher biases and assumptions. These questions are designed to serve as prompts for journaling throughout the dissertation process, allowing you to think more critically about what reflexivity looks like at different stages of the research process.
- Part II of the book mirrors each of the chapters of an actual dissertation, with a focus on addressing all key required components. The purpose of each chapter is twofold: to provide instruction and to demonstrate application, and so each of these chapters is presented in two sections: Section I provides instructions regarding the specific content of each chapter and how that content is developed. Section II is the application that demonstrates what a written-up chapter would look like based on the content developed. In this way, the chapters of Part II are, in effect, a *dissertation in action.*
- A real researchable problem is illustrated up front and is carried through in the application section of each chapter of Part II to demonstrate the steps involved in the dissertation process. By using a real problem, we model what a real dissertation should look like. Carrying one research problem throughout the chapters also allows the reader to follow the same idea as it threads through all the different sections required in a qualitative dissertation.
- The authors acknowledge and reinforce throughout the book that there are often institutional and/or program-related differences in requirements vis-à-vis the dissertation process. Where appropriate, we flag possible instances of differences in the content and structure of the dissertation so that students are aware of these.
- Where appropriate, we point out instances where qualitative traditions or genres might differ in application and explain how these differences or distinctions can be addressed.
- In the instruction section of each chapter of Part II, road maps in the form of tables, figures, and checklists are provided throughout. These afford at-a-glance overviews at each stage of the research-writing process. These road maps are our own creation and have not been previously published.
- Based on the idea of road maps, we emphasize the use of working tools to clarify thinking and organize and present the data. Within each instruction section, we include templates for how to go about creating these tools. In the appendices, we include various completed exemplars to offer the reader some idea of what the finished products might look like.
- A quality assessment checklist is provided for each chapter of Part II. This checklist is a supplement to the narrative and serves to review what needs to be accomplished before proceeding to the subsequent chapter. A final comprehensive checklist for the complete dissertation is provided in Part III.
- Most of the chapters include a set of annotated resources for referral to additional up-to-date, cutting-edge, and relevant literature and research. In preparing this book, the lead author, Linda Bloomberg, has done

extensive research and literature reviews, and shares sources that have been found to be most useful. In many cases, this includes seminal works in the field, but also includes works that are less well known and that are considered worthwhile and relevant. With each edition of this book, these annotations have been updated to reflect currency in the field. This edition's annotated bibliography includes a total of 68 resources.

- A comprehensive checklist of all the activities that constitute the entire dissertation process is provided on the inside of the back cover. This practical tool is intended to help students get started on the process and keep themselves in check with regard to the required activities at every stage along the way.

New to the Fourth Edition: Chapter-by-Chapter Overview

This fourth edition of *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map From Beginning to End* follows a similar structure to the successful first edition published in 2008, the second edition (2012), and the third edition (2016), and continues to offer doctoral students comprehensive guidance and accessible and practical tools for navigating each step in the recursive and iterative qualitative dissertation process. While key features that distinguish the book's unique approach are retained, this fourth edition responds to developments in the field as well as reviewer feedback. Two key elements are new to the fourth edition:

- Throughout, there is a greater focus on application to a broader range of qualitative methodologies (traditions or genres). The author's view of qualitative research is to go beyond prevailing assumptions and norms, make a strong case for nonhegemonic, inclusive ways of thinking and informed action, and thereby intentionally facilitate transformative and equity-oriented possibilities. A critical stance vis-à-vis research is vital at the current historical moment, with dominant powerful and pervasive ideologies and policies working to marginalize and silence individuals and groups who challenge the status quo. Indeed, the title of both the 13th and 14th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (2017, 2018) is *Qualitative Inquiry in Troubled Times.* This fourth edition includes a greater focus on how all qualitative traditions or genres can encompass activist research and social justice inquiry, taking a critical stance toward highlighting and potentially changing social structures and processes that shape individual and collective life. This broader coverage of the critical aspect of inquiry, including both methodologies and methods, is reflected throughout (particularly in Chapters 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10) as well as in the selected annotated bibliographies at the end of each chapter. With the increasing tendency for qualitative researchers to ask themselves what the outcome of their research will be in terms of making some impact on a larger social purpose, the inclusion of a strong activist agenda and how qualitative researchers can approach their research critically is now more apparent among all of the different traditions or genres. This broader coverage addresses the current landscape of qualitative research and allows the book to have wider application for dissertation work within the evolving field of qualitative inquiry.
- Considering the researcher as the primary instrument of research, the importance of systematically and methodically addressing social location and positionality, and paying close attention to context and complexity become critical toward achieving rigorous and trustworthy research. Assessing issues of trustworthiness, and in particular credibility, has increasingly become a clear focus in the evaluation of qualitative research studies. One of the most fundamental quality criteria for qualitative research is reflexivity; the practice of situating oneself within the context of the research, showing an awareness of, sensitivity to, and engagement with the cultural and social embeddedness of methods, theories, and research questions, as well as reflecting on and critiquing one's own assumptions and biases. As such, in the current edition, there is a greater focus throughout on reflexivity, underscoring the importance that as a researcher you are thinking more deeply about the potential impact of all the choices you make regarding your study's design, including identification, justification, and limitations for all methodological choices, and what might be your biases and assumptions, and why. Critically confronting and engaging with our interpretations, and the biases that shape them, is a key consideration in qualitative research. Addressing this ethical responsibility requires a reflexive approach to research that also includes developing and maintaining a commitment to openness to critical feedback and change. This focus is reflected throughout (particularly in Chapters 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10). In addition, each of the chapters of Part II includes a set of reflexive questions that are designed to tap into any inherent biases and assumptions.

The current edition includes additional and updated materials in each of the chapters of Part I, and presents a new Chapter 5, "Achieving Alignment Throughout Your Dissertation."

- Chapter 1, "A Complete Dissertation: The Big Picture" (based on Bloomberg, 2009), outlines each content element involved in the dissertation process and includes "reasons," "quality markers," and "frequent errors" for each element. This broad guideline overview is a precursor of what is to come, with each element being more fully explored and developed further along in the book. Chapter 1 includes an updated section for evaluating the quality of a qualitative dissertation, and toward this end, two updated and revised evaluation rubrics are provided.

- Chapter 2, "Gearing Up: There Is Method in the Madness," provides additional information and practical tips regarding organizing and managing the research project. Also included is a new section pertaining to data security, emphasizing its importance in light of the advent and pervasiveness of social media and new technologies, including various forms of publicly accessible visual, audio, and virtual materials and data.
- Chapter 3, "Choosing a Qualitative Research Approach," is substantially rewritten and reorganized to reflect the history and current landscape of qualitative research, highlighting key trends and ongoing developments in the field. Additional details pertaining to the defining features of qualitative research as a field of inquiry have been incorporated to enhance greater understanding of the nuances involved. This edition includes additional clarification regarding mixed methods research as an intentional research approach in its own right, and how this approach aligns with qualitative research methods. Also new to this edition is an outline of the role of the qualitative researcher, with an added emphasis on criticality and reflexivity. The chapter describes and explains in more detail than previous editions the most commonly used current and cutting-edge qualitative methodologies (traditions or genres), and for comparative purposes, this edition includes particular reference to each of the major genres' philosophical underpinnings, application, methods, and critiques. With the increasing tendency for qualitative researchers to ask themselves what the outcome of their research will be in terms of making some impact on a larger social purpose, the inclusion of a strong activist agenda and how qualitative researchers can approach their research critically is now more apparent among all of the different traditions or genres. Discussion around indigenous methodologies and critical arts-based inquiry is new to the section on critical genres. Throughout this chapter is an increased emphasis on reflexivity, the politics of research, representation, positioning and positionality, and voice as integral features of a critical, collaborative, and activist stance.
- Chapter 4, "Developing Your Proposal," includes updated references to a variety of style manuals used in the social sciences and additional guidelines for academic writing and APA format and style requirements. The current edition's chapter also includes expanded sections that address the dissertation's literature review and methodology chapter requirements and also provides additional details regarding the use of pilot studies and field tests.
- An *all-new* Chapter 5, "Achieving Alignment Throughout Your Dissertation," provides the necessary clarity regarding the importance of methodological integrity and congruence throughout the research and writing process. This new chapter has grown out of work Linda Bloomberg has done in developing workshops and seminars on this topic. In her own work with doctoral students, as well as in discussing this with colleagues at various universities around the world, students' understanding and achieving alignment throughout the qualitative dissertation is very often a stumbling block, and lack of expertise in this area often complicates an already stressful process. Alignment (or lack of alignment) is often a key question or issue at the time of the dissertation defense as well. This chapter provides a clear understanding of the concept of alignment in qualitative research, highlights and clarifies the key elements and concepts to be aligned throughout the dissertation, and explains how to ensure and check for alignment, and therefore methodological integrity, throughout. Table 5.1, "Aligning Key Dissertation Components," serves as an at-a-glance road map and checklist, indicating all the key components and elements that should be taken into account vis-à-vis alignment, and for ease of use, it includes reference to relevant chapters in this book. Numerous new references were added with this chapter. To ensure that alignment is addressed throughout the research and writing process, this concept is revisited throughout all of the book's chapters. In addition, chapter checklists have been updated to address the alignment among research components, making the concept of alignment more prominent.

The chapters of Part II, "Content and Process: A Chapter-by-Chapter Road Map," continue to mirror the chapters of an actual dissertation. Chapters 6 through 8 set up the study and constitute the study's framework. As pointed out in Part I, these three chapters form the research proposal. Chapters 9 through 11 discuss how to analyze and present the data that are collected.

- Chapter 6, "Introduction to Your Study," remains largely unchanged except for more detailed discussion around the significance of identifying and developing a viable research problem, articulating a clear and concise purpose statement, and developing strong research questions. As mentioned at the outset, and again in subsequent chapters, the reader is continually reminded that while most institutions will approach the proposal and dissertation in common ways, there are some differences in terms of the organization and presentation of the proposal and dissertation.

- In appreciating how doctoral students often struggle with developing a well-synthesized literature review and comprehending the nature and function of a theoretical or conceptual framework, additional discussion in Chapter 7, “Developing and Presenting Your Literature Review,” serves to enhance and clarify these integral aspects that have significant implications for the design and analysis of qualitative research. Additional explanation is provided around the nature and function of the conceptual or theoretical framework in a dissertation as well as the subtle differences between these two terms, even though they are often used interchangeably. This edition also includes expanded discussion in a number of other areas: the role and function of a literature review, the significance of utilizing credible peer-reviewed literature, strategies to organize and manage material, and the use of concept maps to critically analyze literature. The section on literature synthesis has also been expanded, and two new synthesis matrices have been included as workable tools to assist in developing this chapter of the dissertation.
- Chapter 8, “Presenting Methodology and Research Approach,” includes numerous new additions and some revisions. New to the chapter is a section on Internet and online research as work in the field; triangulation strategies to address trustworthiness; document review and analysis; and ethics (with specific reference to privacy issues, including confidentiality and anonymity). Sections that have been substantially reworked include reflexivity/positionality and a critical stance as this relates to the role of the researcher; data analysis and how this aligns with choice of qualitative methodology (tradition or genre); and trustworthiness issues, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.
- Chapter 9, “Analyzing Data and Reporting Findings,” continues to acknowledge analytic distinctions among traditions and genres, emphasizing how each tradition is sensitive to particular analytic methods and strategies. This edition places a stronger emphasis on addressing alignment and achieving methodological congruence. There is additional discussion regarding issues involved in researcher reflexivity and additional description of key features and practical relevance of data analysis vis-à-vis the various qualitative genres. A new section addresses analysis of text, discourse (talk), and visual data, and new information is provided with reference to dealing with exceptions in the data. The application section has been revised to indicate even more clearly how the study’s findings must directly address the research problem and respond to each of the study’s research questions.
- Chapter 10, “Analyzing, Interpreting, and Synthesizing Findings,” remains largely unchanged but provides some additional material and references regarding data analysis and representation within the different qualitative genres or traditions, and greater focus on addressing trustworthiness by way of ongoing researcher reflexivity.
- Chapter 11, “Drawing Trustworthy Conclusions and Presenting Actionable Recommendations,” remains largely unchanged except for additional emphasis placed on the significance of alignment among the study’s findings, interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations.

Some new material has been added to Part III, “Nearing Completion,” which focuses on the final stages of the dissertation process, includes two chapters:

- Chapter 12, “Some Final Technical Considerations,” remains largely unchanged except for additional reference to alignment in the final checklist.
- Chapter 13, “Defense Preparation and Beyond,” deals with the challenges encountered in pre- and post-defense preparation. The chapter remains largely unchanged except for the addition of new dissertation defense questions, which have been categorized for ease of use and applicability and are now organized to address the research process itself, the outcomes of the study, and the study’s conceptual framework. Regarding post-defense preparation, an expanded section is devoted to a critical overview of online publication opportunities. A new set of annotated resources describes useful texts for approaching the publication and presentation of research.

New organization and structure throughout this fourth edition includes:

- Sections where the narrative was too dense have been reorganized, and additional headings and/or subheadings have been included so that the reader can more easily follow the text.
- Updated references, citations, and websites throughout that include new and cutting-edge research and practice, as well as attention to new editions of previously cited works.
- Each of the chapters in Part II now includes a set of reflexive questions.
- Chapter checklists in each of the chapters of Part II now include a separate section to address alignment of research components. This serves to reinforce and make the concept of alignment more focused and prominent.
- Inclusion of new and updated annotated resources throughout provides broad coverage of the most commonly used qualitative traditions or genres included in the book. In order to remain relevant and accessible, all outdated annotations were discarded. A total of 30 new and current annotations were added, and 17 were updated to reflect the most current editions.
- Additional revisions have been made to existing charts for organizing data and managing the dissertation process. The fourth edition includes a new table that serves as an at-a-glance road map and checklist, indicating all the key components and elements that should be taken into account vis-à-vis alignment, and the use of this table is extended by including references to relevant chapters in this book. Two new synthesis matrices are provided as practical tools that can be used in developing a literature review. In addition, a new table is included that offers an overview of trustworthiness criteria for qualitative research.
- Updated and reformulated appendices where necessary. Two extensive rubrics for evaluating the quality of a completed dissertation and literature review were added in the previous edition. These rubrics, referenced in Chapter 1, have been updated in the current edition and will hopefully continue to be highly useful to both professors and doctoral students and also used as a source of critique and scholarly discussion.

Companion Website

The companion website, study.sagepub.com/bloomberg4e, an ancillary package designed by lead author Linda Dale Bloomberg to accompany this text, provides free access to SAGE journal articles and other resources relevant to materials in the book. This student study site includes a comprehensive selection of additional materials and resources to enhance students' understanding of the content of the book and take their learning one step further. The site includes access to the following:

- All tools and templates referenced and illustrated in the book are downloadable for ease of use.
- List of 101 questions that provides and answers a comprehensive overview of the dissertation process in all its many varied components. The intent is that these questions will stimulate critical thinking, reflection, and dialogue, thereby motivating doctoral students or prospective doctoral students to seek and consult additional relevant texts and resources in order to delve deeper into the many issues raised. These questions might also be used to prompt discussion between doctoral students and their advisors.
- Chapter-specific articles featuring annotations as well as access to full-text articles from SAGE's leading research journals. Each selected article is annotated and includes questions that apply to the material contained therein, as such, supporting and expanding the concepts presented in each of the dissertation's chapters.
- Links to relevant web resources direct students to additional tools for further research regarding important and relevant chapter topics. This includes access to a comprehensive range of journals related to qualitative research, as well as a how-to guide that covers the mechanics of data collection for applied qualitative research.
- Carefully and intentionally selected web-based video resources feature relevant content for use in independent as well as classroom-based exploration of key topics, concepts, and ideas.
- Some of the book's appendices, specifically those that are illustrations of completed exemplars that are referenced throughout the book.

Acknowledgments

Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map From Beginning to End is meant as a tribute to the resolve of the countless doctoral students with whom we have worked and continue to work, and from whom we have learned so much. This book could not have been conceptualized without being a part of their experiences. Of special importance to the completion of this work are the doctoral students whom we interviewed and who candidly shared their experiences and insights, thereby providing the rich qualitative data for the book's application sections.

Many thanks to those who have contributed in various ways to the enhancement of this fourth edition: Helen Salmon, senior acquisitions editor, for her constructive feedback, ongoing support, and expertise at all stages of this project; Megan O'Heffernan, editorial assistant, for her support and assistance; Andrew Olson, production editor, for his efficiency in overseeing the editing process; Diane Wainwright, copy editor, for her thoroughness in refining and editing the manuscript; and Chelsea Neve, content development editor, for her support with producing and overseeing the book's companion website. It has been a pleasure to work with this team of professionals.

Great appreciation goes to SAGE Publications for recognizing the value of this book and, as with the previous editions, for working tirelessly and collaboratively to prepare this fourth edition for publication. The success of the previous editions of this book is indeed gratifying, as is the ongoing positive feedback that I continue to receive from students and faculty alike in various parts of the world. My hope is that this fourth edition will continue to offer the support, structural framework, and guidelines that doctoral students seek in their journey along the long road of developing and defending a rigorous qualitative dissertation.

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About the Authors

Linda Dale Bloomberg,

lead author, is former adjunct faculty and dissertation advisor in the department of adult learning and leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. As senior researcher for the South African Human Sciences Research Council and National Institute for Personnel Research, Dr. Bloomberg's work focused on change management, diversity initiatives, and enhanced workplace learning. She currently develops curriculum for qualitative research in graduate programs, serves as dissertation chair and subject matter expert, and also serves as consultant to various research, higher education, and nonprofit advisory boards. She is founder of Bloomberg Associates and ILIAD (Institute for Learning Innovations and Adult Development) and a cofounder of Columbia University's Global Learning and Leadership Institute. She has authored and edited numerous publications in the fields of organizational evaluation, qualitative research, leadership development, adult learning, and distance education. Dr. Bloomberg is a contributor to the recently published *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation* (2018), and is currently working on *Executive Coaching: Supporting Adult Development and Implications for Learning and Leadership.* She presents regularly at national and international professional conferences on topics related to qualitative research, dissertation instruction, and adult learning. Dr. Bloomberg holds master's degrees in counseling psychology, organizational psychology, and education. In 2006, she received her doctorate in adult education and organizational learning from Columbia University.

Marie Volpe

is an adjunct professor at Teachers College, Columbia University in the Department of Adult Learning and Leadership. Over her 20 years with the College she has sponsored 60 dissertations and has used her extensive experience in the corporate and academic sectors to develop and teach courses in staff development and training, program development, and qualitative research methods. Dr. Volpe's primary focus in recent years has been finding ways to motivate and develop students' skills to frame a dissertation topic and work through all of the steps and emotional roadblocks to complete their degrees. Dr. Volpe regularly conducts lectures on qualitative research methods in East Asia, Australia, and more recently in Ireland and Italy. Since 1999, she has conducted professional development workshops for teachers in Mongolia, China, and Korea. Prior to her academic positions, Dr. Volpe had a career that spanned 35 years with Exxon Corporation, where she held the position of manager of education and development. She earned both a masters in organizational psychology and a doctorate in Adult Education from Teachers College, Columbia University and completed a postdoctoral experience at Harvard University.

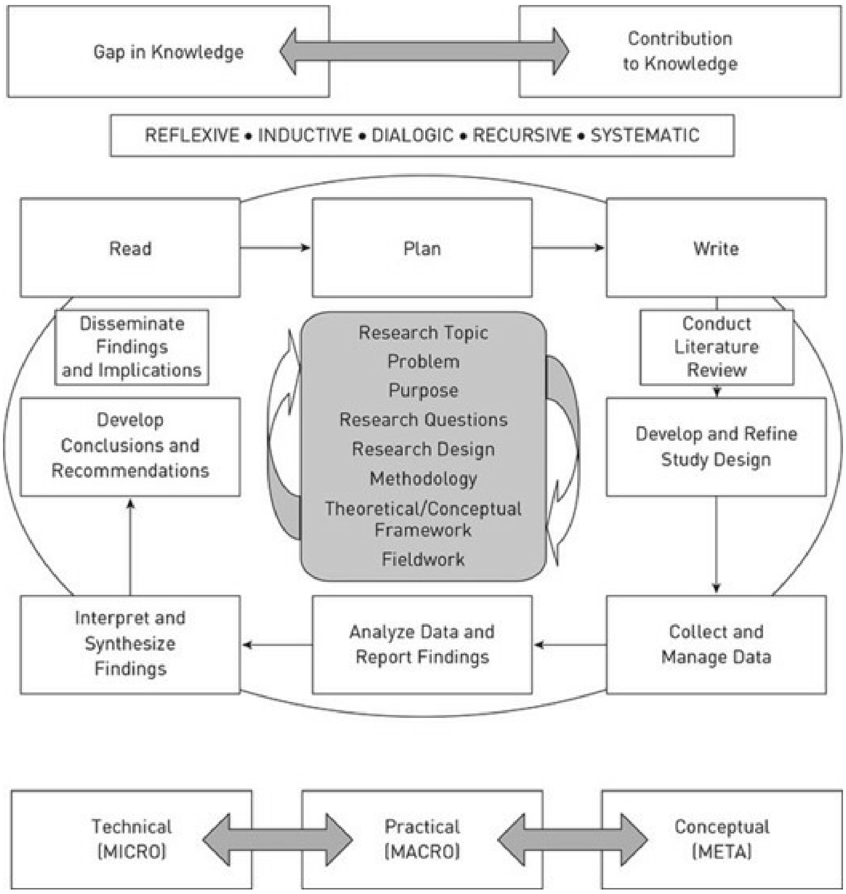
Part I Taking Charge of Yourself and Your Work

The intent of this book is to demystify and clarify the dissertation process while maintaining intellectual rigor and the highest ethical standards of research. Part I presents the initial steps involved in thinking about and preparing for the complex dissertation process by expanding appreciation and understanding of both the content and the process pertaining to conducting qualitative research and producing a sound defensible dissertation. This work is intellectually rigorous, requiring intensive thinking, preparation, and planning and is very much a matter of having tenacity, perseverance, and patience. Completing a dissertation is, in fact, a process of continuous learning because for most people, conducting research and writing a document such as this is a first-time endeavor, an undertaking for which there is little experience. By the end of the process, you will indeed have learned as much about yourself and how to conduct research as you will have learned about the subject of your inquiry.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of all key elements for each section of the dissertation—that is, a precursor of what is to come further along in this book. The chapter also includes a section regarding evaluating the quality of a qualitative dissertation. Chapter 2 addresses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to successfully complete the required work and covers areas including strategies for organizing and managing the project, identifying and developing a researchable topic, choosing suitable advisors, and establishing a realistic timeline. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the landscape of qualitative inquiry and discusses the implications of choosing an appropriate qualitative methodology (tradition or genre) in an attempt to develop conceptual understanding of the logic behind the choices made. Chapter 4 explains the process and content involved in developing a sound and comprehensive research proposal, including all necessary components. The focus of Chapter 5 is on maintaining alignment between all elements of the dissertation to ensure methodological congruence and, therefore, high academic standards.

Figure I.1 depicts the cyclical and complex qualitative dissertation process in its entirety. This figure demonstrates the iterative nature of qualitative research by illustrating the relationships between and among multiple components. The figure also sheds light on the continuum of movement between technical (micro), practical (macro), and conceptual (meta) levels of thinking and explains the inherent hierarchy of activities that constitute the complex dissertation process.

Figure I.1 Visualizing the Dissertation Process



Source: This figure first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2010). *Understanding qualitative inquiry: Content and process* (Part II). Unpublished manuscript.

Chapter 1 Objectives

- Provide *a cursory glance* at the constitution of an entire dissertation.
- Offer a comprehensive outline of all key elements for each section of the dissertation—that is, a precursor of what is to come, with each element being more fully developed and explained further along in the book.
- For each key element, explain reason for inclusion, quality markers, and frequent or common errors.
- Provide key criteria or indicators to evaluate the quality of a qualitative dissertation.

Overview

Following is a road map that briefly outlines the contents of an entire dissertation. This is a comprehensive overview and as such is helpful in making sure that at a glance you understand up front the necessary elements that will constitute each section of your dissertation. Reasons for inclusion, quality markers, and frequent errors are included for each element of the dissertation. This broad overview is a prelude to the steps involved in each of the chapters that are described and demonstrated in Part II. While certain elements are common to most dissertations, please note that dissertation requirements vary by institution. Toward that end, students should always consult with their advisors and committee members to ascertain any details of any of the elements that might be specific or particular to institutional or departmental requirements. Finally, a rubric for evaluating a complete qualitative dissertation and a rubric for specifically evaluating the quality of a literature review are included.

Front Matter

Order and format of front matter may vary by institution and department.

- Title page
- Copyright page
- Abstract
- Dedication
- Acknowledgments
- Table of contents
- List of tables and figures (only those in chapters, not those in appendices)

Title Page

The title gives a clear and concise description of the topic and/or problem and the scope of the study. The title page will show the title; the author's full name; the degree to be conferred; the university, department, and college in which the degree is earned; and the month and year of approval. Margins for the title page and the entire document are left—1.5 inches; right, top, and bottom—1 inch. Also, the title should be in all capitals.

Students often labor over coming up with a dissertation title at the early stages of dissertation work. It is a good idea to create what is, in effect, a "working title" as you think about your topic and hone your problem and to refine this title as your study proceeds. A title generally captures the major thrust of your research. A working title becomes a guiding focus as you move through your study. Keeping notes or journaling about how and why your title changes over time is a useful exercise because it tracks developments in your thinking as your study progresses. A more extensive discussion regarding selecting a final dissertation title is included in Part III of this book.

Reason

The title both guides and reflects the purpose and content of the study, making its relevance apparent to prospective readers. The title is also important for retrieval purposes, enabling other researchers to locate it through a literature search.

Quality Markers

A well-crafted title conveys the essence and purpose of the study. The title should include the type of study ("An Analysis") and the participants. Use of keywords will promote proper categorization into databases such as ERIC (the Education Resources Information Center) and Dissertation Abstracts International.

Frequent Errors

Frequent title errors include the use of trendy, elaborate, nonspecific, or literary language and grandiose or unrealistic expectations (e.g., "Finally, a Solution to . . .").

Copyright Page

Copyright is the legal right of an owner of created material to control copying and ownership of that material. Authors of research documents who wish to protect their writing through copyright may do so. A student may file a claim to copyright by corresponding directly with the U.S. Copyright Office (Library of Congress, 101 Independence Avenue S.E., Washington, DC 20559–6000).

The copyright symbol (©) should appear with author's name and year centered between the margins on the lower half of the backside of the title page. Below the copyright line, include the statement "All Rights Reserved."

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Abstract

The abstract, limited to 350 words, is a concise summary description of the study, including statement of the problem, purpose, scope, research tradition, data sources, methodology, key findings, and implications. The abstract is written after the dissertation is completed and is written from the perspective of an outside reader (i.e., not “My dissertation examines” but “An examination of . . .”).

The page numbers before the text are in Roman numerals. The abstract page is the first page to be numbered, but as iii. All Roman numerals should be centered between the left and right margins, and 1 inch from the bottom of the page. The title of the page, “ABSTRACT,” should be in all capitals and centered between the left and right margins and 2 inches from the top.

Reason

The abstract’s inclusion in Dissertation Abstracts International (which mandates a 350-word limit) makes it possible for other researchers to determine the relevance of this work to their own studies. Over 95% of American dissertations are included in Dissertation Abstracts International.

Quality Markers

Marks of quality include conciseness and accuracy. The abstract should also be written in the third person (active voice without the personal pronouns *I* and *we*). Generally, the first sentence of an abstract describes the entire study; subsequent sentences expand on that description.

Frequent Errors

Inclusion of irrelevant material (i.e., examples, information extraneous to the dissertation itself), exclusion of necessary material (i.e., problem, purpose, scope, research tradition, data sources, methodology, key findings, and implications), and incorrect format are frequent abstract errors.

Dedication and Acknowledgments

These pages are optional, although most dissertations include a brief acknowledgment of the contributions of committee members, colleagues, friends, and family members who have supported the students' research. "ACKNOWLEDGMENTS" should be capitalized and should appear centered between the left and right margins, 2 inches from the top. Text should begin two line spaces after "ACKNOWLEDGMENTS."

The dedication page is separate from the acknowledgments page. If included, the dedication text should be centered between the left and right margins and between the top and bottom margins; it should also reflect a professional nature. Do not include the title "DEDICATION" on the dedication page.

Table of Contents

An outline of the entire dissertation, listing headings and subheadings with their respective page numbers, the table of contents lists all chapters and major sections within chapters and all back matter with page numbers.

The heading “TABLE OF CONTENTS” is centered between the left and right margins, 2 inches from the top of the page. The listing begins one double space below and even with the left margin. Leader dots are placed from the end of each listing to the corresponding page number. All major titles are typed exactly as they appear in the text. When a title or subtitle exceeds one line, the second and succeeding lines are single-spaced and indented two spaces. Double spacing is used between major titles and between each major title and its subtitle.

The table of contents may be followed by any of the following, if needed, and any of these subsequent lists are formatted in the same manner as the table of contents:

- List of tables
- List of figures
- List of illustrations

Reason

The table of contents assists the researcher in organizing the material while promoting accessibility for the reader.

Quality Markers

The headings and subheadings clearly and concisely reflect the material being presented. Headings and subheadings are parallel grammatically (i.e., “Introduction,” “Review of Literature” not “Introduction,” “Reviewing the Literature”). The headings and subheadings in the table of contents are worded exactly the same as those headings and subheadings in the text.

Frequent Errors

Frequent errors include lack of parallelism in headings and subheadings, as well as wording in the table of contents that does not match wording in text.

Dissertation Chapters

Order and format of dissertation chapters may vary by institution and department.

1. Introduction
2. Literature review
3. Methodology and Research Approach
4. Findings
5. Analysis, Interpretation, and Synthesis
6. Conclusions and recommendations

Epilogue, Afterword, or Final Thoughts

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter makes a case for the significance of the problem, contextualizes the study, and provides an introduction to its basic components. It should be informative and able to stand alone as a document.

- *Introduction:* The introduction includes an overview of the purpose and focus of the study, why it is significant, how it was conducted, and how it will contribute to professional knowledge and practice.
- *Problem statement:* The problem indicates the need for the study, describes the issue or problem to be studied, and situates this within a broader social context.
- *Statement of purpose:* Describing the research purpose in a logical, explicit manner, the statement of purpose is the major objective or intent of the study; it enables the reader to understand the central thrust of the research. Once the problem is clearly stated, the purpose will then need to evolve to align with the problem. One way of assuring that is to have one—and only one—wording for the purpose. Once you settle on the wording, use that exact wording throughout whenever you present the purpose.
- *Research questions:* Research questions are directly tied to the purpose. They should be specific, unambiguously stated, and open-ended. These questions cue readers to the direction the study will take and help to delineate the scope of the study. In qualitative studies, research questions are developed at the start of a project and become modified as the research process proceeds to address emergent issues. It is therefore important that the researcher remain responsive to the phenomena and contexts of the study so that the research questions may (and often do) evolve over time.
- *Overview of research design:* This section outlines the research approach (qualitative research), research methodology (qualitative genre or tradition), research setting, population and sample, instrumentation (data collection tools, as relevant), and methods of data collection and analysis.
- *Rationale and significance:* Rationale is the justification for the study presented as a logical argument. Significance addresses the benefits that may be derived from doing the study, thereby reaffirming the research purpose.
- *Role of the researcher:* This section explains the role of the researcher in planning and conducting the study, with reference to the researcher's reflexive stance so that all potential subjectivities are addressed. Any relevant prior experience that may impact or enhance the study is addressed.
- *Researcher assumptions:* This section makes explicit relevant researcher assumptions, beliefs, and biases (as applicable), which may impact the research process or the actual study. Assumptions are those ideas that you believe to be true but do not have evidence to support.
- *Definition of key terminology:* Some terms may be unfamiliar to readers. In addition, the meanings of certain terms can vary depending on the context, conceptual framework, or field of study. Making terms explicit adds precision and ensures clarity of understanding. These terms should be operationally defined or explained; that is, be sure to make clear how these terms are used in *your* study.
- *Organization of the dissertation:* This brief concluding explanation delineates the contents of the remaining chapters in the dissertation so that the reader has an idea of what to expect.

Reason

The introduction sets the stage for the study and directs readers to the purpose and context of the dissertation.

Quality Markers

A quality introduction situates the context and scope of the study and informs the reader of all components of the study. Discussion is concise and precise, and all choices are logically explained. All key elements are clearly aligned, including problem, purpose, research questions, and the rationale with regard to research design, methodology, and methods.

Frequent Errors

Errors occur when the introduction does not clearly reflect the study's components and/or the relationship of methodological choices to the proposed research problem and purpose.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter situates the study in the context of previous research and scholarly material pertaining to the topic, presents a critical synthesis of empirical literature according to relevant themes or variables, justifies how the study addresses a gap or problem in the literature, and outlines the theoretical or conceptual framework of the study. A dissertation does not merely restate the available knowledge base of a particular topic but adds to or augments it.

- *Introduction:* The introduction describes the content, scope, and organization of the review as well as all the strategies used in the literature search.
- *Review of literature:* This section accomplishes the following:
    – is clearly related to the problem statement, purpose, and research questions;
    – states up front the bodies of literature that will be covered, and why;
    – reviews primary sources that are mostly recent empirical studies from scholarly journals and publications, as well as secondary sources;
    – is logically organized by theme or subtopic, from broad to narrow;
    – synthesizes findings across studies and compares and contrasts different research outcomes, perspectives, or methods;
    – notes gaps, debates, or shortcomings in the literature and provides a rationale for the study; and
    – provides section summaries.
- *Theoretical or conceptual framework:* This framework draws on theory, research, and experience, and examines the relationship among constructs and ideas. As such, it is the structure or heuristic that guides your research. In essence, the framework provides the theoretical or conceptual basis for development of the study and analysis of findings. When appropriate, a graphic depiction of the model is included, visually illustrating the relationships between concepts, ideas, or variables to be studied.
- *Summary:* A comprehensive synthesis of the literature review should complete this section. This synthesis serves to integrate key themes and issues emanating from the review.

Reason

This chapter provides a strong theoretical or conceptual basis for the dissertation by analyzing and synthesizing a comprehensive selection of appropriate related bodies of literature. The review of literature should build a logical framework for the research, justify the study by conceptualizing gaps in the literature, and demonstrate how the study will contribute to existing knowledge. The review serves to situate the dissertation within the context of current ongoing conversations in the field. The theoretical or conceptual framework guides the research and plays a major role in analysis of findings.

Quality Markers

A comprehensive and thoughtful selection of resources (scholarly peer-reviewed literature) directly related to the study's purpose and background, not the full scope of the field, is considered a mark of a quality literature review. Importantly, the literature is *synthesized* rather than just summarized. All relevant primary sources and empirical research studies are cited (these are preferable to secondary sources, which are interpretations of the work of others). The writer adopts a critical perspective in discussing the work of others and provides a clear analysis of all available related research. Relevant literature is critiqued, not duplicated, and there is a clear connection between the purpose of this study and the resources included. The role and function of the theoretical or conceptual framework are clear: The framework clearly draws on theory, research, and/or experience, providing theoretical or conceptual coherence to the research. Alignment among the framework and the study's problem, purpose, and research questions is clear. In addition, there is evidence of the correct use of American Psychological Association (APA) format, citations, and references throughout.

Frequent Errors

Frequent errors include insubstantial breadth of review (i.e., insufficient number or range of resources; failure to include relevant primary sources) and insubstantial depth of review (i.e., use of nonscholarly or non-peer-reviewed material; inability to demonstrate clear understanding of resources). Another error is that the review reads more like a catalog of sources than a synthesis and integration of relevant literature. There is also a tendency to eliminate literature that contradicts or questions the findings of the dissertation's study. Other errors include incorrect or insufficient citation of sources, resulting in accidental plagiarism, and presentation of a diagrammatic theoretical or conceptual framework with no accompanying narrative explanation.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Approach

This chapter situates the study within the qualitative research approach and also within a particular methodology (qualitative tradition or genre) and provides a rationale for that approach and methodology. The chapter provides a detailed description of all aspects of the design and procedures of the study, including the research setting, population, and sample, and describes all relevant data collection and analysis methods that have been used.

- *Introduction:* The introduction restates the research purpose and describes the organization of the chapter.
- *Rationale for research design:* This section describes the research approach (qualitative research) and the research methodology (qualitative genre or tradition) with a rationale for their suitability regarding addressing the research questions and citing appropriate methodological literature.
- *Research setting and/or context:* This section describes and justifies selection of the research setting, thereby providing the history, background, and issues germane to the problem.
- *Research population, sample, and data sources:* This section addresses the following:
    – explains and justifies the sample used and how participants were selected (including target population and sampling procedures);
    – describes the characteristics and size of the sample and provides other pertinent demographic information; and
    – outlines ethical considerations pertaining to participants, shedding light on how rights of participants were protected, with reference to conventions of research ethics and the IRB (institutional review board) process.
- *Data collection methods:* This section describes and justifies all data collection methods, tools, instruments, and procedures, including how, when, where, and by whom data were collected.
- *Data analysis methods:* This section describes and justifies all methods and tools used for analysis of data (manual and/or computational).
- *Issues of trustworthiness:* This section discusses the measures taken to enhance the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.
- *Limitations and delimitations:* This section identifies potential weaknesses of the study and the scope of the study; that is, the external conditions that restrict or constrain the study's scope or potential outcome. Limitations are external conditions that restrict or constrain the study's scope or may affect its outcome. Limitations represent the inherent weaknesses or flaws given the research design. Qualitative limitations are threats to transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability. Delimitations are those conditions or parameters that the researcher intentionally imposes in order to limit the scope of a study (e.g., using participants of certain ages, genders, or groups; conducting the research in a single setting)—that is, the boundaries set by the researcher, often to increase the feasibility of the study.
- *Summary:* A comprehensive summary overview covers all the sections of this chapter, recapping and highlighting all the important aspects of the study's methodology. Discussion is concise, precise, and easily understandable. Remember, you do not want to lose the reader!

Reason

The study is the basis for the conclusions and recommendations. In many ways, it is what makes the difference between a dissertation and other forms of extended writing. A clear description of the research sample, setting, methodology, limitations and delimitations, and acknowledgment of trustworthiness issues provide readers with a basis for accepting (or not accepting) the conclusions and recommendations that follow.

Quality Markers

A quality study achieves the purposes outlined in the introduction's research problem and research questions. Alignment between the research approach (qualitative research), research methodology (qualitative tradition or genre), and methods of data collection and analysis used in this study is clear. All relevant information is clearly articulated and presented. As relevant, the narrative is accompanied by clear and descriptive visuals (charts, figures, tables). The chapter includes sufficient relevant detail so the study could be replicated.

Frequent Errors

Errors occur when data are not clearly presented, the study is not applicable to purposes outlined in the introduction, and methods of gathering and analyzing data and trustworthiness issues are insufficient or not clearly explained or where alignment between the study's key components is not clear or apparent.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter organizes and reports the study's main findings, including the presentation of relevant data. Findings are written up in different ways depending on the research tradition or genre adopted.

- *Introduction:* The introduction provides a brief summary of and rationale for how data were analyzed. It describes the organization of the chapter according to research questions, conceptual framework, or thematic categories.
- Findings build logically from the problem, research questions, and research design and qualitative methodology (tradition or genre).
- Findings are presented in clear narrative form using relevant verbatim quotes and "thick description." Narrative data are connected and synthesized through substantive explanatory text and visual displays, if applicable. Some tables and figures may be deferred to the appendices.
- Findings are presented to show clearly how these address the study's research problem and research questions.
- Headings and subheadings are used to guide the reader through the findings according to research questions, themes, or other appropriate organizational schemes.
- Rather than being ignored or overlooked, inconsistent, discrepant, or unexpected findings are noted with discussion of possible alternative explanations.
- *Summary:* This section explains in summary form what the chapter has identified and prepares the reader for the chapters to follow by offering some foreshadowing as to the intent and content of the final two chapters.

Reason

The challenge of qualitative analysis of data lies in making sense of large amounts of material, reducing raw data, identifying what is significant, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal. The researcher, as storyteller, is able to tell a story that is vivid and interesting, and at the same time accurate and credible. This chapter is the foundation for the analysis and interpretation of findings, conclusions, and recommendations that will appear in the next and forthcoming chapters.

Quality Markers

Markers of a quality findings chapter include clear, complete, and credible representation of the data that have emerged as a result of the study and effective use of graphs, charts, and other visual representations to illustrate the data. The study's findings are clearly aligned with the research problem and purpose, and provide a response to all of the research questions. Findings are presented objectively, without speculation—that is, free from researcher bias. If relevant, any prior assumptions are addressed as necessary. Presentation and structure of this chapter are neat, precise, and directly aligned with the study's qualitative methodology (tradition or genre).

Frequent Errors

Errors occur when study findings are manipulated to fit expectations from research questions, when researcher bias and/or subjectivity is apparent, and/or when the presentation of findings is not aligned with the study's chosen methodology (tradition or genre). Other frequent errors include poor use of visual representation and findings that are ignored, overlooked, or are overly or inaccurately generalized.

Chapter 5: Analysis, Interpretation, and Synthesis of Findings

This chapter synthesizes and discusses the findings in light of the study's research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework. Finding patterns and themes is one result of analysis. Finding ambiguities and inconsistencies is another. Overall, this chapter offers the researcher an opportunity to reflect thoroughly on the study's findings and the practical and theoretical implications thereof. Some universities may require that this chapter is combined and incorporated with the previous chapter so that presentation of findings and analysis of findings are presented together in one chapter. This requirement should therefore be addressed as necessary.

- *Introduction:* The introduction provides an overview of the chapter's organization and content.
- *Discussion:* This section provides an in-depth interpretation, analysis, and synthesis of the results and/or findings.
  - – Analysis is a multilayered approach. Seeking emergent patterns among findings can be considered a first round of analysis. Examining whether the literature corresponds with, contradicts, and/or deepens interpretations constitutes a second layer of interpretation.
  - – Issues of trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability) are incorporated as these relate to and are addressed throughout the analysis process.
  - – Discussion may include interpretation of any findings that were not anticipated when the study was first described in previous chapters. Establishing credibility means that you have engaged in the systematic search for rival or competing explanations and interpretations.
  - – This section restates the study's limitations and discusses transferability of the study's findings to broader populations or other settings and contexts.

Reason

Analysis is essentially about searching for patterns and themes that emerge from the findings. Interpretation that is thoughtful and compelling provides the opportunity to make a worthwhile contribution to your academic discipline. This constitutes the necessary *synthesis* that this chapter calls for. The goal is to discover what meaning you as the researcher can make of them by comparing your findings both within and across groups, and with those of other studies.

Quality Markers

There is no clear and accepted single set of conventions for the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data, but there are guidelines with respect to each of the qualitative methodologies (traditions or genres). This chapter must of necessity reflect a deep understanding of what lies beneath the findings—that is, what those findings really *mean.* Interpretation is presented systematically and is related to the literature, theoretical or conceptual framework, and interpretive themes or patterns that have emerged. A key characteristic of qualitative research is willingness to tolerate ambiguity. As such, examining issues from all angles in order to demonstrate *the most plausible* explanations is an indication of high-level analysis. Integrity as a researcher is given credence by inclusion of all information, even that which challenges inferences and assumptions.

Frequent Errors

Frequent errors include analysis that is simple or shallow. Other errors include lack of synthesis, no clear connection to other research literature or theory, questionable credibility and/or plausibility of explanations is questionable, and when the chapter is poorly structured, presented, and articulated.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter presents a set of concluding statements and recommendations. Conclusions are assertions based on findings and must therefore be warranted by the findings. With respect to each finding, you are asking yourself, "Knowing what I now know, what conclusion can I draw?" Recommendations are the application of those conclusions. In other words, you are now saying to yourself, "Knowing what I now know to be true, I recommend that . . ."

- Conclusions are based on an integration of the study findings, analysis, interpretation, and synthesis.
- Concluding statements end the dissertation with strong, clear, concise "takeaway messages" for the reader.
- Conclusions are not the same as findings; neither are conclusions the same as interpretations. Rather, conclusions are essentially conclusive statements of what you now know, having done this research, that you did not know before.
- Conclusions must be logically tied to one another. There should be consistency among your conclusions; none of them should be at odds with any of the others.
- Recommendations are actionable; that is, they suggest implications for policy and practice based on the findings, providing specific action planning and next steps.
- Recommendations support the belief that scholarly work initiates as many questions as it answers, thus opening the way for further practice and research.
- Recommendations for research describe topics that require closer examination and that may generate new questions for further study.

Reason

This chapter reflects the contribution the researcher has made to the knowledge, practice, and/or policy in the field of study. In many ways, this chapter provides endorsement for the researcher's entrance into the ranks of the body of scholars in the field.

Quality Markers

Clearly stated and focused concluding statements reflect an integration of the study findings, analysis, interpretation, and synthesis. Recommendations must have implications for policy and practice, as well as for further research, and *must* be doable. The reasonableness of a recommendation depends on its being logically aligned with and clearly derived from the findings, both content and context specific, and most important, practical and capable of implementation.

Frequent Errors

Overgeneralization of importance or relevance sometimes leads to grandiose statements. Other frequent errors include the lack of a clear relationship to the review of literature or recommendations that have no apparent usefulness for practice and future research; that is, they are not "doable."

Epilogue, Afterword, or Final Thoughts

This final section offers the researcher an opportunity to reflect on the overall process, review the findings that have emerged, and share any new learning and insights that she or he has developed over the course of the research and writing process. How do you personally value the research experience? What are the lessons you have learned from conducting the study? What might you do differently were you to conduct a study of this nature again? What insights, knowledge, and inspiration have you derived from conducting this study?

Back Matter

Appendices

Appendices contain all research instruments used, as well as any relevant additional materials that have been referred to in the dissertation manuscript, including all data collection tools, sample interview transcripts, sample coding schemes, and charts. Each item that is included as an appendix is assigned a letter or number and listed in the table of contents, as per APA requirements.

References

The list of references includes all works cited in the dissertation in alphabetical order by author and in proper APA format. All sources that are quoted, summarized, or paraphrased, as well as all other sources of information (text, visual, electronic, personal correspondence, etc.), must be correctly cited using APA parenthetical citation format within the dissertation. All sources must also be correctly listed on the references page. Proper citation serves several purposes: This attributes work fairly to the appropriate authors, situates the dissertation within the context of the body of literature in the field, and provides readers with a quick resource for locating and accurately accessing all sources that were used.

Evaluating the Quality of a Qualitative Dissertation

Tracy (2010) proposed a series of criteria or "key markers" for evaluating the quality of qualitative research, including worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence—maintaining that "this eight-point conceptualization [of qualitative inquiry] offers a useful pedagogical model and provides a common language of qualitative best practices that can be recognized as integral by a variety of audiences" (2010, p. 837). Tracy goes on to state that

> Perhaps the most controversial part of this conceptualization is the notion of universal criteria for qualitative quality. However I believe that we need not be so tied to epistemology or ontology (or the philosophy of the world) that we cannot agree on several common end goals of good qualitative research. (p. 850)

Similarly, O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) propose adhering to a set of core guiding quality principles for both designing and evaluating the quality of qualitative work:

- Transparency (auditability, rigor, and credibility)
- Reflexivity (being aware of the constructed nature of the findings and the impact of the researcher)
- Transferability (the extent to which the study could relate to other contexts)
- Ethicality (significance of contribution, risk and benefit assessment, and worthiness of topic)
- Integrity (epistemological congruence, authenticity, sampling adequacy)

While suggesting that these are useful guiding principles, these authors propose that it is essential that researchers from each methodological framework explicate how these general principles might be applied to their specific context and consider whether particular additional markers are necessary to evaluate work in their area.

Now that you have some idea of the core elements that are required for the various sections of your dissertation, two rubrics are included for your convenience. These will hopefully provide you with useful information pertaining to the different levels of quality of a qualitative dissertation. These rubrics are by no means exhaustive since, as stressed previously, different institutions have different requirements and criteria, and there is no "one size fits all" approach. The intention is that these are tools that will provide you with some idea of what may be involved in the evaluation of the content of a completed dissertation. Appendix A is a rubric for evaluating a completed qualitative dissertation. Appendix B is a rubric for evaluating a completed literature review. The suggestion is that you use these rubrics as guides in assessing or evaluating the quality of your own work and in determining where limitations may lie and where improvements and enhancements can be made. Remember, in undertaking a research study, the intent is to produce findings that will make a contribution to knowledge and ultimately make a difference in a discipline, practice, or policy. Quality must be evident not only in terms of content of the final product—that is, your dissertation—but also in the multiple processes inherent in *how well* you conducted the research, indicating criticality, transparency, reflexivity, and rigor.

Chapter 2 Objectives

- Discuss the significance regarding identification and choice of topic so that students can begin to think about areas of interest in relation to potential researchable topics.
- Clarify expectations and issues regarding appropriate advisor–student collegial relationship and mutual responsibility.
- Introduce the mind-set that is required to create the physical and mental "space" that is necessary to begin the dissertation process in as methodical and organized a manner as possible.
- Offer practical advice for embarking on the research and writing process including organizational, managerial, and data security tips.
- Begin to develop the skills involved in establishing and managing a realistic and doable timeline.

Overview

Undoubtedly, if you are reading this book, you are a continuous learner; it is the reason you decided to pursue a doctoral degree in the first place. It takes a certain amount of courage to take on this work because in many ways it is fraught with uncertainty. For those of you who are just starting out and for those who need to restart and continue, it can seem an overwhelming process. Truth be told, everyone who has ever embarked on this journey most likely has experienced a certain amount of anxiety, if not downright fear. Will I know how to do this work? Will I be up to the task? What if I fail? Ah, what if I succeed? Will it meet my expectations? These are some of the cobwebs that cloud our vision and stand in our way. It is okay to feel anxiety and fear. These feelings are natural as long as they do not debilitate you.

One way not to become overwhelmed is to look at the entire process of completing a dissertation as an incremental one. It is like the novice skier, who recognizes that a good way not to be overwhelmed by the sheer size of the mountain is to traverse it—going from side to side, conquering it bit by bit. It is a matter of taking one step at a time and finding out what is needed at each step along the way. That is what this book is all about—giving you the information you need and helping you to develop the skills required along the way to complete this work.

So let us take up our journey and begin by getting yourself energized and organized mentally and physically. Begin by adopting a reflective stance. Think about those things, personal and professional, that have caused you to procrastinate, get stuck, or even abandon the work. Attempt to come to terms with those obstacles. Persistence and determination are what it takes to finish. Develop a sense of urgency about completing your dissertation. No matter how talented you are, if you don't have a sense of urgency, develop it now! Make plans to deal with the real challenges that you face, and determine to move beyond your own self-imposed obstacles by taking action. Commit to acting despite your apprehensions, and commit to developing an "I can do this" attitude; become your best friend and not your own worst enemy. This is of paramount importance. Once you have the right mind-set and attitude, you can begin to get organized.

Identifying and Developing a Researchable Topic

The starting point for any research project, and indeed the first major challenge in conducting research, is coming to some decision about a sound, researchable topic. The topic is the subject of inquiry around a particular research problem that your study will address. For some, choosing a topic can be an exciting process; finally, you have the opportunity to pursue an area in which you have long been interested. For others, generating and selecting a topic can be a frustrating and somewhat overwhelming experience. Commonly, students consider a few potential topics before finally settling on one.

Finding a research topic that is interesting, relevant, feasible, and worthy of your time may take substantial effort, so you should be prepared to invest your time accordingly. Considering your options, doing some background work on each option, and ultimately settling on a topic that is manageable will spare you many of the frustrations that come from attempting research on a topic that, for whatever reason, may not be appropriate. The criterion of feasibility is especially important when choosing a dissertation topic. You don't want to settle on a topic and then find out that the study you were imagining can't be done, or the survey or assessment instrument you need can't be used. You also want to make sure that you select a topic that will allow you to be an objective researcher. If you select a topic that you have worked closely on for many years, make sure you are still open to new information, even if that information runs counter to what you believe to be true about the topic. It is very important to think about these considerations beforehand so that you don't get stuck during the dissertation process.

As Tracy (2010) describes it, "Good qualitative research is relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative. Worthy topics often emerge from disciplinary priorities and, therefore, are theoretically or conceptually compelling. However, worthy topics just as easily grow from timely societal or personal events" (p. 840). When judging the significance of a study's contribution, researchers gauge the current climate of knowledge, practice, and politics and ask questions such as "Does the study expand knowledge and insight?" "Deepen understanding?" "Improve practice?" "Generate ongoing research?" "Liberate or empower?" Tracy (2010) explains that the significance of qualitative research can be conceptualized in various ways: Theoretically significant research builds theory or extends or problematizes current theoretical assumptions. Such contributions offer new and unique understandings that emerge from the data analysis—conceptualizations—that help explain social life in unique ways and may be transferred to other contexts. In doing so, the study builds on past research but provides new conceptual understandings that can be used by future researchers. Heuristic significance moves people to further explore, research, or act on the research in the future. Research is heuristically significant when it develops curiosity in the reader, inspiring the need for new discoveries. Heuristic significance also implies an influence on audiences, including policy makers, research participants, or the lay public, to engage in action or change—in this way creating an overlap with practical significance. Practically significant research asks whether the knowledge derived by the research is useful in shedding light on or framing a contemporary issue. Does the knowledge produced by the research empower participants to become more critically reflective, thereby challenging assumptions and perspectives and viewing society in new ways? Does the research provide a story that might liberate individuals from injustice or in some way transform their lives? Another means toward achieving significance is through engaging in research methodology in novel, creative, or insightful ways, thereby yielding methodological significance. A research project that incorporates methodologically significant approaches may not only lead to theoretical insights and practical usefulness but also contribute to future researchers' practice of methodological skills.

In seeking a topic, you should remember that the key objective of doing a dissertation is to obtain the credentials by demonstrating that you understand and can therefore conduct good research. In selecting a topic, most students focus on trying to be original and exhibiting the desire to contribute to the existing knowledge base. Most universities and doctoral faculties agree that a dissertation should be an original piece of research and should make a significant contribution to the field. At the outset, it is important to remember, however, that making an original contribution does not imply that there need be an enormous "breakthrough." In social science research, the discovery of new facts is rarely an important or even challenging criterion. Rather, research is a process of searching or re-searching for new insights; it is about advancing knowledge or understanding of a practice or phenomenon. In fact, it is perfectly acceptable to model your research on a previous study and develop some aspect of it or even replicate it. Replicating a previous study or aspects of a previous study is appropriate because knowledge accumulates through studies that build on each other over time. When thinking of finding a researchable topic, there are some search strategies that may be helpful:

- Begin by completing a cursory review of available scholarly sources. This is a necessary step that will provide you with an understanding of the availability of literature on the proposed topic or topics you may have in mind. Looking at previously published dissertations is another good way to gauge the level of research and involvement that is generally expected at the dissertation level. Previously published dissertations can also be good sources of inspiration for your own dissertation study. The literature review of a dissertation contains a wealth of information. Not only can the literature review provide topic ideas by showing some of the major research that has been done on a topic, but it can also help you evaluate any topics that you are tentatively considering. From your examination of literature reviews, you can determine to what extent your research ideas are relevant to the current state of the discipline.
- Another way to begin developing a researchable topic is to look around you at the activities in which you are involved and to draw on your own personal and professional experiences. Most students find that they can best access areas in which they already have some expertise or familiarity with practice in the field. Once you have identified an area of interest, you can then begin to examine and become familiar with the available literature related to your topic. Especially useful are reviews of literature found in journals specifically committed to publishing extensive review articles, as well as policy-oriented publications that discuss current and emerging issues. In addition, all discipline areas have their own encyclopedias, yearbooks, and handbooks, most of which can be accessed on the Internet. You also might take time to look over earlier dissertations and seek previous studies that in some respects mirror your own interests and topic.
- In addition to seeking out relevant literature, engage in conversation with colleagues and peers to hear different perspectives about pertinent issues and to begin to sharpen your topical focus. Generating and selecting a viable topic is a complex process that involves various competing factors. As you may notice throughout this book, our predisposition toward research and writing is that both are highly interactive processes. Seeking the feedback and critique of academic advisors, faculty committee members, and colleagues is, in our experience, an integral part of the dissertation process.

Undertaking a dissertation is a rigorous and long-term engagement in terms of both conducting the fieldwork and working with the data. Although the dissertation need not necessarily be one's "life's work," caring about the topic at hand and having a compelling interest to learn what is not yet known are critical to sustaining motivation and commitment, and hence momentum. The sooner you can begin to narrow your research interests and identify and develop a topical focus, the better. Having a fairly good idea of the area in which you will be situated, you will most productively be able to utilize your time to refine your research problem and so further the dissertation objectives. Once you have identified a general area of interest, you will then need to begin narrowing your topic. The process of developing a researchable topic is a process of idea generation—the movement from a general interest toward a more clearly refined idea around a researchable problem. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

Selecting and Forming Your Dissertation Committee

One of the most important tasks of a doctoral candidate is finding a suitable advisement team. Each university has a different system in this regard, and you need to make sure of your institution's and/or program's policies and procedures. At some universities, the doctoral committee structure is based on an apprenticeship model and is used as a vehicle to guide the student from course work through the dissertation defense. The dissertation committee in effect becomes the group of faculty responsible for your progress right from the beginning of the process, with all members contributing to the development of an acceptable dissertation. The committee is usually a hierarchical organization, with each member of the committee having a different responsibility vis-à-vis your research.

Most institutions refer to the lead advisor as the chair (or sponsor), who is the dissertation process expert first and foremost. The second reader is usually considered the subject matter expert, who will have deep content expertise with regard to the topic area. There is often also at least one member of the committee who is an expert in the selected design and methodology. It is imperative that doctoral students understand committee members' roles and processes based on their institutions, as these roles and processes can vary to some extent. In some institutions, the chair has the ultimate approval power throughout the dissertation stages and processes. At other institutions, there are "gatekeepers" that can block a chapter, proposal, or even dissertation manuscript from moving to the next phase. This needs to be clear, and so students are advised to inquire as to their institutions' expectations and exact processes.

Ideally, the doctoral committee is composed of faculty with different areas of expertise and whose resources you will be able to tap in the process of working on your dissertation. Again, this is a matter of institutional difference. In some instances (but not always), you can select your committee from among those in your department and related departments, those whose courses you have taken, and/or those whose work bears some relation to the focus of your dissertation. Some faculty may be members of other programs or other schools within your university. In other instances, choice of committee may be more tightly constrained. In some cases (but not always), subject matter experts beyond your university are chosen. It is strongly advised that you be clear about your own institutional requirements so you can follow the necessary protocol and take into account acceptable policy and procedures. Additional details regarding selecting and forming your dissertation committee are included in Part III of this book.

Remember that your advisor or dissertation chair will hopefully be your mentor, principal guide, and primary resource throughout the dissertation process. Therefore, to the extent possible, given your institution's process and requirements, you need to spend time looking for the kind of authentic educator you feel confident can help you throughout the process. Take the time to do some research, ask others about their experiences, and find out as much as you can about the faculty at your institution and their areas of interest. Considerations in seeking the right advisor, sponsor, or dissertation chair include the following:

- Expertise—Your advisor need not be a content expert with regard to your particular topic but should be a *process expert*. In this case, you may select a second reader who is a content expert, and in this way, you would have a strong combination of resources.
- Access and availability—You may find the kind of expertise you are looking for in a prospective advisor and feel comfortable with that faculty person, but he or she may be so busy that it makes getting advisement time and feedback difficult and even frustrating.
- Understanding—All too often, and inadvertently, one's work is interrupted by life issues. As such, your advisor will be someone who is willing to provide you with understanding and encouragement from the sidelines, and who knows when to push you to start moving again. Above all, this person should have a genuine interest in helping you succeed.

Once you have been assigned an advisor, sponsor, or dissertation chair, be proactive in establishing and maintaining a good working relationship. Keep her or him apprised of your status along the way by regularly sending progress reports and updates. This communication serves to maintain contact throughout and is a strategy for gaining the necessary support and feedback as you proceed to tackle your dissertation.

Finding just the right advisor is a tall order, and you might be wondering what happens if you do not make the right selection or if you are appointed an advisor who is not the right fit for you. Many students are afraid to change advisors because they view it from a political perspective. It is often acceptable to make changes by going through the correct channels, seeking out the most appropriate person within your department, and asking for his or her help and advice. Remember, if you do make changes, be sure to give your existing advisor the respect and courtesy of informing him or her of your desire to change. Be aware, too, that some departments discourage changing advisors or dissertation committee chairs, and may not even allow it. The view in these instances is that doctoral students need to know when an issue warrants a change and when they may simply be overreacting to "tough-love" advising.

Stakeholder Responsibility and Standards of Good Practice

As a graduate research student, and key stakeholder in the process, you have a right to expect the following:

- Orientation dealing with the dissertation process and requirements and policies that are entailed.
- Identification of a doctoral committee with a designated doctoral advisor and second reader.
- A graduate handbook that outlines and explains all departmental policies, expectations, and deadlines pertaining to supervision of doctoral students. This handbook might include rights and responsibilities of doctoral students as well as procedures for changing advisors and/or filing grievances.
- Verbally communicated or written documentation from your advisor regarding expectations, recommendations for best practices, and deadlines for deliverables.

Supervision or advisement has become increasingly recognized as a professional skill that requires training and monitoring. In addition to committee chairs, most university departments have faculty members who serve as dissertation advisors and who are responsible for ongoing guidance and support throughout the research process. This includes informing students about institutional and departmental regulations, requirements, and policies (and changes and updates when these occur); keeping students updated about responsibilities, deliverables, and deadlines; and assisting students with completing and timeously submitting all official documentation. Obtaining a doctorate cannot be achieved without the necessary institutional support, structure, and guidance. Qualitative research itself poses additional potential dangers posed by inherent lack of structure, and so regular and structured supervision becomes increasingly critical. As a student, you would not want to spend months or even years in the field only to realize that you have not collected appropriate and relevant amounts of material and/or conducted appropriate and relevant analytic procedures to qualify for a grounded and defensible dissertation. As such, *you* need to take the initiative to (a) become familiar with the structure and policies of your department and (b) consult with your chosen advisor on a regular and consistent basis about your progress as well as the challenges you may encounter. As you advance through the process, you will certainly come to realize that there is no substitute for self-discipline and orderly thinking, and that your professional working relationship with your advisor is a key factor in this process.

Students and faculty are partner stakeholders in the dissertation process. Producing a quality dissertation is expected to require creation, review, feedback, and revision of numerous successive drafts. Each draft submitted for review to the dissertation advisor and/or committee members should reflect the student's best efforts in light of accumulating knowledge, experience, and feedback. In turn, the final product and the quality thereof are a reflection, too, of the guidance and support of faculty. As such, both student and faculty have a stake in the process and its final outcome: a successful defense and a quality product that has contributed new knowledge and insights to the field and that is hopefully worthy of enhancing practice and/or prompting further research.

Advisors expect doctoral students to

- Work independently.
- Think critically and conceptually.
- Submit drafts as needed.
- Be available for regular meetings or conversations at mutually convenient times.
- Be honest about their progress.
- Choose to follow advice and guidelines, or offer valid or reasonable reasons for not choosing to do so.

Student Responsibilities

While students receive guidance from their dissertation chairs and committee members, they are ultimately responsible for the timely completion and successful defense of a high-quality (i.e., defensible and publishable) dissertation. The following guidelines will assist students in accomplishing this goal:

1. Establish and sustain a collegial working relationship with your advisor.

2. Carefully consider feedback from the advisor. Initiate and engage in conversation to better understand and evaluate feedback. Explain to the advisor any decision made to adapt or reject feedback, and remain open to further feedback.
3. Create, revise as needed, and adhere to a dissertation project plan (including timeline). The project plan should be developed and revised in close consultation with the advisor.
4. When writing the dissertation, enable the advisor to provide timely and helpful review and feedback by submitting quality work at each revision.
5. If a conflict with the advisor arises, first address the conflict directly with the advisor. If the conflict remains unresolved, arrange a meeting with the chair (or committee member) and the program director or another appropriate third party.
6. Assure and appropriately evidence compliance with all relevant research regulations (e.g., federal and institutional) regarding human subjects.
7. Understand that hired assistance is acceptable under certain circumstances. An editor may be hired to provide aid during the writing process; however, the help received should be limited to editing assistance for narrative already created and revised.
8. Prepare for and defend the dissertation proposal and demonstrate capacity to successfully complete and defend the dissertation according to the proposed timeline.
9. Defend the dissertation to the satisfaction of the dissertation committee and in accordance with established program and institutional procedures.
10. Assuming successful defense, present the final written dissertation with proper paper, binding, style, and format, according to program and institutional guidelines.

Doctoral students expect their advisors to

- Supervise, advise, mentor, and coach.
- Provide ongoing feedback and support (written and verbal).
- Read work in advance of meetings.
- Be available when needed at mutually suitable times.
- Be both supportive and constructively critical.
- Have thorough knowledge of the field of qualitative research and the chosen methodology (genre or tradition).
- Be somewhat proficient regarding the research topic.
- Be genuinely interested in the topic and/or the contribution that the research study may potentially make to the field.

Faculty Responsibilities

While students are ultimately responsible for the timely completion and successful defense of a high-quality (i.e., defensible and publishable) dissertation, dissertation faculty members are responsible for providing support and critical feedback throughout this dissertation process. The following guidelines will assist students' understanding and expectations regarding faculty's responsibility in providing support and guidance:

1. Engage dissertation students in extensive conversations to explore and eventually focus on a meaningful and significant dissertation topic. Through focused conversations, students should broaden and deepen their thinking and understanding around potential contribution to their topic of choice.
2. Assure that the dissertation progresses with the following characteristics: (a) The dissertation topic holds personal and professional meaning for the student as well as significance and value to the field; (b) research and/or guiding questions are developed in relation to both the dissertation topic and the theoretical or conceptual framework; (c) research methodology (qualitative genre or tradition) and research methods (data collection and analysis) are appropriately aligned with the research problem, purpose, and research questions and support qualitative research principles; (d) dissertation findings, analyses, and conclusions are consistent with collected data; (e) limitations and delimitations of the study are explicitly recognized and explained; (f) research and writing style are appropriately scholarly; and (g) the final dissertation product is worthy of reviewed publication.

3. Assure appropriate compliance with all relevant human subjects research regulations as per IRB requirements (e.g., federal and institutional).
4. Provide students with timely written and/or oral review and feedback on submitted dissertation drafts with a view toward guiding successful and timely completions of a high-quality (i.e., defensible and publishable) dissertation and defense.
5. Provide guidance to students' development of the dissertation project plan—slowing or accelerating the timeline as required to assure timely completion of a high-quality (i.e., defensible and publishable) dissertation.
6. Ensure adequate preparation for proposal-related hearing or qualifying exam and dissertation defense by guiding and challenging student thinking and writing throughout their dissertation work and by asking fundamental and challenging questions throughout the dissertation process.
7. Conduct the dissertation defense and notify the student and program chair of results according to established program procedures.

Organizing and Managing Your Project

Your dissertation is an iterative (and often messy) project that will extend over a period of time. Therefore, successful completion requires careful organization and planning. To begin the process of getting organized, you need to create a "workspace" for your dissertation—a physical as well as a mental and intellectual space. You will also begin to create a system for organizing and managing your work on this project by developing a writing routine and by starting to keep records of information as well as of your thinking.

Creating a Workspace

Find a place where the dissertation is the only thing that you do. Find a space that works for you. A space where you can minimize distractions is key. This might be a coffee shop, the library, or an empty office at your workplace. The important thing is to find a space that for the time you dedicate to writing, only your dissertation exists. Having done this, you can then begin to plan time dedicated to writing and make this a concrete commitment by structuring time for writing. Remember, making specific plans to block off time for writing is a mental and emotional commitment. And alerting people to your plans and taking concrete steps to structure your time builds in a social and physical commitment. You are then certainly more likely to write! And that's the goal!

Creating your new workspace means that you also should begin identifying writing resources. In addition to purchasing the relevant textbooks, become familiar with online library databases, as they will become invaluable as well. Your computer, in connection with your university library system, is a literature searching and bibliographic management tool. An ongoing literature review begins right from the beginning stages of topic identification; continues with reviews of research methodologies, specific methods of data collection, and issues of trustworthiness; and carries through to the final stages of analysis and synthesis. In addition, you have to produce a bibliography or reference list that is formatted correctly and in perfect synchronization with the materials referenced in the body of your dissertation. This ongoing literature review can indeed be one of the most time consuming of all the dissertation challenges. It is certainly worth taking the time to become familiar with using your library's literature search engines and databases, as well as with the variety of software programs that allow you to efficiently perform the tasks of referencing your materials. This is mentioned just briefly here so that you can start adding these thoughts to your new mental workspace. Further details pertaining to some of the more commonly used electronic library databases for the social sciences are presented as Appendix C.

Managing the Data

As you begin your research and as you live with your study, you will begin to gather and accumulate a diverse array of material that has potential relevance. As you become immersed in your work, you will continue to be inundated with large amounts of information, including formal documents, correspondence, photocopies of articles, pieces of reflective writing, class notes, reading notes, discussion notes, handouts, and memos, as well as other miscellaneous scraps of paper. All of this information is the precursor to the final data. It is the raw material of the inquiry that will be of use later. You certainly do not want to lose any of your material, nor do you want to drown in it. Organizing and managing dissertation-related "stuff" right from the beginning is essential to getting on track and staying focused. In this regard, you will need to make sure that it is sorted systematically and stored safely and securely and will be easily retrievable when you need to access it.

There are various systems for handling information at a practical level, and based on your learning style preference, different methods will seem more appealing. Those of us who are more visual and tactile like to print hard copies of everything and have the physical "evidence" in our hands. Some people "file" material in stacks or neatly labeled files or folders. Still others are less inclined to file manually, preferring to set up electronic folders in which to store information by way of emerging topics or chapters. Regardless of which method you choose, organizing your material well and in a way that works best for you is a crucial step in the overall research process. By organizing your material, you will be able to easily retrieve your sources now and in the future, group similar sources together, and possibly identify potential patterns or links within your research topic.

In addition to storing various forms of information, you also should make sure that you keep the various drafts of your dissertation. During the process of writing your dissertation, drafts will need to be edited and refined. As you make revisions and update earlier versions, you will find yourself continually writing and rewriting. These drafts are important and should not be discarded. It is possible that you may want to revisit some text of an earlier version to check on something you have written. In addition, as your research and writing progress, by comparing drafts you can keep a check on your progress, as well as note any developments in your understanding of certain issues and phenomena. Therefore, before making revisions, original drafts should be kept intact, and each revised version should be labeled, dated, and stored in a designated file or folder for easy retrieval.

Whatever methods work best for you and whatever strategy of information management you choose, your computer will become your best friend throughout the dissertation process. Using your computer, you can catalog, record, and manage multiple forms of information, including references. RefWorks is one way to collect, manage, and efficiently organize research papers and documents. The drag-and-drop capability along with smart document recognition makes it easy and fast to upload documents and metadata into your account. The resource allows you to import citations directly and indirectly from library databases, capture research from websites like Google Scholar, PubMed, and WorldCat, and create American Psychological Association reference lists. With this resource, you can annotate, organize, and cite your research, as well as collaborate with friends and colleagues by sharing collections of citations. Becoming familiar with your computer and technological resources before you start your research will save you much time and frustration. Developing computer literacy and mastering the appropriate software programs does add another layer of learning to an already intensive experience, but one that is well worth the effort. If you feel overwhelmed in this regard, you might want to seek technical assistance.

In addition, no matter what kind of computer system or software package you are working with, a necessary and, in fact, absolutely essential consideration is that you are—right from the beginning—vigilant in saving information. This goal can be accomplished by regularly and frequently backing up your files by way of copying them to your hard drive, as well as to a disk or flash drive, or by saving them to an online storage system such as Dropbox, Google Drive, or one of the many other technologies that is currently available. You can never back up too much! Many people recommend printing out hard copies of completed sections in addition to saving electronic copies. As useful as they are, computers are not infallible. They can and do crash, and losing material can be a devastating setback in the dissertation process.

Data Security

A few words regarding data security is called for in light of the emergence of new challenges to anonymity and confidentiality that have been brought about by the advent and pervasiveness of social media and new technologies, including various forms of publicly accessible visual, audio, and virtual materials and data. While data storage and management have always been a concern, new cloud technology and transcription services, as well as the mobility of data by way of e-mail and electronic storage devices, create a new set of ethical concerns for researchers. Data management and data security are central and ongoing concerns with regard to protecting anonymity and/or confidentiality. There are significant debates in the field about how to consider and approach technology-mediated data collection methods and how, from an ethically responsible perspective, to treat and manage the kind of data that a researcher can access online or virtually. While there are no established guidelines for how to treat these data, and given the prevalence of online data collection and its possible ethical implications, Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggest a thorough examination of literature related to the role of social media and the Internet more broadly and also specifically with respect to your particular study design and context. Indeed, in planning and conducting your study you should carefully consider all possible ways that data security can be breached or compromised, including who might have access to your data and why. All necessary safeguards and precautions regarding how you will securely store your data must be implemented at the outset of the study and must also be explicitly addressed in your research proposal, institutional review board (IRB) application material, and final dissertation manuscript.

Tracking Your Thinking

Up to this point, much of the discussion has focused on the practical details of the organization and management of dissertation-related material. Aside from keeping track of information, you need to keep track of your thinking. Just as it is important to have the relevant material on file, so it is important to keep a record of your changing thoughts about the literature and its relevance to your emerging research topic, as well as about the research process in general. One way to ensure that you preserve your reasoning and thinking and are able to spell out the development of your ideas is to keep a research journal. Recording your thinking means that you will accumulate material that can be revisited and drawn on and that can form a substantial part of the methodology and analysis chapters of your dissertation. Keeping careful records also implies an open-minded and critical approach, and provides ideas for future directions of your work. In addition, by making your reasoning transparent, you contribute to what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as an "audit trail," which provides useful material for making trustworthiness claims for your study.

Journaling allows you to be meticulous about keeping an orderly record of your research activities and your productivity. Journaling also engenders a reflective stance, which offers the opportunity to create a record of your experiences—your insights, speculations, hunches, questions, methodological and analytical concerns, tentative interpretations, and so on. In the qualitative inquiry process, you, as the researcher and writer, are the main instrument of data collection and data analysis. It is your task to provide personal insight into the experience under study. Integral to the notion of *self as instrument* is a capacity for reflection. The act of reflection, as John Dewey (1916) suggests, affords the potential for reconstructing the meaning of experience that actually yields learning. In effect, a journal provides a solid link to and keeps track of the many levels of experience that are involved in the dissertation process. In the qualitative dissertation, what you bring to the inquiry is as important as what you discover as you live with your project. The quality and credibility of the dissertation indeed rests on your capacity for insightful conceptual reflection.

Developing a Collegial Support System

After course completion, much of the study process is independent, solo, and often lonely. Moreover, many students are currently engaged in online doctoral programs with little or no contact with classmates or peers. As such, maintaining a strong and continual connective link to your dissertation chair and other members of your committee is a vital component of successful doctoral completion. Although much of the work involved in the dissertation process—in both the researching and writing phases—is done independently, you need not feel you must "go this alone," and you should not isolate yourself. As a resourceful doctoral candidate, it would be in your best interests to create a dissertation support system of some kind that contributes to your success by providing emotional and academic support. Support systems include various options such as dissertation groups, a dissertation "buddy" (someone with whom you are compatible and who has a similar work ethic to your own and who you feel might be more efficient than a larger group), and virtual support groups (operated through online chat rooms, online editorial critiques, and online coaching and/or mentoring). There are many people who have the potential to promote your progress. In our experience, we have found the graduate student network to be a particularly valuable resource. It is to your advantage to reach out to graduates and other professionals and colleagues who you believe might be helpful to you in this regard. This becomes especially important in the burgeoning online environment where students are working outside the parameters of a traditional classroom, a context where isolation and lack of connection might be particularly prevalent.

Table 2.1 outlines the steps necessary to embark on the dissertation process in a methodical and organized manner. Once you have your mental and physical house in order, and with strong personal commitment and the will to succeed in completing your dissertation, you are ready to take the first step or resume wherever you may have left off in the process.

Table 2.1

TABLE 2.1 Guidelines for Organizing and Managing Your Project: An Overview

Task	Why?	Action Steps
Create your own "dissertation space."	Successful completion requires careful organization and planning. Structure is important. To begin, you should create a physical and mental "space."	1. Set aside a physical workspace that is dedicated to your dissertation. Find a place where the dissertation is the only thing that you do. 2. Set aside times to work on your dissertation. 3. Create your mental workspace; develop an "I can do this!" attitude.
Create a *system* for organizing and managing your work.	As you become immersed in your work, you will continue to be inundated with large amounts of information. Carefully consider issues of data security (confidentiality and anonymity with regard to your study's design and context). You do not want to lose any material, nor do you want to drown in it. Organizing and managing dissertation-related "stuff" right from the beginning is essential to getting on track and staying focused.	1. Start collecting and storing all material that is potentially related to your topic. 2. Keep records of all relevant information. 3. Make sure all information is securely stored to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of research sites and participants. 4. Make sure that all material is sorted systematically and stored so it will be easily retrievable. 5. Choose the storage method that works best for you. File all information manually or electronically.
Save all drafts.	As you make revisions and update earlier versions, you will be continually rewriting. Drafts should not be discarded. You may want to revisit earlier versions in order to check on previous thinking and strategies.	1. Keep clear records of all drafts. 2. Be vigilant in saving all drafts systematically and methodically. Be consistent in your labeling of documents and filing!
Keep track of your thinking.	The quality and credibility of the dissertation rests upon your capacity for insightful conceptual reflection. Just as it is important to have relevant material on file, so is it important to keep a record of your changing thoughts about the research process. Journaling engenders a critically reflective stance, a key characteristic of qualitative research. Recorded reflection provides ideas for future directions of your work and also contributes to an "audit trail," providing useful material for making validity claims. Keeping careful records makes your reasoning transparent—both to yourself and to your readers. What happens throughout the research process is a vital source of data: A research diary contributes significantly toward a substantial part of the methodology chapter of your dissertation.	1. Keep track of your thinking by way of journaling, writing memos, or keeping a research diary. 2. Keep a running log of all conversations you have with colleagues and advisors. This log should include important details and suggestions, as well as your reflections, reactions, and ideas.
Track your productivity as a way to motivate you to write.	Goal setting can be hard: Our goals can be too big. Or they can be too small. We set goals that are just right when we set them, and then life happens and we might miss our targets. This can be very frustrating and demotivating.	1. Record what you do each day or part of the day. In a week, you will have a list of things you've done, rather than a list of near and entire misses. So much more motivating! 2. Pay attention to what you're tracking, as this might reveal useful patterns about where and when you were most productive. You can then try and do more of that!
Forgive yourself! Understand and accept the necessity of slow movement and messiness as groundwork for productivity.	The research and writing process is iterative, recursive, and messy, with challenges (detours and roadblocks) along the way that can impede—or even stall—our progress. We tend to become discouraged if we move slowly and are not so productive in some parts of our writing. Being discouraged leads to frustration, and frustration takes away energy, and lack of energy depletes motivation. And so productivity suffers.	1. Change the way you think and you will change the effect on your writing. The slow and messy parts are all part of building a foundation of thinking and writing. 2. Pay attention to the patterns of your writing process. This will help prevent you from feeling demotivated when writing slows down. 3. Trust that you will gather momentum and accelerate if you can shift your thinking to understand and accept this iterative and often messy process.
Save, save, save!	The importance of saving material cannot be underestimated. Loss of information and data can be extremely stressful and time consuming, not to mention detrimental to your final product. Develop the habit of saving!	1. Be vigilant and methodical with regard to file naming. 2. Regularly and frequently back up all your files by way of copying them to an external hard drive, disk, flash drive, or backup web location. 3. Make sure that your computer is set up for consistent autosave and backup.
Identify and store all writing resources.	Ongoing literature review begins from the beginning stages of topic identification and carries through to the final stages of analysis and synthesis. In addition, you will have to produce a bibliography or reference list that is formatted correctly and that is in perfect synchronization with the materials referenced in the body of your dissertation. Making notes on your reading should be an active and critical process.	1. Maintain clear records of relevant resources, including books and journals. 2. Keep track of all your reading, making critical notes as well as being very careful to accurately list all references and citations. 3. Become familiar with online library databases. The university library system is an essential literature search and bibliographic management tool. 4. Explore different software program options that allow efficient referencing of your materials.
Develop a collegial support system.	While much of the work in the dissertation process will be done independently, you do not need to "go this alone," nor do you have to work in isolation. This becomes especially significant in the online environment. Research is essentially a collaborative endeavor rather than a solo process. The graduate student network is a valuable resource for collaboration, sharing of resources, and dialogue.	1. Students should always be encouraged to build support systems and seek guidance from committee members and peers. 2. In addition, be sure to reach out to graduates and other professionals and colleagues who you believe might be helpful to you as you navigate the lengthy dissertation process.

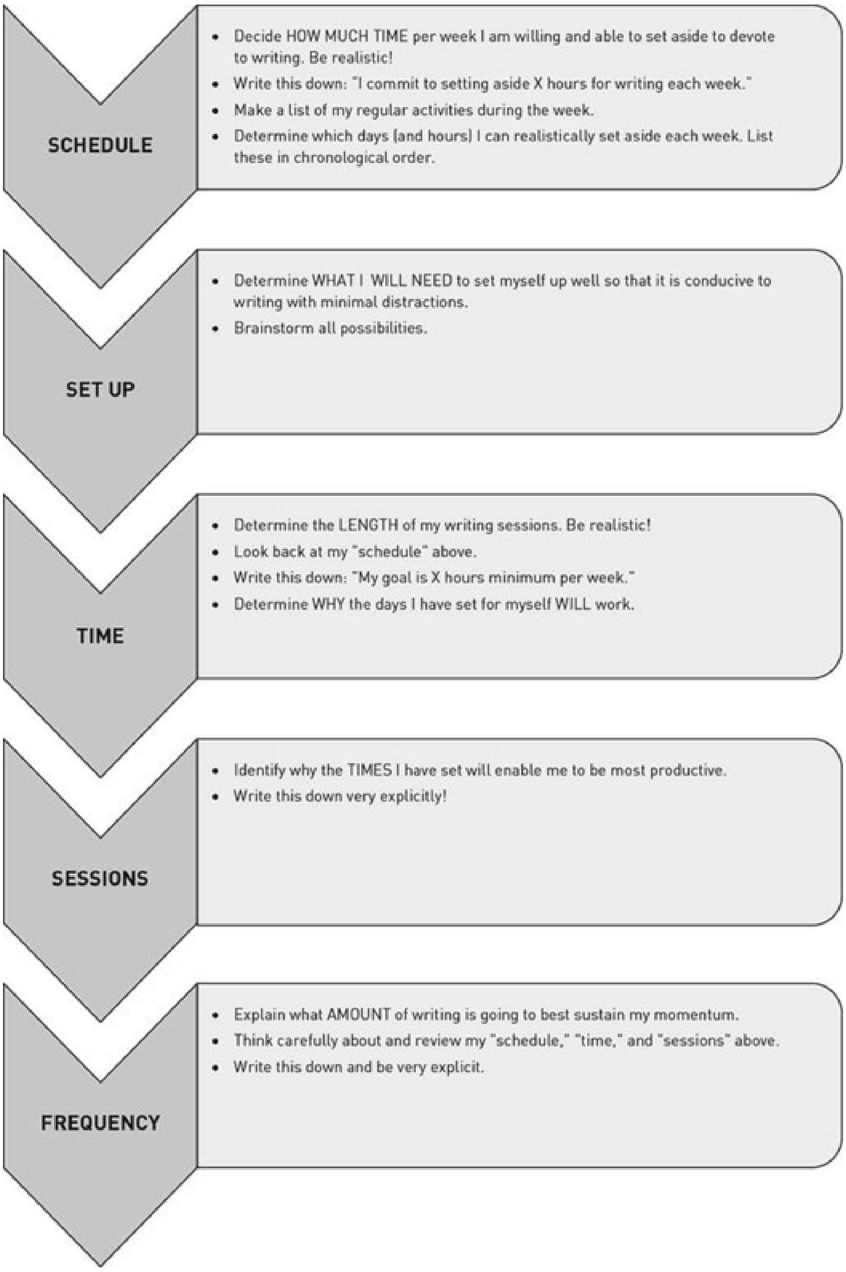
Planning Your Time

You might finally be ready to write your dissertation, but every time you sit down to work, you're seized with "writer's block." Most people have a romantic image of a writer as someone who writes during spontaneous bursts of creativity. Unfortunately, few writers write only when they feel inspired, and waiting for inspiration is impractical when you are working on a long-term project such as a dissertation. If you work on your dissertation only when you feel like it, the project will never be completed. It certainly requires self-discipline to always be ready to write on certain days whether you feel inspired or not and to stick to self-imposed deadlines. Yet the right plans and routines can make self-discipline an extremely easy thing to establish. Effective planning is key to gaining better control over one's writing. Organizing our time makes writing far less stressful and helps us actually accomplish goals we might otherwise consider out of our reach. When thinking about planning time and establishing realistic timelines, you should be thinking of continuing the same approach to time management as when completing your course work, which was an essential step in the doctoral process, and which enabled you to reach the point of embarking on your dissertation. Similarly, after completing the course work, you will now need to develop a system of planning your writing times and adhering to the schedule. Figure 2.1 is an example of a schedule-planning tool.

The importance of blocking significant amounts of uninterrupted time cannot be emphasized enough. By providing this essentially amorphous and iterative process with some structure, a structured timetable makes writing more predictable, and therefore less intimidating, and allows you to pace yourself. Schedules help reduce the pressure associated with deadlines as well as the tendency to procrastinate. Moreover, setting a schedule also helps integrate your writing into the rest of your life, which is important. There are some basic principles for developing an effective writing schedule:

- Make a list of your regular activities, and within that context, decide how much time you hope to devote to your writing. If you've never tried a weekly schedule before, be open to adjustment. Try to create a balance between writing and other activities.
- Identify the times and days when you are most productive and least likely to be interrupted. For example, if you know you are tired in the afternoon, don't schedule your writing times then. Find your ideal time slots that can become sacred for writing.

Figure 2.1 Schedule-Planning Tool



- Working on a dissertation entails ample opportunities to doubt whether you can actually complete the task. Intimidated by and frustrated with the great distance from their goal, many doctoral students may never complete their dissertations. Yet even the most “impossible” tasks can be managed if broken into several smaller (and less intimidating) tasks or “batched.” Setting smaller benchmarks or “chunks” along the road to your ultimate goal helps you proceed one step at a time while alleviating the tremendous pressure of having to constantly grapple with your entire project. Having divided your dissertation into smaller segments also allows you to plan how long you need to spend on each segment and project when you might complete your entire manuscript.
- It is important to set a comfortable, relaxed pace that allows you to avoid pressure. The best way to maximize your sense of accomplishment and minimize your experience of disappointment is to set goals that are within your reach. You also need to build into your timetable some slack time for when you are sick or overburdened with unanticipated commitments. Moving along slowly should not prevent you from being prolific. Even days when you write only one page ultimately add up. The secrets are perseverance and persistence, which are much more important than speed.
- Be proactive in maintaining your momentum. Be sensitive to the “flow” of your writing. With a large project such as a dissertation, try to minimize the number of times when you have to interrupt your writing

for more than a day at a time, as this serves to disrupt the necessary momentum.

- Finally, be sure to have in your mind a realistic deadline for your project. Setting deadlines is the most effective way of closing open-ended tasks. Indeed, in helping overcome indefinitely receding horizons, a firm deadline is a writer's best friend.

Establishing a Realistic Timeline

One of the major challenges of completing the dissertation is developing and honing the habit of thinking critically. Another challenge is the practical application of ideas, including the need to systematically plan the study, collect and analyze the data, and write up the dissertation. The ability to focus, problem solve, and make informed decisions at every step of the way will bring your study to completion. Time is part of the equation, and as mentioned earlier, thoughtfully planning your time and establishing firm deadlines contribute to successful completion.

Clearly, the more time you devote to carefully thinking about, planning, and completing your study, the more effective your discipline will be. Because the time commitment required of an individual doing qualitative research is substantial, you need to pace yourself from the beginning. Be sure to keep your goals realistic, or you will set yourself up for failure. As such, be honest about the time that particular tasks might take to complete and what other life demands are competing with the dissertation demands. Aside from time constraints, you also need to plan carefully for what can be achieved given your available resources (e.g., personal and financial support). Finally, you must consider developing realistic deadlines with regard to institutional constraints. For example, many university departments are typically understaffed during the summer months and over winter vacation. Expecting feedback from advisors, gaining approval from review boards, or even attempting to set meeting times with research participants at these particular times of the year would be somewhat unrealistic. In addition, always be sure to inquire about your institution's IRB process, and be aware of all deadlines for submissions as well as time frames regarding the application and review process so that you can plan your time accordingly and appropriately. Becoming familiar with the expectations and requirements of your institution's IRB process is an essential component of effectively planning and executing your timeline.

A timetable for work may or may not be formally required by your committee, but it is an effective way to manage your time and keep you on track. In line with the ski metaphor mentioned earlier, it is important that you set yourself a time frame within which to complete each section of the dissertation. Just as the experienced skier traverses the terrain, benchmarking is fundamental to success in the dissertation process, too. In developing realistic deadlines, we recommend that students "chunk" the tasks in conjunction with a multiyear calendar. Create a system whereby you work on parts that contribute to the whole—chapter-by-chapter or even one part of a chapter at a time. The dissertation journey is essentially about achieving milestones one step at a time.

A useful guiding principle is to always have a sense of your next step. Identifying the various stages in the process, pacing yourself, and documenting your achievement of goals and subgoals along the way are important and will contribute to keeping you task oriented and focused. Having some sense of how your progress is moving you closer and closer to completion will help to keep you motivated. In this regard, we recommend marking your progress on a checklist that you create for yourself. A sample checklist appears on the inside back cover.

It is especially critical that you not lose momentum once formal course work has ended. At this moment of being out there on their own, many students experience overwhelming feelings and are unsure of how to proceed. The longer they remain fixed and unmoving, the more their inclination to start on the dissertation wanes; the longer this continues, the more difficult it becomes to get going again.

You also should bear in mind that, in most institutions, once a student is certified and becomes a doctoral "candidate," he or she usually has a designated number of years in which to complete the dissertation, or else he or she will have to be recertified (which involves retaking the "certification" or "candidacy" exam—a most unappealing thought). In any event, although extensions may be granted for extenuating circumstances, to get an extension, a student usually has to demonstrate that she or he has been making significant progress. This is all the more reason to take the time to develop a timeline, stay on task, and set realistic, appropriate, and reasonable goals. After all, this doctoral program is a once-in-a-lifetime venture, and you surely want to succeed.

In following up with our students as to their progress, we often hear, "I'm still reading." Reading widely indeed allows you to become knowledgeable and proficient in a specific domain. Although reading is essential, it can sometimes be an avoidance mechanism when it is time to write. It is now time to start *writing* your dissertation. The sooner you begin writing, the easier it is to continue writing and the more rapidly your dissertation is likely to progress. Adopt a do-it-now attitude and get started!

3 Choosing a Qualitative Research Approach

Chapter 3 Objectives

- Discuss the implications of choosing a qualitative research approach based on the study's problem, purpose, and research questions.
- Illustrate how the primary characteristics of qualitative research compare and contrast with the characteristics of quantitative and mixed methods approaches.
- Offer conceptual understanding of the logic behind choice of a qualitative research approach including history, defining features, and knowledge claims.
- Outline the role of the qualitative researcher, with emphasis on criticality and reflexivity.
- Provide an overview of the current landscape of qualitative inquiry, highlighting key trends in the field.
- Clarify and explain the most commonly used current and cutting-edge qualitative methodologies (traditions or genres), with particular reference to philosophical underpinnings, application, methods, and critique.

Overview

Choice of research approach is directly tied to research problem and purpose. As the researcher, you actively create the link among problem, purpose, and approach through a process of reflecting on problem and purpose, focusing on researchable questions, and considering how to best address these questions. Thinking along these lines affords a research study methodological congruence (Richards & Morse, 2013). A research problem should not be modified to fit a particular research approach, and you cannot assume a particular qualitative approach regardless of your research problem. In other words, research approach follows research problem; the appropriate research approach is the one that best fits with your research problem.

Qualitative research addresses the question of "what." Knowing what something is entails a conceptualization of the matter under investigation as a whole and in its various parts. Knowing what something is also involves the conceptualization of its "how"—that is, its process and unfolding. Importantly, qualitative research includes an understanding of context, circumstance, environment, and milieu. As Wertz et al. (2011) explain, knowledge of the "what" may be implicit or explicit, carefully established or uncritically assumed, and informally or formally acquired. Deep understanding about what a subject matter is, in all its real-world complexity, and an ability to describe, explain, and communicate that understanding lies at the core of qualitative research.

Qualitative research is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants. This approach implies an emphasis on exploration, discovery, and description. Quantitative research, in contrast, is applied to describe current conditions, investigate relationships, and study cause–effect phenomena. Both research approaches involve complex processes in which particular data collection and data analysis methods assume meaning and significance in relation to the assumptions underlying the larger intellectual traditions within which these methods are applied.

A brief mention regarding mixed methods research is warranted here because students often construe mixed methods as just that: the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study. While this holds true, there is more to mixed methods in that it is a distinct and complex research approach that *intentionally and systematically* uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods *concurrently* in one study, or *sequentially* in two or more studies. An important logic behind the application of this design is that together, the methods complement each other, providing an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Bazeley, 2018; Creamer, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Combining and triangulating methods can assist the researcher in tackling complex research problems that involve several layers of understanding and therefore require multiple analytic techniques. As such, the philosophy underlying mixed methods is something that is often overlooked or misunderstood. Commonly, a research team is involved in a mixed methods study because multiple forms of data collection are occurring concurrently or over a lengthy period of time. As such, a team approach is often called for with a mixed methods study because of the labor-intensive and collaborative nature of data collection and analysis. One benefit is that the results of one method can help inform the findings of the other. Another benefit is that the extent of convergence of the study's findings could raise questions or contradictions that require additional clarification. This may initiate the need for further methods to be implemented, in which case the breadth and range of the study is expanded so that the research purpose is broadened. In reality, the use of a true mixed methods study is challenging, however, since most researchers develop expertise predominantly in one research approach, and it is thus often difficult to bridge the qualitative/quantitative divide, both practically as well as philosophically. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, a team approach is often necessary and thus might not always be possible with dissertation research. If considering a mixed methods study, it is recommended that students seek some published mixed methods journal articles that use their proposed research design and introduce these to advisors and committee members as a working model. Published examples of research in a field will create legitimacy and feasibility for this research approach.

Table 3.1 provides a broad summary overview of qualitative research, illustrating its primary characteristics and indicating how these compare and contrast with the characteristics of quantitative and mixed methods approaches.

Table 3.1

TABLE 3.1 **Overview of Research Paradigms**

	Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research	Mixed Methods
Research paradigm	Postpositivist	Constructivist, critical theory/advocacy	Pragmatic
Strategy/ tradition/genre of inquiry	Descriptive, correlational, causal/comparative, and experimental research	Case study, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative inquiry, discourse analysis, phenomenology, action research, postmodernism, and poststructuralism	• Sequential design can be exploratory or explanatory • Concurrent design triangulates methods
Research purpose	• Seek consensus (the norm) • Examine topic in order to quantify results • Investigate relationships and cause–effect phenomena	• Seek range and variation in findings • Delve into the "essence" of the topic	• A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is needed to fully understand a problem
Researcher role	• Adopts an *etic* (outsider) point of view • Seeks to test or verify theory • Identifies variables, makes predictions, and seeks specific evidence that will support or disconfirm hypothesis • Believes that research can be value-free • Attempts to remain unbiased, objective, and impartial	• Adopts an *emic* (insider) point of view • Seeks to discover and understand meaning of experience • Adopts a flexible stance and is open to change • Is reflective about own voice and perspective • Acknowledges personal values, and brings own experience to bear on the study • Is active and involved	• Appreciates how quantitative and qualitative data might complement each other • Develops a rationale for integrating aspects of qualitative and quantitative research • Decides whether to prioritize one or the other type of approach or to consider them equally important
Research design	• Hypothetic-deductive: Research is about "idea testing" • Design is determined up front and follows systematic procedures • Large samples are selected randomly • Study is conducted under controlled conditions • Usually involves some form of pre- and posttest • Little opportunity for creativity outside prestructured research design	• Inductive: Research is about "idea generation" • Design is proposed up front but is open and emergent, rather than rigid and fixed, to permit exploration • Small samples are selected purposefully • Research takes place within natural contexts • Real-world situations are studied as they naturally unfold • Researcher-designed framework allows for flexibility and creativity	• Design combines quantitative structure and qualitative flexibility • Borrows distinct elements from both quantitative and qualitative approaches • Purposeful or random sample selection • Researcher-designed framework allows for innovation or creativity
• Presentation of findings	• Charts, graphs, and diagrams are used to display results • Discussion explains and augments visual displays	• Thick, rich description is the primary mode of data presentation • Visual displays are used to augment the narrative discussion	• Both quantitative and qualitative modes of presentation are used to illustrate the research design and to portray and describe findings

Source: This table first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2007a). *Revisiting research approaches.* Unpublished manuscript.

Note: Although qualitative research is presented here as one broad approach, it must be remembered that each tradition or genre has its own peculiarities and nuances. Moreover, current thinking over the years has led to the development of terminology that more appropriately reflects the nature and distinction of qualitative research.

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The History of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research as a field crosscuts disciplines and subject matters, and includes traditions associated with foundationalism, positivism, postpositivism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, posthumanism, and the many qualitative research perspectives and methods connected to cultural and interpretive studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Over the years, qualitative inquiry has passed through several historical moments or phases: the traditional (1900–1950), the modernist or golden age (1950–1970), blurred genres (1970–1980), the paradigm wars (1980–1985), the crisis of representation (1986–1990), the postmodern (1990–1995), postexperimental inquiry (1995–2000), the methodologically contested present (2000–2004), paradigm proliferation (2005–2010), the fractured posthumanist present that battles managerialism in the audit-driven academy (2010–2015), and an uncertain, utopian future where critical inquiry finds its voice in the public arena (2016–). These moments overlap and coexist in the present, and so the field of qualitative research continues to transform itself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Defining Features of Qualitative Research

Any definition or conceptualization of qualitative research must work within the complex historical field. Qualitative research means different things in each of the eleven moments. Nonetheless, some key generic defining characteristics are applicable to the field as a whole:

- Qualitative research involves an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative researchers study people in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena and experiences in terms of the meaning people bring to them.
- Qualitative research is grounded in a philosophical position that is essentially constructivist in the sense that it is concerned with how the complexities of the social and cultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood in a particular context and at a particular point in time. The intent of qualitative research is to examine social situations or interactions, with the researcher becoming immersed in the world of others in an attempt to achieve a *holistic* understanding of a phenomenon or experience.
- The researcher strives to describe the meaning of the findings from the perspective of the research participants. To achieve this goal, data are gathered directly from the participants. Since description, understanding, interpretation, and communication are the primary goals, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis.
- Qualitative research is characterized generally by *thick description*, a term coined by ethnographer and anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973). Thick description is an important aspect in increasing the complexity of the research by thoroughly describing the study's setting, research participants, and related experiences so as to produce findings and interpretations that will allow readers to derive contextualized meaning. As Ravitch and Carl (2016) explain,

  > Thick description connotes a depth of contextual detail, usually garnered through multiple data sources . . . It allows readers enough information and a depth of context so they can picture the setting in their minds and form their own opinions about the quality of your research and your interpretations. (p. 194)

- An underlying assumption of qualitative research is that rich data that is nested in a real context can be captured only by way of the interactive process between the researcher and the research participants. Since understanding is the primary goal, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis. However, the subjective lenses that *both* the researcher and research participants *together* bring to a qualitative study form the context for the findings.
- Triangulation addresses issues of trustworthiness in qualitative research. The qualitative researcher triangulates by making use of multiple and different sources and methods, and these are reported as part of the study's methodology, including peer review or peer debriefing (which provides an external check of the research process) and member checks (where participants' views are solicited regarding the credibility of the study's findings, analyses, and interpretations).
- Design flexibility is a significant hallmark of qualitative methodology. Iterativity is a related hallmark. In the qualitative research process, instrumentation can be modified when necessary to explore new insights and to address revised research questions.

Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive activities, privileges no single methodological practice over another. The challenge is to appropriately match the research approach to a research problem, purpose, and questions. Thus, as a researcher, you are obliged to understand those theoretical principles that shape the logic of your inquiry, as this will allow your study to be appropriately positioned within an inquiry tradition and also lay the foundation for supporting your study's findings. Preliminary steps in formulating your study include (a) assessing the knowledge claims that the researcher brings to the study based on her or his theoretical perspectives; (b) acknowledging the role of the qualitative researcher; (c) developing some familiarity with the current landscape of qualitative research; and (d) identifying an appropriate qualitative methodology (genre or tradition) that will align with and therefore best inform your research problem and purpose.

Knowledge Claims

A knowledge claim implies certain assumptions about what the researcher will learn during the inquiry and how she or he will learn. These claims might be called *research paradigms* or *worldviews*—that is, a basic set of beliefs and assumptions that guide action. Philosophically, researchers make claims about what knowledge is (ontology), how we know what we know (epistemology), what values go into knowing what we know (axiology), and the processes for studying knowledge (methodology). There are essentially four core paradigms that inform qualitative research and that identify how worldviews shape the conceptualization, practice, and nature of research, and these are discussed next.

Postpositivism

Postpositivism is referred to frequently as “the scientific method,” “quantitative research,” or “empirical science.” It refers to the thinking that developed from logical positivism, a school of thought that maintains that all knowledge can be derived from direct observation and logical inferences based on that observation (Phillips & Burbules, 2000). Postpositivism reflects a deterministic philosophy, and the problems studied by postpositivists typically examine causes that influence or affect outcomes. Thinking within this paradigm is reductionistic. The belief is that there are laws or theories that govern the world and that these can be tested and verified. Thus, research typically begins with a theory and a set of hypotheses, and the intent is to test ideas. Research is concerned with causal relationships, and the aim is to advance the relationship between variables. The knowledge that develops through a postpositivist lens is based on careful observation and measurement. Results of a study either support or refute the theory. Being objective is an integral component of inquiry, and standards of reliability and validity are important.

Pragmatism

Pragmatism arises from the work of Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey. Pragmatism is not committed to any one research philosophy or paradigm. For the many forms of pragmatism, knowledge claims arise out of situations, actions, and consequences rather than from antecedent conditions (as in postpositivism). There is a concern with practical application and workable solutions to research problems (Patton, 2015). Instead of methods being important, the problem is primary. Researchers posit that research is contextually based and typically employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand the problem. Pragmatic researchers propose that, within the same study, methods can be combined in creative ways to more fully or completely understand a research problem. It is contended that researchers should be free to choose the methods and procedures that best meet their needs and purposes and that the research questions should determine the methods used. Pragmatists thus adopt multiple data collection and data analysis methods.

Social Constructivism/Interpretivism

Social constructivism challenges the scientific-realist assumption of postpositivism that reality can be reduced to its component parts. The basic tenet of constructivism is that reality is socially, culturally, and historically constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000; Neuman, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). Therefore, research attempts to understand social phenomena from a context-specific perspective. Social constructivists view inquiry as value-bound rather than value-free, meaning that the process of inquiry is influenced by the researcher and the context under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The central assumption of this paradigm is that reality is socially constructed, that individuals develop subjective meanings of their own personal experience, and that this gives way to multiple meanings. Therefore, it is the researcher's role to understand the multiple realities from the perspectives of participants. The only way to achieve this understanding is for the researcher to become involved in the reality of the participants and to interact with them in meaningful ways. Thus, constructivist researchers often address the "process" of interaction among individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work to understand particular cultural and historical settings. The constructivist researcher's role is essentially that of "passionate participant," as the facilitator of multivoice reconstruction (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Constructivist researchers recognize and acknowledge that their own backgrounds shape their interpretations, and they thus "position" themselves in the research to acknowledge their own cultural, social, and historical experiences. Rather than starting with a theory (as in postpositivism), researchers pose research questions and generate or inductively develop meaning from the data collected in the field.

Critical Theory

The critical theory paradigm, which also is referred to as an advocacy, liberatory, or participatory framework, has a clear focus on social justice and includes feminist perspectives, racialized discourses, queer theory, trans theory, and disability inquiry. This framework arose during the late 1980s from the critique that postpositivist assumptions imposed unfair structural laws and theories that did not fit marginalized or disenfranchised individuals or groups. In addition, the critique of constructivism is that it did not go far enough in advocating for an action agenda to address the injustice and inequality inflicted on those who have become the passive object of inquiry.

Critical theorists view research as intertwined with politics, and therefore advocate that research contain an integral action agenda that will bring about reform that will change the lives of the research participants and the institutions and communities in which they live and work, as well as the researcher's life (Brookfield, 2005). Critical perspectives involve research strategies (e.g., action research, participatory action research, and narrative analysis) that are openly ideological and have empowering and democratizing goals. It is assumed that the researcher will engage participants as active collaborators in the inquiry so as not to further marginalize them as a result of the inquiry. To achieve this, participants are typically involved in designing questions, collecting data, and analyzing and interpreting information. Advocacy means providing a platform for research participants so that their voice can be heard and their consciousness can be raised. The goal of research is to create political debate and discussion to empower people to take action, to bring about change in existing social structures and processes, and to reconceptualize the entire research process.

The Role of the Qualitative Researcher

Qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of narrative and visual data to gain insight into a particular phenomenon of interest. Taking place within natural or nonmanipulated settings, qualitative research allows for complex social phenomena to be viewed holistically. An underlying assumption of qualitative research is that rich data that are nested in real context can be captured only by way of the interactive process between the researcher and the research participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The researcher strives to describe the meaning of the findings from the perspective of the research participants, and to achieve this goal, data are gathered directly from participants. Since description, understanding, interpretation, and communication are the primary goals, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis. Indeed, one of the strongest influences on the research process, including participant reactivity as well as the study's outcomes, starts and ends with the researcher. As Charmaz (2015) aptly puts it,

> Just as methods we use influence what we see, what we bring to the study also influences what we can see. Qualitative research of all sorts relies on those who conduct it. We are not passive receptacles into which data are poured. We are not scientific observers who can dismiss scrutiny of our values by claiming scientific neutrality and authority. (p. 27)

Maintaining a reflexive approach throughout ensures a critical review of the involvement of the researcher in the research and how this impacts the processes and outcomes of the research.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) outline the four key pillars of qualitative research as criticality, collaboration, rigor, and reflexivity. These are essentially the ideal qualities of a qualitative researcher, too. As these authors state, "All research is powerful. With this power also comes great responsibility and potential" (p. 391). Criticality means that you are critically approaching all aspects of the study, paying careful attention to issues of power and equity so that you are accurately and with integrity representing the experiences of others. Collaboration entails engaging with participants and others connected to your research (advisors and colleagues) in thoughtful and deliberate ways through dialogic engagement practices that support a critical stance. Rigor in qualitative research encompasses a variety of considerations, including developing and engaging in a research design that seeks and acknowledges complexity; maintaining fidelity with regard to research participants by being responsive to emerging meanings that are derived from the data while at the same time ensuring a systematic approach to data collection and analysis; seeking to understand and represent as complex and contextualized a picture as possible; and transparently addressing the challenges and limitations of your study. Reflexivity, being an active and ongoing awareness of your personal role, undergirds the entire research process and the impact of your role regarding all possible ways that your subjectivity and assumptions directly relate to and shape your research.

Qualitative research is about embracing and critically approaching the subjectivities inherent in the content and processes of the research itself. The qualitative researcher's role as both "insider" and "outsider" is one of the most important aspects (and many argue that it is the most important aspect) of a study's trustworthiness. At the same time, ironically, the researcher's insider/outsider perspective is also the most sensitive, vulnerable, and unpredictable part of a study's design. Reflexivity is the process through which researchers seek to acknowledge, examine, and understand how their positionality (their own social and cultural background, beliefs, and assumptions) can impact the research process. While the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity are no longer meaningful in qualitative research, strategies that may be collectively labeled as "reflexive practices" abound in the qualitative methodological literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; May & Perry, 2014; McNess, Crossley, & Lore, 2015; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). These practices focus on examining one's subjectivity and biases and reflecting on how these may shape the research process. "Researcher as instrument" raises important ethical, accountability, and social justice issues, including intersubjectivity, power, authorship, and voice. Importantly, the reflexive researcher understands that a reflective stance is an imperative—that is, an explicit self-consciousness including social, political, and value positions.

Reflexivity is an iterative process, as the researcher makes transparent the impact of herself or himself on the research process and at the same time the impact of the research process on her or him. Whereas in quantitative research this impact is considered to be a bias or limitation that needs to be controlled for, in qualitative studies this is considered an asset that indeed enriches and enhances the work and provides an additional level of credibility. As O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) explain,

> Without this critical reflectivity there is the risk of iatrogenic difficulties whereby there may be an unintended harmful impact as a result of claims to neutrality, objectivity or non-interpretation, which are essentially misnomers. Thus the importance of reflexivity becomes an ethical issue as well as a quality one. (p. 175)

What must be addressed are the relational aspects of research, including how interpersonal dynamics and the broader issues of power, privilege, positionality, and identity shape and impact all aspects of the research process (developing research questions; engaging with, or excluding, certain theories; selecting and recruiting research participants; selecting a research site) and ultimately the data, findings, interpretation, conclusions, and recommendations. Reflexivity forces researchers to come to terms not only with our choices of research problem and those whom we engage in the research process, but with ourselves and the multiple identities that we embody in the research setting—that is, the contradictions and paradoxes that form our own lives. As such, reflexivity has become one of the key markers indicating trustworthiness and rigor of a piece of qualitative research, and is a skill that researchers need to cultivate in conducting qualitative work.

As the instrument of data collection and data analysis, reflexivity must remain an active, intentional, and ongoing awareness to address, monitor, and act on your role as a researcher and the significant impact that you have on your research, particularly with regard to issues regarding interpretation and representation. This implies recognizing and acknowledging the part you play throughout the research process—in the construction of and contribution to the content and process of your research throughout its conceptualization, development, enactment, and write-up. Toward this end, it is a useful practice to keep a research journal, as this provides an ongoing structured opportunity to develop a research habit that can serve to deepen your thinking around critical and key issues and processes by creating a space for intentional reflection. Unlike memos that are written at selected moments throughout the research process and that tend to focus on specific topic areas, the research journal is an ongoing chronology of your thoughts, questions, assumptions, and ideas—a kind of phenomenological exploration into your own research process itself. Over time, your entries can allow you to make deeper connections between current and past ideas, ongoing self-reflection, and your developing perspectives, viewpoints, and questions. This chronology is beneficial throughout the research process as well as when the study is complete and often contains very useful information that can be drawn upon at the times of analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

Transparency is key to ensuring trustworthiness. Trustworthiness means that the community of researchers and scholars will trust your analysis and interpretation of what others said and did in the field, thereby supporting the credibility and dependability of your research and the transferability of your findings. Toward this end, each chapter of Part II of this book concludes with reflexive questions to ensure that you are thinking more deeply about the potential impact of all the choices you make regarding your study's design, including identification, justification, and limitations for all methodological choices, and what might be your underlying (explicit and implicit) biases and assumptions and why.

The Current Landscape of Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research, as outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), editors of the most recent *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, is an emergent and fluctuating field of inquiry. This phase in which we find ourselves currently is characterized by renewed calls for social justice and is concerned with moral discourse, asking that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about race, gender, class, democracy, globalization, freedom, complexity, and community. As Denzin and Lincoln (2018) outline, the current phase of qualitative research includes the intellectual agenda (where issues and problems revolve around the implementation of a social justice framework in an increasingly hostile environment to promote a critical qualitative inquiry); the advocacy agenda (advocacy should include showing how qualitative work addresses issues of social policy and critiques outdated positivist modes of science and research); and the ethical agenda (the qualitative inquiry community needs an empowerment code of ethics that transcends disciplines, honors indigenous voices, and values compassion, community, praxis, and social justice).

The critical focus, characterized by skepticism toward master narratives and grand theories, has been directed toward *phronesis*—that is, practical contextualized knowledge that is responsive to its environment (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Overall, there is a greater emphasis across all qualitative traditions or genres regarding facilitating social change by taking an active critical stance toward social structures and processes that shape individual and collective life. The motivation is that qualitative inquiry has the potential to highlight inequities and inequality, barriers and access, poverty and privilege, and the implications of suffering from injustice. Recent trends indicate that qualitative research includes a strong activist agenda, increasingly striving to go beyond prevailing assumptions, understandings, and norms; making a strong case for nonhegemonic inclusive ways of thinking and informed action; and thereby intentionally facilitating transformative and equity-oriented possibilities. As Denzin and Giardina (2016) write in *Qualitative Inquiry Through a Critical Lens,*

> As part of being open to the messy politics of our field(s), there needs to be a greater openness to alternative paradigm critique. We need to work through the beliefs that organize our interpretive communities, including our theories of being (ontology), knowing (epistemology), inquiry (methodology), moral conduct (ethics), praxis, politics, truth, voice, and representation. (p. 9)

A critical stance vis-à-vis research is vital with dominant powerful and pervasive ideologies and policies working to marginalize and silence individuals and groups who challenge the status quo. Indeed, the title of both the 13th and 14th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry in 2017 and 2018 is *Qualitative Inquiry in Troubled Times.*

Qualitative Research Methodology (Genres or Traditions)

Qualitative research is in itself a field of inquiry that crosscuts disciplines and subject matters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In addition to assumptions about knowledge, and operating at a more applied level, are genres or traditions (the word *strategy* is more suited to quantitative research) that provide specific direction regarding research design and research methods. These vary depending on ideology and theory, focus of interest, degree of interaction between researcher and participants, and participants' role in the research. It is important to acknowledge that traditions or genres are not always wholly separate, however, and may overlap. Moreover, to complicate matters, each tradition is not necessarily an agreed-upon "whole," often encompassing numerous and diverse strands. Although all of qualitative research holds a number of characteristics and assumptions in common, there are variations in how a qualitative study might be designed and what the intent of the study might be. Each qualitative tradition and each individual researcher has ways of defining a research topic; critically engaging the literature on that topic; identifying significant research problems; designing the study; and collecting, analyzing, and presenting the data so that it will be most relevant and meaningful. Just as the choice of research approach is directly tied to and must be aligned with the research problem, purpose, and research questions, the same applies to the choice of qualitative tradition or genre. The concept of alignment is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Following is a descriptive and critical overview of some of the most current qualitative traditions or genres. As you read further, you will notice that the primary differences lie essentially in the particularities of the philosophical and methodological underpinnings, the social context that is examined, the data collection methods, the unit of analysis, data analysis strategies, and modes of presentation. While not all qualitative researchers aim for social justice explicitly—some being focused on simply describing a phenomenon or helping to create *verstehen* (deep understanding) of an unexplored or underexplored situation—there is an increasing tendency for qualitative researchers to ask themselves what will be the outcome of their research in terms of making some impact on a larger social purpose. As such, you will notice a strong activist agenda among the different traditions or genres. The overviews that follow are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, the intent is to provide a succinct description of each tradition or genre in terms of methodology, philosophical underpinnings and application (including social action or activist potential), methods (data collection, analysis, and presentation), and critique (strengths and potential limitations). There are some excellent texts that cover qualitative traditions or genres in great detail, and it is recommended that once you are familiar with the basic tenets of each of these and have a clearer idea of your study's research design, you seek and explore more comprehensive literature on your tradition or genre of choice. We refer you to an excellent selection of additional literature provided by Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* (2016, pp. 33–40)

Case Study

Overview of Methodology

Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the richness and complexity of a bounded social phenomenon (or multiple phenomena), be this a social unit or system such as a program, event, institution, organization, or community (Lichtman, 2014; Stake, 1995, 2005; Yin, 2018). Case study is employed across disciplines, including education, health care, social work, history, sociology, management studies, and organizational studies. The purpose is to generate understanding and deep insights to inform professional practice, policy development, and community or social action. Case study is both a methodology and an object of study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yin (2018) refers to the "foundational trilogy" in that case study *research* refers to the mode of inquiry, or genre; case *studies* refers to the method of inquiry, or research method; while *case(s)* refers to the unit of inquiry in a case study.

Yin (2018) and Stake (1995, 2005), two of the key proponents of case study methodology, use different terms to describe case studies. Yin categorizes case studies as exploratory or descriptive. The former is used to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear single set of outcomes. The latter is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred. Stake identifies case studies as intrinsic or instrumental, and he proposes that a primary distinction in designing case studies is between single and multiple (or collective) case study designs. A single case study may be an instrumental case study (research focuses on an issue or concern in one bounded case) or an intrinsic case study (the focus is on the case itself because the case presents a unique situation). A multiple case study design is used when a researcher seeks to determine the prevalence or frequency of a particular phenomenon. This approach is useful when cases are used for purposes of a cross-case analysis in order to compare, contrast, and synthesize perspectives regarding the same issue. The focus is on the analysis of diverse cases to determine how these confirm the findings within or between cases, or call the findings into question. Selecting a case (or cases) requires that the researcher establish a rationale for a purposeful sampling strategy and clear indications regarding the boundaries of the case (or cases).

Philosophical Underpinnings and Application

Since case study methodology is a broad definition of a choice of research focus, it can be used with numerous methods and accompanying philosophical positions (Mills & Birks, 2014). Recent trends indicate that case study methodology has developed along two very broad, distinct paths (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). One pathway aligns with interpretive constructivist philosophy, with the goal of describing and explaining how everyday practices in specific places are connected to larger structures and processes. The second pathway is a critical orientation, which follows the lines of critical theory. A key assumption of this latter approach is the application of explanations that contribute to understanding beyond the case at hand, thereby looking for underlying mechanisms, conditions, and capacities that might be evidence of contributory factors. A central consideration in case study methodology is to ensure that the researcher's selected methods are aligned with his or her particular ontological and epistemological beliefs.

Methods

Typically, case study researchers study current, real-life cases that are in progress so that they can gather accurate information that is not lost by time. As an exploratory form of inquiry, case study affords significant interaction with research participants, providing an in-depth picture of the unit of study. Research is extensive, draws on multiple methods of data collection, and involves multiple data sources. Triangulation is critical in attempting to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and adds rigor, breadth, and depth to the study and provides corroborative evidence of the data obtained. In selecting the set of data collection methods, it is important that the researcher take into account the alignment between research questions and the type of data that is needed to address those questions. Each data source is one piece of the "puzzle," with each piece contributing to the researcher's understanding of the whole phenomenon. This convergence adds strength to the findings as the various strands of data are woven together holistically to promote a deeper understanding of the case.

Analysis of data can be holistic or embedded—that is, dealing with the whole or parts of the case (Yin, 2018). When multiple cases are examined, the typical analytic strategy is to provide detailed description of themes within each case (within-case analysis), followed by thematic analysis across cases (cross-case analysis), providing insights regarding how individual cases are comparable along important dimensions to warrant any presumed common findings between them. The challenge is to identify and address all plausible rival explanations to support the overall findings (Yin, 2018). Research culminates in the production of a detailed description of a setting and its participants, accompanied by an analysis of the data for themes, patterns, and issues (Stake, 1995, 2005; Yin, 2018). In addition to thick, rich description, the researcher's interpretations, conclusions, recommendations, and personal reflection contribute to the reader's overall understanding of the case study. Analysis of findings should show that the researcher has attended to all the evidence, should address the most significant aspects of the case, should demonstrate familiarity with the prevailing thinking and discourse about the topic, and should address all plausible rival explanations as a core aspect of interpreting the study's findings.

Thematic analysis is not for purposes of generalizing beyond the case but rather for rich description of the case in order to understand the complexity thereof. A caveat of case study research is that the goal is not generalizability but rather *transferability*—that is, how (if at all) and in what ways understanding and knowledge can be applied in similar contexts and settings. In case study research, the academic discussion has become redirected toward *phronesis* (practical contextualized knowledge that is responsive to its environment)—that is, how and in what ways understanding and knowledge can be applied in other similar contexts, settings, and conditions (Bloomberg, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher attempts to address the issue of transferability by way of thick, rich description that will provide the basis for a case or cases to have relevance and potential application with regard a broader context.

Critique: Strengths and Limitations

Yin (2018) outlines the criteria for an exemplary case study, and these illustrate the strengths of this qualitative genre: These criteria include the study's *significance* (A single case study is chosen because it was a revelatory case —that is, one that discovers and reflects some real-world situation. A critical case is chosen because of the desire to compare rival propositions that reflect a debate in the literature or differences in beliefs or perspectives. A longitudinal case seeks to examine the same single case at two or more different points in time. The desired time intervals would presumably reflect the anticipated stages at which the changes would most likely reveal themselves, or alternatively, the researcher may be interested in capturing trends over time); the study's *completeness* (First, the researcher provides clear attention to the boundaries—that is, the distinction between the phenomenon being studied and its context; and second, a case study should convincingly demonstrate that the researcher has made an exhaustive effort to collect all relevant evidence related to the phenomenon, including any rival explanations); the study's *consideration of alternative perspectives* (To adequately represent different perspectives, a researcher should seek alternatives that challenge the assumptions of the case or that portray insightful perspectives, including different cultural views, theories, and variations among research participants. To the extent possible, an exemplary case study will anticipate possible alternative or rival explanations and will illustrate how these are either accepted or rejected in light of the study's findings); and the study's *illustration of sufficient evidence* (A case study should present all relevant evidence, including a data trail depicting how the research was conducted and how data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted. With regard to a multiple case study design, the researcher should illustrate that the cross-case conclusions have not been biased in any way by undue attention to any of the individual cases involved).

As with any other methodology or method, case study is not itself an inherently flawed approach. Rather, it is when the methodology or method used is an inappropriate fit for the research purpose and research questions. One caveat is that case studies may not have clear beginning and end points, and deciding on boundaries that adequately surround the case can be challenging. Another potential vulnerability is that the case may turn out not to be the case it was thought to be at the outset, and as Yin (2018) recommends, single case designs particularly require careful investigation in order to minimize the chances of misrepresentation and to maximize the access needed to collect data.

Ethnography

Overview of Methodology

Ethnography, as both a method and a product, has multiple intellectual traditions located in diverse disciplines. The word ethnography literally means "writing about people." Ethnography is a form of qualitative research focused on discovering and describing the culture of a group of people and learning what it is like to be a member of the group from the perspectives of the members themselves. Individuals become members of a culture through a socialization process. Culture encompasses the shared attitudes, values, norms, practices, patterns of interaction, perspectives, material objects and artifacts, rituals, and language that members of a group use in understanding their world and relating to others. Emerging from the basic principles of ethnography, Internet ethnography, or virtual ethnography, is an emerging method or methodology for conducting qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Philosophical Underpinnings and Application

Rooted in cultural anthropology, ethnography involves extended observations of the group, most often through the researcher as participant observer becoming immersed in the day-to-day lives of the participants. Ethnographers take a range of approaches to observing the social reality depending on their specific discipline and philosophy, and classic ethnography has been enriched by variation of its central principles and practices to include a deeply critical focus. Ethnographers may be interested in social change (critical ethnography) or be focused on studying populations that have been marginalized or overlooked (feminist theory, queer theory, trans theory) or on the study of the cultural past of a group of people in order to uncover cultural roots and whether and how the group has changed over time (ethnohistory). A researcher may also be interested in her or his own personal experience by engaging in extensive self-reflection to explore the cultural and contextual description and analysis of her or his life (autoethnography). What characterizes all of these approaches is the emphasis on interpretation—that is, getting to the very core of the meaning of experience from the perspectives of the research participants.

Methods

The ethnographic researcher studies an entire cultural or social group in its natural setting, closely examining customs and ways of life, with the aim of describing and interpreting cultural patterns of behavior, values, and practices *holistically* (Madden, 2011; Pelto, 2013; Van Maanen, 1988, 1995, 2006). Fieldwork is a cornerstone of ethnography, typically involving the researcher's participation in a community or setting over an extended period of time. To produce a holistic "cultural portrait," the researcher gains access to the group through "gatekeepers" and "key informants." Ethnographers study the meaning of the behavior, interaction, and communication among members of the culture-sharing group. Ethnography relies on extended fieldwork, and data collection and data analysis are concurrent.

Ethnographies, like case studies, are reports of data gathered through multiple methods, typically in-depth interviews and participant observation. In his well-known work *Tales of the Field*, Van Maanen (1988) identifies three different types of ethnographic presentation: the realist tale (displays a realistic account of a culture which is published in a third-person voice), the confessional tale (a highly personalized account that displays the author's power of observation that calls attention to building credible and authentic cultural description), and the impressionist tale (the researcher relates her or his own experiences as an autoethnographic account. The tale is told through the chronology of events in the research process, drawing attention not only to the culture under study but also to the experiences that were integral to the cultural description and interpretation). Performance ethnography is another presentational form, involving the staged reenactment of ethnographically derived notes in which culture is represented through performance (including staged production, artwork, dance, storytelling, or film) rather than textually. Much of the work in this vein is aligned with the principles of critical pedagogy.

Geertz (1973) coined the term "thick description" with an emphasis on the need to understand and elaborate the symbolic import of what is observed and systematically documented during fieldwork. This approach added an interpretive element to ethnography in an effort to enhance the quality of ethnographic texts. A reflexive stance therefore becomes imperative so that researchers remain accountable for their positions of authority and their ethical responsibilities relative to representation and interpretation. The goal of analysis is to seek patterns and irregularities, examining data for explanations of the studied phenomenon. Approaches to analysis can include cultural analysis, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, content analysis, and discourse analysis (Mills & Birks, 2014). The final product of analysis is a holistic cultural portrait of the group that incorporates participants' views (*emic*) as well as the researcher's views (*etic*). As a result, the reader learns about the culture-sharing group from the participants themselves as well as from the perspective of the researcher. The final product typically advocates for the needs of the group or suggests changes in society so as to address the needs of the group. Products may include performances, poems, and artworks. Both the process and the outcome of ethnographic research are ways of examining a culture-sharing group as well as the final product of that research.

Critique: Strengths and Limitations

As Creswell and Poth (2018) point out, ethnography poses challenges for the following reasons: The researcher needs grounding in cultural anthropology and familiarity with regard to the meaning of the social-cultural system. Data collection is extensive and requires much time involving prolonged immersion in the field. As a result, ethnography may not be suitable for dissertation research where time frames and deadlines are involved. There is also the possibility that the researcher will "go native"; that is, the researcher will become so immersed in the group and identify with the group and as such be unable to complete the study, or alternatively become compromised by the study. To counteract ethnocentrism, researchers take on emic and etic perspectives, but at the same time they do run the risk of "going native." Because of this fine interplay and potential balance of opposing forces, triangulation of observations and data sources becomes particularly important in ethnographic research. Moreover, critique has been directed toward the Internet as an emerging and ever-changing tool and research site. An advantage of using the Internet for conducting research is that it opens up the possibility of conducting studies in areas or contexts that may otherwise be inaccessible or with individuals who may not be able to participate because of physical barriers or protection issues. This method, however, challenges the assumed rapport-building that characterizes traditional ethnographic approaches in terms of being part of an everyday community and culture. As such, Internet ethnography or virtual ethnography has yet to produce consensus regarding context-specific ethical issues including privacy, identity, authenticity, site permissions, and informed consent.

Phenomenology

Overview of Methodology

Phenomenology may be conceived as a philosophy and a method. The purpose of phenomenological research is to investigate the meaning of the *lived experience* of people to identify the core essence of human experience or phenomena as described by research participants. Phenomenologists are committed to understanding what our experiences in the world are like; experience (*verstehen*) is to be examined as it actually occurs, and on its own terms (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Vagle, 2016; van Manen, 1990, 2016). Rather than study just the variant structures of an experience (the unique part of an individual's experience that varies from person to person), phenomenologists assume that there is some commonality in human experience and seek to understand this commonality, or *essence.* The essence is considered to be universal and is present in particular instances of a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, 2016). Phenomenology does not endeavor to develop a theory to explain the world; rather, the goal is to facilitate deeper insight to help maintain greater contact within the world (Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 1990, 2016).

Philosophical Underpinnings and Application

Rooted in the philosophical perspectives of Husserl (1859–1938) and subsequent philosophical discussions by Heidegger (1889–1976) and Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), phenomenological research involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). In this process, the researcher "brackets" her or his own experiences to understand the participants' experiences (van Manen, 1990, 2016). The notion of bracketing is considered one of the key elements that distinguish Husserlian phenomenology. Heidegger, a pupil of Husserl, moved phenomenology from a descriptive to an interpretive endeavor, focusing on the hermeneutic perspective, which recognizes that human existence is always embedded within a world of meanings. Therefore, phenomenology becomes hermeneutical when its method becomes interpretive rather than purely descriptive (Mills & Birks, 2014).

In contrast to traditional or classical phenomenology (founded by Husserl), a newer type of phenomenological research has developed, referred to as interpretive phenomenological analysis or IPA (Smith et al., 2009). IPA targets how particular people in particular contexts make meaning and interpret their experiences. The focus is on research participants' perspectives on their own experiences rather than attempting to describe their transcendental experience (that is, experiences that cut across all people). IPA therefore critically questions the concept of participants bracketing their demographic, cultural, and personal characteristics.

Methods

Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common, the basic purpose of research being to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (van Manen, 1990). In phenomenological research, the researcher is a writer, as the craft of writing is central to this design. Writing is intricately linked to analysis, as the researcher attempts to capture, by way of in-depth interviews, the essential characteristics of the phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) discusses phenomenological research as a dynamic interplay among various core research activities: First, the researcher focuses on a phenomenon or lived experience that is an "abiding concern" (p. 31). The researcher, in taking on a reflexive stance, reflects on essential themes that constitute the nature of this lived experience. The researcher then writes a description of the phenomenon, maintaining a strong relationship to the topic of inquiry.

Phenomenology is not only description, however; it is also an interpretive process in which the researcher interprets the meaning of the lived experience. As Moustakas (1994) points out, the concept of *epoche* involves bracketing one's own experiences as much as possible to take a fresh perspective vis-à-vis the phenomenon under consideration; however, this state is seldom perfectly achieved. The researcher analyzes the data by searching for *significant statements* related to the phenomenon under study and then derives meanings and themes. Following analysis, the researcher develops a *textural description* of the experiences of participants, as well as a *structural description* of their experiences, to produce a combination of descriptions in order to convey an overall essence of the phenomenon. Finally, the researcher typically employs member checking whereby participants review the researcher's descriptions and interpretations.

Critique: Strengths and Limitations

While phenomenology provides a structured approach toward deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals, there are some critiques of this form of inquiry: Phenomenology requires some understanding of broader philosophical assumptions, and these should be identified and explained by the researcher. Moreover, bracketing personal experiences is difficult, if not impossible, and rather than strive to bracket experiences, the researcher should decide how and in what ways her or his own personal understanding can be introduced into the study and usefully incorporated in the analysis. Quality and rigor have also become key areas of critique of phenomenology, and ongoing scholarly debate ensures that phenomenology as a method continues to develop and that strategies for researchers to ensure rigor and research quality will continue to be refined and enriched.

Grounded Theory

Overview of Methodology

Grounded theory is most appropriately employed in studies where little is known about a phenomenon of interest. The purpose of grounded theory is to inductively generate theory that is grounded in, or emerges from, the data. Theory can be defined as "an explanatory scheme comprising a set of concepts related to each other through logical patterns of connectivity" (Schwandt, 2016). The goal is to move beyond description and to have the researcher generate or discover a theory of a process, an action, or an interaction grounded in the views of the research participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Study participants would all have experienced the process, and the development of theory might explain practice or provide a framework for further research. A core component is that theory development is generated by or "grounded" in data from the field—especially in actions, interactions, and social processes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Theory is not generated a priori (that is, based only on reasoning) but rather is based on the concepts that are generated directly from the data that are collected. In other words, theory is inductively derived or generated.

Philosophical Underpinnings and Application

Grounded theory is an overall approach to inquiry with the purpose of generating theories that explain interactions and/or settings of interest. In its original conception, grounded theory sought to build explanations of social phenomena by working backward—from data to theory. As such, this was somewhat revolutionary. Theoretical insights as articulated by the researcher have explanatory power to make a significant contribution in terms of knowledge building as well as potential practical application, and this was the key rationale of the proponents of grounded theory—Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998).

Grounded theory can also be a powerful qualitative method for social justice inquiry and a means of informing policy and practice (Charmaz, 2015, 2016; Charmaz, Thornberg, & Keane, 2018). As a systematic comparative method of constructing theory, grounded theory brings micro and meso analyses to the foreground by illustrating connections to institutionalized macro structures and processes. Such connections, in turn, link individuals and interactions to oppressive social policies and practices. Grounded theory can illustrate how inequities and discriminatory social practices are enacted in different ways. The first is by providing interpretive analyses of how structural inequality is played out in individuals' meanings and actions and how individual agency and actions affect larger social structures. Second, theorizing can generate insights and ideas that challenge or refine current policies and practices, as grounded theory provides tools to discover the ideological roots of implicit meanings, actions, and broad social processes of which people may be unaware. Third, grounded theory offers researchers taking a social justice view an opportunity to gain intimate familiarity to analyze discourses reported on the substantive topic and the actions concerning it—as such, situating and theorizing implicit shared meanings that can expose unrecognized or unacknowledged contradictions (Charmaz et. al., 2018).

Methods

Grounded theory is a "constellation of methods" for collecting, managing, and analyzing qualitative data (Charmaz, 2015). To examine changing experiences over time and to describe the dimensions of experience, research involves multiple recurrent stages of data collection and the refinement of abstract categories of information (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014, 2015, 2016; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Holton & Walsh, 2017). Data analysis starts at the moment of initial contact with the phenomenon being studied and continues throughout the development of a grounded theory. In other words, data collection and data analysis are concurrent and continual activities. Open-ended interviews and observations are used to collect data. Two primary characteristics of grounded theory are the *constant comparative method* of data analysis (i.e., the ongoing comparison of data with emerging categories) and *theoretical sampling* of different groups to maximize the similarities and differences of information. The objective is to generate theory from the data or modify or extend existing theory. The researcher integrates categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the studied process. Through theoretical sampling coupled with theoretical sensitivity, the researcher strives to ensure that the raw data are reflected or grounded in the final theory produced.

Theoretical sensitivity is important on the part of the researcher in order to be able to determine what kind of data need to be collected and what aspects of the data are most important for the grounded theory. Grounded theory data analysis involves three stages that facilitate the development of a theory that is grounded in the data. Researchers typically begin with *open coding*—that is, coding data for major categories of information. This first stage involves examining the data and naming and categorizing discrete elements in the data in order to develop concepts. During the second stage, the researcher develops the concepts into categories and looks for possible relationships among the categories. This involves *axial coding*—that is, identification of one open coding category as the "core phenomenon." Axial coding gives way to the emergence of *causal conditions* (factors that cause the "core phenomenon"), *strategies* (actions taken in response to the "core phenomenon"), *contextual and intervening conditions* (situational factors that influence the strategies), and *consequences* (outcomes as a result of the strategies). In the third and final stage, the researcher looks for the story line of the theory by reflecting on the data and the findings that were produced during open coding and axial coding, rechecking the theory with the data, and consulting with the published literature for additional ideas in developing the grounded theory and understanding its broader significance. This final process involves *selective coding;* that is, the researcher develops propositions or hypotheses that interrelate the categories or assembles a story line that describes the interrelationships among categories. Analysis is considered to be complete when theoretical saturation occurs—that is, when no new concepts emerge from the data and when the theory has been thoroughly validated with the collected data.

Critique: Strengths and Limitations

Glaser and Strauss (1967) list four characteristics of grounded theory: fit, understanding, generality, and control. First, the theory must fit the data if it is to be useful. Second, the theory must be clearly stated and understandable to all. Third, the theory should display generality in that the scope of the theory and its conceptual level should not be so specific but rather be applicable beyond the original research study. Fourth, if a practitioner uses the theory, she or he will have some control over the phenomenon that is explained by the theory. This would ensure that the application of the theory in everyday practical situations would be relevant and worthwhile.

The theory developed by the researcher is articulated toward the end of the study, and this theory hopefully has explanatory power to make a significant contribution in terms of knowledge building and potential practical application. Critiques of grounded theory include researcher ability to set aside or suspend theoretical ideas so that the analytic substantive theory can emerge. In addition, the researcher faces the difficulty inherent in determining when categories are saturated or when the theory is sufficiently detailed. As with other qualitative traditions or genres, examining researcher positionality is also crucial because the researcher and the researched typically hold differential and unequal positions of power and privilege. Interpretation is inherently political, and so too are our notions of justice and what constitutes social justice inquiry. As such, it is imperative that the researcher engaged in a social justice-oriented grounded theory study be explicit about prior ideas, conceptions and experiences.

Various researchers have attempted to address some of the critiques and limitations of the practice of grounded theory research. Timonen, Foley, and Conlon (2018) explain that because grounded theory has evolved over time to comprise several different variants, researchers new to this methodology often have difficulty in grasping the different strands within it. As such, processes such as theoretical sampling and saturation are frequently misunderstood. To make this methodology more comprehensible and accessible, these authors outline the main tenets of grounded theory, dispel some of the common myths associated with it, and propose some core principles underpinning existing grounded theory approaches that can aid further engagement with the different variants. Charmaz (2015) illustrates how grounded theory has generated innovative ideas since its earliest beginnings. This researcher, one of the field's most established scholars, promotes a constructivist grounded theory approach, explaining that this approach addresses previous criticisms raised about earlier versions of grounded theory as a qualitative methodology being somewhat mechanical and inflexible. Constructivist grounded theory adopts the inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended approach of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original statement (in line with the pragmatist tradition) but highlights the flexibility of the method and resists mechanical applications of it.

Narrative Inquiry

Overview of Methodology

Narrative is regarded as "the primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful" (Polkinhorne, 1988, p. 1). Narrative research is focused on how individuals assign meaning to their experiences through the stories they tell. Narratives are always interlinked between an individual and her or his social and cultural context. As such, narratives cannot be isolated or looked at independent of context. Narrative research has many forms, incorporates a variety of practices and applications, and is rooted in different social disciplines (Mills & Birks, 2014). To begin, it is important to understand that narrative inquiry as a research genre can be employed successfully in multiple disciplines, and no two narrative studies will look alike. Paramount in any narrative research is the necessity to "think narratively," as narrative inquirers structure a self-narrative through living, telling, retelling, and reliving (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). A biographical study is a form of narrative inquiry in which the researcher records the experiences of another's life. Autobiography is written and recorded by those who are the subjects of the study.

In narrative inquiry, participants tell stories of their lived experiences, and then in relational ways, the researcher inquires into and about these experiences. This approach is essentially the study of life experiences as a *storied phenomenon.* In contrast to phenomenology, where the goal is to describe the essence of the experience of a phenomenon, the narrative researcher works with the participant to discern the individual storied experience through narrative threads, narrative tensions, plotlines, narrative coherences, and/or silences, and then composes a narrative account of the participant's storied experience. Narrative inquirers also inquire into the institutional, social, cultural, familial, and linguistic narratives in which each participant's experiences are embedded and that shape each individual experience.

Philosophical Underpinnings and Application

As researchers and scholars have become increasingly reflective about their work, what has emerged is the distinctiveness of narrative as human activity and the specific ways that narrative inquiry can promote social change (Chase, 2018). Narratives are socially constrained forms of action, socially situated performances, and ways of acting in and making sense of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Wounded storytellers can empower others to tell their stories, giving them "voice." *Testimonios* (Latin American first-person eyewitness accounts narrated by those who are marginalized or exploited and who lack social and political power) can mobilize individuals and even communities against perceived social injustice, repression, and violence (Chase, 2018). Telling the stories of marginalized people can help create a public space requiring others to hear what they might not want to acknowledge or hear. Collective stories can help form the basis of a social movement. As such, narrative inquiry can serve to facilitate and advance a social change agenda.

Methods

The narrative researcher is immersed in the complexity of the multiple layers of stories we as human beings live day to day. As a method, narrative research begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals or cultures, including poetry, play, or performance. Multiple data sources are used, including conversations, field notes, and photographs, among others. Life history is an integral research technique as developed by the Chicago School of Sociology. The information gleaned from the story or stories is then retold or "restoried" by the researcher into a "narrative chronology" in order to provide the meaning of experiences. As Chase (2018) points out, one approach is to make use of paradigmatic reasons including how individuals are enabled or constrained by social resources. Ultimately, the narrative combines views from the participants' lives with those of the researcher's life, culminating in a collaborative narrative (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013; Clandinin, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Daiute, 2014; Kim, 2016). Paramount to all narrative work is the centrality of relationship in the research process and recognition of the sacredness of the stories that participants share and trust within the research environment (Mills & Birks, 2014).

Critique: Strengths and Limitations

It is important to remember that narrative research does not lead to conclusions and certainty. Uncertainty and tension guide the work, and rather than produce conclusive findings, the process offers understanding and meaning. There is an inherent reflexivity in narrative research that demands the attention of the researcher and the participant collaborators as the story emerges and evolves through multiple iterations. Each researcher will bring his or her own epistemological and ontological views to the study, and so multiple challenging issues can potentially arise in collecting, analyzing, and telling individual stories, not least of all being how the researcher is positioned within the narrative. As Pinnagar and Daynes (2007) ask: Who owns the story? Who has the right to tell it? Who can change it? Whose version is convincing? What happens when narratives compete? As a community, what do stories do among us?

Action Research

Overview of Methodology

Action research (AR) is a systematic, collaborative, and democratic orientation toward inquiry that seeks effective solutions to complex problems that people confront in their communities and organizations (McNiff, 2018; Mertler, 2017; Stringer, 2014). The research process is iterative, cyclical, and participative in nature and is intended to foster deeper understanding of a given situation informing future action, starting with conceptualizing and particularizing the problem and moving through several interventions and evaluations. Action research studies have direct relevance to improving practice and advocating for change. This type of research is especially valuable to those involved in professional, organizational, educational, and community research, with a focus on engaging stakeholders in collaborative relationships and working on developing localized solutions. Many work settings have embraced action research as a collaborative form of continual organizational learning. There are currently various different strands of action research:

1. Participatory action research (PAR): This approach emphasizes that multiple parties or stakeholders with an interest in the research topic and project must work together as a research team in framing and conducting the AR study, thereby producing knowledge about a shared problem. A key point of PAR is involvement of participants in conduct of the research and its dissemination.
2. Critical action research (CAR): This approach is similar to PAR but places specific emphasis on the political possibilities and ramifications of the research and emphasizes the empowerment of those with little power in their communities and society. The word *critical* signifies the addition of an ideological element to the research, striving for immediate social change by emancipating the oppressed and increasing social justice. CAR studies often include attempts at "consciousness-raising." In the field of education, an early proponent of this approach was Paolo Freire, who attempted to use education to free the disadvantaged from what he saw as oppression through his landmark text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968/1970).
3. Action science (AS): This approach was developed by Argyris and Schon (1978, 1996) with a focus on research in organizations. In contrast to PAR and CAR, the emphasis is on traditional scientific rigor and the attempt to transform an organization into a *learning organization* in which people work and learn together, and grow over time. AS, referred to as the *science of practice,* encourages rigorous experimentation and making theories in use as explicit as possible.
4. Appreciative inquiry (AI): This approach focuses on an organization's members and working with them to achieve a jointly constructed and shared purpose, vision, and goal. Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008) defined AI as

> The cooperative search for the best in people, their organization, and the world around them. It involves the systematic discovery of what gives a system "life" when the system is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. (p. 433)

AI follows four phases: discovery, dream, design, and destiny.

Philosophical Underpinnings and Application

Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), founder of action research, emphasized that theory and practice should be connected, leading to action, specifically social improvement. According to Lewin's change theory (1946), systematic change follows three phases*: unfreezing* (i.e., identifying and removing resisting forces), *changing* (i.e., creating an unbalance of forces so that the driving forces are greater than the resisting forces), and *refreezing* (i.e., reaching a new state of equilibrium). Action research arose too from the ideas and philosophy of John Dewey (1859–1952), one of the classical American pragmatists, who was focused on the *philosophy of experience* and who had great faith in education to improve society. Action research, being about collaborative and democratic practices, with a key focus on influencing and impacting processes of change, makes it essentially political. As McNiff (2018) explains, this means engaging with the politics of research in general, of the social context, of the researcher, and of the potential reader. Participatory action research and critical action research are explicitly ideological and emancipatory, and are intended to critique and radically transform fundamental social structures and processes.

Methods

Action research is typically participatory and collaborative and can employ both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Qualitative methods include observation, interview, and focus group. The researcher's role is that of facilitator who questions, problem-poses, and consults. McNiff (2018) describes action research as "research in action on action for action" (p. 14). The goal is, through systematic questioning and feedback, to open new "communicative spaces" so that people may increase the effectiveness and meaningfulness of their work. Action research encompasses a set of consciously collaborative and democratic strategies for generating knowledge and designing action in which the researcher and other stakeholders work together. The process includes a dynamic and powerful cycle of planning, acting, developing, and reflecting (Mertler, 2017). This cyclical framework enables people to commence on a shared and productive process of inquiry in a stepwise fashion and to build greater detail into procedures as the complexity of issues increases. The cycle is not necessarily linear, however, and the research can start at any phase and cycle through the process multiple times.

Action research is based on the assumption that all stakeholders, those whose lives are affected by the problem under study, should be involved in the research process in order to inform understanding and subsequent action. As such, knowledge production unfolds and proceeds as a collective process, actively engaging people who have previously been the "subjects" of research to collectively investigate and reconcile their own situation. The goal of this work is improvement (AR) or transformation (PAR), and a report is often less important than the *process* that leads to improvement or transformation, including lessons learned and changes considered and/or made. Depending on the interests and needs of participants, a written report may be collaboratively produced, or an oral report or visual display illustrating lessons that were learned or changes accomplished could become the final research product. Reporting, whatever form it takes based on mutual collaboration between researcher and participants, has inherent relevance and meaning with regard to societal improvement, either directly or indirectly.

Critique: Strengths and Limitations

Action research can serve as an ideal mechanism for the advocacy of social justice within educational and societal contexts (McNiff, 2018; Mertler, 2017). This research approach describes the complexity of local situations, integrates theory and practice, stimulates reflective practice, and is committed overall to democratic social change. Moreover, data analysis and interpretation can do more than possibly solving initial problems; it can also support the development of community building necessary for assisting with the long-term implementation of possible solutions to problems, as well as identifying and addressing newly arising problems or issues.

The major limitation of action research is that it can tend to ignore more basic research literature, and as such is not based on a rigorous research design (Schwandt, 2016). This often makes it difficult for institutional review boards to grant approval because multiple people are involved and the researcher cannot always foresee many possible actions because of the study's fluid nature and continual development. Criticisms of action research have also focused on issues of legitimacy, including voice, representation, power, control, and subordination (McNiff, 2018; Stringer, 2014) and misappropriation (McNiff, 2018). A caveat is that the research process can create large amounts of data in need of analysis to provide effective interpretations for the implementation of positive change, and this might not always be clearly understandable to stakeholders in order to gain their input in identifying and supporting possible solutions to the research problem. In defense of the rigor and credibility of action research, Mertler (2017) and McNiff (2018) address the importance of ensuring that the findings not only reflect the perspectives of the researcher but that these are indeed communicated to and shared with the intended audience so that they can be useful and that the necessary action can actually take place.

The Critical Genres

Overview of Methodology

Critical genres are grounded in theories that assume society is structured by class, status, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation in order to maintain the oppression of marginalized groups. A critical approach asks questions about the historical forces that shape societal patterns as well as the fundamental issues and dilemmas of power, positionality, policy, and domination in institutions, including their role in reproducing and reinforcing inequity and social injustice.

Critical approaches are rooted in the assumption that we live and work within a power-laden context. The focus is on the complexities inherent in power relationships and the social, historical, and ideological forces that serve to constrain knowledge building. Critical theorists are wary of notions of absolute truth and dominant ideologies and are concerned with historical inequities produced by rigid views of knowledge. The quest is to uncover dominant points of view guised as universal truths, and to step away from dominant ideologies and create spaces for resistive, counterhegemonic knowledge production that challenges the oppressive status quo.

Narratives are viewed as power-laden discourses developed for the maintenance of dominant ideas or the power of individuals, institutions, or theories. In recognition of the socially constructed nature of the world, meaning rather than knowledge is sought because knowledge is seen as constrained by the discourses that were developed to protect powerful interests. Meanings are recognized as individual creations that require deconstruction and negotiated interpretation. Deconstruction of grand narratives is viewed as an important way of removing their power (Grbich, 2013).

There are two main strands within the broad arena of critical and emancipatory research: The first strand emerged out of theoretical orientations with regard to postmodernism and poststructuralism. The second strand developed from the social justice movements beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, including the civil rights movement, women's liberation, and the gay rights movement. The various approaches within this strand—including a variety of feminist theories and methodologies, critical discourse analysis, critical race theory, queer theory, trans theory, cultural studies, and critical ethnography—all have an activist or social justice component. As explained by Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2017), the use of the term *critical* in critical approaches indicates an interest not only with procedures but, more important, the rationale behind such approaches, as well as draws attention to the very questions that shed light on why researchers make the choices they do.

Philosophical Underpinnings and Application

Critical research is concerned primarily with examining and changing economic, social, racial, cultural, and gendered relations of power and has its theoretical roots in Western critical theory. Critical theorists critique normalized notions of democracy, freedom, opportunity, social structures, and social justice. Drawing on the work of Paolo Freire, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jurgen Habermas, critical theorists denounce systems of power, domination, and positionality and pursue questions of racism, sexism, gender oppression, religious intolerance, and other forms of oppression, denouncing neutrality in scholarship and focusing on "counternarratives" to respond to grand narratives and dominant discourses.

Critical research is typically interdisciplinary, including education, social work, law, sociology, and environmental studies. This research can be exploratory, theoretical, and applied, and can encompass ethnographic, grounded theory, phenomenological, action research, and narrative inquiry methodologies. Critical theorists across all traditions of qualitative inquiry offer a critical pedagogy for social research following in the footsteps of Paolo Freire, turning teachers and students into critical researchers who are committed to social criticism and the empowerment of individuals. Critical theory seeks practical, pragmatic knowledge that is both cultural and structural and is judged by its degree of historical situatedness and its ability to produce praxis or action that facilitates social change (Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg & Monzo, 2018).

Methods

To be authentic, inquiry is seen as contributing to radical change or emancipation from oppressive social structures, either through sustained critique or through direct advocacy and action taken by the researcher in collaboration with participants. The researcher and the researched are not considered separate entities; through interpretation, their constructed meanings become interwoven (Grbich, 2013). Reflexive subjectivity of the researcher is an essential component of data collection and data analysis. Two specific approaches, indigenous research and critical arts-based inquiry, are briefly described next to illustrate the methods involved.

Indigenous research is concerned with indigenous matters, although it may not involve itself with indigenous peoples. This research draws on postcolonial theory and perspectives, and given the empowerment focus, this can be usefully situated within the various strands of participatory action research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As Kovach (2018) points out, "choice of methodology is a political act . . . that moves indigenous research from a dismissive empiricism to that of a socially just relevancy" (p. 215). Storytelling remains relevant in contemporary indigenous communities, and to claim this custom in research, indigenous researchers have encompassed "storying" and "re-storying" as the primary method. Storying is both personal and collective and can be expressed through spoken words, letters, dance, or theater. Indigenous methodologies value experiential and personal stories, including those of the researcher. This research approach is not only concerned with knowledge creation and cocreation but is also about healing and community-building. Because of past exploitation and misrepresentation of indigenous peoples and cultures, indigenous methodologies seek to ensure that re-storying (representation) respects the tenets of indigenous epistemology, remains contextualized within the experiences of indigenous communities, acknowledges the conditions of indigenous societies (including colonialism and resistance), and is accessible to the people and community it seeks to represent (Kovach, 2018).

Critical arts-based inquiry, as another critical genre, situates the artist-as-researcher who is committed to fostering and promoting a democratic and ethical agenda. This approach is well suited to researchers who anticipate experiences of critical resistance and positive social change through inclusive understanding among communities of learners, participants, researchers, and audiences. Arts-based inquiry is a participatory approach that can be used to resist forms of social injustice and inequity through the uses of aesthetics, methods, and practices of literary, performance, and visual arts, including theater, drama, dance, film, collage, video, and photography (Finley, 2018). The approach is imaginative and intertextual, crosses the borders of arts and research, and can be applied to critical race, indigenous, queer, trans, and feminist studies. Finley (2018) explains how activist art as critical performance pedagogy can be used powerfully to address and transform issues of political significance, including exposing oppression, targeting sites of resistance, and engaging community participants in acts of political self-expression and positive social action both locally and globally. The emphasis is on *doing,* and centers on the performance of revolutionary pedagogy. Performance becomes resistance by way of critiquing hegemonic texts that have become privileged stories, told and retold.

Critique: Strengths and Limitations

Viewing qualitative inquiry through a critical lens forces us to rethink taken-for-granted frameworks, methodologies, and politics and advocates for a critical stance that addresses social justice, decolonization, and the politics of research. Maintaining a reflexive approach ensures a critical review of the position of the researcher in the research and how this impacts the processes and outcomes of the research. Critique is often related to representational issues—that is, how the "other" will be represented. As such, research must of necessity be a *dialogic* process, with the subjective lenses that *both* the researcher and research participants bring to the study as part of the context for the findings. Writing up the research responsibly and representing research participants ethically become imperative.

The preceding discussion provides an overview of some of the current critical genres. These genres vary depending on ideology and theory, focus of interest, degree of interaction between researcher and participants, and participants' role in the research. This brief overview cannot do this area of qualitative research justice, however, and so we refer you to an excellent selection of additional literature provided by Marshall and Rossman (2016, pp.

35–40).

Moving Forward With Your Chosen Qualitative Methodology

It should be clear that each qualitative methodology (tradition or genre), within the broader field of qualitative research, is founded on a particular philosophy that influences the type of research design and methods used. As Mills and Birks (2014) put it,

> The position of the researcher is the bridge between philosophy, methodology, and the application of methods. Thus the alignment between the research question, chosen methodology and personal philosophy, and the ability of the researcher to be reflexive in relation to the research is critical to ensure congruence in the study that will be manifested in the products of the research (p. 27).

Having decided on a qualitative research approach, you will proceed to design your study within the framework of one of the methodologies (traditions or genres) of qualitative inquiry. Thus, the components of the design process (e.g., the theoretical framework, research purpose, and methods of data collection and data analysis) will be aligned with and reflect the principles and features that characterize each methodology. Alignment among all components of the dissertation and the different qualitative methodologies is discussed more fully in Chapter 5. Remember that traditions and genres can overlap and intersect, but it is recommended that you understand each one as rigorous in its own right.

An important assumption that underlies qualitative research is that the world is neither stable nor uniform, and therefore, there are many truths. Qualitative data are analyzed inductively, requiring flexibility in the research design—one of the hallmarks of qualitative research. Data analysis often occurs concurrently with data collection. As the data are analyzed, the researcher seeks patterns and common themes. Qualitative research is iterative. That is, there is a continuous movement between data and ideas. Qualitative research reports include detailed descriptions of the study and clearly express the participants' voices. Qualitative research seeks to establish credibility, dependability, and confirmability and is concerned with the issue of transferability; that is, how and in what ways the findings of a particular study, and the knowledge derived therefrom, might apply or be useful in other similar contexts.

With a researchable problem in mind and with a clear idea of what qualitative research involves, you are in a position to think about carrying your ideas further and consolidating these ideas in terms of developing a dissertation proposal.

Following are some recommended resources that you might consider perusing regarding qualitative research in general, and the various qualitative methodologies (traditions or genres) in particular. This annotated bibliography includes cutting-edge texts as well as some of the seminal works in the field.

Annotated Bibliography

Birks, M., & Mills, J. (2015). *Grounded theory: A practical guide* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This highly practical book introduces the reader to the fundamental concepts of grounded theory, providing a comprehensive description of the strategies and techniques employed in this approach to research. This text contains detailed guidance regarding all aspects of conducting a grounded theory study, including planning and implementing the study, ensuring the study's quality, positioning the researcher in the study, collecting and analyzing data, integrating theory, and presenting findings. There are also useful discussions around evaluation and application of grounded theory, as well as situating grounded theory within the context of current debates in the field. Included are practical case examples with sets of critical questions to help the reader come to grips with the very process of grounded theory and its component parts, and the book is therefore an ideal introduction for students or researchers looking to use grounded theory in their analysis for the first time.

Bochner, A. P., & Ellis, C. (2016). *Evocative autoethnography: Writing lives and telling stories.* New York, NY: Routledge.

This comprehensive text is the first to use evocative ethnography as a methodology and a way of life in the human sciences. The authors, originators of this method, use numerous examples of their own work as well as the work of others to describe how to connect intellectually and emotionally to the lives of readers through the challenging process of representing lived experiences. Written as the story of a fictional workshop, based on many similar sessions led by the authors, this text achieves the following: It describes the history, development, and purpose of evocative storytelling; examines fundamental issues, dilemmas, and responsibilities; illustrates the ways in which ethnography intersects with autoethnography; and provides detailed instruction on becoming a story writer and living a writing life.

Charmaz, K. (2015). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kathy Charmaz's newest edition of her classic text on developing a grounded theory study is an invaluable seminal resource for qualitative scholars, providing a benchmark introduction to doing grounded theory from a constructivist perspective. Charmaz offers a very clear reformulation of grounded theory analysis and explains previous critique, explaining how a constructivist approach addresses inherent limitations of the classic approach. She makes very clear connections to the variety of qualitative data collection and data analysis methods that can be used in a grounded theory study, with a particular focus on in-depth interviewing and document review as a means of gathering rich data. Given the complexity of grounded theory, the discussions around coding practices, memo writing, and theoretical sampling are explicit and clearly articulated. She provides a thorough overview of the steps involved in using data for theorizing and also makes reference to historical and ongoing debates around the place of prior theory. Sections on the place of the literature review in grounded theory, writing the study, and reflecting on the research process are very helpful and shed light on key methodological issues and challenges. Included too is discussion around the legacy of Anselm Strauss, the central figure in the field of grounded theory, and how key tenets of his work continue to impact historical as well as current developments in the field.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

In this revised fourth edition, the authors explore the philosophical underpinnings, guiding assumptions, history, and key elements of five qualitative inquiry approaches: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Various phases of research design inherent in each of the five traditions are compared, from conceptualization to analysis and interpretation. This edition reflects advances within each approach, and as such provides an up-to-date and current account. In a highly accessible manner, the authors compare and contrast the approaches and relate research designs to each of the traditions of inquiry. The coverage of ethics is expanded throughout, and the book includes updated pedagogy, resources, and references. Especially useful are the rich examples from the fields of human services, education, sociology, and psychology; the comprehensive list of additional readings for each of the five traditions; sample exercises to practice specific skills introduced in each chapter; and the comprehensive glossary of definitions of terminology presented by research tradition. This fourth edition is an ideal introduction to the theories, strategies, and practices underpinning qualitative inquiry.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The substantially updated and revised fifth edition of this landmark handbook presents the state-of-the-art theory and practice of the broad field of qualitative inquiry. Representing renowned scholars and researchers, the current text continues the tradition of synthesizing existing literature, defining the current landscape, and making predictions regarding future developments and trends in the field. The book retains some of the classic chapters from previous editions and includes revisions from returning authors to reflect on the current landscape of qualitative inquiry. Additionally, new contributors offer 19 new chapter topics including indigenous methodologies, emergent methodologies in light of new technologies, queer/quare theory, ethnodrama, data and its problematics, triangulation, collaborative inquiry, digital ethnography, the global audit culture, methodologies for cultural and social studies, reframing rigor, thinking with theory, ethics and research regulations, and critical issues for qualitative research. The text includes discussions related to a wide range of methods, expanding the range of data that can be brought to bear on current and pressing social, cultural, and educational issues and concerns.

Holton, J. A., & Walsh, I. (2017). *Classic grounded theory: Applications with qualitative and quantitative data.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book explains the emergence of classic grounded theory, breaking down the original groundbreaking work of Barney Glaser in ways that are useful for both scholars and practitioners. Drawing on conversations with Barney Glaser, as well as the experience of novice researchers who have participated in grounded theory troubleshooting seminars, the book provides step-by-step guidance on undertaking a research study that remains true to the classic practice paradigm. Part One provides an overview of classic grounded theory, including its purpose, foundational pillars, and common sources of confusion. Part Two focuses on grounded theory in practice, including finding data, analyzing data, and shaping theory. The focus of Part Three is on writing conventions and evaluating classic grounded theory, including preparing publications and evaluating grounded theory studies. Throughout, there is a sharp focus on both methodological and ethical issues. Each chapter includes a short quiz to test knowledge, as well as useful suggestions for further reading.

Kim, J. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry: The crafting and analysis of stories as research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This comprehensive, thought-provoking review of narrative inquiry in the social and human sciences guides readers through the entire narrative inquiry process—from locating narrative inquiry in the interdisciplinary context through the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings to narrative research design, data collection (excavating stories), data analysis and interpretation, and theorizing narrative meaning. Six extracts from exemplary studies, together with questions for discussion, are provided to show how to put theory into practice. Rich in stories from the author's own research endeavors and incorporating chapter-opening vignettes that illustrate a graduate student's research dilemma, the book not only accompanies readers through the complex process of narrative inquiry with ample examples but also helps raise their consciousness about what it means to be a qualitative researcher, and a narrative inquirer in particular. This text offers the historical and philosophical context for narrative research, ample methodological instruction, and robust examples, making this a truly comprehensive text. Particularly impressive is the attention to the different genres of narrative, including arts-based and visual-based. Extremely well researched and referenced, this text addresses sophisticated theoretical underpinnings of narrative research, including the rationales and justifications for engaging in both storytelling and the analysis of stories. It also explores a wide variety of helpful strategies for interviewing, fieldwork, and writing. At the same time, it grounds and humanizes its sophisticated scholarship through an inviting, conversational style replete with personal anecdotes, while its many concrete examples of research practice in action further enhance its usefulness for those interested in this rapidly maturing inquiry approach.

McNiff, J. (2018). *Action research: All you need to know* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This is a comprehensive guide to doing action research and becoming a self-reflective action research practitioner and researcher, specifically at the doctoral level. The text provides myriad ideas and frameworks to understand the concepts and processes of action research, combined with a practical workbook that offers guidance through the practicalities and complexities of conducting action research in different contexts. Included in this text are discussions around the "why" of action research, the values-base of action research, the responsibilities of practitioner-researchers in terms of engaging with the literature and contributing significantly to the knowledge base, monitoring research practices and gathering data, establishing the legitimacy of knowledge claims, and representing and communicating knowledge by way of the dissertation report. Not only is this a how-to book, but also it shows what action research means to different people in different research settings and tries to illustrate how all aspects of research and writing can be interwoven into a seamless communicative whole where each informs and strengthens the other. The author claims to be especially interested in the politics of writing, how writing can be used intellectually as a means of rethinking one's ideas and politically as a means of self-empowerment. Included throughout are excerpts taken from action research projects in a wide range of settings and exercises to help students develop successful written accounts of their research process.

Mertler, C. A. (2017). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This is a comprehensive and practical guide to action research for the practicing educator. The text introduces the process of conducting an action research project, providing educators with the necessary knowledge and skills to begin thinking about a research design and meaningful and impactful ways of communicating research findings to relevant stakeholders and interested parties. This latest edition offers practical, comprehensive, and detailed guidance with regard to all the processes, methods, and procedures of conducting education-based action research—as such, bringing material vividly to life. This edition adds enhanced coverage of rigor and ethics in action research, qualitative data analysis techniques, means of establishing quality of both qualitative and quantitative data, and multiple strategies for writing up an action plan, as well as strengthened pedagogical features including social justice advocacy as an important application of action research. The appendices contain useful action research developmental templates, including ways to develop a research plan, planning for data collection, planning for data analysis, action planning, and professional critical reflection exercises that should be integrated at all stages of the research process. The book's broad, balanced coverage makes it an ideal resource for those in the educational field interested in action research as a participatory and collaborative approach toward inquiry, including teachers, administrators, lay leaders, counselors, and intervention specialists.

Pelto, P. J. (2013). *Applied ethnography: Guidelines for field research.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

This comprehensive and engaging guide to applied research distills the expertise of the distinguished ethnographer and methodologist Pertti Pelto over his acclaimed 50-year career in the field. Having written the first major text promoting mixed qualitative and quantitative methods in applied ethnography (*Anthropological Research: The Structure of Inquiry,* 1970), Pelto synthesizes decades of innovation, including examples from around the world to illustrate how specific methods yield ways to address social issues and problems. Ideal for both researchers and students, this comprehensive text covers the key topics and skills required: gaining entry; recording and organizing field data; integrating qualitative and quantitative methods; building and training research teams; short and long-term ethnographic approaches; writing up research findings; assessment and evaluation of ethnographic studies, non-Western perspectives on research; and more.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This classic text is a concise and very readable guide to case study methodology. Unique in his approach and style, Stake draws from naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, and biographic methods to present a disciplined, qualitative exploration of case study methods. In his exploration, Stake uses and annotates an actual case to demonstrate how to address some of the major issues involved in case study research, including how to select the case (or cases) that will maximize learning, how to generalize what is learned from one case to another, and how to interpret what is learned from a case study. Uniquely, this book legitimizes direct interpretation as a case research method. It covers such topics as the differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches to case study, data-gathering methods and triangulation of methods, analyzing qualitative data (coding, sorting, and pattern analysis), the roles of the researcher, and ways of reporting a case study. Also provided are end-of-chapter "workshops" that help students focus on new concepts. This text contains a useful bibliography of references and a glossary index. Of particular interest are Chapter 6, which covers the researcher with regard to the researcher as teacher, evaluator, advocate, and more; Chapter 7, which addresses research validity in qualitative research in connection with triangulation and presents triangulation protocols as one solution to increasing the validity of case studies; and Chapter 8, which provides the reader with useful ways in which to organize and report case findings. Because of its engaging style, wellspring of examples, suggestions, and practical tips, this book is well suited to researchers seeking to more fully understand the case study approach as perceived by one of the seminal leaders in case study work. This text can also serve as a very short introductory manual to qualitative research in general.

Swaminathan, R., & Mulvihill, T. M. (2017). *Critical approaches to questions in qualitative research.* New York, NY: Routledge.

The authors of this text conceptualize questions as a tool that can stimulate different types of thinking. Asking good questions is at the very heart of research, critical thinking, and problem solving. Learning how to formulate questions that examine the power relations between the researcher and participants is at the heart of critical approaches. This book provides a comprehensive overview and treatment of critical and humanistic approaches to key questions in qualitative research, and also examines questions as tools for strategic thinking and decision making at all stages of the qualitative research process across qualitative traditions including phenomenology, ethnography, life history, feminist research, and participatory action research. The book illustrates the ways in which different research questions necessitate different methodological choices, framing questions for research and interviewing, and to guide the data analysis and writing processes. The implication is that creating more effective questions and formulating questions to guide reflexivity will serve to focus more closely on power and privilege, acknowledge diverse ways of thinking and knowing, and confront prevailing assumptions and therefore uncover and dismantle hegemonic omissions and invisibilities that promote the status quo. Using examples from research and teaching, this book situates constructing and formulating questions and critique as a critical component of qualitative research.

Tight, M. (2017). *Understanding case study research: Small-scale research with meaning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This text provides a comprehensive and reader-friendly guide to the nature and use of case study research, and is designed primarily for beginning doctoral students. The book takes as its central position that case studies are *small-scale research with meaning.* Grounded in both theory and practice, the book sets out not only the key debates and ethical issues surrounding case study research but also focuses specifically on the work of others and how one can understand, use, and write about secondary data as the basis for one's own research project. The author provides tips, examples, and explanation regarding real-world case studies from the social sciences and other disciplines, thereby illustrating the kinds of research to which case studies can be applied. There is a strong focus throughout on the advantages and disadvantages of using case studies, the meaning and value of case study research, and the use of case studies in different disciplines and research designs. Chapters include the value of case study; case studies in mixed/combined research designs; learning from case study; selection, context, and theory in case study; method, analysis, and reporting in case study; and the future of case study research.

Vagle, M. D. (2016). *Crafting phenomenological research.* New York, NY: Routledge.

This is an accessible, concise introduction to phenomenological research in the fields of education and the social sciences. The author outlines the key principles for conducting this research from leading contemporary practitioners. He explains the genealogy of phenomenological theories and also illustrates practical applicability—that is, how these theories permeate a life and create a new way of being with the world. The book introduces postintentional phenomenology, which incorporates elements of poststructural thinking into traditional methods.

The book is replete with exercises for students, case studies, resources for further research, and illustrative examples of completed phenomenological studies. This is a critical and contemporary examination of phenomenological research for the 21st century.

van Manen, M. (2016). *Phenomenology of practice.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Max van Manen offers an extensive exploration of phenomenological traditions and methods for the human sciences. This is his first comprehensive statement on phenomenological thought and research in over a decade. Phenomenology of practice refers to the meaning and practice of phenomenology in professional contexts including education, psychology, and health care. It also applies to the practice of phenomenological methods in contexts of everyday living. Van Manen presents a description of key phenomenological ideas as they have evolved over the past century and thoughtfully addresses the methodological issues pertaining to reflection, empirical methods, and writing. This comprehensive work will be of interest to all those concerned with the interrelationship between being and acting in human sciences research and in everyday life.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and application: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This landmark text on case study methodology, revised and updated from the original publication, offers comprehensive coverage of case study as a rigorous research method and how it is applied in practice. At the outset, the author provides an overall graphic of the entire case study research process. In each of the succeeding chapters, each step is clearly and thoroughly explained, from design to collecting, analyzing, and reporting findings. The text highlights research features of numerous published exemplars, providing methodological insights to illustrate similarities between case studies and other social science methods. Recognized as one of the most cited methodology texts in the social sciences, this latest edition offers a portal to the world of case study research, covering all basic and advanced knowledge for conducting case study research, and is filled with tips and strategies on how to specifically address multilayered cases. With the integration of 11 new applications, this book provides access to exemplary case studies drawn from a wide variety of academic and applied fields. Emphasis is placed on how to use plausible rival explanations to bolster case study quality and ways to synthesize findings across cases in multiple case study research. Also included is a comprehensive glossary of terms directly related to case study research. This book is distinctive in that it presents the breadth of case study research and its scholarly heritage at a detailed yet practical level.

4 Developing Your Research Proposal

Chapter 4 Objectives

- Explain the logic and reasoning behind developing a sound and comprehensive research proposal, including content and process.
- Provide an in-depth understanding of the content of a proposal so that students can make direct application to their own research.
- Provide an overview of each of the sections that constitute a three-part proposal and explain how these parts will ultimately be incorporated in the dissertation.
- Offer a comprehensive set of guidelines regarding academic writing skills.
- Clarify expectations and issues regarding academic integrity.
- Provide a brief overview of guidelines regarding institutional review board (IRB) certification and approval.

Overview

A completed proposal is the point at which you present and justify your research ideas to gain approval from a faculty committee to proceed with your study. Once your proposal has been approved, you are ready to embark on the research. Holding the proposal meeting represents a vital step in the dissertation process. At this meeting, you and your committee will discuss your proposed study relative to its scope, significance, design, and instrumentation. You also agree on expectations and procedures for the study's duration. Approval of the proposal follows a specific format and approval process, which can differ among institutions, and doctoral students need to clarify this with their chairpersons early on in the dissertation journey. While confirmed approval of the proposal to proceed with the study is always required, some universities require a formal defense of the proposal, but many do not.

As Marshall and Rossman (2016) point out, when writing a proposal for a qualitative research study, three interrelated concerns need to be addressed: "do-ability" (that is, considerations of feasibility), "should-do-ability" (that is, consideration of potential significance and ethics), and "want-to do-ability" (that is, considerations of sustained and sustaining interest). In essence, a well-planned and logical proposal should indicate (a) whether the research design is clearly explained, credible, and achievable; (b) why others should be interested in the research; and (c) whether you as the researcher are capable and willing to conduct the proposed research.

The proposal is a well-thought-out written action plan that identifies (a) a narrowly defined and clearly written problem statement; (b) a purpose statement that describes how the problem will be addressed; (c) research questions that are tied to the purpose and when answered, will shed light on the problem; (d) a review of the literature and relevant research to determine what is already known about the topic; and (e) data collection and data analysis methods. Rather than merely describe specifications of what you will do, a qualitative proposal should present a clear argument that explains and justifies the logic of your study. In effect, a dissertation proposal is a "working document" on the way to the production of a dissertation. Although a proposal is mandatory, it also is the means to obtain feedback from advisors before implementing your study, and this feedback is usually useful in improving the proposed study. Typically, you will write multiple drafts of your proposal. Based on the feedback you receive, you will continue to work toward an increasingly more integrated presentation of the different components guiding the proposed study.

The approved proposal describes a study that, if conducted competently and completely, should provide the basis for an extensive research report (the dissertation) that will meet all the standards of acceptability. However, remember that design flexibility is one of the hallmarks of qualitative research. Although you are expected to make a convincing and persuasive case for the research in the proposal, and while the proposal is a contractual document, it is also a working document—a preliminary and evolving outline of the research plan. Therefore, as the research progresses, you should remain open to the possibility that some changes or modifications will, in all likelihood, have to be made along the way.

Proposal Components

At the outset, please note that while most institutions will approach the proposal and dissertation in common ways, at the same time there are differences in terms of the organization and presentation, and distinct differences in terms of what and how qualitative language and terminology are used. This book presents information as guidelines that are meant to be flexible per institutional expectations and requirements and are subject to modification depending on your institution, department, and program.

Some universities make specific demands regarding the format of proposals, whereas others provide more general guidelines for form and content. You will no doubt have to attend carefully to the variations that reflect the expectations and requirements of your particular institution. The chapters in Part II of this book provide more elaboration on each of these sections. Note, too, that proposals are written in the future tense because they are proposing research that has not yet taken place. Once you have carried out your study and proceeded to write up your dissertation, be sure to change your writing to the past tense.

Introduction to the Study

The introduction includes the context or background for your study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, your research questions, the research approach, researcher assumptions and expertise, significance of and rationale for the study, and explanation of key terminology. All of these components are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6. The introductory section serves three major purposes. First, it orients your readers by providing them with the context leading to the problem that you are addressing and the overall purpose of your inquiry. Second, it identifies your research questions and the research approach you are adopting. Third, it begins to frame the study by explaining what has led you to focus on your topic, conveying a personal orientation as well as a more general sense of the rationale and significance of the study. In summary, the introduction sets the stage for explaining and justifying the research. It should draw readers into your inquiry while orienting them to its nature and purpose.

Literature Review

Developing a scholarly literature review utilizing academic writing is a vital component of your research process and of your dissertation. The literature review identifies what is already known about your topic and research problem. Literature is reviewed to identify other relevant research so that you can situate your work within the current body of literature, as well as draw from existing literature to inform your study. The literature review helps develop the argument for your study by showing how your study is part of a broader conversation. In order for a literature review to support your research, you will need to examine and articulate the various aspects of relevant peer-reviewed literature in an integrated and critical way, making central connections and asking the kinds of questions that will shed new light on key issues related to your study.

Following the review, you will present a theoretical or conceptual framework, which is designed to guide your study and situate it within its appropriate theoretical, conceptual, and practical contexts. Conceptualization and development of this framework is an evolving, iterative, and reflexive process that integrates all aspects of the study in an explicit and transparent way. The categories of this framework are tied directly to the research questions. These are the same categories under which your data are sorted. The conceptual framework is not an abstract model. It is, in fact, a working tool. These categories continue to evolve and become further refined as data emerge.

To establish a solid framework for doctoral study, you are required to discuss the theory (or theories) or concept that support each of the presented constructs in your aligned problem and purpose statements and research questions. As a doctoral-level candidate, you are expected to include a cohesive, meaningful, and comprehensive conceptual framework in your dissertation proposal. The proposal should include an overview of the broad conceptual and/or theoretical area under which the research falls and discuss how the proposed research fits within the larger body of research in the field. Discussion specifically includes important issues, perspectives, and if appropriate, controversies and any theoretical tensions in the field. Your discussion should reflect knowledge and familiarity with both historical and current literature. Once a draft of your conceptual framework section is written, the next step is to ask yourself several important questions:

1. Is the theoretical or conceptual material relevant to my topic?
2. Are the seminal and contemporary theoretical or conceptual sources appropriately described, supported, and cited?
3. Does the section clearly reflect consideration of my proposed study's theoretical or conceptual assumptions and principles? Have I considered these assumptions and principles from several angles?
4. Is there any theoretical controversy or problematic issue that I may have missed or not adequately discussed?
5. Is the theoretical or conceptual framework presented in a cohesive, integrated, and understandable way?

When the answer to each of these questions is yes, it is likely that the framework for the proposed study is appropriate and comprehensive. If the answer is no to any of the questions, you will need to rework this section of your proposal to address any limitations. The theoretical or conceptual framework is, in our experience, one of the most misunderstood pieces in the dissertation puzzle and is a source of anxiety and frustration for many. The expectations and requirements pertaining to your literature review, and the development of an appropriate theoretical or conceptual framework, are discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

Methodology

The methodology section of the proposal helps further develop the argument for your study by showing how and in what ways you will go about conducting your study. This section includes an overview of the research design, information needed and sources of data, a proposed research sample, plans and methods for data collection and data analysis, and a rationale for the methods to be used. The strategies you intend to employ for both collecting and analyzing data are determined by the particular qualitative methodology (tradition or genre) that you have adopted for the study; thus, in your discussion, you need to demonstrate these connections in order to establish methodological congruence. In addition, you will need to explain how you intend to deal with issues of trustworthiness. This includes discussion around credibility (which parallels validity in quantitative research), dependability (which parallels reliability in quantitative research), confirmability (which parallels objectivity in quantitative research), and transferability (which parallels generalizability in quantitative research). You will also need to address any anticipated ethical issues and your plans for dealing with these, including dissemination and policy relevance as applicable, explanation regarding how you intend to communicate your findings, as well as limitations and delimitations, and some plans for addressing these issues.

Although research proposals do not necessitate the collection of data, it is recommended that you include in your proposal intentions to conduct any pilot studies, which will constitute preliminary findings in advance of your actual research. A pilot study or pilot project is a small-scale preliminary study conducted in order to evaluate feasibility (time, cost, or any potential adverse events) in an attempt to improve upon the study design *prior* to the actual study being conducted. As Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2013) point out, the pilot study is a useful basis for making some initial decisions in designing research. Remember, pilot studies that involve human participants will require *the same scrutiny* as full-scale research projects and must be submitted for IRB review and approval. It is important to remember, therefore, that pilot studies, if included in the proposal, will only be conducted *after* the proposal has been approved and IRB permission secured. Details regarding IRB protocol and requirements are discussed further on in this chapter. Please note that, in contrast to pilot studies, field tests involve asking peers or colleagues for feedback and input regarding a proposed research instrument or tool while you are still developing the study and do not require IRB approval, as they do not actually involve collecting data.

Additional Elements

In addition to the three parts of the proposal outlined previously, we recommend the inclusion of a clear title, a tentative chapter outline for the dissertation, and a detailed projected timetable for your research. Both of the latter elements illustrate that you are able to plan and think ahead. The proposed chapter outline indicates logic, structure, and clarity. The timeline will convince the reader that you have given serious thought to the tasks involved and the time needed to complete each task. The timeline will help the reader (and you) judge the feasibility of the proposed study and may suggest implications for logistics and practicality that might not be immediately apparent in the body of the proposal. In addition, you need to attach as appendices all necessary and relevant information, such as a copy of IRB (or similar body) approval for your proposed study, tailored consent forms with a clear outline of the steps you will take to protect research participants, projected instruments and forms to be used in pilot studies, projected coding schemes and projected matrices, and any other appropriate documents.

Of course, proper use of references and citations is necessary, too. It is important to note that citations from the literature constitute the beginning of a more comprehensive list of references that is continuously being developed as you proceed through each chapter and will culminate in a final set of references at the end of the dissertation. Attention to updating your list of references throughout your study is indeed a critical discipline in carrying out research. This task can be accomplished manually, but should you prefer, there are also software programs that can assist in creating a list of bibliographic references including EndNote (www.endnote.com), ProCite (www.procite.com), and RefWorks (www.refworks.com). These programs can be thought of as an online filing cabinet and can be used to store citation information and format bibliographies in American Psychological Association (APA) style.

A proposal requires a logical structure. The conceptual and methodological parts of the proposal need to make sense in relation to one another, and the writing must be clear and concise. You need to think carefully about the relationship between the various parts of your proposal and how they are aligned. This keen sense of interrelatedness not only provides your readers with a cohesive picture of the proposed project but also helps you, as the researcher and writer, to conceptualize the entire process involved.

It is important to point out that this understanding of structural interrelationship, while implying clear definition and cohesiveness, does not necessitate a rigid framework. It is vital that your proposal preserves the design flexibility that is characteristic of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers need to remain flexible and attuned to emergent data. In this regard, you should expect that, before it evolves toward its final form, your proposal will most likely undergo many drafts as you refine your thinking. The thinking, writing, and rewriting involved in developing a sound proposal will help you to develop a logic and a plan that will continue to guide and direct your research. As such, the time and energy spent in writing a clear and persuasive proposal that is carefully explained, theoretically sound, methodologically thoughtful, and practically grounded will reap rewards throughout the dissertation endeavor.

You may have heard the term *elevator speech.* This refers to your ability to clearly and concisely answer the question "What is your study about?" If somebody asks you this, for example in an elevator, you would not have very long to explain the essence or gist of your study. This is where you have to be crystal clear about your research problem and purpose statement, as these convey the study's context, rationale, goals, and objectives. Preparing this speech at the proposal stage also provides you with clarity about what it is you are seeking to achieve with your study and reinforces the study's rationale and significance.

Guidelines for Academic Writing

A dissertation is the combination of performing research and writing about your research to describe and explain it. As a researcher and writer, knowing how to best express your ideas in written form to convey them to the reader becomes an essential skill. The impact of any research is likely to be enhanced if you are able to write well about your work. The dissertation requires a high level of scholarly writing. Although not everyone enjoys scholarly writing, nor is everyone good at it, you have to get into the mode of writing for a particular audience—the academic community. Academic or scholarly writing is, in essence, writing that is clear, concise, precise, and bold. Above all, good writing is a function of good thinking.

Clarity, Coherence, and Cohesiveness

Whatever chapter of your dissertation you are busy with, it is important that you spend time planning not only *what* you will write but also *how* you will write. Creating an outline or "mind map" that traces the path of your argument is one way to begin thinking about this. Creating outlines is an effective way to organize your thinking and sequentially guide your writing. In writing your dissertation, your intention is not only to demonstrate your knowledge of the topic but also to capture the interest of and guide the reader throughout so that she or he understands and can follow your train of thought. To ensure that your paper is user-friendly, aim for clarity and logic:

- In your introductory section, write a paragraph that describes your outline. This paragraph lets readers know where you will take them. A strong introduction as well as a strong conclusion (described further on) will help readers to see the significance of your work.
- Make use of headings and subheadings to provide structure to your writing. These are useful in communicating the key ideas to the reader. Crowding makes reading difficult and unpleasant.
- Resist jargon. Jargon excludes and mystifies the reader. Do not assume that all readers understand specialized language. If you must use a specialized term, be sure to explain it.
- Avoid anthropomorphisms. Anthropomorphism is defined as giving human characteristics to inanimate objects.
- Build coherence through connecting sentences. Every sentence should be a logical sequel to the one that preceded it.
- Use transitions or segues to trace the path of your argument and to guide the reader. Transitions are "bridge sentences" between paragraphs and help make your discussion easy to follow.
- Organize your thoughts in a coherent, well-constructed paragraph. Create paragraphs that contain one main idea only. Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence, followed by supporting sentences that illustrate, elaborate, explain, and clarify your main idea.
- Each paragraph should logically and sequentially lead to the next. Remember to pay particular attention to the last sentence of each paragraph because this is the springboard to the subsequent paragraph.
- Each paragraph must include at least three sentences. If you notice a paragraph that contains fewer than three sentences, incorporate these sentences into an existing paragraph.
- Paragraphs should not be overly long because this overwhelms the reader. If a paragraph is one page or more, break it into two or more paragraphs.
- Make sure that each section and/or chapter ends by summarizing and integrating the main points and themes. A strong and organized summary allows the reader to come away with a clear understanding of what you have written and what will follow.

After writing each paragraph, it is helpful to read it aloud. In this way, you can check for syntax as well as for coherence and flow. In academic writing, it is essential that you are clear and precise. In reviewing your work, ask yourself, "Is what I am reading really what I intended to write? Does it say what I mean it to say?" If a written passage sounds awkward, you might need to add new words, phrases, or sentences to establish clearer connections. You also should watch out for sharp breaks where the reader is left "hanging"; in these cases, you should consider restructuring the sentence or phrase.

In reading aloud, watch for any assumptions and unsupported statements. In these cases, the reader might ask, "Who says so?" You must provide evidence to support what you say. In dissertation writing, you have to get in the habit of writing defensively. In other words, you need to stop after each paragraph and ask yourself, "Have I provoked any questions in the reader's mind?" This step is important because the process in the defense of a qualitative dissertation is one of questioning and challenging any assumptions you may have made. As soon as you provoke questions in the reader's mind, she or he begins to lose confidence in your argument and may even go looking for more questions. That is the last thing you want to happen.

Reading aloud also allows you to check for grammatical errors:

- Make sure that you use complete sentences, not fragmented ones.
- Do not use unwieldy, run-on sentences. Long or complicated sentences force the reader to decide which of the points you are making should be emphasized. Each sentence should contain one thought only. Aim for short, clear, and crisp sentences.
- Check for incorrect use of punctuation, which can affect meaning.
- Be consistent in your tenses.
- Place descriptive words and phrases as close as possible to the words they describe, or they may inadvertently describe the wrong word.
- Be careful not to end a sentence with a preposition (*to, from, with,* etc.).
- Whenever possible, use the active rather than the passive voice. The active voice reduces wordiness and is more direct, giving vitality and force to your writing.
- Look for unnecessary adjectives and delete vague qualifications such as *very.*
- Remember that academic writing is formal writing. As such, slang expressions, colloquialisms, idioms, and casual language are inappropriate.

Format and Style Requirements

An academic research report must consistently follow a selected system for format and style. Format refers to the general pattern of organization and arrangement of the report. Style refers to appropriate writing conventions and includes rules of grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and use of abbreviations and acronyms to be followed in preparing the research report. Most colleges and universities require the use of a specific style that is published in a style manual, and you will need to make inquiries regarding your particular department's recommended style preference. The most frequently used style manuals in the social sciences are included as Appendix D.

There are very specific criteria for formatting the reference entries, including use of capitalization or not, use of plain text or italics or not, specific punctuation, sequence of the entries, spacing, and so on. Regardless of which manual you use, you are expected to adhere to its rules meticulously. Early on in the dissertation process, you should become familiar with your required manual and use it consistently throughout. Mastering the manual's technical nuances early on (including the use of headings, footnotes, tables, and figures) will save you considerable time and effort in the long run. Manuscripts with errors are significantly less likely to be accepted for publication in journals, so attention to detail is very important. The publication manuals provide extensive guidelines and should be referred to as necessary, as you are writing each chapter. Correct APA formatting will take practice, so do not be discouraged.

Be especially careful to follow the manual's guidelines regarding citation of references. It is imperative that all citations be completely accurate. For specific APA reference examples, refer to Chapters 6 and 7 of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). For information about citing references in text, refer to pages 174–179. For information about references, refer to pages 180–224. For electronic resources, see pages 187–192; journal articles, see pages 198–202; books and book chapters, see pages 202–205. The following Internet resource provides valuable information regarding APA style and reference examples: http://www.apastyle.org/manual/supplement/index.aspx.

Especially important is that, from the beginning, you remain vigilant in updating your reference list each time you add a citation. Do not imagine that you will remember to do so later. Searching for "lost" references is time consuming and very frustrating. Some useful pointers regarding references include:

- Create your reference list as you develop each section. As each citation is included in the paper, record the reference in your list.
- The reference list must be accurately alphabetized.
- All references must be complete and accurate and not contain any missing, misspelled, or incorrect details.
- Use the APA Manual or www.apa.org to format each reference correctly. There are very specific criteria for formatting reference entries, including use of capitalization, plain text or italics, sequence of entries, spacing, and so on. Also note how information must be included, such as multiple authors, volumes of journal articles, chapters in edited books, online sources, and so on.
- All references must exist, and all links must be working properly.
- If using a citation software, ensure all information is included and properly formatted. Although such programs can be helpful, they are not always correct.
- The references within citations should be alphabetized by the last name of the first author.
- Make sure that for each reference that is listed, there is at least one corresponding citation within the body of the text, and vice versa. In your reference list, include only sources that are cited in your text. The reference list is not a bibliography, which would include everything you may have read or researched.
- As a rule of thumb, at least 85% of your references must be less than 5 years old. This is to ensure that your study remains current and relevant.

In addition to general format and style requirements, there are books that deal specifically with the rules and principles of writing. These offer useful suggestions regarding sentence construction and word choice. Although writers tend to have their own favorites, we have found Strunk and White's (2014) *The Elements of Style* and Hacker and Sommers's (2016) *A Writer's Reference* to be extremely helpful guides. Chapters 3 and 4 of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.) also include useful information regarding writing style requirements.

A note regarding use of first-person *I* in your writing: Generally, writing in the active voice is recommended. In qualitative research, in particular, the researcher is the main research tool or instrument. The unique style and narration of the researcher is an integral part of the study, and as such, the first-person *I* is sometimes used. According to some (but not all) views, this usage can be justified in a qualitative research report, as opposed to *the researcher* or *the author*, which tends to sound distant and uninvolved. Because there may be different preferences regarding the use of the first person, we strongly recommend that you check with your advisor before proceeding to write.

Although different style manuals emphasize different rules of writing, several rules are common to most. The most common rules include the following:

- Do not use contractions.
- Avoid being too colloquial or too informal.
- Avoid overuse of sophisticated vocabulary. Communicate complex ideas in the simplest way possible.
- Italicize all statistical symbols and abbreviations.
- Spell out all numbers from one to nine and use numerals for those 10 and above.
- Spell all Latin abbreviations correctly.
- Use lists selectively and sparsely. Too many lists appear as an attempt to avoid writing.
- Refer to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, sixth edition, for correct ways to list items. Whatever way you select must remain consistent throughout your document.
- Double-space your work throughout.

Tables and figures are often included in a dissertation to augment the narrative, thereby enabling the reader to more clearly understand the issues being discussed. These graphic organizers are somewhat distinguished from one another:

- Tables are typeset, rather than photographed, from artwork supplied by the author. Tables consist of text only and are frequently used to present quantitative data. Tables offer precise details, including percentages and whole numbers and should always include group size (i.e., $N = \ldots$).
- Figures are typically used to convey structural or pictorial concepts. Figures can be line graphs, bar graphs, pie graphs, maps, drawings, and photographs. Choose a figure if you want to reinforce the point you are making by way of a strong image.

Tables and figures are used to present material in summary form and should add clarity to the overall presentation of the report. Indeed, readers of dissertations are often drawn to graphic displays of information. Tables and figures follow their related textual discussion and are referred to by number. If you choose to use displays of any sort, make sure that they are appropriately included and do not unnecessarily disrupt the flow of the text. The potential usefulness and importance of visual displays suggest a need to dedicate time and care in creating them. Tables and figures should be uncluttered and self-explanatory; it is better to use two tables (or figures) than a single overcrowded one. If you choose to include tables and figures, be sure to consult your style manual for correct format and usage.

Proofreading and Editing

Always proofread your work. The goal of proofreading is to enable you to find and correct your own errors in thought and organization. After writing each section, examine your sentences for clarity and grammar. In an effort to present an organized, logical, and coherent argument, be prepared to spend time editing and reediting as you "polish" your narrative, correct sentence structure, and trim excess wordiness and redundancy. You will find yourself writing and rewriting throughout the process of doing your dissertation. Writing multiple drafts of a manuscript is part of the writing process and is standard practice for most writers.

If you feel that you need assistance with writing, be sure to contact your instructor for additional resources and guidance. It should be obvious that the expectations for correctness and accuracy in academic writing are high. If you feel that you are unable to meet these demands at your current level of writing proficiency, you may need to seek outside assistance. It is quite acceptable to hire an editor or a proofreader to help meet academic writing expectations. In addition, most universities offer writing classes and/or workshops.

A dissertation is indeed a "creation" or "construction" that takes effort and time. Constructing a dissertation is both an art and a science, and it takes thoughtful and careful planning. A good dissertation is built on solid outlines and is constructed logically and sequentially, paragraph by paragraph. This process includes paying close attention to style, format, and precise language. Most important, your writing should flow logically and smoothly. You do not want to lose the reader.

Integrity Matters

The strength of your writing rests on your ability to refer to and incorporate the work of others. It is imperative, however, that you attribute recognition to all and any sources of information that you use. There are few intellectual offenses more serious than plagiarism in academic and professional contexts. A charge of plagiarism can have severe consequences, including expulsion from a university or loss of a job, not to mention a writer's loss of credibility and professional standing.

Plagiarism is commonly defined as submitting material that in part or whole is not entirely one's own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source; that is, plagiarism is the uncredited use (both intentional and unintentional) of somebody else's words or ideas. Plagiarism is presenting someone else's words or ideas as your own. The following are *all* examples of plagiarism:

- Quoting or paraphrasing material without citing the source of that material. Sources can include websites, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, journals, TV and radio programs, movies and videos, photographs and drawings, and charts and graphs—that is, any information or ideas that are not your own.
- Quoting a source without using quotation marks—even if you do cite it.

Deliberate plagiarism—that is, copying the work of others and turning it in as your own or falsifying data—is considered cheating. But there is also another kind of plagiarism—accidental plagiarism. This occurs by carelessly and/or inadequately citing ideas and words borrowed from another source.

In all academic work, and especially in our writing, we are building upon the insights and words of others. A conscientious writer always distinguishes clearly between what has been learned from others and what he or she is personally contributing to the reader's understanding. To avoid plagiarism, it is important to understand how to attribute words and ideas you use to their proper source. In this regard you must be certain to give credit whenever you make use of any of the following:

- Another person's idea, opinion, or theory.
- Any facts, statistics, graphs, or drawings—any pieces of information—that are not common knowledge.
- Quotations of another person's actual spoken or written words.
- Paraphrase of another person's spoken or written words.

Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism

Note Taking

- Read the entire text and summarize it in your own words. Then paraphrase important points and copy usable quotes. Enclose quotes in quotation marks.
- Make sure to always carefully distinguish between material that is quoted, material that is paraphrased, material that is summarized, and your own words and ideas.
- As you paraphrase, make sure you are not just rearranging or replacing a few words.
- Check your paraphrasing against the original text to be certain that you have not accidentally used the same phrases or words and that the information is accurate.
- Include in your notes all the information you will need to cite your sources.
- Copy all source information into your working bibliography.
- Print any web pages you use. Write the URL and the date on the webpage if it is not included on the printout.

Citing Sources

You must cite the source of every quote, every paraphrased passage, and every summarized idea you use in a research paper. Commonly known facts, such as dates or definitions, do not need to be cited unless you take those facts directly from a specific reference source. If you're not sure whether a source should be cited, include it just in case. Sources must be cited throughout the body of the paper:

- Copy quoted material exactly, enclose it in quotations marks, and name the author immediately before or after the quote.
- Cite the source information (title, publisher, date, etc.) for the quote or paraphrased or summarized information either in parentheses within the text or in a footnote.
- List on a reference page at the end of your paper the information for all the sources you have cited. (Remember, the reference list is not the same as a bibliography. A bibliography is a list of all the sources you used—both those you cited and those you used for research but did not cite directly. In a dissertation a bibliography is not required.)

A Note About Attributions or Citations

The two most commonly used attribution systems—Modern Language Association (MLA) and American Psychological Association (APA)—consist of two parts: (a) a reference or works cited list at the end of the document, giving precise information about how to find a source, and (b) parenthetical citations immediately following the material you are citing. Professors and disciplines may vary as to the preferred style for documenting ideas, opinions, and facts, but all methods insist upon absolute clarity as to the source and require that all direct quotations be followed by a citation. It is sometimes difficult to judge what needs to be documented. Generally, knowledge that is common to all of us, or ideas that have been in the public domain and are found in a number of sources, does not need to be cited. Likewise, facts that are accepted by most authorities do not require a citation. It is often wrongly assumed that if one finds material on the web, that material is in the public domain and does not need to be cited. However, the same guidelines apply to all sources you use in your work: electronic or print, signed or unsigned.

Gray areas always exist, and sometimes it is difficult to be sure how to proceed. If you are in doubt, err on the side of overdocumentation. For proper use of quotations, refer to your style manual. There is no fixed rule regarding when and how much to quote and paraphrase. If you quote and cite too often, you may seem to offer too little of your own thinking. If you quote too little, readers may think that your claims lack support, or they may not be able to see how your work relates to that of others. However, there are some general rules of thumb: Use direct quotations when you are using the work of others as primary data or when the specific words of your source are of particular significance. Paraphrase sources when you can say the same thing more clearly or when you are more interested in conveying the general idea than in how it is expressed by a particular source. Do not quote because you think it is easier or you think you lack the authority to speak for your sources. Make your own argument with your own claims, reasons, and evidence.

Institutional Review Board Approval

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is concerned with studies desiring to implement research development, evaluation, and testing characterized as a systematic investigation to develop or contribute to generalized knowledge of research or the public (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). Any research designed to research human subjects, interact with human subjects, provide interventions for human subjects, obtain identifiable information about living subjects, or observe and record private behavior of human subjects must come under the jurisdiction of the governing board of institutional research. Interviews, observations, surveys, and all other forms of data collection methods that do not use data previously collected or archived will need to undergo review and approval by the IRB.

The IRB assures compliance with federal laws regarding the protection of human subjects from harm; ensures the right to informed consent to research procedures; and prevents violations of confidentiality and/or anonymity, violations of rights to privacy, and deception. The logic and necessity of protecting the dignity and personal and/or professional safety of research participants is widely accepted among social scientists today (although this was not always the case historically). During the course of the 1990s, issues arose that brought increased scrutiny and sensitivity to the process, including concerns regarding privacy and violations of appropriate informed consent procedures that apprise subjects fully of the risks involved in participating in research. Abuse of research subjects in the name of science has led to the establishment of commonly agreed-upon codes of research ethics. While there are some variations across disciplines and national boundaries, key principles are fundamental. These include (a) voluntary participation, (b) identity protection of research participants and locations, (c) disclosure to participants of potential risks and benefits associated with the research, and (d) obtaining informed consent. All studies conducted under the auspices of federally funded educational and research institutions are required to receive IRB approval. As such, IRBs have emerged in accredited academic institutions of higher education as bureaucratic entities responsible for the regulation, governance, and enforcement of significant research ethics.

IRB approval is sought after one successfully defends a proposal. IRB approval requires that the researcher obtain proof of certification for the use of human subjects in research. This certification is obtained by completing an online course offered by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program for most institutions. This online course is tailored to the research being proposed. The researcher is strongly advised to review his or her college's policy on IRB certification for the use of human subjects in research to determine the required modules of the online course that must be completed for certification at his or her institution.

Undergoing and successfully completing an IRB certification and approval accomplishes two key tasks: First, the student benefits from the advice of several academics who are trained to detect any potential flaws in terms of research design and methodology that could pose a threat to participants. Second, IRB approval is a stamp of credibility backed by a legitimate academic institution. This credibility is valuable both for the researcher and for the research participants.

The application for IRB approval requires detailed information regarding the researcher, the proposed study, the subject population, any projected funding, any requests for protocol review, and a description of the protocol. Our experience working with doctoral students has revealed that many have found some items on the application document challenging. One such item is the request for protocol review. Students are required to identify the research review section from the following: exempt and expedited (both constitute no more than minimal risk involving the use of human subjects); and full committee review, implemented when a project does not fall under any categories of the exempt or expedited review sections. A further section of the IRB form that needs highlighting is the protocol description. This section requires a detailed description of the subject recruitment process, confidentiality procedures, any potential research risks and benefits to the subjects, informed consent procedures, and the location of the research site, if applicable. An IRB guidebook, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Penslar, 1993), explicitly makes note of the difficulties confronting qualitative researchers where informed consent is concerned:

> Fieldwork or ethnographic research involves observation or interaction with the persons or group being studied in the group's own environment, often for long periods of time. Since fieldwork is a research process that gains shape and substance as the study progresses, it is difficult, if not impossible, to specify detailed contents and objectives in a protocol. . . . Therefore, while the idea of consent is not inapplicable in fieldwork, IRBs and researchers need to adapt prevailing notions of acceptable protocols and consent procedures to the realities of fieldwork.

Another useful resource is Maloney (2012), *Protection of Human Research Subjects: A Practical Guide to Federal Laws and Regulations.* This resource is applicable to researchers entering into or working in the field of biomedical or behavioral research involving human subjects.

Submitting the IRB form to the college's IRB office for approval requires inclusion of the following supplementary documents: an informed consent form, interview transcripts, data collection and analysis tools, recruitment materials and permission letters as appropriate, a certificate or proof of having undergone human subject research training as described earlier, and a research site approval letter, if necessary. The following key considerations can help facilitate the application process:

1. Become familiar with the IRB guidelines of your academic institution by obtaining relevant documentation from the IRB office or the office of doctoral studies and also visiting the appropriate website. Where possible, attend relevant workshops or seminars.
2. Describe your research in simple terms, clarifying all technical terminology where applicable. You cannot assume that your application will necessarily be reviewed by somebody wholly familiar with qualitative research.
3. Prior to submitting your application, contact the IRB office for clarification regarding informed consent procedures. In some instances, as mentioned, research may be exempt from the requirement of written informed consent.
4. In your application, be very clear and transparent regarding how you intend to address privacy issues, as well as any issues concerning potential harm to research participants.
5. Expect some delay with the IRB approval process. The application may take an extended period of time, particularly in those studies that propose the use of children or marginalized populations. It is quite standard that you are asked to revise and resubmit your initial application several times before your research complies with IRB standards and procedures.
6. It is important to note that data collection involving human subjects generally cannot begin until final IRB approval of the proposal is issued. In some instances, data collection begins inadvertently, such as with pilot studies. Incorporation of such data in the research study needs to be clearly explained and outlined in your IRB application process. In some cases, modification of IRB stipulations is acceptable.

Following are some recommended resources that you might consider perusing regarding development of the various structural elements needed for the first three chapters, which comprise the dissertation's proposal.

Annotated Bibliography

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Concise rules of APA style* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Compiled from the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, this pocket guide includes information on punctuation (for those who confuse slashes with hyphens), capitalization (for those who confuse newtons and watts with Newton and Watt), spelling (for all of us), italicizing, and abbreviating, as well as advice on presenting statistics, tables, figures, quotations, citations, footnotes, and appendices (it prefers "appendixes"). It also provides very helpful reference examples, including those from electronic and audiovisual media, a cross-reference to the publication manual, and a checklist for manuscript.

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

This is the style manual of choice for writers, editors, students, educators, and professionals in psychology, sociology, business, economics, nursing, social work, justice administration, and other disciplines in which effective communication with words and data is fundamental. In addition to providing clear guidance on grammar, the mechanics of writing, and APA style, the manual offers an authoritative and easy-to-use reference and citation system and comprehensive coverage of the treatment of numbers, metrication, statistical and mathematical data, tables, and figures for use in writing, reports, or presentations.

Goodson, P. (2017). *Becoming an academic writer: Fifty exercises for paced, productive, and powerful writing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

By way of a step-by-step format, this book seeks to help students and scholars improve their writing by engaging in deliberate practice exercises. Featuring 50 exercises, this practical and self-paced guide is flexibly organized so that readers can choose to work their way through all or some of the exercises in order to focus on specific areas of skill building and expertise. General academic writing skills to be developed and/or improved include establishing a writing mind-set, building academic vocabulary, improving grammar, editing, and proofreading. More specific skill building is also addressed, including writing introductions, writing problem statements, writing a methods section, writing up research findings, writing a conclusions section, and developing an abstract.

Hacker, D., & Sommers, N. (2016). *A writer's reference* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.

This book should be consulted as needed to master the academic style of scholarly writing , not for grammar lessons. The authors provide details pertaining to word choice, grammar, sentence style, and punctuation. The authors also discuss the most commonly used academic writing styles (APA, MLA, and Chicago Manual of Style), as well as various online resources (search engines and databases) that can be accessed through library portals. The latest edition has been revised to reflect MLA updates. This resource is also available as an interactive e-book with high-quality multimedia content and ready-made assessment options, including LearningCurve adaptive quizzing.

Schwandt, T. A. (2016). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This up-to-date guide includes current and seminal terms and phrases that have shaped and continue to shape the origins, purposes, rationales, logic, meaning, and methods of the practices that characterize the broad field of qualitative inquiry. Together, these entries constitute a guide to the overall methodological and epistemological concepts and theoretical orientations of qualitative inquiry. Individually, these entries are useful descriptors and explanations that are often required at some point in the research and writing process by both novice and experienced researchers. Right up front, you need to begin familiarizing yourself with the very fabric of qualitative inquiry, and this book provides the threads of this fabric in a usable and accessible manner.

Schwartz, B. M., Landrum, R. E., & Guring, R. A. (2017). *An easyguide to APA style* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Written by experienced instructors who are active and respected members of the APA, the updated third edition provides a reader-friendly guide for mastering APA style and format, and all the basic fundamentals of academic writing are addressed in a comprehensive manner. Chapter 5, titled "Thou Shalt Not Steal (or Be Lazy)," deals with plagiarism (in its many forms), and Chapter 6 discusses the use of biased language (with a particular focus on gender bias), offering ways to go about avoiding common pitfalls and errors. The authors provide helpful tips and visual representations of how to use APA style, with a particular focus on all details pertaining to the use of references and citations. Chapter 12, titled "Everybody Needs References," is particularly useful in this regard. Numerous samples are included throughout the book, and a chapter dealing with common errors constitutes a useful reference for correctly using APA guidelines. Written in clear, conversational style, this text includes easy-to-understand explanations and examples regarding academic writing style and format. The book conforms to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.), thereby making it an accessible, current, and relevant adjunct resource.

Strunk, W., & White, E. B. (2014). *The elements of style* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.

This timeless book is a wonderful companion as you proceed to write your dissertation. It clarifies the rules and principles of grammar and composition, emphasizing the power of words and the clear expression of thoughts and feelings. Published for the first time in 1919, the current edition is only modestly updated. This book is a gem and is small enough and important enough to carry around in your pocket!

Chapter 5 Objectives

- Offer a comprehensive overview of the concept of alignment in qualitative research.
- Highlight and clarify the key elements and concepts that must be aligned throughout the dissertation.
- Explain how to ensure and check for alignment throughout a qualitative dissertation in order to best conduct and write up the research.
- Provide guidelines and suggestions regarding establishing and maintaining congruence, and therefore methodological integrity, throughout the qualitative dissertation process.

Overview

Your dissertation is a multifaceted product that should, in the end, demonstrate that you were capable of conceptualizing, managing, conducting, and presenting a rigorous and comprehensive qualitative research study. Of importance, your final product should also indicate and provide clear evidence that you have addressed alignment at every step of the process, and that all of the key pieces of the larger "whole" are congruent and fit with each other. Qualitative research is recursive in that it builds on and depends upon all of its component parts. Making sure that you have achieved alignment among all the key components and elements means that your study is tight in terms of methodological integrity. Methodological integrity is essential both at a philosophical and a practical level and is an indication of a study of worth and quality.

There are numerous key elements and concepts that must be aligned and remain consistent throughout the dissertation so that the study remains methodologically sound. This process begins when the researcher identifies a worthy topic, goes on to formulate the research problem and purpose of the study, and then develops a set of appropriate research questions to address the study's purpose. Because the research questions are directly tied to the research purpose, answering the questions must, in the final analysis, accomplish the study's purpose and also contribute to shedding light on and addressing the research problem. The problem, purpose, and research questions constitute the essential thrust of a qualitative study, and clear and evident alignment among these three core elements enhances the logic, coherence, consistency, and transparency of the research overall. It should be clear from reading Chapter 3 that each research methodology within the broader field of qualitative research (also referred to as *traditions* or *genres*) is founded on a particular philosophy that influences the type of research design and methods used. Therefore, one of the core issues related to planning and conducting a methodologically sound qualitative study is how to choose an appropriate and suitable methodology that will address your research problem. Having made this choice, you will thus proceed to design your study within the framework of the methodology that you have selected. All of the components of the design process, including the theoretical or conceptual framework, methods of data collection, data analysis, and data presentation, will need to be aligned with and reflect the principles and features that characterize your chosen methodology so that there is a conceptual fit across all levels. In essence, the theoretical or conceptual framework, research design, and research methodology together must generate data appropriate and adequate for responding to the study's research questions. Finally, once you have conducted the study, your conclusions should tie together the study's major findings. Your recommendations, which follow your findings and conclusions, are, in turn, the application of those conclusions to practice, policy, and future research.

This chapter seeks to provide you with a clear understanding of the concept of alignment in qualitative research, highlights and clarifies the key elements that must be aligned throughout the dissertation, and explains how to ensure and check for alignment throughout the research process. Alignment (or lack of alignment) is often a key question or issue at the time of the dissertation defense. The final dissertation manuscript should provide clear evidence that you have addressed alignment at every step of the process so that the study reflects methodological integrity. Table 5.1 serves as an at-a-glance road map, indicating the key components and elements that should be taken into account vis-à-vis alignment, and for ease of use, the table includes reference to relevant chapters in this book. Checking for and achieving alignment is something you should be aware of at the very start of your study, throughout the research and writing process, and again at the completion stage, where you will revisit the importance of alignment again to make sure that all the elements that constitute your entire document are aligned and that there are no holes, gaps, or inconsistencies. The intent is that by reading this chapter, you will come away with a clearer understanding of the concepts of alignment, congruence, and methodological integrity vis-à-vis qualitative research.

Table 5.1

TABLE 5.1 Aligning Key Dissertation Components

	Areas for Alignment	Chapter Reference
1	Research Problem and Research Approach (Qualitative Research)	3, 4, 6
2	Research Problem and Research Purpose	4, 6
3	Research Problem, Research Purpose, and Research Questions	4, 6
4	Research Problem, Research Purpose, and Research Methodology (qualitative genre or tradition) A. Case Study B. Ethnography C. Phenomenology D. Grounded Theory E. Narrative Inquiry F. Action Research G. The Critical Genres	3, 4, 6, 8
5	Research Methodology and Research Methods	3, 8
	A. Case Study B. Ethnography C. Phenomenology D. Grounded Theory E. Narrative Inquiry F. Action Research G. The Critical Genres	
6	Research Problem and Literature Review	4, 6, 7
7	Literature Review and Theoretical/Conceptual Framework	7
8	Theoretical/Conceptual Framework, Research Questions, and Research Findings	4, 6, 7, 9, 10
9	Research Methodology, Research Design, and Data Analysis A. Case Study B. Ethnography C. Phenomenology D. Grounded Theory E. Narrative Inquiry F. Action Research G. The Critical Genres	3, 8, 9
10	Research Methodology, Research Design, and Presentation of Findings A. Case Study B. Ethnography C. Phenomenology D. Grounded Theory E. Narrative Inquiry F. Action Research G. The Critical Genres	3, 8, 10
11	Research Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions	10, 11
12	Conclusions and Recommendations	10, 11

Research Problem and Research Approach

The starting point for any research study, and indeed the first major challenge in conducting research, involves identifying and developing a sound topic. Once you have identified a general area of interest, you will need to begin narrowing your topic. The process of developing a researchable topic is a process of idea generation—the movement from a general interest toward a more clearly refined idea around a researchable problem.

The goals of theoretical research are either to contribute new knowledge or extend current theory to a new area. The goals of applied research are to use knowledge to contribute directly to the understanding of a problem or generate a solution for the problem. You should be asking:

- Is my worldview aligned with a qualitative research approach?
- Does my intended research problem "fit" with qualitative research?
- Do the problem, purpose of the study, and the research questions have the potential to serve the goal of the research, either applied or theoretical?
- Is there sufficient theory to explain the phenomenon, or a reasonable solution to the research problem, sometimes referred to as the "so what?" test?

As a field, qualitative research is broad and deep. While subtly nuanced in many ways, the overall field itself is defined by key characteristics. To begin, you will need to become knowledgeable about the characteristics of qualitative research, including the strengths, challenges, and limitations associated with this approach to inquiry.

Quantitative research is applied to describe current conditions, investigate relationships, and study cause–effect phenomena. Qualitative research, in contrast, is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants. This implies an emphasis on exploration, discovery, and description. Both research approaches involve complex processes in which particular data collection and data analysis methods assume meaning and significance in relation to the assumptions underlying the larger intellectual traditions within which these methods are applied. However, rather than determine cause and effect, or predict or describe the distribution of an attribute among a population, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences and how they construct their worlds. The two paradigms or orientations that inform qualitative research, namely social constructivism (or interpretivism) and critical theory, both place emphasis on seeking understanding of the meanings of human actions and experiences and on generating accounts of meaning from the viewpoints of those involved. Both paradigms assume that reality is socially constructed and that there is no single observable reality, but rather multiple realities or interpretations. Qualitative researchers study individuals and groups in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning that people bring to them. The intent of qualitative research essentially is to examine a social situation or interaction by allowing the researcher to enter the world of others and to achieve a *holistic* understanding rooted in real-world complexity and to describe, explain, and communicate that understanding.

Since description, understanding, interpretation, and communication are the primary goals of qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis. Whereas in quantitative research the role of the researcher is to remain detached, with the aim of being as objective as possible, in qualitative research the *researcher as instrument* openly brings her or his experience and perspective to the research. Qualitative research does not purport to be objective, nor is this a goal. However, to be rigorous, qualitative research does strive to be transparent and to openly, legitimately, and clearly document and communicate all decisions taken throughout the research process. Qualitative research seeks to establish credibility, dependability, and confirmability and is concerned with the issue of transferability rather than generalizability (as in the case of quantitative research)—that is, how and in what ways the findings of a particular study might apply or be useful in other similar contexts.

Research Problem and Research Purpose

Your study's research problem and research purpose contain similar information but are presented in different ways. The problem includes some background and context for the issue that is in need of exploration and also provides a rationale for the importance of the topic. The research purpose is an extension of the research problem. The problem statement serves a foundational role in that it communicates what is the formal reason for engaging in the dissertation in the first place. The problem statement is the discrepancy between what we already know and what we want to know. The statement also illustrates why we care—that is, the reasons why your study should be conducted.

Once you have identified your own narrowly defined topic and concise problem statement, you are ready to formulate your purpose statement. The purpose statement is the *major objective or intent of the study* and enables the reader to understand the central thrust of your research. In essence, your research purpose will shed light on or serve to deepen understanding of your research problem.

Note that choice of a qualitative approach is directly tied to research problem and purpose. As the researcher, you actively create the link among problem, purpose, and approach through a process of reflecting on your problem and purpose, focusing on researchable questions, and considering how to best address these questions. Thinking along these lines affords a research study methodological congruence (Richards & Morse, 2013). It is important to understand that a research problem should not be modified to fit a particular research approach. You cannot assume a qualitative approach regardless of your research problem. In other words, research approach follows research problem; the appropriate research approach is the one that best fits with your research problem.

Research Problem, Research Purpose, and Research Questions

These are the three core elements that form the very backbone of your study. As stated previously, the research problem and purpose contain similar information but are presented differently. The problem statement provides background and context to situate the research problem, and also provides a rationale for the importance of the study. The research purpose is an extension of the research problem and also provides a framework for the research questions. The research questions in turn mirror the research purpose; that is, if you look closely, the questions are actually the research purpose in narrative form, and they should shed light on the purpose.

Because the research questions are directly tied to the research purpose, answering the questions must accomplish the study's purpose and also, in the final analysis, contribute to shedding light on and addressing the problem. One must in effect be able to trace all the ideas in the research questions back through the purpose statement to the problem statement; this underscores, therefore, that you must ask relevant and effective questions. The research questions, which can be answered by qualitative and quantitative data, will necessarily correspond directly to the research methodology (qualitative genre or tradition).

Qualitative research is *recursive* in that it builds and depends upon all of its component parts. Qualitative research is also flexible, and that is certainly one of its hallmarks. Your research questions are often informed by your personal and/or professional experiences, literature you have read, and the way that you understand the world. Furthermore, as you begin to implement your research, the preliminary data you collect will also inform (and possibly lead you to refine) your research questions. That said, achieving alignment between your research purpose and research questions is key. You will not want any new questions that you may develop to be misaligned with your purpose, and hence with your research problem.

Remember that the first chapter of your dissertation (which you begin developing in the proposal stage) is the most critical, and everything that follows hinges on how well this chapter is constructed. This first chapter of the dissertation is also critical in that it forms part of the research proposal. The introductory chapter therefore sets the stage for the study; it also makes a case for the significance of the problem, contextualizes the study, and provides an introduction to its basic components—most specifically, directing the reader to the research problem, research purpose, and research questions.

Research Problem, Research Purpose, and Research Methodology (Qualitative Genre or Tradition)

One of the core issues related to planning and conducting a qualitative study is how to choose an appropriate and suitable research methodology, also referred to as qualitative genre or tradition. What is the best place to start? Should your decision be based on the research design and philosophical paradigm of your project? What if you don't know quite yet what is the philosophy of your research? Should you choose a methodology that is most familiar to you or that you have heard other students using? Should you choose a methodology that will be the easiest to apply? How will you justify your choice? Defining the purpose of your research will help bring you clarity.

Qualitative inquiry includes a variety of research methodologies, each of which is based on particular views about the social world and how it is known (ontology) and views about knowledge and how it is knowable (epistemology). Each worldview carries with it certain values and perspectives, including how the quality of research is to be evaluated. Philosophy and method, rather similar to form and function, create an integrated whole. When research is approached without clarity of underlying philosophical constructs, execution will be haphazard, often leading to inaccurate and meaningless findings. The worldview of a researcher determines the type of research problem and research purpose that are selected, as well as methodological approach, specific methods of data collection, specific data analysis procedures, interpretation of data, and presentation of findings. Worldview or paradigm in essence, therefore, determines the study's overall research design—that is, the way you as the researcher plan for, articulate, and set up the *doing* of your study. Worldview therefore influences all phases of the research project and the many choices within each phase, forming the study's philosophical substructure. As such, qualitative research is a truly holistic activity whereby the various layers of research align with one another. Qualitative researchers should therefore approach their research through a particular paradigmatic lens, worldview, value, and political commitment.

As the researcher, you actively create the link among problem, purpose, and methodology through a process of reflecting on your research problem and purpose, focusing on researchable questions, and considering how to best address these questions. A central issue for qualitative research is that there are considerable differences in epistemological positions that methodological choices are informed by (and inform). Scholars have argued that the different qualitative methodologies are also underpinned by particular theoretical assumptions, and that consistency between their philosophical positions and methods should be clear and focused. All the study's components should therefore be interconnected and interrelated so that the study itself is a grounded and cohesive whole rather than the sum of fragmented or isolated parts. Thinking along these lines affords a research study "methodological congruence" (Richards & Morse, 2013). O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) also emphasize that methodological congruence is inextricably linked to quality in quality research, stating: "The different methodological approaches are informed by different ontological and epistemological foundations, and these fundamentally influence everything about how the research is conceptualized, actioned, and analyzed" (p. 68).

There are numerous qualitative methodologies, each of which has ways of defining a research topic; critically engaging the literature on that topic; identifying significant research problems; designing the study; and collecting, analyzing, and presenting the data so that it will be most relevant and meaningful. Each of the methodologies includes ideological, conceptual, and methodological implications. Understanding the logic behind a research methodology allows your study to be appropriately positioned within an inquiry tradition and also lays the foundation for supporting your study's findings. The position of the researcher, in essence, is the bridge between philosophy, methodology, and the application of methods. Thus, the alignment between the research question, chosen methodology, and personal philosophy, as well as the ability of the researcher to be reflexive in relation to the research, is critical to ensure congruence in the study that will be manifested in the products of the research.

Having decided on a qualitative research approach, you will proceed to design your study within the framework of one of the methodologies (traditions or genres) of qualitative inquiry. At the outset of any study, the researcher needs to carefully consider a number of important methodological issues, not least of all the theoretical perspectives that drive a particular methodology and how these fit with the proposed study. Thus, the components of the design process (theoretical framework, research purpose, and methods of data collection and data analysis) will reflect the principles and features that characterize the chosen qualitative methodology. As the researcher, you must carefully consider how these components relate to the study goals, driving questions, guiding theories, and commitments. You should be asking:

- Which methodology does my intended research topic and problem "fit best" with?
- What is the purpose of my research?
- Is my worldview aligned with the methodology selected? Why? Why not?
- Is the methodology a comfortable match with my research skills?

Bearing in mind that qualitative methodologies are informed by different ontological and epistemological foundations—and that the researcher's values and assumptions fundamentally influence everything about how research is conceptualized, conducted, analyzed, and presented—you will need to be somewhat knowledgeable about the various qualitative research methodologies, including their key philosophical underpinnings and characteristic applications. Next is a review of the most common qualitative methodologies.

A. Choosing the Appropriate Methodology: Case Study

Case study is a qualitative methodology for providing an intensive description and contextual-bounded analysis of a social phenomenon (or multiple bounded phenomena), be this a social unit or a system such as a program, institution, process, event, or concept (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2014; Stake, 1995, 2005; Yin, 2018). Single case study and multiple case study are among the most widely used and versatile qualitative methodologies. One of the key attributes of case study is that it reflects a bounded system or a "case." To identify and define the case, you would begin by asking questions about how the case will be bound and what specifically will be analyzed within the bounded system—that is, the unit of analysis. This methodology is an exploratory form of inquiry that affords significant interaction with research participants, providing an in-depth picture of the unit of study. The researcher explores the bounded system (or bounded systems) over time through in-depth data collection methods involving multiple data sources. Case study research produces a detailed description of a setting and its participants, accompanied by an analysis of the data for themes, patterns, and issues.

B. Choosing the Appropriate Methodology: Ethnography

Ethnography is associated with the social sciences, including folklore, anthropology, history, urban development, education, linguistics, communication, culture studies, and sociology. As both a method and a product, ethnography has multiple intellectual traditions located in diverse disciplines. Ethnographers may be interested in social change (critical ethnography) or focused on studying populations that have been marginalized or overlooked (feminist ethnography, confessional ethnography). A researcher may be interested in her or his own personal experience and become the subject of her or his own research in order to think more analytically and reflexively about this experience within the broader societal context (autoethnography). Among emergent techniques are ethnographic novels and visual ethnography including photography, video, and electronic media. Due to the diversity within the methodology of ethnography, it is important for researchers working within this approach to be transparent regarding which epistemological position informs their work.

The ethnographic researcher studies a cultural or social group (or subgroup) in its natural setting, closely examining customs and ways of life, with the aim of describing and interpreting cultural patterns of behavior, values, and practices (Van Maanen, 1988, 1995, 2006). Rooted in cultural anthropology, the ethnographer enters into a close interaction with participants in their natural settings as "participant observer" to seek an in-depth understanding of how individuals in different cultures and subcultures make sense of their lived reality. Fieldwork is a cornerstone of ethnography and involves the researcher's active participation and "immersion" in a community or setting over an extended period of time. Data are collected through interviews, observations, document/artifact analyses, and examination of life histories. Research findings recreate shared beliefs, meanings, practices, social interactions, and behaviors of a connected group of people.

C. Choosing the Appropriate Methodology: Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a way of thinking that emphasizes the need for researchers to achieve an understanding of their participants' worlds from the participants' points of view and the ways in which those participants make sense of the world around them. As such, a phenomenological design is not a suitable design when the researcher has a problem-solving purpose.

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a method, the purpose of which is to investigate the meaning of the *lived experience* of people in order to identify the core essence of human experience or phenomena as described by research participants themselves. Types of phenomenological research include realistic, constitutive, existential, and hermeneutical. The epistemological position of phenomenology is that the knowledge gained through the research process should reflect the participants' perspectives regarding the ways in which they make sense of their worlds. Phenomenology does not endeavor to develop a theory to explain the world; rather, the aim is to facilitate deeper insight to help us maintain greater contact within the world (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; van Manen, 1990, 2016). Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common, the basic purpose of research being to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence. Experience (*verstehen)* is to be examined as it actually occurs, and on its own terms, and this is seen as more important than the researcher's own understanding of that experience. The congruence with regard to the epistemological foundation ensures that the interpretation provided is that of the participants rather than the researchers. Data collection occurs through interviews, written surveys, art, and photographs, all of which can provide insight into the human experience. An emergent coding strategy such as open or selective coding is usually used, and depending upon the number of participants in the study, the thematic analysis may include both individual and collective.

D. Choosing the Appropriate Methodology: Grounded Theory

The purpose of grounded theory is to inductively generate theory about a particular behavioral phenomenon that is grounded in, or emerges from, the data. Theory can be defined as "an explanatory scheme comprising a set of concepts related to each other through logical patterns of connectivity" (Schwandt, 2016). The goal is to move beyond description and to have the researcher generate or discover a theory of social processes, actions, or interactions that are grounded in the views of the research participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Study participants would all have experienced the process, and the development of theory might explain practice or provide a framework for further research.

Grounded theory draws on data from a subgroup of individuals from a substantive area. Research involves multiple recurrent stages of data collection and the refinement of abstract categories of information. Theory development is a continual process of generating meaning and of building consensus to explain phenomena from the people experiencing the phenomena. Open coding, followed by selective coding intertwined with memo writing, are hallmarks of grounded theory analysis. The epistemological premise of grounded theory assumes that the theoretical knowledge to be gained through research cannot be presupposed. As such, the methodological approach is congruent with this premise and regards knowledge production as something that can be gained only through an inductive process (Charmaz, 2016; Charmaz, Thornberg & Keane, 2018). Furthermore, due to this unfolding process, the methodology promotes iterative cycles of simultaneous data collection and analysis.

E. Choosing the Appropriate Methodology: Narrative Inquiry

The intent of narrative research is to develop a deep and nuanced description of a person, place, or event. The narrative researcher is immersed in the complexity of the multiple layers of stories human beings live day to day. The information gleaned from the story or stories is then retold or "restoried" by the researcher into a "narrative chronology" in order to provide the meaning of experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ultimately, the narrative combines views from the participants' lives with those of the researcher's life, culminating in a collaborative narrative (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013; Clandinin, 2007, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Daiute, 2014; Kim, 2016). Paramount to all narrative work is the centrality of relationship in the research process and recognition of the sacredness of the stories that participants share and trust within the research environment (Mills & Birks, 2014). Uncertainty and tension guide the work, and rather than produce conclusive findings, the process offers understanding and meaning. There is an inherent reflexivity in narrative research that demands the attention of the researcher and the participant collaborators as the story emerges and evolves through multiple iterations.

Narrative researchers hold a range of different ontological and epistemological positions. Narrative inquiry relies on observations, interviews, field notes, text data, and other artifacts such as photos, videos, artwork, journals, or letters to provide data for a descriptive analysis. Interview methods are the primary data collection tool, however, as interviews offer a basis for sharing power and allowing participants to tell their stories in their own ways and on their own terms. The purpose of narrative analysis is to help readers understand why and how things happened (or didn't happen) in the way they did and help them empathize with the protagonist's lived experience. There are various analytic models and typologies of narrative analysis, and under the broad rubric of narrative inquiry, each of these retains an integrity that permeates throughout data collection and data analysis, as such, maintaining an internal congruence with its theoretical roots.

F. Choosing the Appropriate Methodology: Action Research

Action research is a systematic, collaborative, and democratic orientation toward inquiry that seeks effective solutions to complex problems that people confront in their communities and organizations (McNiff, 2018; Mertler, 2017; Stringer, 2014). Especially valuable to those involved in professional, organizational, educational, and community research, action research focuses on specific situations that people encounter by engaging them in collaborative relationships and working on developing localized solutions. Action research challenges the claim of neutrality and objectivity by traditional social science standards and seeks full collaborative inquiry by all participants, often to engage in sustained change in organizations, institutions, or communities. This methodology blurs the distinction between researcher and participants, creating an ideally democratic inquiry process to collaboratively question practice, make changes, and evaluate the impact of those changes (Stringer, 2014). Participatory action research (PAR) draws heavily on the concept of emancipation as articulated by Freire (1968/1970) that sustainable empowerment and development must begin with the concerns of the marginalized and entails a cycle of research, reflection, and action.

Being about collaborative and democratic practices makes the research essentially political because it aims to influence processes of change. The research itself is an intervention because it seeks to promote actual change by informing and impacting a practice, procedure, system, or environment, thereby leading to the improvement of life for a desired targeted group of individuals. The strength of action research is indeed its focus on generating solutions to practical problems or issues and its ability to empower those working in practice-based environments by engaging them in the research process. As such, the most influential theoretical framework for action research is critical theory, as it aims to encourage and facilitate inclusion and active participation.

G. Choosing the Appropriate Methodology: The Critical Genres

In the past two decades, a critical turn has taken place in the social sciences, humanities, and applied fields, with scholars challenging the historical assumptions of neutrality in inquiry, asserting that all research is fundamentally political (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The critical traditions, including postmodern, poststructural, and postcolonial perspectives, contribute to critical discourse analysis. A variety of emergent genres are situated within the critical paradigm, including critical ethnography, autoethnography, critical discourse analysis, critical race theory and analysis, feminist approaches (increasingly referred to as gender studies), indigenous research, queer/quare theory and analysis, trans theory, and cultural studies. Critical genres are grounded in theories that assume society is structured in such a way to maintain the oppression of marginalized groups. Each genre embraces changing existing social structures and processes as a primary purpose and has openly political agendas and emancipatory goals. It is increasingly argued that research involves issues of power and positionality and that traditionally conducted social science research has silenced groups in society by making these groups the passive objects of inquiry. Viewing qualitative inquiry through a critical lens forces us to rethink taken-for-granted frameworks, paradigms, methodologies, and politics, and advocates for a critical stance that addresses social justice, decolonization, and the politics of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Critical research is skeptical of narratives, viewing these as containing power-laden discourses developed for the maintenance of dominant ideas or the power of individuals, institutions, or theories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Deconstruction of grand narratives is viewed as an important way of removing their power (Grbich, 2013). In recognition of the socially constructed nature of the world, meaning rather than knowledge is sought because knowledge is seen as constrained by the discourses and dominant points of view that were developed to protect powerful interests and ideological forces that serve to constrain knowledge building. A critical approach asks questions about the historical forces that shape societal patterns as well as the fundamental issues and dilemmas of power, positionality, policy, and domination in institutions, including their role in reproducing and reinforcing inequity and social injustice. The key purpose is to address, challenge, and hopefully change problematic social circumstances.

Research Methodology and Research Methods

Methodology determines how the researcher thinks about a study, how decisions about the study are made, and how researchers position themselves to engage with participants and with the data that are generated. The term *methods* commonly denotes specific techniques, procedures, or tools used by researchers to generate and analyze data. The methods that a qualitative researcher chooses are informed by both the research approach and the research methodology so that there is a conceptual fit across all levels. *Research design* is the way you as the researcher plan for, articulate, and set up the *doing* of your study, and applying the chosen methods.

O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) write extensively on the necessity for congruence between ontology, epistemology, and methodology in terms of how this informs the choice of methods for data collection and data analysis in qualitative research. Based on the research questions, specific data collection methods are chosen to gather the required information in the most appropriate and meaningful way. A solid rationale for the choice of methods used is crucial, as this indicates methodological congruence and illustrates that the choice of methods is grounded in the chosen methodology and in the study's overall research design. Before you can collect any data, therefore, a clear and aligned statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research question(s) must be developed, followed by the development of a data collection protocol that clearly address the research question(s).

A researcher can tend to become comfortable with a particular method or set of methods, and this can lead to misalignment of research goals. It is unwise to arbitrarily select a method without carefully considering what kinds of data you are seeking. A clear, logical, and direct relationship must be established between the intent of the study and what and how data will be collected. Choice of method is therefore based on relevance and value. The most commonly used types of qualitative data collection methods involve interviews, observations, focus groups, and document reviews:

- Interviewing techniques include unstructured, semistructured, or structured; can be formal or informal; and can occur once or multiple times.
- Observational techniques can be obtrusive or unobtrusive and either participant or nonparticipant.
- Focus groups are essentially group interviews. Researcher skill is required for facilitation, recording, and reporting.
- Document review refers to the collection of data from written artifacts including policies, legislation, lesson plans, mission statements, letters, memos, posters, diaries, and other forms of written text. Artifacts and visual material such as photos, blogs, artwork, music, or graffiti are also considered appropriate documentary material.

Many of the qualitative methodologies include specific and dedicated research methods that are integral to the research design and sequence. To achieve triangulation, qualitative studies usually combine several data collection methods over the course of the study. When considering the use of various methods, the researcher should carefully consider whether these methods will address and can be applied to the research questions while at the same time ensuring that these methods are also crucial to maintaining integrity with regard to the research methodology.

A. Choosing Appropriate Methods: Case Study

Data collection in case study research is typically extensive and draws on multiple methods of data collection including interviews, document review, observation, focus groups, surveys, life history, and critical incidents. Indeed, one of the strengths of the case study approach is its methodological eclecticism; that is, a variety of methods can be used, including methods that generate quantitative data such as statistical data provided by census material. Remember, however, while case studies incorporate many types of data (qualitative and quantitative), not all these data may be appropriate for your particular study. Methods vary depending on the particular case and related research questions. It is therefore important to take into account the important link between research questions and the type of data that will serve to answer your questions.

Triangulation is critical in attempting to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study; adds rigor, breadth, and depth to the study; and provides corroborative evidence of the data obtained. In triangulation, the researcher makes use of multiple and different sources and methods, and these are reported as part of the research design, including peer review or peer debriefing (which provides an external check of the research process) and member checks (where participants' views are solicited regarding the credibility of findings, analyses, and interpretations).

B. Choosing Appropriate Methods: Ethnography

Ethnographers seek to study the meaning of the behavior, interaction, and communication among members of the culture-sharing group by describing and analyzing patterns of roles, artifacts, and ceremonies of the cultural group. Rooted in cultural anthropology, ethnography involves extended observations, with the researcher as participant observer becoming immersed in the day-to-day lives of the research participants. Fieldwork is a cornerstone of ethnography, typically involving the researcher's participation in a community or setting over an extended period of time. To produce a holistic "cultural portrait," the researcher gains access to the group through "gatekeepers" and "key informants." Both the process and the outcome of research ethnography are ways of examining a culture-sharing group as well as the final written product of that research.

Ethnographers typically study groups, communities, or organizations by making use of a variety of data collection methods, including participant observation, interviews, document review, and artifacts. As with all the qualitative methodologies, decisions about data collection methods should be guided by your research questions. In an ethnographic study, data are collected on an ongoing basis, and data collection and data analysis proceed simultaneously. Ethnographic interviewing is an elaborate system consisting of a series of interviews to tap into participants' cultural knowledge. This interviewing approach is grounded in cognitive anthropology and seeks to elicit the cognitive structures that reveal participants' worldviews. The value of the ethnographic interview lies in its focus on culture from the participants' perspectives and through firsthand encounters. This approach generates a typology of categories of meaning, thereby highlighting the nuances of the culture. Observation is typically included as a data collection method, and it is important that the researcher be aware that there are multiple levels of observation contained within a setting. Often what is not present or obvious is just as important as what is present and obvious.

C. Choosing Appropriate Methods: Phenomenology

Phenomenological research involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). In this process, the researcher "brackets" her or his own experiences to understand the participants' experiences (van Manen, 1990). The notion of bracketing is considered one of the key elements that distinguish Husserlian phenomenology. Heidegger, Husserl's pupil, moved phenomenology from a descriptive to an interpretive endeavor, focusing on the hermeneutic perspective, which recognizes that human existence is always embedded in a world of meanings. Therefore, phenomenology becomes hermeneutical when its method becomes interpretive rather than purely descriptive (Mills & Birks, 2014).

Phenomenology (including Hermeneutics as a method for examining text) typically involves several in-depth interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest. The purpose of this type of interviewing is to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals might share. This approach to data collection rests on the assumption that there is a structure and an essence to shared experiences that can be narrated. The value of phenomenological interviewing is that it permits an explicit focus on the researcher's personal experience combined with those of the research participants by focusing on deep lived meanings that guide actions and interactions. The researcher, in taking on a reflexive stance, reflects on essential themes that constitute the nature of this lived experience. The researcher then writes a description of the phenomenon, maintaining a strong relationship to the topic of inquiry. Phenomenology is not only description, however; it is also an interpretive process in which the researcher interprets the meaning of individual lived experience.

D. Choosing Appropriate Methods: Grounded Theory

The objective of grounded theory is to generate theory from the data or modify or extend existing theory. Grounded theory researchers approach interviews and documents for the theoretical usefulness of the data, seeking to analyze the meaning that the data convey and thereby developing theoretical categories. The researcher works to integrate categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the studied process. Through theoretical sampling coupled with theoretical sensitivity, the researcher strives to ensure that the raw data are reflected or grounded in the final theory produced.

Data collection and data analysis are concurrent and continual activities. Open-ended interviews and observations are used to collect data. Analysis involves a number of strategic methods that facilitate the development of a theory that is grounded in the data. Researchers typically begin with *open coding*—that is, coding data for major categories of information. From this type of coding, *axial coding* emerges—that is, identification of one open-coding category as the "core phenomenon." This process gives way to *causal conditions* (factors that cause the "core phenomenon"), *strategies* (actions taken in response to the "core phenomenon"), *contextual and intervening conditions* (situational factors that influence the strategies), and *consequences* (outcomes as a result of the strategies). The final step in the process is *selective coding;* that is, the researcher develops propositions or hypotheses that interrelate the categories or assemble a story line that describes the interrelationships among categories. Thus the theory developed by the researcher is articulated toward the end of the study, with the intent of having explanatory power to make a significant contribution in terms of knowledge building and potential practical application.

E. Choosing Appropriate Methods: Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is an interdisciplinary methodology that draws from traditions in literary theory, oral history, drama, psychology, folklore, and film philosophy (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The assumption is that people construct their realities through narrating their stories. Inquiry involves a collaboration between the researcher and participants that is established over time in the storytelling, retelling, and reliving of personal experiences.

Narrative inquiry begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals or cultures. In this form of research, the researcher studies the lives of one or more individuals through the telling of stories, including poetry, play, or performance. Life history is an integral research technique as developed by the Chicago School of Sociology. This data collection method offers a basis for sharing power by allowing research participants to tell their stories in their own ways. The information gleaned from the story or stories is then retold or "restoried" by the researcher into a "narrative chronology" in order to provide the meaning of experiences (Kim, 2016). Ultimately, the narrative combines views from the participants' lives with those of the researcher's life, culminating in a collaborative narrative that offers understanding and meaning (Andrews et al., 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Daiute, 2014; Kim, 2016). Paramount to all narrative work is the centrality of relationship in the research process and recognition of the sacredness of the stories that participants share and trust within the research environment (Mills & Birks, 2014).

In narrative inquiry, data analysis and interpretation work in tandem because data are analyzed and interpreted concurrently to develop an understanding of narrative meanings. Kim (2016) talks about "flirting with the data," which includes looking for common elements, noticing differences and diversity, and seeking metaphors. Typically, field notes and interview transcriptions are shared with the narrator, and the written analysis may be constructed collaboratively. As such, there is recognition that the researcher is not just passively recording and reporting the narrator's reality. There is a reflexivity inherent in narrative research that demands the attention of the researcher and the participant collaborators as the story and its meaning emerges and evolves through multiple iterations.

F. Choosing Appropriate Methods: Action Research

In action research, many different data collection methods are used, including observation, interview, and focus group. Participatory action research draws heavily on the concept of emancipation as proposed by Freire (1968/1970) and entails cycles of research, reflection, and action. This action routine provides a simple yet powerful cyclical framework that enables people to commence on a shared and productive process of inquiry in a stepwise fashion and to build greater detail into procedures as the complexity of issues increases. This approach is based on the assumption that all stakeholders—those whose lives are affected by the problem under study—should be involved in the research process in order to inform understanding and subsequent action. Knowledge production unfolds and proceeds as a collective process, actively engaging people who have previously been the "subjects" of research to collectively investigate and reconcile their own situation. When ideally executed, action research creates a fully democratic inquiry process, blurring the distinctions between the researcher and participants to collaboratively question practice, make changes, and evaluate the impact of those changes.

The research protocol is iterative, cyclical, and participative in nature and is intended to foster deeper understanding of a given situation, starting with conceptualizing and particularizing the problem and moving through several proposed interventions and evaluations. Data collection and analysis are interwoven throughout the research process to produce understanding and inform future action. When practitioners use action research, it has the potential to increase the amount they learn consciously from their experience; the action research cycle can be regarded as a learning cycle. Action research studies often have direct relevance to improving practice and advocating for change.

G. Choosing Appropriate Methods: The Critical Genres

Inquiry in critical traditions is conceived as contributing to radical change or emancipation from oppressive social structures, either through sustained critique or through direct advocacy and action taken by the researcher, often in collaboration with participants. Researchers working within a critical framework ask themselves what will be the outcome of their research in terms of making some impact on a larger social purpose. Learning to formulate research questions that examine power relations between the researcher and research participants is at the heart of critical approaches. Reflexive subjectivity of the researcher—that is, constant reflective and self-critical processes—therefore becomes an essential component of data collection and data analysis. The researcher and the researched are not considered separate entities; rather, through interpretation, their constructed meanings become interwoven (Grbich, 2013).

Research Problem and Literature Review

The study's literature review is a vital component of the dissertation research process, serving to contextualize your study in the following ways:

- Traces the etiology or history of the specific fields and topics related to your study's research problem.
- Cultivates familiarity and expertise regarding issues and debates in the field, providing context and background for the research problem.
- Identifies key theories related to the phenomenon and/or context under study and which of these will most appropriately frame and situate your study.
- Assists with developing an argument for the rationale and significance of your research.

The literature review must be relevant and appropriate for the specific study at hand. Each body of literature that you review must be tied to or address some aspect of the research problem. You should be asking:

- To what extent does my literature review frame the context of my specific research problem?
- To what extent does my literature review highlight the significance of my study?
- To what extent does my literature review address the historical and current relevance of my research problem?

Literature Review and Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The terms theoretical framework and conceptual framework are often used interchangeably throughout the literature. Whereas a deductive approach to literature review typically makes use of theories and theoretical frameworks, the inductive approach tends to lead to the development of a conceptual framework, which may take the form of a conceptual model (Imenda, 2014). The conceptual or theoretical framework that you choose must be clearly situated within the body of literature that is being reviewed. Theory (or concepts) helps to situate a study within ongoing conversations in relevant fields and adds new dimensions and layers of understanding about the phenomenon of interest, hence extending the meaningfulness of your study's data. An important part of theory (or concepts) in the dissertation is that inclusion serves to make an argument for the rationale and significance of your study. You should be asking:

- In what theory or concept is my study grounded or based?
- To what extent does my conceptual or theoretical framework explicate the ways in which theory or concepts contribute to or addresses this study?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework, Research Questions, and Research Findings

A well-conceived conceptual or theoretical framework should serve to guide your study and play a central role throughout the entire research process. As explained by Ravitch and Riggan (2017) and Ravitch and Carl (2016), the framework generates the focus of the research as much as it is informed and shaped by it. The framework offers a source of thinking, planning, and conscious action throughout the research process, helping to situate your study within its appropriate context, grounding the researcher's philosophical stance, and articulating how all key methodological elements are related. As O'Reilly & Kiyimba (2015) discuss, collection and analytic methods should be born out of a transparent theoretical framework so that the work is rigorous, trustworthy, and has veracity.

A theoretical/conceptual framework, research design, and research methodology together must generate data appropriate and adequate for responding to the research questions. Ravitch and Carl (2016) explain that the framework contributes to creating relevant research questions and then matching the methodological aspects of the study with these questions. As these authors state, "In this sense, the conceptual framework helps align the analytic tools and methods of a study with the focal topics and core constructs as they are embedded in the research questions" (2016, p. 37). Research questions are initially linked to the research problem and may also be theoretically linked based on the literature and related research, thereby illustrating that the study holds potential significance for that field. While the theoretical/conceptual framework makes the case for why a study is significant and how the study design appropriately answers the research questions, it also becomes the repository for the study's findings, which in turn provide answers to the research questions. Findings and interpretation must be integrated with the literature and theoretical/conceptual framework.

Research Methodology, Research Design, and Data Analysis

Research design is the way you as the researcher plan for, articulate, and set up the *doing* of your study. It is the overall approach regarding the many ways in which you bridge the context of your study, including the development of your study's purpose, research questions, data collection methods, and methods of data analysis. Qualitative analysis encompasses the processes that are needed to make sense and meaning of the data. Data analysis includes a variety of recursive processes for looking across your data set, including examining raw data, developing and applying multiple coding processes that combine to create categories, identification of emerging patterns within categories, and construction of analytic themes that reflect important concepts in the data. In turn, these themes ultimately become your study's findings, which are interpreted in light of the literature and theoretical perspectives.

While data analysis in qualitative research is typically composed of the previously mentioned processes, the actual methods of data analysis must be informed by and contingent upon both your research design and research methodology. While qualitative researchers share a common appreciation of the analytic process, there are some key philosophical differences among the various qualitative methodologies, and each of the methodologies promotes specific strategies for data analysis. It is imperative, therefore, that each methodology retains an integrity and congruence between ontology, epistemology, and methods used. Because different qualitative research traditions or genres promote specific strategies for data analysis, whatever analytic approach you choose to use must align with the philosophical underpinnings of your chosen methodology. When a researcher mistakenly attempts to engage in research by starting with methods and choosing an analytic approach after the data have been collected, it is evident the parameters of a particular methodology have not been considered, and the risk is that the research will lack integrity and trustworthiness.

A. Data Analysis: Case Study

The type of analysis associated with case study research can be a holistic analysis of an entire case or an embedded analysis of part of a case (Yin, 2018). Throughout data collection, a detailed description of the social processes that constitute a bounded entity emerges. The researcher develops themes to be analyzed, not for generalizing beyond the case but for understanding the dynamics and complexity of the case itself. When a study involves multiple cases, the researcher will examine and describe themes within each case (within-case analysis), followed by thematic analysis across cases (cross-case analysis). Analysis and interpretation of case study takes place in an iterative manner. The researcher collects data, analyzes it to see what the data are saying (analysis), and seeks to understand what it means (interpretation). This process builds trustworthiness and also provides an audit trail. While case study is characterized by methodological eclecticism, the centrality of contextualized deep understanding as the ultimate objective is recognized as key.

B. Data Analysis: Ethnography

Ethnographers analyze data for a description of the culture-sharing group, including emergent themes and an overall interpretation. Patterns of behavior and thinking indicate how and in what ways the cultural group works and lives, leading to an overall illustration of "how a system works" (Fetterman, 2010). Ethnographic data analysis takes place as an ongoing activity and is an activity that is intertwined with data gathering. Ethnographic analysis is an inductive process—that is, a process of working to discover what the data mean. Description is at the core of analysis, and researcher interpretation provides a window into the research setting and its meaning. Ethnography relies on extended fieldwork, and data collection and data analysis are concurrent. Analysis and interpretation go back and forth as the story comes together as a meaningful whole. To counteract ethnocentrism, the researcher takes on emic and etic perspectives but at the same time runs the risk of going native; that is, the researcher identifies so completely with the group that she or he can no longer step back and take an objective perspective. Because of this fine interplay and balance of forces, triangulation of observations and data sources becomes particularly important in ethnographic research.

C. Data Analysis: Phenomenology

Analysis in phenomenological research proceeds from the central assumption that there is an *essence* to an experience that is shared with others who have had a similar experience. As such, the experiences of those participating in the study are analyzed as unique expressions and then examined in order to identify and distill the essence. The focus is on “life as lived”—that is, the “lived experience.” Phenomenological research makes use of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of an “essence” description (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers who use this approach are reluctant to describe specific analytic techniques, fearing that these might be seen as rules and become inflexible (Hycner, 1985). As such, the focus is on attitude and the response to the phenomenon under study. The aim is to achieve an analytic description of the phenomena not affected by prior assumptions.

Building on data from the first and second research questions (“What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?” and “What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?”), data analysis is an attempt to highlight “significant statements” that provide understanding and insight with regard to how participants experience the phenomenon, which Moustakas (1994) refers to as “horizonalization.” The researcher then goes on to develop clusters of meaning or themes from these significant statements. Themes lead to textural and structural description. Van Manen (1990) refers to data analysis as “phenomenological reflection” in order to be able to grasp essential meaning. The researcher typically employs member checking whereby participants review the researcher’s interpretations and descriptions.

D. Data Analysis: Grounded Theory

Data analysis in grounded theory starts at the moment of initial contact with the phenomenon being studied and continues throughout the development of a grounded theory. The constant comparative method is used for data analysis and involves an interplay among the researcher, the data, the emerging categories, and the developing theory. Theoretical sensitivity is important on the part of the researcher in order to be able to determine what kind of data need to be collected and what aspects of the data are most important for the grounded theory.

Central to grounded theory are three stages to analysis that include procedures for identifying and naming the data and developing categories of information (open coding), interconnecting the categories and looking for relationships among them (axial coding), and looking for the story line of the theory by reflecting on the data and the findings that were produced during open coding and axial coding (selective coding). The theory is then rechecked with the data and with the published literature for additional ideas in developing the grounded theory and understanding its broader significance, thereby ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions (Birks & Mills, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Holton & Walsh, 2017).

Constant comparative analysis is a foundational pillar of classic grounded theory. Through the comparative processes of axial coding, categories are related to one another, with a search for causal explanations for events and interactions. Coding and memoing are the key heuristic techniques in constant comparative analysis. As Holton and Walsh (2017) explain, the conceptualization of data through coding and memoing is the foundation of grounded theory analysis, with the goal being the discovery of a latent pattern of social behavior that might explain an issue or concern. This latent pattern analysis approach spotlights and unravels the complexity of embedded and often subtle patterns of behavior in a social setting to reveal a plan of action. This pattern, the "core category," emerges as data are open coded and conceptualized. Once the pattern emerges, the analysis shifts to concentrate theoretically sampling and selectively coding further data in order to elaborate and eventually saturate the core category and any other concepts that have some relationship to the core. As such, the constant comparative approach begins with the first data that is collected, continues on to theoretical saturation and, finally, integration.

E. Data Analysis: Narrative Inquiry

Data analysis in narrative inquiry is analyzed for the story it has to tell. This involves interpretation, which in turn affects how we as researchers represent our research findings. One may construe analysis and interpretation as two separate concepts, as analysis may imply objectivity, and interpretation may imply subjectivity. However, in narrative inquiry, these two concepts work in tandem because the data are analyzed in order to develop an understanding of the *narrative meaning* of research participants' lived experiences through storytelling, and these meanings are interpreted concurrently with their analysis (Clandinin, 2007; Kim, 2016).

Narrative analysis can occur by way of a variety of methods such as the "paradigmatic mode of analysis" (which relies on paradigmatic cognition, a thinking skill that humans use to organize experiences as organized and consistent) or a "narrative mode of analysis" (based on narrative cognition that attends to the particular and special characteristics of human action that take place in a particular setting). One of the means of data analysis and interpretation involves what Kim (2016) refers to as "narrative smoothing," a method that is used to make participants' stories coherent and engaging. As Kim explains,

> It is like brushing off the rough edges of disconnected raw data. However it can also be problematic because it involves certain omissions, such as the selective reporting of some data (while ignoring other data), or the lack of context due to the researcher's assumption that what is clear to him or her will also be clear to the reader. (p. 192)
>
> Kim (2016) offers a detailed account of different methods and models of analysis in narrative inquiry. Essentially, analysis and interpretation work in tandem to find narrative meaning in the process of storytelling, retelling, and reliving of personal experiences. Typically, field notes and interview transcriptions are shared with the narrator so that the written analysis may be constructed collaboratively. As such, there is recognition that the researcher is not just passively recording and reporting the narrator's own reality.

F. Data Analysis: Action Research

Action research encompasses a set of consciously collaborative and democratic strategies for generating knowledge and designing action in which trained experts in social research and other stakeholders work together. Action research can create large amounts of qualitative and/or quantitative data in need of analysis to provide effective interpretations for the implementation of positive change. The data analysis and interpretation process needs to be accurate and clearly understandable for all stakeholders to gain their input regarding identifying and supporting possible solutions to the problems that are being researched. Data analysis and interpretation can also potentially support the development of community building necessary for assisting with long-term implementation of possible solutions, as well as identifying and addressing emergent problems or issues.

The research protocol is iterative, cyclical, and participative in nature and is intended to foster deeper understanding of a given problem situation, starting with conceptualizing and particularizing the problem and moving through several interventions and evaluations. Data collection and analysis are interwoven in the process. The purpose of data analysis in action research is very clearly twofold: to produce understanding or theory and to inform future action.

Because the researcher's role is that of facilitator who questions, problem-poses, and consults, the research is less about producing a report that includes findings and more about lessons learned and changes considered and/or made. Depending on the interests and needs of participants, a written report may be collaboratively produced, or an oral report or visual display illustrating lessons that were learned or changes accomplished could become the final research product. Reporting, whatever form it takes based on mutual collaboration between researcher and participants, has inherent relevance and meaning with regard to societal improvement, either directly or indirectly.

G. Data Analysis: The Critical Genres

The critical and postmodern turns in critical inquiry, characterized by skepticism toward master narratives and grand theories, have been directed toward *phronesis* (Marshall & Rossman2016); that is, practical contextualized knowledge that is responsive to its environment. Critical genres are grounded in theories that assume society is structured in order to maintain the oppression of marginalized groups. Reflexive subjectivity of the researcher—that is, constant reflective and self-critical processes—is an essential component of data collection and data analysis, which are ongoing and intertwined. The focus is on asking questions that examine historical and current inequity and oppression, and through this questioning process uncovering and unraveling hegemonic forces of policy, power, and dominance in institutions, including their role in reproducing and reinforcing inequity, oppression, and discrimination. The researcher and the researched are not considered separate entities; through interpretation, their constructed meanings become interwoven (Grbich, 2013). Inquiry is designed to contribute to radical change or emancipation from oppressive social structures either through a sustained critique or through direct advocacy or action taken by the researcher, often in collaboration with participants in the study.

Research Methodology, Research Design, and Presentation of Findings

By way of *data analysis*, you are forming a record of frequently occurring phenomena or patterns of behavior. Once you have established patterns, these patterns need to be explained. This is where *interpretation or representing of findings* comes into play. Whereas data analysis presents the findings of your research by organizing data from various sources into categories to produce a readable narrative, the purpose of representation of findings is to provide interpretative insights into your study's findings themselves. During the writing and representation phase of research, the researcher allows a story to emerge, and as we try to most meaningfully and effectively communicate our research findings, we must keep our intended audience at the forefront. Your presentation will hopefully lead your audience to understand your findings as clearly as you do. Remember, organization and presentation of findings must align with

- research design (qualitative research),
- research methodology (qualitative traditions or genres), and
- research questions.

The findings of qualitative research are typically reported in a narrative manner, and qualitative studies usually include extensive samples of quotations from participants, which provide the detail to substantiate the story that you are telling. By using the participants' own words, the researcher aims to build the reader's confidence that the reality of the participants and the situation studied is accurately represented. Methodological challenges posed by intellectual, political, and ethical challenges have increasingly impacted qualitative research design. The complexities presented by new technologies and contexts, including social media networking, have opened the way for innovative and creative modes of presentation. Moreover, there is an increasing demand that research be directly useful to the researched—that is, the research participants and research setting or context. Just as there are clear analytic distinctions among traditions or genres demanding that the researcher will have to think about data analysis in a particular way, so also are there distinct interpretation and representation strategies. As such, the very ways the findings are represented and presented are specific to each qualitative methodology or research tradition.

A. Presentation of Findings: Case Study

In case study research, the researcher reports the meaning of the findings—that is, a detailed analysis of themes and the overall lessons learned from the bounded case or cases, which can be an event, process, program, or individual. The findings are typically reported in a narrative manner to include extensive samples of quotations from participants. Findings are presented in such a way to illustrate a response to all research questions.

B. Presentation of Findings: Ethnography

Ethnography is a report of data gathered through multiple methods, typically in-depth interviews and participant observation, where the participants' perspectives are presented. Illustrating in great detail how a culture-sharing group works and lives is the final product of an ethnographic study. The researcher positions herself or himself and strives to provide thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the social context. The final product is in effect a holistic cultural portrait of the group and incorporates the views of the participants (emic) as well as the views of the researcher (etic). Van Maanen (1988, 1995, 2006) recommends presenting ethnographic research through different styles of "tales" as a way of presenting truthful cultural portraits. These include realist tales (displays a realistic account of a culture which is published in a third-person voice), confessional tales (a highly personalized account that displays the author's power of observation that calls attention to building credible and authentic cultural description), and impressionist tales (the researcher relates her or his own experiences as an autoethnographic account. The tale is told through the chronology of events in the research process, drawing attention not only to the culture under study but also to the experiences that were integral to the cultural description and interpretation). The presentation of findings often advocates for the needs of the group, or suggests societal changes or action. Ethnographic products can be narrative, art-based, or performance-based. Performance ethnography is a staged reenactment in which culture is represented through performance (including staged production, artwork, dance, storytelling, or film) rather than text. Much of the work in this vein is aligned with the principles of critical pedagogy.

C. Presentation of Findings: Phenomenology

Whereas a narrative study reports the stories of experiences of a single individual or several individuals, a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenology has a very strong philosophical component, drawing heavily on the writings of Husserl (1859–1938) and those who expanded on his views, including Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. As such, the basic purpose is to reduce individual experiences to a composite description of the universal essence of experience—that is, according to van Manen (1990), "a grasp of the very nature of the thing" (p. 177). From structural description ("how" things occurred—that is, the context) and textural description of the lived experience of participants ("what" the participants experienced), the researcher writes a composite description that presents the *essence of the phenomenon* or *essential invariant structure.* At its core, phenomenology is the study of the lived experiences and the development of the essence of these experiences rather than explanations or analyses of experience (Moustakas, 1994).

D. Presentation of Findings: Grounded Theory

In a grounded theory study, the result of the process of data collection and data analysis is a theory, a substantial-level theory, written by the researcher. The theory emerges by way of memoing in which the researcher records ideas about the evolving theory throughout the analytic process. The theory may be tested later to determine whether it can be generalized to other samples or populations, or the study may end at this point with the generation of theory being the end goal of the research.

E. Presentation of Findings: Narrative Inquiry

Regarding presentation of data, a narrative researcher can take a literary orientation or a chronological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Active collaboration with participants is a key component so that researchers present participants' stories while at the same time remaining reflective about their own personal and political backgrounds and agendas, which of necessity shapes how they "restory" the account.

F. Presentation of Findings: Action Research

Action research, or the more emancipatory participatory action research (PAR), typically relies on inquiry that is collaboratively developed. Since the goal of this work is improvement (AR) or transformation (PAR), there may be no actual final report. Indeed, a report is often less important than the *process itself* that leads to improvement or transformation. The researcher's role is that of facilitator who questions, problem-poses, and consults. As such, the research is less about producing a report that includes findings and more about lessons learned and changes considered and/or made. Depending on the interests and needs of participants, a written report may be collaboratively produced, or an oral report or visual display illustrating lessons that were learned or changes accomplished could become the final research product. Reporting, whatever form it takes, based on mutual collaboration between researcher and participants has inherent relevance and meaning with regard to societal improvement, either directly or indirectly.

G. Presentation of Findings: The Critical Genres

To illustrate marginality and social oppression, and the impact thereof, critical researchers have an avowedly and explicitly political agenda and make use of narrative, performance, poetry, autoethnography, and ethnographic fiction as their forms of representation. The researcher's goal is to take a stand against social injustice by having greater impact than allowed by an article in an academic journal or book. An emphasis can be on storytelling and the production of counterstories to balance hegemonic representations, thereby providing witness to social injustices and marginalization. Another critical form of representation is that of performance or "cultural performance"—that is, a staged reenactment of the injustice being exposed. This type of representation can be in the form of art-based studies, music, and other forms of media. As evidenced at the many qualitative research conferences over the past decade, critical researchers are increasingly turning their findings into various performative styles, borrowing from the arts and humanities to create a writing genre similar to theater performance.

Critical perspectives include a heightened awareness of and sensitivity to how the researcher represents participants in the study. There is a strong focus on scrutinizing the complex interplay between the researcher's own personal biography, power, and status and the ways in which the researcher interacts with the research participants. A key implication of these concerns is that researchers pay close attention to participants' reactions and to the *voice* they use in their work as a representation of the relationship between themselves and their participants. As pointed out by Marshall and Rossman (2016), further implication of the critical perspective is that the traditional criteria for judging the trustworthiness of the work have become contested.

Research Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions

Two general rules apply:

- Findings and interpretation together are the basis for drawing trustworthy conclusions.
- Each conclusion should be tied to a respective finding or findings.

The "If/Then/Therefore/Thus Matrix" (Table 11.1 contained in this book) provides a useful way to go about aligning findings and conclusions, and then recommendations. Your conclusions should tie together the major findings and also include a summary of the major research interpretations (what the findings mean). This discussion should be directly linked to answering your research questions. It should be very clear to your reader that your research findings provide a response toward addressing the research problem.

As a general rule of thumb, you should provide at least one conclusion for each finding. However, the process is not altogether linear, and so it is possible that one conclusion can (but does not always) cut across more than one finding. It is important to bear in mind when thinking about and formulating each of your conclusions that they must be logically tied to one another.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Two general rules apply:

- Conclusions are the springboard for developing actionable/doable recommendations.
- Recommendations follow your findings and conclusions. They are the application of those conclusions.

The "If/Then/Therefore/Thus Matrix" (Table 11.1 contained in this book) provides a useful way to go about generating recommendations and making sure that these are aligned with the study's findings and conclusions.

Chapter Summary

The objective of this chapter is to provide a clear understanding of the concept of alignment in qualitative research by highlighting and clarifying key elements and concepts and explaining how to ensure and check throughout for alignment and therefore methodological integrity and congruence. All of the study's components should be interconnected and interrelated so that the study itself is a grounded and cohesive whole rather than the sum of fragmented or isolated parts. It should be clear from reading this chapter that methodological integrity and congruence is essential both at a philosophical and a practical level and is an indication of a study of worth and quality. A high-quality dissertation demonstrates additional characteristics as well, regardless of the topic or research methods, including transparency in reporting by way of a logical trail of evidence so that the study can be considered trustworthy. Ensuring alignment, transparency, and trustworthiness helps to clarify how data were collected, coded, analyzed, presented, and interpreted in ways that directly and clearly provide answers to the study's research questions. Throughout this book, as you will notice, there is a clear focus on achieving alignment among all key elements of the dissertation.

Following are some recommended resources that you might consider perusing regarding establishing alignment and methodological congruence among the various elements of your dissertation.

Annotated Bibliography

Mills, J., & Birks, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Qualitative methodology: A practical guide.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This edited volume focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of major qualitative methodologies: action research, discourse analysis, critical ethnography, grounded theory, historical research, case study, narrative research, and phenomenology. The aim of this book is to provide a practical guide to the very early stages of designing a qualitative study, with the reader being introduced to key concepts as building blocks of this process. Qualitative methodologies as opposed to qualitative methods are the main focus of the book, and the reader is reminded up front that the two terms have very different meanings: A methodology is a set of principles and ideas that inform the design of a research study, whereas methods are practical procedures and techniques used to generate and analyze data. Part 1 of the book addresses the foundations of qualitative research, including its historical development and the concepts of a generic qualitative research process. Part 2 scaffolds the reader's learning by examining eight qualitative methodologies. The authors acknowledge that qualitative research studies are not always clear-cut, and that qualitative researchers will often draw upon a range of research traditions. The focus is on philosophical underpinnings, positioning of the researcher, and alignment of philosophy and methodology with purpose and methods. Part 3 examines the details involved in planning a qualitative study, including strategies for writing a proposal, maintaining ethics, and appraising the quality of a qualitative study. Useful case studies and activities are included in each section.

O'Reilly, M., & Kiyimba, N. (2015). *Advanced qualitative research: A guide to using theory.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book addresses the more complex theoretical issues embedded in qualitative research and adopts a reflective stance that emphasizes the nuanced role of the researcher. Throughout each chapter, theory is powerfully and pervasively interwoven in the discussion of its impact on various aspects of the research process. Each chapter has been designed to enable readers to progress in their thinking and practice through an exploration of the key theoretical issues and debates pertinent to quality in qualitative research. A central issue for qualitative research is that there are considerable differences in epistemological positions that methodological positions are informed by (and inform). The authors clearly focus on a move away from mechanical notions of qualitative methods and standardized approaches to research. Instead, they focus on key issues in the field including methodological integrity and congruence, perspective-driven data collection, paradigmatic alignment, and theoretically led analysis. An issue that is very well developed is that which pertains to the value and uniqueness of addressing ethics. The authors outline several key ethical issues including the role and impact of the qualitative researcher, power dynamics inherent in the research process, the iterative and unpredictable nature of research, data and identity protection, and ethics related to data management, dissemination of findings, and sharing of knowledge within and beyond the academic community, including research participants. The book has both a theoretical and an applied focus and is an important and useful resource for those seeking to practically engage with advanced qualitative research methods.

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This text is focused on developing knowledge with regard to the methodological (how to design and conduct qualitative research), theoretical (philosophical underpinnings), and conceptual (the ways the researcher conceives and shapes the study and its multiple components) that is needed to engage in rigorous research. As such, the reader can begin to cultivate, appreciate, and integrate theoretical, methodological, and conceptual knowledge and skills that are needed to engage in a respectful and rigorous research process. The authors provide practical explanations and numerous exercises and resources for how to conduct qualitative research, from design through implementation, analysis, and writing up. The book presents the field of qualitative inquiry in a way that helps readers understand what the authors refer to as "criticality" in research by communicating its foundations and processes with clarity and simplicity while still addressing and capturing its complexity. Of particular note are

Chapter 1, which focuses on the role of the researcher (including criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor); Chapter 2, which provides a detailed and informative overview of the use and importance of conceptual frameworks in qualitative research; Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, which explain the significance and ramifications of a critical qualitative research design, and the integral nature of researcher reflexivity and methodological congruence; Chapter 5, which is an overview of the key methods of data collection in qualitative research; Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, which focus on qualitative data analysis processes, with a strong emphasis on how the analytic process must align with the particular qualitative tradition or genre chosen for the study; and Chapter 9, which deals with presentation and representation of qualitative findings as aligned across genres. Overall, this is an excellent critical text that does not simply provide an overview of qualitative research; it dynamically draws out and highlights the key components and complexities involved in the qualitative research process as they apply to and impact trustworthiness, methodological integrity, and rigor.

Part I: Summary and Discussion

Taking Charge of Yourself and Your Work

Part I of this book addresses the initial and preliminary stages of the dissertation process, and we offer suggestions regarding the various activities involved.

Developing Your Study

- The starting point for any research project involves coming to some decision about a sound, doable topic—that is, the subject of inquiry around a particular research problem that your study will address. Determine what you want to research and what you want to learn.
- Once you have identified a general area of interest, narrow your topic to develop a more clearly refined idea around a researchable problem. Crafting a narrowly defined problem statement will serve to control the scope of your research, making it a manageable study.
- Develop a working title that can serve as a guide and focus for the study. The working title should remain flexible so that it can be refined and re-refined as your study progresses. Keeping notes about how and why your title changes over time is a useful exercise.
- Select a qualitative methodology (tradition or genre) based on the nature of your research problem and your study's purpose and research questions. You will then be able to proceed to design your study within the framework of the appropriate methodology, with the components of the design process aligning with and reflecting characteristic principles and features.
- Draft a proposal that consists of the first three chapters of what will become your dissertation—introduction, literature review, and methodology. Your proposal is brought forth to a hearing by a committee for endorsement and approval to proceed, and gaining approval is therefore a major step on the road to completing your dissertation.
- Check on institutional and/or program-related requirements with regard to all dissertation proposal requirements. Keep in mind that the proposal will also require a review by your university's institutional review board.

Working With Your Committee

- Seek a suitable advisement team. Each university has a different system in this regard, and you need to make sure of your institution's and/or program's policies and procedures.
- Understand that students and faculty are partner stakeholders in the dissertation process. Be aware of student and faculty expectations and responsibilities. This is a necessary element in the dissertation process that many students are not clear about, and hence they have unfulfilled expectations and can therefore tend to make unnecessary demands.

Preparing Yourself and Managing Your Time

- Understanding the elements that constitute each section of your dissertation is a necessary first step. Become familiar with the relationships between and among the multiple components that constitute a dissertation, including the technical (micro), practical (macro), and conceptual (meta) aspects.
- Overcome your anxieties and frustrations by viewing and tackling your work in increments—piece by piece, step by step. Action leads to progress, and progress leads to increasing levels of confidence, which is vital to maintaining momentum.
- The time commitment involved in doing your dissertation is substantial given the volume of work, so plan your time thoughtfully. A timetable for your work may or may not formally be required by your committee, but it is an effective way to manage your time and keep you on track. Create a system whereby you work on parts that contribute to the whole—chapter by chapter or even one part of a chapter at a time. The dissertation journey is essentially about achieving milestones one step at a time.
- As a resourceful doctoral candidate, try to create a dissertation support system that will contribute to your

success by providing emotional and academic support. There are many people who have the potential to promote your progress, and the graduate student network is a particularly valuable resource. It is to your advantage to reach out to graduates and other professionals and colleagues who you believe might be helpful to you in this regard.

Organizing Your Work

- Develop your own system to organize and manage the ongoing accumulation of data. This will help you feel more in control and less overwhelmed.
- Right from the beginning, be vigilant in saving information. Losing material, even pieces of it, can be a devastating setback.
- Make use of a journal to capture your thoughts, ideas, and strategies. Recording your thinking means that you will accumulate material that can be revisited and drawn on, and that can form a substantial part of the methodology and analysis chapters of your dissertation. Keeping careful records implies a reflexive approach and provides ideas for future directions of your work as well as an "audit trail," which is useful for making trustworthiness claims for your study.
- Familiarize yourself with data sources that you will need throughout the process (e.g., library resources, computer databases, and relevant texts).

Guidelines for Academic Writing

- Considering that your audience is primarily the academic community, employ formal, scholarly writing throughout.
- Ensure that format and style adhere to your institution's and/or program's requirements.
- Use outlines to plan and present your writing.
- Develop the habit of writing defensively. This approach not only ensures clarity but also helps to ensure that what you are writing does not provoke questions in the minds of the readers.
- Be aware of strategies for avoiding plagiarism, including accidental plagiarism.
- Proofread and edit your work consistently to find and correct your own errors in thought and organization. Read your work aloud to check for syntax, flow, and any unwarranted assumptions and unsupported statements.

Achieving Alignment Throughout Your Dissertation

- Alignment must be addressed at every stage of the dissertation process—from the very beginning when you are seeking to study a specific research problem, right through the very end when you are writing up your study's conclusions and recommendations . . . and EVERY stage in between!
- It is imperative that you ensure and check for alignment throughout a qualitative dissertation in order to best conduct and write up the research.
- Establishing and maintaining alignment means that your study is tight and that you have taken important steps in ensuring methodological integrity and congruence.
- Demonstrating strong and clear alignment throughout your dissertation is extremely important for the dissertation defense when the methodological integrity of your research is finely scrutinized by your committee members. Be well prepared for questions in this regard!
- Chapter 5 is designed to assist you in developing a clear understanding of the concept of alignment in qualitative research by highlighting and clarifying all of the key elements and concepts that must be strongly and clearly aligned throughout the dissertation.

Part II Content and Process A Chapter-by-Chapter Road Map

Part II is about writing up your study. Each chapter in Part II mirrors the respective chapter of an actual dissertation. Chapters 6 through 8 set up the study and constitute the study's framework. As pointed out in Part I, these three chapters form your proposal. Chapters 9 through 11 discuss how you actually deal with the data that you collect.

The problem identified in Part I, which addresses why people who have completed all the doctoral course work do not go on to complete the research and write their dissertations, is used throughout each chapter in Part II. In this way, you can follow the same idea as it threads through all the different sections that constitute a dissertation. Each chapter in Part II is presented in two sections. Section I provides instructions regarding the specific content of each chapter and how that content is developed. Section II is the application that demonstrates what a written-up chapter would look like based on the content developed. In the "Instruction" section of each chapter of Part II, we offer various road maps—in the form of tables and figures—to guide and plan your thinking. Appendices include completed examples of such road maps based on the "Application" section in each chapter.

Although the objective in each "Application" section is to illustrate the content of an actual dissertation, what we present is not a fully developed dissertation chapter but a representation or model of what the chapter should look like based on a required structure. As such, bear in mind that in a real dissertation, the discussion would need to be extensively more elaborated and expanded. The intent of the "Application" sections is that you will develop a clear grasp of the content, understand the process, and thereby be able to apply what you learn here to your own dissertation. In addition, we stress throughout that requirements vary among institutions and programs, and so with all components of the dissertation, you will need to check with your advisor and/or department regarding planning, preparing, and presentation.

We are careful to point out at the outset and throughout the chapters of this book that while most institutions will approach the proposal and dissertation in common ways, at the same time there are differences in terms of the organization and presentation of the proposal and dissertation, page limits and/or expectations for each chapter, and distinct differences in terms of what and how qualitative language and terminology are used. This book presents information as guidelines that are meant to be flexible per institutional expectations and requirements, and subject to modification depending on your institution, department, and program.

Table II.1 provides an overview of the contents of an entire dissertation. It is a prelude to the steps involved in each of the chapters that are described and demonstrated in Part II.

TABLE II.1 Overview of Dissertation Content

Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Problem	Chapter 2: Literature Review	Chapter 3: Research Methodology	Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings	Chapter 5: Analysis and Interpretation of Findings	Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations	
• Context • Problem • Purpose • Research Questions • Research Approach • Anticipated Outcomes • Researcher Assumptions • Rationale and Significance • Researcher Perspectives • Definitions of Terminology	• Purpose • Rationale for Topics • Description: Topic I • Description: Topic II • Description: Topic III • Summary • Theoretical or Conceptual Framework • Narrative Description • Graphic Depiction	• Purpose • Introduction • Overview of Information Needed • Overview of Methodology • Demographic Data • Analysis and Synthesis of Data • Issues of Trustworthiness • Limitations • Summary	• Purpose • Description of findings must be objective. • Findings are not subject to interpretation by researcher.	• Purpose • Description of meaning tied to each finding is subjective. • Analysis relates to research questions and is synthesized with data from other methods and literature.	• Conclusion • Typically, each conclusion drawn should be tied to the respective findings and interpretations.	• Recommendations • Typically there are recommendations for (a) practice, (b) policy, and (c) further research.
			Matrix of Findings Through Recommendations: "If/Then/Therefore/Thus"			
			"If I find this . . ."	"Then I think this means . . ."	"Therefore I conclude that . . ."	"Thus I recommend that . . ."

Table II.1

6 Introduction to Your Study

Chapter 6 Objectives

Section I: Instruction

- Understand how to develop the research problem that is situated within the context of your topic of interest.
- Narrow and refine the research problem statement.
- Develop a purpose statement that addresses the research problem.
- Identify the research questions that are tied to the purpose and, when answered, will shed light on the research problem.
- Describe and define content for additional chapter elements including research approach, anticipated outcomes, researcher's assumptions and perspectives, rationale and significance, and definitions of key terminology.
- Explain the significance of alignment among research problem, research purpose, research questions, qualitative inquiry, and chosen qualitative methodology (tradition or genre).

Section II: Application

- Present a completed example for the first chapter of a dissertation.

Overview

The first chapter of your dissertation is the most critical, and everything that follows hinges on how well this first chapter is constructed. Chapter 1 of your dissertation begins with the *context*, which introduces the research by providing the background that sets the stage for the *problem* to be investigated. Once you have identified a sound, researchable problem, the next step is to describe the *purpose* of the research—that is, *how* you will go about addressing the problem. To carry out the study's purpose, three to four *research questions* are developed that, when answered, will shed light on the research problem you have identified. Therefore, the problem, purpose, and research questions are the building blocks—the very core—of your study; they are intrinsically tied together and the basis from which everything else develops.

Our objective in this chapter is twofold: to provide you with an understanding of how to think through and identify the critical elements in setting up and carrying out a research study and to provide you with an illustration of a well-constructed introductory chapter. In this chapter, we introduce the research problem on which this book is based, and we continue to use this same problem throughout the succeeding chapters to illustrate each step of the dissertation process.

The first chapter of a dissertation is about defining what is to be studied and why it is worth studying. We begin this chapter by reviewing the key elements involved in setting up a sound qualitative study. Although the requirements vary among programs and/or institutions, some common core elements need to be included in a dissertation's first chapter—namely, problem, purpose, and research questions. Each of these elements is described and illustrated in greater detail in the following section.

Section I: Instruction

Research Problem

Beginning researchers often confuse a topic with a research problem, so we provide some clarification. As explained in Chapter 2, the starting point for any research project, and indeed the first major challenge in conducting research, is coming to some decision about a sound, researchable topic. The topic is the subject of inquiry around a particular research problem that your study will address. A topic refers to a general area of interest. For example, we may be interested in the issue of change because we are living in a time when rapid and increasing changes are taking place all around us. A research problem is more specific. It seeks to understand some aspect of the general topic. For example, given our interest in change, we want to better understand how people learn to master or adapt to change. Thus, our problem focuses on the participants' perceptions with respect to some specific change event. The problem therefore indicates the need for the study, describes the issue or problem to be studied, and situates it in a broader educational or social context. The process of developing a researchable topic is a process of idea generation—the movement from a general interest toward a more clearly refined idea around a researchable problem. It is important that the problem becomes specific and narrow enough to let you master a reasonable amount of information.

The heart of a dissertation is articulation of the research problem. This is the place where most committee members will go first to understand and assess the merits of a proposal or a dissertation. The problem statement is a brief discussion of a problem or observation, succinctly identifying and documenting the need for and importance of the study. After reading the problem statement, the reader will know why you are doing this study and be convinced of its importance. The reader will not be left with an unanswered "So what?" question at the study's conclusion. In qualitative research, the problem should be open ended and exploratory in nature. A problem that leads to a question that can be answered with "yes" or "no" is not suitable for formal, scholarly qualitative research.

Identifying the Research Problem

All qualitative research emerges from a perceived problem—some unsatisfactory situation, condition, or phenomenon that we want to confront. Sometimes, the source of research is around a particular scholarly debate, a pressing social issue, or some workplace phenomena we want to better understand. You will need to clearly describe and document the research problem that prompted the study and include appropriate sources to document the existence of a problem worthy of doctoral-level research. The problem indicates the need for the study. In writing up your problem statement, be sure that it refers to an important, authentic, genuine problem that we know little about but that is significant and therefore worthy of investigation. Ask yourself, "So why is this a problem?" The fact that there may be little in the literature on the subject is *not* a problem. For every problem, there has to be a worthwhile reason for the study to be conducted. We do not do research because we are interested in a certain topic or because we have a hunch about something and we want to go and *prove* it, as would be the case with quantitative research. A qualitative research problem is driven by incomplete knowledge or limited understanding. You address the problem not by solving or changing it but by better understanding its cause(s) and the implications thereof.

Identifying a research problem is one of the most often cited stumbling blocks for students who are just beginning the dissertation journey. All too often, students have grand ideas about conducting big and important research in a particular area of interest to them. And all too often, we remind students that, although every topic should have the potential to make a contribution to a particular field, this should not be the overriding objective. Rather, what is most important is that a topic be so narrowly defined and focused that it is specific enough to be carried out to its conclusion. If you have too many aspects associated with your problem, which is often the case, in your study you may not be able to properly manage and account for all of these.

Evaluating a Researchable Problem

Refining the problem to be addressed calls for reflecting on whether that problem *can* and *should* be researched in the first place. First, whether the problem can or cannot be researched involves giving some thought to the practical feasibility or *do-ability* involved (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Important judgments will have to be made regarding the possibility of access to potential sites and potential research populations, availability of sources of information, the researcher's knowledge and skills, and the availability of time and resources at your disposal to collect and analyze data over a sustained period of time. Second is the question of *should.* This question is complex and brings various factors into play. Considering the *should-do-ability* of a study calls into consideration the practical as well as the theoretical implications of pursuing a research problem (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). You therefore need to take the following aspects into account:

1. Potential audience. Who would appreciate the worth of my study? Who would care enough to read it? Who would be interested?
2. Intellectual value and worth of the study. What, if any, is the wider significance of this research? Who would benefit by this study? Would a study in this area contribute to the ongoing conversation in a particular social science discipline or applied field? Would the study generate theoretical and/or conceptual understanding? Will the study contribute to the development of professional practice? What, if anything, would be the significance for policy?
3. Personal and professional goals. Will this study further my personal and/or professional interests? Will it enhance my career and/or career change? Will the research problem sustain my interest over the ensuing months and years?
4. Ethical considerations. Does the research involve practices or strategies that might embarrass or harm participants? Are there any risks to others in reporting the findings and outcomes of the potential study?

In seeking to evaluate a researchable problem, you should determine whether your problem statement would pass the *ROC* test. That is, your problem must be researchable (doable), original, and contributory:

Researchable

- Could the problem be addressed by collecting and analyzing data?
- Do you have the time, resources, and skills to carry out the research?
- Is the research study (site and participants) accessible?
- Will you be able to find an organization that will provide you written formal permission to conduct research at its site?
- Are you able to access data through public sources that require no permission to use the data for research?

Original

- Is this a replication study with a new population or passage of time?
- Will this study examine or explore a new issue or different perspective of an existing problem?
- Is this a study that has not been previously conducted and that may create new knowledge?

Contributory

- Should the problem be studied? In other words is the study warranted?
- Will this study advance scholarly knowledge?
- Will this study contribute to practice and/or policy?
- Will this study contribute to a community or society at large?
- Will this study make a difference in your profession?

Refining and Honing Your Problem Statement

Since all forms of systematic inquiry may be considered as actions in response to problems, having a well-conceived problem statement is an essential component of your research. The problem statement serves a foundational role in that it communicates the formal reason for engaging in the dissertation study (Jacobs, 2013).

A problem statement must demonstrate inclusion of the following:

- Theoretical and/or practical importance
- The type of research to be employed
- The population to be investigated and why this population was chosen
- The elements or factors involved and how these are related and will be explored
- Clarity and conciseness in articulation

Table 6.1 is a tool you might find useful in outlining and articulating your problem statement. This tool enables you to think about each of the prompts presented in relation to your proposed research topic.

TABLE 6.1 Problem Statement Development Template

Think about the following prompts in relation to your proposed topic:
1. ***What?***
In no more than a few sentences, explain a concern or problem that the research will address. Remember, qualitative research emerges from a perceived problem—some unsatisfactory situation, condition, or phenomenon that you seek to examine. How do you know from the literature or practical experience that this is a problem that needs investigating? What might be missing in the current body of knowledge? Refer to relevant, current, peer-reviewed literature and research that supports the presence of the problem, and briefly describe the nature of that support. Make notes here to respond to this prompt.
2. ***Who, How, Where, and When?***
In no more than a few sentences, describe the impact of the problem. Who is negatively impacted by the problem, and how? When and where is the problem evident? Refer to relevant, current, peer-reviewed literature and research that addresses the impact of the proposed research problem. Make notes here to respond to this prompt.
3. ***Why?***
In no more than a few sentences, identify the conceptual basis for the problem. What does the literature outline as the cause of the problem? Remember, the research problem is driven by incomplete or limited understanding. You address the problem not by solving or changing it but by better understanding its cause(s) and the implications thereof. Thereby, you will need to substantiate the significance of the problem—hence, the justification for the proposed study. Refer to relevant, current, peer-reviewed literature and research that supports the conceptual basis of the problem, and briefly describe the nature of that support. Make notes here to respond to this prompt.
4. ***Synthesis***
Can you clearly articulate your problem statement? That is, if somebody were to ask you what you were researching, could you succinctly explain the *what, who, how, where, when,* and *why* of the proposed study? As you think about this more, you may discover areas of your problem statement in need of further refinement or revision. Make notes here to respond to this prompt.

Table 6.1

The research problem we work with in the application sections of this book is: Why do some doctoral candidates complete the doctoral course work and yet do not go on to complete the research and write their dissertations, thereby remaining all-but-dissertation (ABD)? The central thrust of the research is how participants explain their failure to complete their dissertations after completing their course work, why they believe this failure occurred, and why they were unable to overcome the obstacles that stood in their way. This research problem is narrowly defined and focuses on a specific segment of the population; it is relevant to you, the reader, and hopefully will contribute to your ability to complete the research and write your dissertation. Once you have identified your own narrowly defined topic and clear, concise problem statement, you are ready to formulate your purpose statement and research questions that must be addressed and answered to shed light on the research problem.

Purpose Statement

The research purpose refers to *how* you will go about addressing the problem—that is, who will be involved and what perceptions they have that are germane to your problem. A purpose statement is a declarative statement that summarizes the research project's main goal or goals, and provides some guidance with regard to establishing the study's research questions. Specifically, the purpose statement is the major objective or intent of the study; it enables the reader to understand the central thrust of the research. Given the importance of the purpose, it is helpful to frame it as a short, crisp, almost "bite-sized" statement that can be retained by the reader and researcher alike. Because the purpose is a critical piece of the entire study, it needs to be given careful attention and must be written in clear and concise language. Once the problem has been clearly developed and stated, then the purpose will need to evolve to align with the problem statement. One way of assuring this alignment is to maintain one—and only one—wording for the purpose. Once you settle on the wording, use that exact wording throughout your document whenever you present the purpose.

Henceforth, we recommend that each succeeding chapter of the dissertation include the purpose statement in the introductory paragraph. This notion is demonstrated in each "Application" section. Please note, however, that inclusion of the purpose statement in this way is a requirement that applies to some programs but not all. If you choose to include the purpose statement in the opening section of all your chapters, be sure that you word this statement exactly the same throughout so that it can be easily identified. Even if you do not include the purpose statement in each chapter's introductory paragraph, in every instance that you mention your study's purpose, be sure to adhere to the same wording throughout. Accuracy and precision in this respect allow for clarity and help avoid potential confusion. This stage is the time not to be creative but rather to remain practical!

Note that there is a close relationship between the research methodology (qualitative tradition or genre) and the purpose statement. In all traditions, you are trying to *discover* something. With case study, ethnography, or phenomenology, you are trying to understand, describe, or explore a phenomenon. In grounded theory studies, you are trying to develop or generate theory. Therefore, you need to be specific about the words that you use to define your purpose statement. In addition, the purpose statement should include terms that refer to the specific methodology, the research site, and the research participants.

You will see from Figure 6.1 that the purpose is directly related to and flows from the research problem, and that the research questions in turn are related to and flow from the purpose. A good strategy for testing the interconnectedness and logic of your problem, purpose, and research questions is to lay all three of these elements out on one page as illustrated in the following example. It is vital to complete this step before you begin writing Chapter 1 because these three elements are the heart of your study, and you must get them right. This simple exercise helps you achieve clarity around the problem in its simplest form, and it identifies how you will go about shedding light on the problem. This step forces you to implode for clarity before you explode and fully develop the subject matter. In other words, to keep your problem in focus, you need to reduce it to simple terms before you can present it in more scholarly and elegant ways. When you do this, you are less likely to lose sight of exactly what aspects of a particular phenomenon you seek to explore. If you take the time to produce this one simple page, it will greatly facilitate the writing of a well-developed first chapter. Chapter 1, while one of the shorter chapters in a dissertation, is arguably the most important because everything that follows is a result of how well the critical elements—problem, purpose, and research questions—have been developed.

Figure 6.1 Road Map for Developing the Dissertation's First Chapter: Necessary Elements

PROBLEM:

Research indicates that significant numbers of people in doctoral programs complete all the course requirements yet do not go on to complete the research or produce their dissertations. Hence, despite their significant investment in time and money, these people never receive the doctoral degrees they set out to obtain, and thus remain ABD. There is little information as to why this phenomenon occurs.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this case study is to explore the perceptions of doctoral candidates regarding why they have not managed to complete their dissertations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. On completion of their course work, to what extent do participants perceive that they were prepared to conduct research and write their dissertations?
2. What do participants perceive that they need to learn to complete their dissertations?
3. How do participants attempt to develop the knowledge, and acquire the skills and attitudes that they perceive are necessary to complete their dissertations?
4. What factors do participants perceive might help them to complete their dissertations?
5. What factors do participants perceive have impeded and/or continue to impede their progress in working toward completing their dissertations?

Research Questions

As you can see from Figure 6.1, the research questions are directly tied to the study's purpose. This underscores that you must ask the right questions to shed light on the research problem. Research questions are general questions about the phenomenon under study—what the researcher wishes to learn or understand about it. Research questions are quite different from the more specific questions asked in interviews: The former provide a framework for understanding a phenomenon, whereas the latter are intended to produce the data for the answers to each of the research questions.

Your guiding research questions are the intersecting point between every aspect of the research design, and the centrality of research questions in the study is therefore key. Conceptualizing, developing, writing, and rewriting research questions are all part of a dynamic, reflective qualitative inquiry process. Good qualitative questions are significant tools that shape a study design and analysis, and using qualitative research questions reflexively can help a researcher to clarify the study's purpose (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). In qualitative studies, research questions are developed at the start of a project, and these become modified as the research process proceeds to address emergent issues. It is therefore important that the researcher remain responsive to the phenomena and contexts of the study so that the research questions may (and often do) evolve over time. This requires a mind-set that allows you to adopt a research approach that is flexible and responsive to change, refinement, and modification. Although initial questions often emerge from a researcher's passions and interests in particular topics, ultimately, the goal is to refine and possibly expand the inquiry through reflexive, iterative, and dialogic processes that are central to the theoretical and ethical positions taken up by the researcher. During the inquiry process, a researcher needs to see questions as tools for discovery as well as tools for clarity and focus. In the end, qualitative questions must draw the reader into the research with a focus on the significance of the research problem and purpose and at the same time function as lenses that are directed outward by the researcher to capture the nuances of the lives, experiences, and perspectives of others.

Qualitative research questions should be clear, specific, and unambiguously stated. They should also be interconnected—that is, related to each other in some meaningful way. As such, the questions should be displayed in a logical order. Mostly, the research questions must be substantively relevant; they must be worthy of the research effort to be expended. Therefore, you need to consider carefully the nature of your research questions and the kind of understanding they may generate. Maxwell (2013) offers a useful categorization of the kinds of understanding that qualitative inquiry can generate by way of the following types of questions:

> Descriptive—these ask what is going on in terms of actual observable (or potentially observable) events and behavior;
> Interpretive—these seek to explore the meaning of things, situations, and conditions for the people involved; and
> Theoretical—these are aimed at examining why certain things happen and how they can be explained.

Qualitative research questions are typically open ended and usually start with *how* or *in what ways* and *what.* In developing your research questions, it is important that the questions be open ended to foster exploration and discovery. Therefore, avoid wording your questions in ways that solicit yes or no answers. Your research questions should be nondirectional. They should not imply cause and effect or in any way suggest measurement. Do not use terminology that suggests or infers quantitative research, such as *affect, influence, cause,* or *amount.* Once you have developed your research questions, it is a good idea to step back and test them. You do this by reading each one and asking, "What kind of information will I likely get in response to this question?"

Additional Elements

In addition to the research problem, purpose, and research questions, there are other associated elements or subsections that appear in a fully developed Chapter 1. It should be noted, however, that aside from problem, purpose, and research questions, there may be some variations in required subheadings depending on individual programs and/or universities. Begin this section with one or two brief introductory paragraphs in which you tell the reader what research methodology you have used and mention the site and research sample. In this introduction, you also should lay out the organization of the remainder of the chapter so that the reader has a clear idea of this up front. After this brief introduction, you are ready to discuss the context. Following is an outline of typical subheadings included in Chapter 1. These headings appear in sequential order:

Context—This is the beginning of the dissertation; it is the stage setting leading up to and introducing the problem to be addressed in the study. The context provides the history, background, and issues germane to the problem. It gives the reader an understanding of circumstances that may have precipitated the problem, the current state of the situation surrounding the problem, and the primary reasons that an exploration of the problem is warranted. It is important to embed your discussion of the context in the ongoing dialogue in the literature. This is not a formal review of the literature, as in Chapter 2 of the dissertation; rather, it helps you to build the case for why your research should be undertaken and to convince the reader of the study's need and value. It is in this way that you set up the legitimacy of the problem. The context can usually be covered effectively in five to seven pages.

Research Problem—*as described previously*
Purpose—*as described previously*
Research Questions—*as described previously*

Research Design Overview—This section briefly describes the kind of study you are conducting, identifying which among the different qualitative traditions you will be choosing. In this section, you also describe the site and research participants, the data collection methods that you use, and the type of data that you are collecting, as well as the strategies you use for data analysis. This discussion should not be more than a page or two because more explicit information regarding your research approach is provided in Chapter 3.

Rationale and Significance—This discussion is presented in two well-thought-out paragraphs (or in some institutions may be required as two separate sections) that provide the rationale for the study and its significance. The rationale is the justification for the study presented as a logical argument. It describes the genesis of the study and why it is important to carry it out. This is distinct from the significance of the study, which addresses the benefits that may be derived from doing the study. The significance addresses questions regarding your study such as "So what?" or "What difference does it make?" Therefore, the issue of significance reaffirms the research purpose and is a more detailed explanation of the implications of your study—that is, what benefits will be derived from the study. In other words, in attempting to establish the significance of your research, you should think about the various ways in which your study is likely to contribute to (a) theory (by adding to research and literature), (b) potential practical application, and/or (c) ways in which the study might improve policy.

The Researcher—This section informs the reader what you—as the researcher—bring to the study. Begin by describing your background, education, and professional experience that lends itself to your interest in and knowledge about the subject of your inquiry. You also can share your unique perspectives and interests as they relate to and inform the study. In this way, the reader develops some idea as to why you are prepared (*qualified* is too strong a word) to carry out your research.

Researcher Assumptions—These statements reflect what you hold to be true as you go into the study and from which you believe you will be able to draw some conclusions. Your assumptions are based on certain premises that may either hold up or be shown to be unwarranted. The researcher usually identifies four or five assumptions. These are the important issues around your topic that you believe to be true as you begin your research. Later on, at the end of your research (in the analysis chapter), you will revisit and reflect on your initial assumptions.

Definitions of Key Terminology—This section provides the definitions of terminology used in the study that do not have a common meaning or those terms that have the possibility of being misunderstood. These terms should be operationally defined or explained; that is, you must clarify how these terms are used in *your* study. If you use the definitions of others, be sure to include the authoritative sources to support these definitions. Which terms to define and clarify is a matter of judgment. Generally, these are the terms that are central to your study, that are used throughout, and that may not be understandable to all readers. Making terms explicit adds precision and ensures clarity of understanding.

The reflexive questions that follow can serve as prompts for journaling throughout the dissertation process, and in this case, for Chapter 1 of your dissertation, in which you are setting up and establishing the study's key components.

The *research problem* is the social or cultural issue that identifies the importance of and need for the study in order to produce new knowledge that will therefore deepen understanding. All qualitative research emerges from a perceived problem—some unsatisfactory situation, condition, or phenomenon that you have identified and/or experienced and that you wish to confront, examine, and understand. The *research purpose* is the major objective or intent of the study and will hopefully shed light on the research problem. *Research questions* undergird the research process, and asking meaningful and relevant research questions is at the heart of critical thinking and problem solving. The way you frame your purpose and questions directly shapes your research, both in terms of content and process.

Reflexive Questions for Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Research Problem

1. Is my research problem an issue of social and/or cultural significance? Why? In what ways?
2. What does this problem or issue mean to me, either personally or professionally?
3. Will this research add to the knowledge base in my field and/or discipline?
4. Will examining this problem have the potential to raise social awareness in my field and/or discipline?
5. What difference can this research potentially make in terms of changing policy and/or practice? How, and in what way(s)?
6. Have my assumptions and perspectives related to the research topic, research problem, or context changed over time? If so, how, and in what ways?

Research Purpose

1. Have I framed the research purpose in a meaningful way?
2. What personal and/or professional agenda am I trying to address or resolve with this research purpose in mind?
3. What personal and/or professional insights have driven me to conduct this research?
4. Is this research purpose socially relevant?

Research Questions

1. Are my questions substantively relevant and worthy of research?
2. Do my questions confront any prevailing assumptions?
3. Do my questions stimulate critical thinking?

Chapter Summary Discussion

This chapter described the critical components that ground and frame a research study: problem, purpose, and research questions. The interconnectedness of these components was emphasized, as these are at the core of the research, and everything that follows hinges on how well these components are constructed and aligned. In addition to these major components, the chapter also described and illustrated all the other elements that may constitute a well-developed introductory chapter, including research approach, researcher assumptions and perspectives, rationale and significance, and definitions of key terminology.

TABLE Quality Assessment Chapter Checklist

Problem	✓ Is the background of the problem clearly presented? ✓ Is adequate background information presented for an understanding of the problem? ✓ Is the problem appropriate for qualitative inquiry? ✓ Is the problem sufficiently narrow in scope? That is, can you differentiate the problem from your broader topic? ✓ Is the problem clearly and logically articulated? ✓ Does the discussion move from the general to the specific? ✓ Is the problem clearly situated within the literature? That is, does the literature serve to place the problem in context? ✓ Is there a logical segue that leads directly to the purpose statement?
Purpose	✓ Is the purpose specific, focused, and unambiguously stated? ✓ Is it clear as to how the research purpose will address the problem? ✓ Is the purpose relevant to your chosen research tradition?
Research Questions	✓ Are the research questions clearly focused and unambiguously stated? ✓ Are research questions open ended so that they will foster exploration and discovery? ✓ Would answers to research questions shed light on or address the research problem? ✓ Are all the research questions interconnected? That is, is there a natural relationship among them? ✓ Is there alignment among problem, purpose, and research questions?
Research Design	✓ Is your research approach appropriate and feasible as a means of qualitative inquiry? ✓ Is your research methodology appropriate and feasible for a qualitative research design?
Researcher Perspectives	✓ Does this section inform the reader what the researcher brings to the study? ✓ Do you discuss how researcher experience and perspective are related to the problem?
Researcher Assumptions	✓ Are researcher assumptions and biases revealed and explained?
Rationale and Significance	✓ Is there a well-thought-out rationale that provides justification for this study? ✓ Is a convincing argument explicitly or implicitly made for the importance or significance of this research? ✓ Is it clear how this research will contribute to the knowledge base and/or practice and/or policy?
Definition of Terms	✓ Does the chapter conclude with definitions and/or explanations of key terminology that might not have a commonly understood meaning? ✓ If you include definitions, have you properly cited all relevant authoritative sources?
Addressing Alignment	✓ Is your research problem aligned with your research approach (qualitative research)? ✓ Is your research problem aligned with your research purpose? ✓ Is your research purpose aligned with your research questions?
And . . .	✓ Have you checked for institutional and/or programmatic requirements regarding the content and structure of Chapter 1? ✓ Have you checked for institutional and/or programmatic requirements regarding appropriate use of qualitative language and terminology? ✓ Is the writing throughout clear and readable? Refer to Chapter 4 "Guidelines for Academic Writing."

Section II: Application

Now that we have reviewed and explained the essential elements required to construct a research study and introduced it in Chapter 1, we are ready to see what an actual written-up first chapter of a dissertation would look like using the problem previously identified.

Chapter 1 of the Dissertation

Introduction

This study sought to explore the phenomenon of why some people who enter doctoral programs complete all the course work but do not go on to complete their dissertations. It was anticipated that the knowledge generated from this inquiry would afford new insights and so inform higher education practice. This research employed qualitative case study methodology to illustrate the phenomenon under examination. Participants in this study included a purposefully selected group consisting of 20 doctoral candidates who had completed the course work but not yet completed their dissertations.

This chapter begins with an overview of the context and background that frames the study. Following this is the problem statement, the statement of purpose, and accompanying research questions. Also included in this chapter is discussion around the research approach, the researchers' perspectives, and the researchers' assumptions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the proposed rationale and significance of this research study and definitions of some of the key terminology used.

Background and Context

Although there has been a proliferation in the number of doctoral degrees granted in the last two decades, there also has been an increase in attrition rates in doctoral programs. The status of “all but dissertation” (ABD) has been a critical one in graduate education since the 1960s, and its poignancy—and its permanency—has been growing (Sternberg, 1981). That doctoral candidates struggle, stall, and ultimately fail to complete their doctorates still remains one of the central issues in doctoral education in the United States in the 21st century.

It is estimated that around 50% of students who enter doctoral programs leave without graduating (Berg, 2007; Bowen & Rudenstein, 1992; Dunn, 2014; Lovitts, 1996, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). As Bowen and Rudenstein (1992) state, “The percentage of students who never earn PhDs in spite of having achieved ABD status has risen . . . the absolute numbers are high enough to be grounds for serious concern” (p. 253). These authors further report that, for many of those who eventually receive the degree, it takes between 6 and 12 years to do so. Failure to complete doctoral programs not only represents a personal setback to the individual in pursuit of the degree, but it also is wasteful in terms of resources, time, and money for institutions and academic departments (Katz, 1995; Lenz, 1995).

More recently, Dunn (2014) reports that the Council of Graduate Schools confirmed this phenomenon with its PhD Completion Project, which tracked 9,000 doctoral students among 30 institutions from the early 1990s through 2004. Findings indicated that 57% of students who started doctoral programs completed within 10 years, and that roughly 30% dropped out altogether. Key to these findings is that attrition rate spikes when students begin their dissertations.

The completion of a doctoral dissertation is usually the most taxing and difficult academic requirement a student will face during her or his term of graduate education (Brause, 2004; Dunn, 2014; Meloy, 1992, 1994; Rudestam & Newton, 2001; Sternberg, 1981). The journey through the required research and writing processes is a challenging one, pushing the student intellectually, philosophically, emotionally, and financially. Many studies have been conducted to understand the reasons for students’ attrition in doctoral programs (Dunn, 2014; Green & Kluever, 1997; Lovitts, 1996; Meloy, 1994; Miller, 1995). Meloy (1992) indicates the significant role played by the advisement relationship. Lovitts (1996) identifies lack of institutional support as a major contributing factor; this support could be in the form of information about the program or with regard to relationships between students and faculty. Dunn (2014) identifies mentoring and advising as key contributing factors to success.

It appears that many students in doctoral programs proceed through the steps with only a vague understanding of the process of writing a dissertation and are not fully prepared for the complexity and intensity inherent in the doctoral process. They lack the necessary knowledge and skills, and hence find themselves floundering. Although one can speculate as to what knowledge, skills, and attitudes are needed to successfully complete a dissertation, and although existing literature provides a multitude of perspectives regarding what it takes to successfully complete a dissertation, there seems to be little conclusive agreement. Therefore, this study seeks to shed light on why some people who enroll in doctoral programs complete all the course requirements but do not complete their dissertations and obtain the degrees they sought. It is this problem that this study seeks to address.

Problem Statement

Research indicates that a significant number of people in doctoral programs complete all the course requirements, yet they do not go on to complete the research and produce their dissertations. Hence, despite their significant investment in time and money, these people never receive the doctoral degree that they set out to obtain and thus remain ABD. There is little information as to why this phenomenon occurs.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of doctoral candidates regarding why they have not managed to complete their dissertations. It was anticipated that through a better understanding of the motivation and needs of doctoral candidates, the issues and challenges they face, and the availability of academic resources, more informed decisions could be made by both prospective and current doctoral candidates as well as academic institutions. To shed light on the problem, the following research questions are addressed:

1. On completion of their course work, to what extent do participants perceive they were prepared to conduct research and write their dissertations?
2. What do participants perceive they need to learn to complete their dissertations?
3. How do participants attempt to develop the knowledge, and acquire the skills and attitudes that they perceive are necessary, to complete their dissertations?
4. What factors do participants perceive might help them to complete their dissertations?
5. What factors do participants perceive have impeded and/or continue to impede their progress in working toward completing their dissertations?

Research Approach

With the approval of the university's institutional review board, the researchers studied the experiences and perceptions of 20 doctoral candidates. These participants had completed all the required doctoral course work yet had not been able to complete their dissertations. This investigation was a case study using qualitative research methods. Case study seemed most suited as a research methodology, with its features and characteristics fitting well with the present study. This research explores a bounded social phenomenon through in-depth data collection methods, involving multiple data sources. This case study involves a detailed description of a context and its participants, accompanied by an analysis of the data for themes, patterns, and issues. As is typical of case study methodology, analysis is not for the purpose of generalizing beyond the case but rather for rich description of the case in order to understand the complexity thereof.

In-depth interviews were the primary method of data collection. The interview process began with the researchers conducting two pilot interviews. The information obtained through 20 individual interviews subsequently formed the basis for the overall findings of this study. Each interviewee was identified by a pseudonym, and all interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. To support the findings emanating from the in-depth interviews, participants completed critical incident reports.

Although the nature of this study prevented the researchers from achieving triangulation of data, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and pilot tests shaped and refined the two data collection methods used. Coding categories were thus developed and refined on an ongoing basis, guided by the study's conceptual framework. In addition, various strategies were employed, including the search for discrepant evidence, interrater reliability in the coding process, and peer review at different stages as the study progressed.

Assumptions

Based on the researchers' experience and background as academic advisors, three primary assumptions were made regarding this study. First, course work does not prepare doctoral candidates to conduct research and write their dissertations. This assumption is based on the premise that the attrition rate in doctoral programs is high—estimated at 50%. Second, because doctoral students are mature adults, they will be sufficiently self-reliant and self-directed, and that will enable them to conduct research and write the dissertation. This assumption is guided by a predominant adult learning principle that says adults have a preference for planning and directing their own learning. Third, because students have successfully completed all their course requirements, they should be able to carry out a research project and write a dissertation. This assumption is based on the premise that past success is likely to be a predictor of future success. Fourth, doctoral candidates do not always receive the direction and guidance they need from their advisors and hence will learn informally to obtain what they need to successfully complete their work. This assumption is based on the experience that we have had as dissertation advisors. Fifth and finally, people who enroll in doctoral programs are strongly motivated to obtain the doctoral degree. This assumption is premised on the notion that people would not make the significant investment in time and money to enroll in a doctoral program without a strong desire to achieve the goal of obtaining the degree.

The Researchers

At the time of conducting this study, both researchers were employed as faculty members in a doctoral program as teachers and academic advisors. Thus, the researchers bring to the inquiry process practical experience as working professionals in a doctoral program, having both knowledge and understanding of the environmental context.

The researchers acknowledge that the same experiences that are so valuable in providing insight could serve as a liability, biasing their judgment regarding research design and the interpretation of findings. In addition to their assumptions and theoretical orientation being made explicit at the outset of the study, the researchers remained committed to engage in ongoing critical self-reflection by way of journaling and dialogue with professional colleagues and advisors. Moreover, to address their subjectivity and strengthen the credibility of the research, various procedural safeguards were taken, such as triangulation of data sources, triangulation of methods, and interrater reliability checks with professional colleagues.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study emanates from the researchers' desire to uncover ways to encourage and help students complete their dissertations. These students may be prospective doctoral students, candidates stalled at some stage of the process, or those who may have decided to abandon their work altogether.

Increased understanding of the research process and development of the skills needed to write and complete the dissertation may not only reduce the number of ABDs but also increase the potential for a greater number of students to attain a doctoral degree. A terminal degree not only may afford the recipients more career options and personal gratification but also has the potential to benefit society at large.

Definitions of Key Terminology Used in This Study

ABD—An acronym that refers to those people who have enrolled in a doctoral program and have completed all the course work but who have not gone on to complete the dissertation and graduate with a doctoral degree.

Dissertation—A doctoral research project that presents a problem for investigation, employs methods to collect data on the problem, reports and analyzes findings emanating from the data collection, draws conclusions, and makes recommendations based on the findings.

Doctoral Student—A student enrolled in a doctoral program who has not yet taken the mandated certification exam but who is active in some phase of the required course work.

Doctoral Candidate—A student who has completed all the course work and passed the certification exam and is either working on the proposal development or involved in some stage of dissertation research.

Proposal—The point at which a student presents and justifies his or her research ideas in order to gain approval from a faculty committee to proceed with the study. Only when a student's proposal has been approved can he or she embark on the research. The proposal consists of the first three chapters of a student's dissertation.

Following are some recommended resources that you might consider perusing regarding developing the first chapter of your dissertation, with a specific focus on the research problem, research purpose, and research questions.

Annotated Bibliography

Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., Williams, J. M., Bizup, J., & FitzGerald, W. T. (2016). *The craft of research* (4th ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

This book offers clear, helpful, and systematic guidelines on how to conduct qualitative research and report it effectively. Especially helpful are Chapters 3 and 4, which offer informed instruction on how to move from an interest to a topic, and then how to shape the topic into a more clearly defined and researchable problem replete with purpose and associated research questions. Chapters 7 through 13 discuss ways to assemble and build good arguments in your writing in order to converse with your readers, support your claims, and anticipate and respond to questions and objections. Chapter 15 offers useful suggestions for how to communicate and present evidence visually by way of tables, charts, and graphs. Chapter 16 focuses on developing introductions and conclusions. Chapter 17 includes useful tips regarding style revisions and ensuring clarity and consistency of writing. Throughout the book, the authors emphasize the importance of precision in designing and crafting a viable, coherent study.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

A classic in qualitative research methods, this text provides a comprehensive summary of the major qualitative traditions or genres including narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Going beyond the philosophical assumptions, perspectives, and theories, in Chapter 6 the focus turns to the introduction of a qualitative study, the key elements involved in developing the study's introduction, and maintaining alignment and integration among the key structural elements: stating and developing the problem, formulating the purpose statement, and generating a central research question and subquestions. Consistent with the authors' view throughout the book is the emphasis on how these three elements relate to the particular chosen qualitative genre or tradition and how this evolves through close attention to methodological congruence. These authors explain how the study's central research question can be "encoded" to accomplish the intent of the chosen research methodology, such as the development of stories in narrative inquiry or the generation of a theory in grounded theory. The authors illustrate how this might be accomplished by providing several useful exercises as well as illustrative examples from qualitative studies in the social sciences.

Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Building on his landmark publication *A Realist Approach for Qualitative Research,* Joseph Maxwell expands his approach to qualitative inquiry and provides researchers and students with a broad and practical guide to planning qualitative research. This text illustrates how the interconnected components of design interact and provides strategies for creating coherent and workable relationships among key design components. Viewing the study's research questions at the heart of research design, Maxwell seeks to create a cyclical sequence among goals ("Why are you doing this study?"), conceptual framework ("What do you think is going on?") methods ("What will you actually do?"), and trustworthiness ("How might you be wrong?"). Rather than focus on theory, the focus is on useful content, insights, and workable examples including tools and matrices. A final chapter provides an overview of research proposals including presenting and justifying a qualitative study based on proposing relationships between research design and the proposal argument.

Richards, L., & Morse, J. M. (2013). *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book is designed for advanced undergraduate or graduate students in the social sciences, with the intent of developing a deeper understanding of the language of qualitative inquiry, or as the authors put it, "to start thinking qualitatively." This text explores the fit of research question, data gathering, and analysis across five traditions: ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, discourse analysis, and case study. The reader is taken through all key steps involved in research design, from software choice and use, data making, coding, and

abstracting to presentation and publication of findings. The authors emphasize the variety of methodological choices and as such provide a "map" of methods with tables explaining how and why different research questions, sorts of data, approaches to analysis, and outcomes are associated with and fit best with different methods. Suggestions are offered for how best to go about identifying and selecting the most appropriate choice of inquiry tradition, with a strong focus on researcher reflexivity as well as the integrity of qualitative methods—that is, matching research questions with appropriate methods. Included are useful bibliographic references for each of the major qualitative research traditions.

Saldana, J. (2015). *Thinking qualitatively: Methods of mind.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book acknowledges the challenge of teaching students not just how to collect and analyze data but how to actively *think* about them. Rather than a "how-to" manual, the chapters of this book constitute an epistemological exercise in understanding and reflecting on qualitative methods, thereby encouraging the development of the core analytical skills and interpretive frames needed for approaching the qualitative research endeavor. As the author emphasizes, qualitative research is as much about mind-set as it is about technique or strategy. Each chapter of the book presents one "method of mind": thinking analytically, realistically, symbolically, ethically, multidisciplinarily, artistically, summarily, interpretively, and narratively. The reader is provided with various applications, including a vignette and practice exercises. Designed to help researchers "rise above the data," the book encourages meta-thinking (thinking about thinking) by exploring how qualitative research designs, methods of data collection and data analysis, and qualitative research write-ups can be enriched and enhanced through different lenses, filters, and perspectives on social life.

Chapter 7 Objectives

Section I: Instruction

- Provide an understanding of the function and purpose of a literature review (the "what").
- Describe the role of a research-based critical literature review in a dissertation (the "why").
- Outline the skills related to the various steps involved in conducting and presenting a thorough and systematic review of the literature, including identifying and retrieving relevant material and sources, as well as analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing ideas found in the literature (the "how").
- Offer a thorough appreciation of the nature, role, structure, and function of a theoretical or conceptual framework and explain its development and application based on qualitative research principles.
- Explain the significance of alignment between research problem, research questions, research findings, literature review, and theoretical or conceptual framework.

Section II: Application

- Present a completed example for the literature review chapter of a dissertation.

Overview

This chapter provides a guide to what some see as one of the most daunting tasks involved in writing a dissertation—that of reviewing topic-specific literature. A dissertation demonstrates your ability to write a coherent volume of intellectually demanding work. A key part of the dissertation that illustrates your scholarship is the way in which you have analyzed, organized, and reported the relevant literature. With thoughtful preparation, careful planning of your work and time, and helpful guidelines, this *is* a manageable task.

In conducting a literature review, you are forced to think critically and consider the role of argument in research. Thus, reviewing the literature is research in and of itself. Because a dissertation is really about demonstrating your ability to conduct and carry out a research project, our intent throughout this book is to help you understand what it means to be a researcher. With regard to the literature review chapter, an underlying assumption is that if you can understand the ideas and master the techniques and methods inherent in the literature review, this will be helpful to you in your own research.

Often students put off doing the literature review because they do not fully understand its purpose and function, or they are unsure of the procedures to follow in conducting a literature search. In this chapter, we attempt to address both of these issues. We also address the theoretical or conceptual framework as an integral element of the research process and provide detailed explanation regarding how to develop this framework, where it would be introduced in the dissertation, and how it functions in analysis. Once you have completed your literature review, you may want to refer to Appendix B: Rubric for Evaluating a Literature Review.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Section I, "Instruction," discusses the purpose and function of the literature review; the role the literature review plays in a dissertation, pointing out possible differences with respect to the different qualitative traditions; and the actual steps involved in conducting and presenting a thorough and systematic literature review. The section also includes discussion around structure and function of the theoretical or conceptual framework. Section II, "Application," demonstrates how to organize and write an actual literature review chapter. Here we focus on the specific problem as outlined in Chapter 1, and using this as an example, we explain and illustrate how to develop the associated literature review and conceptual framework.

Section I: Instruction

Function and Purpose of the Literature Review

The review of related literature involves the systematic identification, location, and analysis of material related to the research problem. This material can include books, book chapters, articles, abstracts, reviews, monographs, dissertations, research reports, and electronic media. A key objective of the literature review is to provide a clear and balanced picture of current leading concepts, theories, and data relevant to your topic or subject of study. The material, although consisting of what has been searched, located, obtained, and read, is not merely a simplistic summative description of the contents of articles and books, nor is it a series of isolated summaries of previous studies. Your readers are being asked to view this literature review as representing the sum of the current knowledge on the topic, as well as your ability to think critically about it.

Areas of inquiry within disciplines exist as ongoing conversations among authors and theorists. By way of your literature review, you join the conversation—first by listening to what is being said and then by formulating a comment designed to advance the dialogue. The literature review thus involves locating and assimilating what is already known and then entering the conversation from a critical and creative standpoint. As Torraco (2005) defines it, "The integrative literature review is a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated" (p. 356). Ultimately, your review "tells a story" by critically analyzing the literature and arriving at specific conclusions about it. Developing a scholarly literature review utilizing academic writing is a vital component of your research process—and of your dissertation. Engaging in this critical review contextualizes your study and includes several interrelated processes and goals:

- Trace the etiology or history of the specific fields and topics related to your study.
- Cultivate familiarity with and expertise in specific areas of knowledge, including issues and debates in the field.
- Become familiar with and learn more about the specific vocabulary, terminology, and concepts in the field of interest.
- Identify key theories or concepts related to the phenomenon and/or context under study, and which of these will most appropriately frame and situate your study.
- Identify factors and influences related to the phenomenon and/or context to be studied.
- Offer new and possibly innovative perspectives regarding conceptualization of the research topic.
- Offer new and possibly innovative perspectives regarding development and/or refinement of research questions.
- Assist with developing an argument for the rationale and significance of your research

In order for a literature review to support your research, you will need to examine and articulate various aspects of relevant peer-reviewed literature in an integrated and critical way, making central connections, and asking the kind of questions that will shed new light on key issues related to your phenomenon of study. The importance of including peer-reviewed literature cannot be stressed enough. Journals and academic papers play an essential role in the dissemination and sharing of knowledge within and beyond the academic community, including with stakeholders who may be involved in commissioning the research. To ensure quality with these publications, journal editors require that the work is peer reviewed. The advantage of the peer-review process is that reviewers provide feedback to editors and writers regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript, which enhances the credibility and quality of the research that is published.

A literature review requires a technical form of writing in which facts must be documented and opinions substantiated. Producing a good literature review requires time and intellectual effort. It is a test of your ability to manage the relevant texts and materials, analytically interpret ideas, and integrate and synthesize ideas and data with existing knowledge. One of the ways to improve your writing is to read as widely as possible. Look for examples of good and bad writing. Try to identify ways in which other authors have structured and built their arguments, as well as the methods and techniques they have used to express their ideas.

Academic writing requires continual practice with rereading and revisions before submitting it to faculty for feedback. Dissertations and peer-reviewed articles have all undergone multiple reviews and revisions by others before being finalized or published. Part of becoming an independent scholar is openly accepting and engaging within this revision process as a method to continually improve academic writing skills. As doctoral studies are ongoing, skills and new learning will be required to become an independent scholar capable of creating knowledge rather than being only a consumer of knowledge. This process involves learning about and appreciating the iterative and collaborative nature of academic writing. Part of being a successful academic scholar is the ability to provide as well as be open to receiving critical feedback on scholarly research and the development of your academic writing. Remember, critical feedback within the research process is not meant to be a personal criticism; rather, it is designed to indicate areas in need of clarity as well as improvements in content, design, and analysis, thereby elevating the level of your academic writing to produce clear, accurate, concise, and grammatically correct written discussions.

Role and Scope of the Literature Review in the Dissertation

The major purpose of reviewing the literature is to determine what has already been done that relates to your topic. This knowledge not only prevents you from unintentionally duplicating research that has already been conducted, but it also affords you the understanding and insight needed to situate your topic within an existing framework. As Boote and Beile (2005) explain,

> A substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review is a precondition for doing substantive, thorough, sophisticated research. "Good" research is good because it advances our collective understanding. To advance our collective understanding, a researcher or scholar needs to understand what has been done before, the strengths and weaknesses of existing studies, and what they might mean. (p. 3)

A review of the literature enables you to acquire a full understanding of your topic; what has been already said about it; how ideas related to your topic have been researched, applied, and developed; the key issues surrounding your topic; and the main criticisms that have been made regarding work on your topic. Therefore, a thorough search and reading of related literature is, in a very real sense, part of your own academic development—part of becoming an "expert" in your chosen field of inquiry.

It is incumbent on you, as the researcher, to find out what already exists in the area in which you propose to do research before doing the research. You need to know about the contributions that others have made relative to your topic because this prior work, as well as current research and debate, will provide you with the framework for your own work. In reviewing the literature, areas of concentrated interest, as well as areas of relative neglect, will become apparent, and so you will begin to identify a "space" for your own work. You also will gain a deeper understanding of the interrelationships and intersections between the subject under consideration and other subject areas. Therefore, a review of the literature allows you to get a grip on what is known and to learn where the "holes" are in the current body of knowledge. A review of the literature also enables you to recognize previously reported concepts or patterns, refer to already established explanations or theories, and recognize any variations between what was previously discovered and what you are now finding as a result of your study.

Qualitative researchers typically use existing literature to guide their studies in various ways depending on the type of study being conducted. Depending on the research tradition you have adopted, there are subtle differences in the interplay between prior knowledge and discovery. As such, there are differences regarding the purpose and process for planning the research design and presenting the review of the literature with respect to each of the research traditions. There are some general guidelines regarding whether the literature is referred to *before* asking questions and data collection or *after* data collection and data analysis. For example, in a phenomenological study, the literature is reviewed primarily following data collection so that the information in the literature does not preclude the researcher from being able to "bracket" or suspend preconceptions. If conducting a grounded theory study, some literature review is conducted initially to place the study in context and to inform the researcher of what has been done in the field. The main literature review is conducted *during* concept development, however, because the literature is used to define the concepts and further define and clarify the relationships in the theory developed from the empirical data. In grounded theory, the literature becomes a source for data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). When categories have been found, the researcher trawls the literature for confirmation or refutation of these categories. The objective is to ascertain what other researchers have found and whether there are any links to existing theories. In conducting an ethnographic study, the literature is reviewed before data are collected, serving as a background for the research question and informing the researcher as to what will be studied and how it will be studied. With narrative inquiry and case study, both "before" and "after" approaches are employed: An initial review is conducted after the development of the research question to shape the direction of the study, and the literature also is reviewed on an ongoing basis throughout the study to compare and contrast with the data that have emerged and the study's theoretical or conceptual framework.

No matter which qualitative tradition or genre you have adopted, the review of related literature is more than just a stage to be undertaken and a hurdle to be overcome. Right from the beginning, literature review is an essential, integral, and ongoing part of the research process. At the initial stages, a preliminary search and analysis of the literature is usually necessary to focus on a researchable topic and evaluate its relevance. It is the progressive honing of the topic, by way of the literature review, that makes most research a practical consideration. Having done that and having developed a narrowly defined problem statement, you then set or situate your problem within a context. To do this, it is important to consult the literature to see whether the study's problem has been addressed and how and to what extent the issues surrounding the problem have been addressed. Being familiar with previous research facilitates interpretation of your study's findings because the latter will need to be discussed in terms of whether and how they relate to the findings of previous studies. If your findings contradict previous findings, you can describe the differences between your study and the others, providing a rationale for the discrepancies. However, if your findings are consistent with other findings, your report could include suggestions for future research to shed light on the relevant issues.

Besides providing a foundation—a theoretical or conceptual framework for the problem to be investigated—the literature review can demonstrate how the present study advances, refines, or revises what is already known. Knowledge of previous studies offers a point of reference for discussing the contribution that your study will make in advancing the knowledge base. As such, the literature review is a conscious attempt to keep in mind that the dissertation research emerges from and is contained within a larger context of educational inquiry. The literature that describes the context frames the problem; it provides a useful backdrop for the problem or issue that has led to the need for the study. The literature review also can assist you in refining your research questions. Furthermore, previous studies can provide the rationale for your research problem, and indications of what needs to be done can help you justify the significance of your study.

Aside from the formal review of related and relevant literature of Chapter 2 of the dissertation, which demonstrates that you show command of your subject area and an understanding of the research problem, you will more generally need to conduct reviews of the literature at various stages of the dissertation process. As a qualitative researcher, you will also need to demonstrate the ability to assess the methodologies that you will be using in your research. This type of assessment is necessary to display a clear and critical understanding of how you will be conducting your study and why you have chosen to conduct it that way. The aim of the methodology chapter is to indicate the appropriateness of the various design features of your research, including your research approach and the specific methodology employed. In this regard, relevant references from the literature are necessary to illustrate the respective strengths and weaknesses of each of the data collection methods you intend to employ. The actual literature review writing process is therefore cyclical, iterative, and ongoing. While developing your literature review, additional sources may need to be identified. This means returning to searching the literature, analyzing the findings, and integrating this information into the literature review. Similarly, remaining current with the research in the area of interest may lead to incorporating additional sources. It is important to realize that the literature review does not formally end once you have written your introductory and literature review chapters but carries over into subsequent chapters as well. The literature review process is therefore ongoing throughout the entire dissertation process, up until completion.

You might be asking, "What is the scope of a literature review?" Just how much literature you will need to cover is a difficult question to answer. Aside from the inclusion of seminal literature and landmark studies, keeping the literature current is important so that the study remains relevant and meaningful. As a general rule of thumb, a literature review should represent the most current work undertaken in a subject area, and usually a 5-year span from the present is a tentative limit of coverage at most institutions, although this is something you will need to check with your chair or department. For historical overviews, however, you might reach beyond the 5-year span. The following general guidelines can assist you:

- Avoid the temptation to include everything. Bigger is not necessarily better. A concise, well-organized literature review that contains relevant information is preferable to a review containing many studies that are only peripherally related to your research problem.
- When investigating a heavily researched and well-developed area, review only those works that are directly related to your specific research problem.

- When investigating a new or little-researched problem area, gather enough information to develop and establish a logical framework for your study. Therefore, review all studies related in some meaningful way to your research problem.

As you continue reviewing the relevant and appropriate literature, you will know when you have reached a saturation point when you begin to encounter the same references and can no longer find any new sources. Generally speaking, a literature chapter is usually between 30 and 50 pages. However, this number depends, to a large extent, on the complexity of your study and the requirements of your school or program. Therefore, take time to clarify this prior to writing the review.

Remember, because you are attempting to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date review of your selected areas, it is important to revisit the literature review toward the end of your study to make sure no new research has been overlooked. This step is especially important if much time has passed since you wrote the original literature review for your proposal. Thus, as your study comes to a close, it may be necessary to conduct a new literature search to make sure that all new studies conducted since you wrote the original literature review are included. Moreover, as we remind you in Part III of this book, the literature review is an important early task. Once you complete your study, you need to reread your literature review and ensure that everything therein is directly relevant to your study. Based on your findings and the analysis and interpretation of those findings, whatever is deemed irrelevant should be eliminated. Equally important, if a section of literature review is missing, it will need to be added.

Preparing for the Literature Review

Developing a literature review can appear to be a daunting task, but it can be successfully accomplished through an organized and methodological approach rather than attempting to quickly complete it. The activities required to develop a literature review are part of an interconnected cyclical process involving searching literature, identifying and organizing the sources, reviewing the sources and recording notes, critically evaluating the material, synthesizing information, and writing the article review. Searching, reading, and writing are all connected and support one another throughout the process of developing the literature review. Finding relevant material for a comprehensive literature review involves multiple strategies and a wide variety of sources. As such, it is important that you become familiar with your institution's library. You should check on what services your library provides, how to access these services, and the regulations and procedures regarding the use of library services and materials.

Peer-reviewed materials other than books, such as journals and conference papers, are generally obtainable through your library databases. This step is where your university library becomes an especially useful and efficient resource. Through their subscription to these databases, libraries have become gateways to information, and technological advancements have opened up a range of new possibilities to researchers. Some of the more commonly used electronic library databases for the social sciences are presented as Appendix C. There are a few hundred databases that can link you to the relevant scholarly publications. Each database has its own unique features; familiarizing yourself with these features will enable you to access and conduct electronic searches. Once accessed, you can search according to your topic of interest and obtain either abstracts or full-text articles. Search processes are not necessarily the same across all databases. The art of database searching involves learning how to input terms that will connect you with the material most related to your topic. Because database formats change frequently, you should check with librarians for recent information regarding new tools or strategies included in the latest versions of the databases.

Aside from online searches, you also should spend time in the library getting used to call numbers related to your topic in order to find the appropriate sections. To produce a comprehensive literature review, you have to be thorough. Many sources that are needed for review are not available online. Conducting a literature search using only online sources might mean that you miss some critical information.

Retrieval and review have their own set of requisite technical skills. A comprehensive literature search on a topic involves managing databases, references, and records. A common thread running through the discussion of the various stages involved in conducting a literature review is how to manage and organize information, materials, and ideas. Table 7.1 shows the various steps involved in constructing a well-developed literature review. Following is a more detailed explanation of each of the steps involved.

Table 7.1

TABLE 7.1 Road Map for Conducting the Literature Review

1: Identify and Retrieve Literature

- Search library catalogs or library stacks.
- Familiarize yourself with online databases and identify those that are relevant for your field of study.
- Develop parameters that will yield focused results by selecting pertinent keywords or descriptors and specifying a limited range of publication dates (go back 5–10 years).
- Try out general descriptors and various combinations of subdescriptors. In this way, your search is refined, and all possible yields are covered.
- Search the Internet for relevant information and resources, making sure to include only reliable sources of information.
- From all the sources that you use, try to obtain both theoretical and empirical (research-based) literature.
- Make sure to seek peer-reviewed literature including primary and secondary sources.
- Identify and include any relevant classic works and landmark studies related to your topic.
- Seek review articles that provide "state of the art" scholarship on a particular topic. In other words, review as much up-to-date work as possible so that your review remains current.
- In collecting literature, be prepared to refine your topic more narrowly.
- Keep control: From the beginning, develop a system for recording and managing material.
- At the end of the study, revisit online databases to check for any new literature that may have emerged.

2: Review and Critically Analyze Literature

- Look for essential components in the literature.
- Extract and record information by asking systematic questions of the literature.
- Develop an analytic format and use it consistently. A concept map may be helpful in this regard.
- Write a short overview report on each piece of literature reviewed, including specific detailed information. These are your annotations, which become your annotated bibliography, and this assists with digesting scholarly literature.
- For research articles, extract technical elements and establish tables or matrices.
- While analyzing the specifics, be on the lookout for broader themes and issues.

3: Synthesis: Write the Review

- Organize separate elements as one integrated, creative whole.
- Determine the patterns that have emerged, such as trends, similarities, and contradictions/contrasts.
- Identify themes and translate them into corresponding headings and subheadings.
- Write a first draft.
- Ensure that your argument flows logically and coherently, that it is written clearly, and that it is well supported by citations.
- Test the draft by inviting/soliciting feedback from colleagues and advisors.
- Edit, revise, and refine, incorporating feedback from others.

4: Develop and Present a Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

- Develop the framework as an integral part of your study. It is a repository for the findings as well as a tool for analysis. As such, careful development is essential.
- Establish categories that are directly tied to each of the research questions.
- Develop descriptors for each category that are based on the literature, pilot study findings, and personal "hunches."
- Be prepared to refine and revise your conceptual framework as the study progresses.
- The framework can be presented in narrative and/or diagrammatic form.

Source: This chart first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2007). *Understanding qualitative inquiry: Content and process* (Part I). Unpublished manuscript.

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Step 1: Identify and Retrieve Literature

Conducting a literature search requires time management, organization, and conscientious note taking. Establishing a schedule to sufficiently search the literature, organize the identified sources, and record clear notes about the obtained information will assist in a comprehensive understanding of the existing research literature. The recorded notes will assist with categorizing the obtained information to identify concepts and themes in preparation for developing the literature review. Ensure that your notes are clear and comprehensive, as these will create the foundation for the development of the literature review.

The literature review process involves locating and assimilating what is already known. To do this, the writer must experience what Fanger (1985) describes as "immersion in the subject" by reading extensively in areas that either directly or indirectly relate to the topic under study. To begin, you need to select available documents, published and unpublished, on the topic. Through your search, you will begin to identify the relevant classic works and landmark studies, as well as the most current work available.

Primary source documents contain the original work of researchers and authors. These sources contain firsthand information, meaning that you are reading the author's own account of a specific topic. Examples include scholarly research articles, books, diaries, speeches, manuscripts, interviews, records, and audio and video sources. Secondary sources describe, summarize, or discuss information or details that are originally presented in another source. Secondary sources are written by authors who *interpret* the work of others, including abstracts, indexes, reviews, encyclopedias, magazine articles, almanacs, popular journal articles, commentaries, and textbooks. Also included among secondary sources are wikis and websites. Secondary sources are useful because they combine knowledge from many primary sources and provide a quick way to obtain an overview of a field or topic. They also are a useful resource for obtaining other sources of information related to your research topic. At the same time, secondary sources cannot always be considered completely reliable, and this is something you will need to determine. As such, as a serious graduate researcher, you should not rely solely on these but should base your review on primary sources as much as possible.

Remember, too, that seminal works are integral to your research. Sometimes referred to as pivotal or landmark studies, seminal works present an idea of great importance or significance, and so they are cited and referred to time and time again in the research. Seminal work may emerge naturally as you progress in your search. But identification of seminal work also relies on your own thoroughness in the examination and synthesis of scholarly literature. It is important to keep in mind that seminal studies may have been published quite some time ago. Therefore, limiting a database search to the past 5 years, for example, may exclude seminal studies from your results. To avoid overlooking pivotal research that may have occurred in years past, it is recommended that you not use a date limiter in your literature search. As you proceed in your search, note which authors are making significant contributions to increasing the knowledge base with regard to your chosen topic. In addition to seeking primary material, you might want to revisit the earlier studies of these writers to note the development of their theory or ideas. As mentioned previously, the use of peer-reviewed material is essential, as this ensures that you are including literature that has been critically evaluated and is therefore considered credible.

A Comprehensive Search Process

In preparation to conduct research, a comprehensive literature search is needed to identify as many possible sources relevant to the chosen topic. This information will facilitate an in-depth understanding of the existing related research, helping to understand what has been concluded and what still needs to be researched. Completing a thorough review of the peer-reviewed literature will allow the identification of potential areas of inquiry as well as increase the understanding of important concepts and theories related to the chosen topic. At this stage, the literature search is exploratory, allowing the research topic to be more clearly understood, developed, and then focused. The goal is to become an informed consumer of research to be capable of becoming a creator of needed knowledge by completing the dissertation.

The retrieval effort consists of a series of stages:

Stage 1: Use keywords and combinations of keywords (descriptors) to identify potential sources: Using various combinations of keywords maximizes the possibility of locating articles relevant to your planned study. Seek and make records of citations that seem to be relevant to your topic.
Stage 2: Skim and screen the sources: Assess each piece of literature to ascertain whether the content is relevant to your study.
Stage 3: Acquisition: Print documents that are available electronically. In some cases, only an abstract is available. In those cases where the material seems relevant, you need to obtain the full-text document. Check out books; copy articles from journals and chapters from books; and if material is unavailable through your own library, order interlibrary loans.

A comprehensive literature search on a topic that covers all the necessary sources and resources is a demanding and rigorous process. It is seldom possible to find all the information required within the space of a few weeks. Often, initial search strategies may not reveal what you are looking for; therefore, you will need to search more widely in the databases and also make use of more complex combinations of words and phrases. Proceed with persistence, flexibility, and tenacity. Persistence means being thorough in your search and keeping detailed records of how you have managed your search activities.

Following are some organizing strategies to assist you in the identification and retrieval process:

1. Because you will return to the library databases time and again to continue your review, it would be wise to develop a system of keeping track of keywords (descriptors) and combinations of keywords you have used. In the dissertation, you will have to report on how the literature was selected and what procedures were used to select the material, so keeping a record of this information is important.
2. It is also important to keep track of each book or document that you consult. In this regard, you should keep diligent bibliographic citations. You will save much time by writing each reference in its proper form initially. There are various software programs available such as EndNote (www.endnote.com), RefWorks (www.refworks.com), Zotero (www.zotero.org), and ProCite (www.procite.com) that enable you to create a list of bibliographic references. These online research management, writing, and collaboration tools are designed to help researchers easily gather, manage, store, and share all types of information, as well as generate citations and bibliographies. Endnote integrates well with most library search engines. Zotero automatically creates references from uploaded PDF files, which means you are storing the references and research in the same place, which is convenient and useful.
3. You may prefer to maintain an ongoing alphabetically arranged, accurate record by way of a Word document; many times, this way is the easiest and most efficient. We suggest that you prepare a typed list of each piece of literature reviewed, making sure that all details (authors, titles, dates, volume numbers, page numbers, etc.) are correct. This list then becomes a working draft of your references. To avoid the frustration of having to search for information at a later stage (and possibly not being able to track it down), keep a close check on this list, making sure not to inadvertently omit any details as you go along. If the reference is a book, be sure to include the library call number because you may need to return to it later. This list will encompass all materials that you have retrieved and thus will have some bearing on your study. In the final version of your dissertation, you will include only a reference list, not a bibliography—that is, not all the reading you may have done but only a list of those texts that are cited in the body of the manuscript.
4. Collecting literature is an ongoing process. You need to develop some system for classifying sources into those that have a direct bearing on your topic and those that are more peripherally related to your topic. You need to be selective in choosing material most relevant to your study. Always keep in mind the problem that your study is addressing. As you gather and sort material, ask yourself how and in what ways the material relates to your research problem. You might categorize each piece of material as *very important*, *moderately important*, or *mildly important.* After locating pertinent material for review, you should store these files, especially those that are central to your topic and that you think you might cite. When possible, you should save material electronically to allow for efficient and easy retrieval.

Exploring and Evaluating Web Resources

Although not scholarly, the Internet will more than likely be your initial starting point for topic ideas and information. Start by searching for some of the keywords related to your area of interest to begin a very broad scan of the range of topics and information sources. Use keywords such as *trending news* or *trending topics, recent research, controversial issues, policy debates*, and other relevant terms to locate recent news. With the tremendous amount of information available via electronic media, it is crucial that you learn to access this information. However, anyone anywhere can put information on the web, so any information from the Internet should be cited with caution. Remember that using the Internet to find academic information takes a lot of hard work to carefully evaluate and determine whether a web resource is reliable, authoritative, or even scholarly.

The Internet has made it possible for anyone to publish web pages. Most websites have not undergone a review process for inclusion in a collection. For these reasons, you should closely evaluate any Internet resources you find to ensure they contain balanced, factual information. One of the key purposes of evaluating online resources is to judge how trustworthy or reliable they are if you intend to use and cite them. A second purpose is to identify the sort of information that is immediately obvious in print publication—that is, information about the publisher and author. Reliable Internet resources may include peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, conference papers, industry and professional standards, scientific papers, news reports, and quick facts and figures. However, keep in mind that just because a website is well presented does not mean that it contains accurate information. Following are a few things you can look for in Internet resources to determine whether or not they are reliable sources of information.

1. Can you identify the author of an Internet resource? Is it clear who is responsible for the document? If so, is there any information about the person or organization responsible for the document? Authority means knowing about this author's education, work history, affiliations, additional publications, etc.
2. Who published the Internet resource? Was the web page published by a business, university, government organization, or professional association?
3. Can you find the date the Internet resource was last updated or published? Currency means knowing the date when the document was produced or last updated, and this enables you to identify the historical context for the document.
4. Does the Internet resource cite the work of others? Are sources clearly listed so they can be verified? Is there editorial input? Is spelling and grammar correct?
5. Does the content of the resource seem balanced and scholarly, or is it biased? Are biases and affiliations clearly stated? The aspiration to be objective, however difficult it might be to achieve, is a traditional value of academic research.
6. What is the intended audience for the Internet resource? Is it appropriate for university-level research? Or is it geared toward secondary education or a more general audience?
7. What is the domain of the Internet resource? If it ends in .org, .gov, or .edu, it is more likely to be a scholarly source. If it ends in .com or .net, it is less likely to be a scholarly source.

Blogs can also be a valuable source for information on trending issues, current events, recent research, debates, and more. Scholars, associations, executives, innovative researchers, everyday practitioners, and students are just some of the people who write blogs. Knowing about and reading blogs that are written by experts in the field, or relevant associations, may be an important step in identifying current studies and trends in a subject area. The website ResearchBlogging.org aggregates blog posts regarding recent peer-reviewed research and publications. Most online popular and news magazines have blog sections. *Psychology Today* offers a large index of its blogs with a guide to its blogging experts' credentials. Harvard Business Review Blog Network features entries written by top executives and business leaders.

The ease of access of web-based articles makes these sources of materials highly attractive. Remember, if you cannot determine the author of information or the date it was produced, however, it has no place in academic research. Although many websites for government agencies, professional organizations, and educational institutions provide useful information, you should always evaluate information obtained from a website for currency, legitimacy, accuracy, and potential bias.

Step 2: Review and Critically Analyze the Literature

Once you have undertaken a comprehensive literature search, you will need to critically assess each piece of material to analyze its content. In other words, you read with the goal of producing a product—an analytical evaluation. Toward this end, you need to put yourself in the role of researcher and prepare a systematic and comprehensive method of critical analysis. Narrowing potential research topics as well as continuing to identify related sources is needed to further understand and clarify what will be eventually studied. Remember, simply reading and describing/summarizing a source is not enough to be considered a scholarly consumer of the literature. Sections and related paragraphs should consist of discussions focused on identified concepts/themes from the research findings to provide a comprehensive review of the related literature. In addition to a critical analysis of a particular source, multiple sources also need to be compared and contrasted, and this information needs to be related with the specific topic, issue, or problem currently under investigation. The ability to provide an accurate evaluative critique of another scholar's research is the analysis component of creating a quality literature review.

Analysis is the job of systematically breaking down something into its constituent parts to describe how they relate to one another. Analysis should be viewed not as a random dissection but as a methodological examination. Although there is a degree of exploration involved in analysis, you should aim to be systematic, rigorous, and consistent. In this way, the identification of the individual and similar elements in a range of materials can be compared and contrasted. Analysis lays the foundation for critique. Critique identifies the strengths and key contributions of the literature as well as any deficiencies, omissions, inaccuracies, or inconsistencies. By highlighting the strengths and identifying the deficiencies in the existing literature, critical analysis is a necessary step toward adding to the knowledge base. When writing the literature review, you will need most of this information in order to put together a synthesized, analyzed, and evaluated product. You are practicing dissecting literature for the important specific pieces of information needed. You are condensing the amount of information that you will need to refresh your memory later. And you are developing a way to document, compare, and contrast what has been researched, what has been found, what has worked, what has not, and what has been recommended. All of these are the essential skills you will need to have in your toolbox for the dissertation journey. Right now you cannot know just how extremely important these skills are as you are collecting your sources.

Analysis consists of two main stages:

Skim and Read

1. Skim the book or article first, noting its topic, structure, general reasoning, data, and bibliographical references.
2. Go back and skim the preface and introduction, trying to identify the main ideas contained in the work.
3. Identify key parts of the article, or if a book, identify key chapters. Read these parts or chapters, as well as the final chapter or conclusion.

Highlight and Extract Key Elements

What you are trying to do is understand the historical context and state of the art relevant to your topic. You are looking at what has been covered in the literature, but you are also looking for gaps and anomalies. Although there will be considerable variation among the different pieces of literature, it is imperative to develop a format and use it consistently. A consistent format will pay off when you begin to synthesize your material and actually write the review. Begin by asking specific questions of the literature. These questions will help you think through your topic and provide you with some idea of how to structure your synthesis discussion.

- What are the origins and definitions of the topic?
- What are the key theories, concepts, and ideas?

- What are the major debates, arguments, and issues surrounding the topic?
- What are the key questions and problems that have been addressed to date?
- Are there any important issues that have been insufficiently addressed or not addressed at all?

In analyzing research studies, you need to identify and extract some of the more technical elements common to all research studies, such as problem, purpose, research questions, sample, methodology, key findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The purpose of reading analytically is to identify and extract these pertinent components in the literature. However, as you read and analyze, you should be on the lookout for the broader themes, issues, and commonalities among the various authors. Also be aware of "outliers" (i.e., points of divergence and difference). Regarding research articles reviewed, make notes of major trends, patterns, or inconsistencies in the results reported. Also try to identify relationships between studies. These findings will all be important to mention in the final synthesis, which aims to integrate all the literature reviewed. A concept map can be developed to begin processing information learned from related sources, helping to organize collected information into themes or categories and then organize this into an outline in preparation to develop a more comprehensive literature review. Concept maps are therefore useful for the identification of potential areas of inquiry for the dissertation. Once writing begins, additional searches and concept mapping will likely be needed to expand upon the earlier identified themes or categories. This expansion of reviewing additional sources during the writing process allows for a more comprehensive search and understanding of the related existing research.

As you continue to read and analyze the literature, also begin to think about what other information you might need so you can refine your search accordingly.

Following are some organizing strategies to assist you in analyzing your material:

1. Read your "very important" documents first. Highlight, make notations in the margins, or write memos on sticky notes of inconsistencies, similarities, questions, concerns, and possible omissions as you go along.
2. Develop a computerized filing system of Word documents for your literature review. For every piece of material that you read, write a brief summary that covers the essential points: major issues, arguments, and theoretical models. Include conclusions that you can draw, and note any inferences that you can make regarding your own study.
3. As you read, be sure to jot down any pertinent comments or quotations that you think might be useful in the presentation of your review. In so doing, be careful to copy quotations accurately. Make sure to use quotation marks when extracting material directly so as to avoid inadvertently plagiarizing others' ideas and/or words. Direct quotations also require page numbers, and it will save you considerable time and energy later in the process if you have noted these page numbers accurately.

Using Annotated Bibliographies

Using annotated bibliographies is one key means to begin organizing literature for later synthesis and inclusion. Whereas a bibliography is a list of sources (books, journals, websites, periodicals, etc.) that one has used for researching a topic, an annotated bibliography is essentially a summary, evaluation, and reflection of each of your sources:

- Summarize: Ask yourself: What are the main arguments? What is the point of this book or article? What topics are covered? If this is a research article, what is the thesis and scope of the study, the findings (including any unexpected findings), and the conclusion? Essentially, if somebody asked you what this book or article was about, what would you say?
- Assess: After summarizing a source, it is helpful to evaluate it. Ask yourself: Is it a useful source? How does it compare with other sources in my bibliography? Is the information credible and/or reliable? Is this source biased or objective? What is the goal or objective of this source? Do I think the author of this source has achieved this goal or objective? Why or why not? If this is a research article, what is your determination with regard to how this study fits with other related studies, and why does the researcher think the findings are important or significant?
- Reflect: Once you have summarized and assessed a source, you need to ask how, if at all, it fits with your research. Ask yourself: Was this source helpful to me? How, and in what ways does it help me shape my argument? How, if at all, can I use this source in my research? Has this source changed the way I think about my topic or research problem? If so, how and in what ways?

When you write annotations for each source that you read, you are not just *collecting* information; you are being forced to read each source more carefully and much more critically. At the professional level, annotated bibliographies allow you to see what has been done in the literature and *where and how your own research and scholarship can fit.* Writing an annotated bibliography also helps you gain a good perspective on relevant bodies of literature and what is being said about your topic. You will begin to develop a good understanding of the issues in your field (current and/or historic) and what others are debating or discussing. Remember, you want your annotations to be useful and meaningful to you, so adding a note that places the material in the context of something else that you've read or in relation to your own research projects will serve to make the annotation more valuable and persuasive. An annotation should present a brief synopsis of each scholarly article, including key elements, recommendations for further research, and critique (strengths and weaknesses). Mostly, this exercise helps you develop your own point of view, a critical element of a good literature review. The templates provided in the following section, (Table 7.2 and Table 7.3), can assist you in organizing your annotations.

Digesting Scholarly Sources

Digesting scholarly sources can be very challenging, and the more you read, the harder it becomes to remember key information. It is therefore essential to be extremely detail oriented so that you do not miss anything. Various tools, in addition to annotated bibliographies, may be useful at this point in the process. Regarding primary research-based sources, consider preparing a summary sheet that compares important characteristics across all the studies that you have reviewed. A template for the analysis and critique of research-based literature is provided as Table 7.2. A template for the analysis and critique of theoretical literature is provided as Table 7.3. These are both useful analytical tools for methodological analysis of the articles prior to beginning the review by conveying the results of your analysis, noting similarities and differences among research studies and/or theories. These tools act as a quick reference and serve as a record of your literature search. In addition, as you fill out each section for each resource, you begin to visualize and internalize the patterns of systematic research efforts. You may see certain links between concepts, gaps in terms of methodology, or recommendations for future research efforts that might suggest a feasible and worthy topic area for your study. Use the sections in each table to help you review, critique, and summarize *each* piece of literature. Remember, you do not need to complete every section, as some might not always apply. The sections are listed as a means to help you generate ideas as you work on reviewing and critically analyzing the literature. Tables such as these can appear in the appendix of your dissertation. Alternatively, they can be included in the body of the literature review chapter to augment and clarify the narrative discussion.

TABLE 7.2 Template for Analysis and Critique of Research-Based Literature

Study Title: ____

Author/Researcher: ____

Publication Date: ____

Full Citation: ____

Methodological Approach/ Research Design/Sampling Methods/Methods of Analysis	
Bodies of Literature Reviewed	
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework	
Research Sample/Participants	
Research Site	
Research Problem	
Research Purpose	
Research Question	
Subquestions	
Data Collection Instruments	
Key Findings	
Limitations of the Study	
Conclusions	
Controversies/Disagreements With Other Researchers	
Recommendations/ Implications for Practice, Policy, Theory, Future Research	

Overall Impressions/Notes to Self: Value/Relevance for Current Dissertation/Call for Further Research:

Source: A version of this chart first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2007b). *Understanding Qualitative Inquiry: Content and Process* (Part I). Unpublished manuscript.

Table 7.2

Source: A version of this chart first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2007b). *Understanding Qualitative Inquiry: Content and Process* (Part I). Unpublished manuscript.

TABLE 7.3 Template for Analysis and Critique of Theoretical Literature

Study Title: ______________________________

Author/Researcher: ______________________________

Publication Date: ______________________________

Full Citation: ______________________________

Overview of Theory or Concept	
Key Premise(s) or Claim(s)	
Reasoning Evidence is provided that clearly supports the claim(s). Opposing claims are recognized and addressed.	
Relevance Extent to which the information directly supports your topic and is useful to your study. What are the implications for your current research?	
Overall Impressions/ Evaluation Does the author suggest the findings can be applied in theory and/or practice? How useful does this work seem to you with regard to theoretical and/or practical applications?	
Synthesis Synthesize the pieces of your critique to emphasize your own main points about the author's work; its relevance and/or application to other theories you have reviewed and to your own study.	

Source: A version of this chart first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2007b). *Understanding Qualitative Inquiry: Content and Process* (Part I). Unpublished manuscript.

Table 7.3

Source: A version of this chart first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2007b). *Understanding Qualitative Inquiry: Content and Process* (Part I). Unpublished manuscript.

When you first start writing your analyses and evaluations of the literature, these may be fairly long (both winded and lengthwise). This is somewhat useful because it means that when you need to use them, you will be reminded of the article or book, and you will be able to pick and choose what you need. As you become focused more on what it is that you will be writing about, your analyses and evaluations will most likely become shorter. With practice, you can more concisely capture all of the required elements of an analysis. Remember, just as you would not build a home without a sturdy and solid foundation, if you want to make steady progress, scholarly work cannot proceed without the necessary foundation of the comprehensive analysis of the literature that supports or contradicts the concepts, theories, and statements that you need to make.

When you have finished reviewing and critically analyzing all the scholarly sources you have collected, be sure to revisit your entire (and rapidly growing) bibliography to make certain that it is complete and up to date.

You now have a complete record of what the literature states about key variables, ideas, and concepts related to your study. Reading through your summaries will serve to highlight important themes, issues, commonalities, and differences—in effect, these are the answers to your critical questions. The resulting insights will give you a sense of the forest as well as the trees. This sense will prepare you to integrate the material you are reading and proceed with writing a coherent and logical synthesis of the literature.

As mentioned previously, one component of becoming an independent scholar is learning how to provide an evaluative critique of the work of other scholars. A critique of scholarly work requires your ability to use high-level critical thinking skills. In addition, you must be able to write constructively and communicate your ideas well, with clear and focused writing. To do so, first you need to demonstrate your ability to clearly and precisely summarize and critically evaluate specific information. Second, you need to demonstrate your ability to clearly present that evaluative information in writing that meets academic and professional expectations. These skills will be invaluable as you go on to develop your literature review and proceed on your journey to become an independent scholar.

Step 3: Synthesis: Write the Review

After you select the literature and organize your thoughts in terms of critically analyzing the literature into discrete parts, you need to arrange and structure a clear and coherent argument. In other words, the next step is to integrate or combine your resources and determine what conclusions can be drawn from the resources *as a group.* To do this, you need to create and present a synthesis—reorganizing and reassembling all the separate pieces and details so that the discussion constitutes *one integrated whole.* In essence, a literature review requires a synthesis of different subtopics to come to a greater understanding of the state of knowledge on a larger issue. This works very much like a jigsaw puzzle. The individual pieces (arguments) must be put together in order to reveal the whole (state of knowledge). Learning to synthesize and present the identified information by concepts, themes, issues, or topics is necessary, as a literature review is not simply an overview of reviewed literature, a study-by-study presentation, or a book report.

What Is Synthesis?

Whereas analysis involves systematically breaking down the relevant literature into its constituent parts, synthesis is the act of making connections between those parts identified in the analysis. Synthesis is about recasting the information into a new and different arrangement—one that is coherent, logical, and explicit. This process might mean bringing new insights to an existing body of knowledge. The intent is to make others think more deeply about and possibly reevaluate what may hitherto have been taken for granted. Synthesis thus builds a knowledge base and extends new lines of thinking.

Synthesis is not a data dump; it is a creative activity. In discussing the literature review, Hart (2018) refers to the "research imagination." An imaginative approach to searching and reviewing the literature includes having a broad view of the topic; being open to new ideas, methods, and arguments; "playing" with different ideas to see whether you can make new linkages; and following ideas to see where they might lead. We see the literature review as somewhat of a sculpture—a work of art that, in its molding, requires dedication, creativity, and flexibility.

Synthesis Versus Summary

A common challenge that students face when writing Chapter 2 is the ability to synthesize information in a scholarly manner. A literature review is not a summary. Rather than merely presenting a summary of each source or study one after the next (like an annotated bibliography or a list of research), a literature review should be organized according to each subtopic (issue or theme) that is included in the discussion, all related to the larger topic. Presenting the literature in this way allows several authors to "speak" at once, thereby *creating a dialogue* about a topic between multiple researchers and their findings.

It is imperative to understand that a literature review is a *critical analysis*, a comprehensive understanding, and a synthesis of the existing research concerning a particular topic. Eventually, the importance of as well as a gap or gaps in the existing knowledge base need to be clearly indicated from the synthesis of the related research findings to support the need to research the proposed topic. Summarizing and synthesizing information are both strategies that are used in reading, review, and research. Both are important skills or techniques in making sense of what one is reading. However, it is important to remember that they are different activities. Each has a different purpose, process, and outcome. Table 7.4 highlights the key differences between summarizing and synthesizing information.

Table 7.4

TABLE 7.4 Comparison: Synthesis and Summary

Synthesis	Summary
An advanced reading technique or skill that requires critical analysis, creativity, and insight.	A basic or intermediary reading technique.
Combines and contrasts information and ideas from different sources.	Information is collated, reiterated, and restated.
Information from different sources is integrated to highlight important points of connection and relatedness, to address similarities and differences, and to draw conclusions.	Information is pulled together and listed to highlight important or key points.
Combines parts and elements from a variety of sources into one unified or integrated entity.	Addresses distinct sets of information. Each piece of information or source remains distinct and separate.
Focuses on deeper ideas and details.	Presents a cursory overview.
The final product reflects the author's knowledge about the sources but also creates new insights or perspectives that add value to the intellectual discussion.	The final product indicates and describes what the sources stated.
Synthesis extends the literal meaning of a text to the inferential level. The final product achieves new ways of thinking and understanding about a body of literature.	A summary captures the literal meaning of texts. The final product demonstrates an understanding of the overall body of literature that was summarized.

How to Synthesize

The good news is that you are already experienced in synthesizing information. You infer relationships among sources probably on a daily basis, such as between a story you heard from a news source and discussions about the same topic with others. Similarly, to synthesize the literature you have collected, you will look to find relationships between your scholarly sources. The first step is digesting the material and understanding the content of the sources. The second step is to review and critically analyze the sources. The third step is to synthesize—that is, going beyond your critique to determine the relationships or patterns among sources, identifying and then comparing and contrasting common concepts or themes. For example, you might find in your readings that certain themes emerged, such as Theme A, B, and C. You might group information from your sources by theme and then compare and contrast. Another scenario could be that your critical analysis revealed that there was one seminal study done that all other researchers expanded upon. Are there overall themes or patterns in the literature? Based on whatever patterns or themes you find, try to infer beyond what the sources have indicated. Determine what this information is suggesting and whether it provides support and a direction for the research topic. What do you believe the patterns or themes suggest? Do they suggest future areas of inquiry? May they suggest a direction for your own research efforts?

A key skill for the development of a well-synthesized literature review is learning how to provide an evaluative critique of the work from other scholars. A critique of scholarly work requires the ability to use high-level critical thinking skills; to write objectively and constructively; and to provide ideas in clear, logically organized, and focused writing.

- Determine and identify similarities or commonalities among the articles by group in terms of concepts, patterns, and relationships. For example, did the authors use similar conceptual or theoretical frameworks, sample participants, methodologies, or instruments and procedures to collect data? How and in what ways were the findings similar? Are any studies an extension of another? Remember, you should be noting not only that articles *are* similar but *how* they are similar. In so doing, rather than summarizing, you are highlighting comparisons among articles, providing relevant information and at the same time synthesizing the various works.
- Determine the differences or contradictions among the articles by group. Again, you should be noting not only that articles *are* different but also *how* they are different. For example, did the authors use different theoretical or conceptual frameworks, sample participants, methodologies, or instruments and procedures to collect data? In what ways are the findings different or contradictory?
- Determine general observations and conclusions about each topic given the relationships inferred from the group of articles within each topic. Determine the existence of any reoccurring concepts, relationships, patterns, or themes and if any of these are in need of further inquiry.

A key element that makes for good synthesis is *integration*, which is about making connections between and among ideas and concepts. It is about applying what you are researching within a larger framework, thereby providing a new way of looking at a phenomenon. Your literature review is a demonstration of how your research problem is situated within the larger conversation and/or part of a broader theoretical scheme. To achieve a well-integrated literature review, you must be sure to emphasize relatedness and organize the material in a well-reasoned and meaningful way. The body of the literature review should provide an objective discussion presenting a synthesis of the previous relevant research. Paragraphs should clearly indicate related concepts or themes synthesized from the research review, any identified contradictory concepts, and underlying related conceptual/theoretical framework(s) supported by American Psychological Association-formatted, in-text, peer-reviewed reference citations published within the past 5 years. Because your review should not read like a book report (one author or study after another), you should strive to craft sentences and paragraphs that reflect multiple sources in one reference. As a general rule, the majority of your reference citations should be in parenthetical form to emphasize an explanation of content rather than what each reference stated, or what each author did or said. For example, you would add the author and date of publication at the end of the sentence—that is, "(Bloomberg, 2011)." In contrast, the use of nonparenthetical reference citations, or "Bloomberg (2011) stated," places the focus on the author, not on concepts.

Because a literature review is *not simply a summary* of different sources, it can be especially difficult to organize the information in a way that makes the writing process simpler. One way that seems helpful in organizing literature reviews is the synthesis matrix. The synthesis matrix is a chart that allows a researcher to sort and categorize the different arguments presented on an issue or topic. Please refer to the two versions of synthesis matrices that follow and decide which might work best for you. One way is to organize your literature by way of each study's key components (Table 7.5). Another way is to organize the reviewed literature by topics or main ideas (Table 7.6.) These tables are designed to assist you with synthesizing the literature in different ways (your choice!) and are intended as working tools to be used in developing your literature review.

With Matrix A, you will begin grouping studies according to your research components. Across the top of the chart are the spaces to record relevant information pertaining to each study. Each of your sources is then broken down into various categories. When the matrix has been populated, and as you study your matrix closely, you will more clearly notice similarities and differences across all the sources that you have listed. Based on what you see emerging in the matrix, you will be able to start writing your review. As you find new information that relates to your already identified topic, record it appropriately, adding to the matrix.

TABLE 7.5 **Synthesis Matrix A (Research Components)**

Study/Research Components: ______________________

Author(s) (Year) Title	Purpose of Study	Sample	Methods	Findings	Themes	Similarities	Uniquenesses
Title A							
Title B							
Title C							

Table 7.5

TABLE 7.6 **Synthesis Matrix B (Topics or Main Ideas)**

Topic or Main Idea: ________________________

	Source #1	Source #2	Source #3	Source #4
Main Idea A				
Main Idea B				
Main Idea C				
Main Idea D				

Table 7.6

With Matrix B, you will begin grouping studies according to topics or main ideas. A new matrix can then be created for any new sources that you acquire and for new topics or main ideas you have identified. Across the top of the chart are the spaces to record sources (literature titles), and along the side of the chart are the spaces to record the main points of argument regarding the topic at hand. As you examine your first source, you will work vertically in the column belonging to that source, recording as much information as possible about each significant idea presented in the work. Follow a similar pattern for all of your subsequent sources. As you find new information that relates to your already identified main points, record this in the pertinent row. In your new sources, you will also probably find new main ideas that you need to add to your list at the left. As you write your review, you will work horizontally in the row belonging to each point discussed. As you combine the information presented in each row, you will begin to see each section of your paper taking shape. Remember, some of the sources may not cover all of the main ideas listed on the left, but that can be useful also. The gaps on your chart could provide clues about the gaps in the current state of knowledge on your topic.

It is important to continue to point out that although the writing process as described might seem somewhat linear, in actuality, the writing process is more cyclical, iterative, and recursive. As you are writing, you might find you need additional resources. This means going back to searching the literature, analyzing the information, and integrating this with existing work. Similarly, you should work to stay current with research in your field, which may also lead you to incorporate additional sources. This will certainly take time and energy as you go back and forth. It cannot be stressed enough that synthesis is an essential component of a quality literature review. This will be an ongoing process where drafts are refined, revised, and reworked until a final best version is crafted.

Presenting the Review

A literature review must be based on a well-thought-out design or plan that integrates the material discussed. The results of your analysis can provide you with ideas for the structure of your review. To present a coherent and logical review, it is important to create a detailed outline prior to writing. You cannot begin without this. An outline will save you time and effort in the long run and will increase your probability of having an organized review. Don't be surprised, however, if the outline changes as you write. In fact, this is quite often the case, as you will need to arrange and then rearrange to maintain a logical flow of thought.

To create the outline, you need to determine how various theorists define the topic and the themes and/or patterns that have emerged. Themes and patterns translate into headings and subheadings. Differentiating each major heading into logical subheadings gives structure to the review as a whole, helping to advance the argument and clarifying the relationships among sections. Headings and subheadings also enable the reader to see at a glance what is covered in the review. With a completed outline, you can begin to sort your references under their appropriate headings and so begin to present your discussion. Following are some important guidelines for writing.

Be Selective

A comprehensive literature review need not include every piece of material that you have located and/or read. Include only material that is directly relevant to your research problem and the purpose of your study. Although all the material that you reviewed was necessary to help you to situate your own study, not every citation with respect to an issue need be included. The use of too many or nonselective references is an indication of poor scholarship and an inability to separate the central from the peripheral.

Provide Integration and Critique

It is your task as a writer to integrate, rather than just report on, the material you have read. Comment on the major issues that you have discovered. Never present a chain of isolated summaries of previous studies. We have stressed throughout this book that you will need to demonstrate an analytical and critically evaluative stance. Once you have pulled together all of the salient perspectives of other authors vis-à-vis your topics, you need to stand back and provide critique. However, providing a critique in an academic work does not mean you make a personal attack on the work of others. When it comes to writing a critical evaluation, you must treat that work with due respect.

Ensure Legitimacy

In using the literature on a topic, you are using the ideas, concepts, and theories of others. Therefore, it is your responsibility to cite sources correctly and comply with academic and legal conventions. This means being scrupulous in your record keeping and ensuring that all details of referenced works are accurately and fully cited. This includes work obtained via electronic media such as the Internet, although copyright protection for data on the Internet is currently in a state of flux.

Limit Use of Quotations

As stated in the writing section of Section I, try to limit the use of direct quotations and quote only materials that are stated skillfully and are a clear reflection of a particular point of view. The practice of liberally sprinkling the literature review with quoted material—particularly lengthy quotations—is self-defeating; unessential quotations are a distraction from the line of thought being presented. Mostly, you should paraphrase rather than quote directly. However remember that any ideas whatsoever that you borrow from others require proper citation or acknowledgment.

Follow Academic Style

There are various conventions in academic writing, including such things as the use of certain words and phrases. Some words that might be common in everyday language and conversation are inappropriate for use in a dissertation. For example, "it is obvious," "it is a fact," "everyone will agree," and "normally" are assumptions and presuppositions and as such are often imprecise. In addition, be sure to guard against using discriminatory language. Bear in mind at all times you are writing not an editorial column but a piece of scholarly research to be read by the academic community. You can benefit from seeking feedback from others. It often takes a critical, objective eye to point out gaps, flaws, and inconsistencies in one's writing.

Revise, Revise, and Revise

A first draft should be just that—a preliminary, tentative outline of what you want to say based on a planned structure. Every writer goes through a series of drafts, gradually working toward something with which he or she can be satisfied. Often what is helpful is to distance yourself from your review and then go back and revisit. Time away for thinking and reflection tends to create "aha moments" and fresh insights. The final draft should be as accurate as possible in terms of both content and structure.

Step 4: Develop the Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

As your literature review is being developed, the synthesis of the research findings should be organized around a viable theoretical or conceptual framework. The review and critique of existing literature should build a logical framework for the research, justify the study by identifying gaps in the literature, and demonstrate how the study will contribute to knowledge development. Development of this framework, which follows the literature review, posits new relationships and perspectives vis-à-vis the literature reviewed, thereby providing the theoretical or conceptual link between the research problem, the literature, and the methodology selected for your research. In this way, this framework is the scaffolding of the study, drawing on theory, research, and experience, and as such, becoming the heuristic device or model that guides your study. Most important, it becomes a *working tool* consisting of categories that emanate from the literature. These categories then become the repository for reporting the findings and guiding data analysis and interpretation. You may be thinking that this still sounds very abstract, and with good reason.

Experience has shown that the theoretical or conceptual framework is one area that many doctoral candidates struggle with as they begin to prepare for their dissertation research. Melding a theoretical or conceptual framework explicitly within the dissertation displays scholarly maturity—that is, increased capacity to think about the conceptual background and context of the research. Students are expected to raise their level of thinking from micro (content) to meta (process) levels of conceptualization. Engaging with the framework is an essential prerequisite for doctoral students, as this is the means through which to articulate the wider theoretical or conceptual significance of their research, their chosen research design, their study's findings, and how their study makes a contribution to knowledge. As research practitioners, we recognize the significance of seeking intellectual rigor and the role of theoretical or conceptual frameworks in achieving this. We have also observed how students encounter difficulties in conceptualizing the framework vis-à-vis their own research. The reason for this knowledge gap is that the term is a somewhat abstract notion, conjuring up a "model" or "diagram" of some sort. Moreover, there do not appear to be uniform and consistent definitions, and discussions in the literature are often not clear, precise, or fully explained. Moreover, oftentimes experienced researchers and advisors themselves encounter challenges in guiding candidates as to what constitutes a rigorous and meaningful theoretical or conceptual framework (Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

These respective difficulties result in large part from research methodology texts lacking a common language regarding the nature of theoretical and conceptual frameworks. As we reviewed the qualitative research literature, it became increasingly clear that those writers who do attempt to explain the notion of theoretical or conceptual frameworks do not do so conclusively and therefore oftentimes offer only vague or insufficient guidance to students in terms of understanding the actual role and place of the framework in the dissertation. Moreover, these two terms are usually used interchangeably in the literature, and some argue that they are in fact two different constructs, both by definition and as actualized during the research process (Imenda, 2014). As such, the structure and function of a conceptual framework continues to mystify and frustrate. Questions that students regularly ask include the following:

- What is a theoretical or conceptual framework, and from where is it derived?
- Why should I include this framework in my dissertation? That is, what purpose does it serve in the research process? And what are its role, function, and application in the dissertation?
- How can the theoretical or conceptual framework strengthen my study? In other words, what is its value?
- What might be the limitations of a theoretical or conceptual framework in my study?
- How do I create and develop my study's framework, and where would I place it in the dissertation?

Each of these key questions is addressed next.

The Theoretical or Conceptual Framework: An Overview

At the outset, we want to point out that while the terms *theoretical framework* and *conceptual framework* are usually used interchangeably, they are two different constructs, both by definition and as actualized during the research process. This view, proposed by Imenda (2014), claims that whereas a deductive approach to literature review typically makes use of theories and theoretical frameworks, an inductive approach tends to lead to the development of a conceptual framework, which may take the form of a (conceptual) model. According to Imenda (2014), a theoretical framework refers to the theory that researchers may choose to guide them in their research. Thus, a theoretical framework is the application of a theory to offer an explanation of an event or shed some light on a particular phenomenon or research problem. In some cases, a research problem can be meaningfully researched not in reference to a theory but rather in terms of concepts inherent within theory. In such cases, the researcher may have to synthesize existing views in the literature concerning a given situation, both theoretical and from empirical findings. The synthesis that is developed may be called a conceptual framework or model, which essentially represents an integrated way of looking at the problem. Such a model could then be used in place of a theoretical framework. A conceptual framework is therefore the result of bringing together a number of related concepts to provide a broader understanding of a phenomenon of interest or of a research problem. The process of arriving at a conceptual framework is an inductive process whereby small individual pieces (concepts) fit together to illustrate possible relationships. Viewed this way, a conceptual framework is derived from concepts, and a theoretical framework is derived from a theory.

A research study is a complex system consisting of multiple interconnected parts. The theoretical or conceptual framework will constitute the glue that ties these parts together and establishes a sense of interdependence. Grant and Osanloo (2014) define a theoretical framework as

> the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for a research study. It serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions. The theoretical framework provides a grounding base, or an anchor, for the literature review, and most importantly, the methods and analysis. (p. 12)

Ravitch and Carl (2016) view a conceptual framework in the following way:

> The conceptual framework is a generative source of thinking, planning, conscious action, and reflection throughout the research process. A conceptual framework makes the case for why a study is significant and relevant, and for how the study design appropriately and rigorously answers the research questions . . . When conceptualized holistically, a conceptual framework serves as the "connective tissue" of a research study in that it helps you to integrate and mobilize your understanding of the various influences on and aspects of a specific research study in ways that create a more intentional systematic process of explicitly connecting the various parts of the study. (pp. 34–35)

These authors go on further to explain,

> The guiding sources for constructing a conceptual framework include (a) the researcher, (b) tacit theory or working conceptualizations, (c) the goals of a study, (d) study setting and context, (e) broader macro-sociopolitical contexts, (f) formal or established theory. (2016, p. 40)

This framework therefore guides the entire research process, enabling researchers to make reasoned defensible choices, match research questions with those choices, align analytic tools with research questions, and thereby guide data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Many researchers contend that without a theoretical or conceptual framework, there would be no way to make reasoned decisions in the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Indeed, the framework that you will develop for your study will no doubt play an extremely central role throughout the entire research process and, most important, in the final analysis. Without theoretical or conceptual development and refinement, and a clear relationship to your research design and implementation, the study could remain weakly conceptualized, undertheorized, and less generative of quality data.

Miles et al. (2014) define a conceptual framework as “the current version of the researcher’s map of the territory being investigated” (p. 20). Implicit in this view is that conceptual frameworks evolve as research evolves. This notion accommodates purpose (boundaries) with flexibility (evolution) and coherence of the research (plan/analysis/conclusion), which all stem from the study’s framework. It is important to realize that thinking about your theoretical or conceptual framework and actually building it is an iterative process. As such, an initial framework can—and most likely will—be revised, reflecting emergent findings and new insights (Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Of interest is that Weaver-Hart (1988) argues that conceptual frameworks contain an inherent dilemma, recognizing that the term itself is a contradiction because concepts are abstract whereas frameworks are concrete. As a consequence, she views the conceptual framework as “a structure for organizing and supporting ideas; a mechanism for systematically arranging abstractions; sometimes revolutionary or original, and usually rigid” (Weaver-Hart, 1988, p. 11). We contend strongly that the framework, while guiding and grounding the research, evolves and unfolds both generatively and recursively as the research process progresses and, as such, should be construed as including both rigor and fluidity in its iterative development and refinement. Because it is so central a component of your dissertation, and because its scope is far reaching throughout the subsequent chapters of a dissertation, development of the theoretical or conceptual framework requires careful, logical, and thoughtful explication.

Role, Function, and Application of the Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

It should be noted that the terms *conceptual framework* and *theoretical framework* are often used interchangeably, and rarely is a clear differentiation made. A theory is a relationship among related concepts, assumptions, and generalizations. By virtue of its application nature, good theory in the social sciences is of value precisely because it fulfills one primary purpose: to explain the meaning, nature, and challenges of a phenomenon, often experienced but unexplained in the world in which we live, so that we may use that knowledge and understanding to act in more informed and effective ways. Concepts are defined as interrelated ideas. As Cohen, Lawrence, and Morrison (2000) point out, concepts enable us to impose some sort of meaning on the world; through them, reality is given sense, order, and coherence (that is, concepts are the means by which we are able to come to terms with our experience). This idea suggests conceptualization as “meaning making” in research. The implication is that a conceptual framework is more than just a set of theories and issues related to the research topic.

What is key is the *cyclical role* for theoretical or conceptual frameworks in providing coherence for research. A well-conceived conceptual framework *is influenced by and at the same time influences* the research process at all levels and at all stages. Developing a conceptual framework compels researchers to be explicit about what they think they are doing and also helps them to be selective—to decide which are the important features of the research, which relationships are likely to be of significance, and hence what data they are going to go ahead and collect and analyze (Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

It becomes clear, then, that the *relationships* between theoretical variables, constructs, or concepts are an essential component of high-quality research and are expressed explicitly through conceptualizations and frameworks. The conceptual framework itself gives meaning to the relationship between variables by illustrating that theories have the potential to provide insight and understanding regarding research topics; it is the device that makes sense of data. In this way, the conceptual framework becomes the lens through which your research problem is viewed, providing a theoretical overview of intended research as well as some sort of methodological order within that process.

A well-defined theoretical or conceptual framework contributes toward thinking more acutely about your research: It frames and grounds your entire study. It helps define the research problem and purpose, as well as aids in the selection of appropriate bodies of literature for review. It serves as a filter for developing appropriate research questions. And it acts as a guide for data collection and analysis, and interpretation of findings. This way of viewing the framework locates it as fulfilling an integrating function between highlighting theories that offer explanations of the issues under investigation and providing a scaffold within which strategies for the research design can be determined and fieldwork undertaken. This view of the framework thus locates it as providing *coherence* to the research act through providing traceable connections between theoretical perspectives, research strategy and design, fieldwork, and the conceptual significance of the evidence. A framework is simply the structure of the research idea or concept and how it is put together. The conceptual framework is therefore essentially a bridge between paradigms that *explain* the research issue and the *actual practice* of investigating that issue.

Viewed this way, then, the framework fulfills two distinct roles: First, it provides a theoretical or conceptual clarification of what researchers intend to investigate and enables readers to be clear about what the research seeks to achieve and how that will be achieved. Second, the conceptual framework forms the theoretical and methodological bases for development of the study and analysis of the findings. Students often do not realize how critical the conceptual framework is in guiding the analysis of the data that have been collected. We stress that the conceptual framework is a practical working tool for guiding the analysis of the data collected, and it becomes the foundation for what will become the coding legend or coding scheme.

The Value of the Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

Theory or concepts help to situate a study within ongoing conversations in relevant fields, guiding all aspects of the study and adding new dimensions and layers of understanding about the phenomenon of interest, and hence extend the meaningfulness of data. The theoretical or conceptual framework strengthens your study in the following ways:

1. Organizes and focuses the study. Qualitative researchers can feel overwhelmed by the mountain of data that confronts them. First, by serving as a “sieve” or “lens,” the framework assists the researcher in the process of sorting through the data and knowing how the pieces drawn from the various data relate to each other and where they “fit” in the larger picture. Second, framework “frames” every aspect of the study in terms of both the process and the product, illustrating how theory or concepts intersect with other components of the study, including research questions, methods, working assumptions, data analysis, and analysis and interpretation of findings.
2. Provides the “idea context,” making an argument for the rationale and significance of the study for its intended field and discipline.
3. Is an explicit statement of theoretical or conceptual assumptions that permits the reader to evaluate them critically.
4. Situates the research within a scholarly conversation and connects the researcher to the existing body of knowledge. Guided by relevant theory or concepts, the framework provides you with labels and categories that help explain and develop descriptions and analyses.
5. Articulating the theoretical or conceptual assumptions of a research study forces you to address questions of “why” and “how.” It permits you to move from simply describing a phenomenon observed to generalizing about various aspects of that phenomenon.
6. Having a theoretical or conceptual structure helps you to identify the limits to those generalizations. The framework specifies which key variables or factors influence a phenomenon of interest. It alerts you to examine how those key variables or factors might differ and under what circumstances.
7. The framework, once developed and articulated, becomes the means by which new research data can be interpreted and coded for future use, as well as a means to guide and inform future research efforts and improve professional practice.
8. The framework ultimately serves as a mechanism to consider and reflect on the significance and value of your research once it is completed, as well as to consider next steps and actionable recommendations.

Limitations of the Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

While the theoretical or conceptual framework has a role and function in the dissertation process, there are some critiques that are worthy of mention and that should be taken into consideration:

Anfara and Mertz (2015) make an important statement about the role and function of the theoretical framework in qualitative research. In acknowledging that the term does not have a clear and consistent definition, they also point out very clearly that a framework allows the researcher to "see" and understand certain aspects of the phenomenon being studied while hiding other aspects. A theoretical framework can reveal and/or conceal meaning and understanding. It can allow us to see familiar phenomena in novel ways, but it can also blind us to certain aspects of the phenomena or distort the phenomena being studied by filtering out critical pieces of data. As such, it is important to bear in mind that while your framework provides a meaningful way of seeing, thinking, and understanding, no theoretical or conceptual framework provides one perfect or complete explanation of what is being studied, an important consideration in your research process in terms of the effects of your framework on your research (including data collection as well as data analysis). Indeed, as exemplified in Anfara and Mertz (2015), using different frameworks on the same data can broaden and deepen the understanding derived. Moreover, "a framework can potentially disrupt the dominant narrative in the field, and even what counts as knowledge about a phenomenon" (Anfara & Mertz, 2015, p. 229). These authors also point out two other potential additional limitations of conceptual or theoretical frameworks: First, while the framework certainly has the ability to organize and focus a study, the framework could be too reductionist, stripping the phenomenon of its complexity and interest. Second, the framework could be too deterministic, forcing the researcher to "fit" the data into predetermined categories.

In the following section, we describe how a theoretical or conceptual framework is developed, how it is used as a coding legend or coding scheme to sort and analyze the data, and how it can subsequently be logically simplified and presented graphically as a model that represents the overall design of a given research project.

Creating Your Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

Conceptualization and development of a theoretical or conceptual framework for your study is an evolving, iterative, generative, and reflexive process that integrates all aspects of the study in an explicit and transparent way. Remember, this framework is not something that is found readily available in the literature. You will have to review pertinent research literature for theories, concepts, and analytic models that are relevant to the research problem you are investigating. The selection of theories or concepts should depend on appropriateness, ease of application, and explanatory power. There are some useful strategies for developing a theoretical or conceptual framework for your study:

1. Reflect on your study's title and research problem. The research problem anchors your entire study and forms the basis from which you construct your theoretical or conceptual framework.
2. Think of a philosophy, theory, and/or any relevant concepts on which the topical issue of your dissertation is based. Brainstorm all possibilities.
3. Review any key social science theories that might be related to your study and choose one or more that can explain or shed light on your research problem and purpose.
4. Discuss with your advisor the assumptions or propositions of these theories, with a focus on their potential relevance or connection to your research.

Although presented in a stepwise fashion, please remember that this process is not linear but rather cyclical and iterative. Building your framework is in effect a dynamic sense-making *process*, helping to refine the research as it progresses—as much guiding the study as it is derived from the study. Indeed, the framework generates the focus of the research as much as it is informed and shaped by it (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The process of development requires deep thinking and critical analysis on your part. It also requires creativity and innovation, since your framework will become the basis for understanding, analyzing, and designing ways to investigate relationships within the social system you are studying. Remember, too, that it is quite usual to develop and discard several potential theoretical or conceptual frameworks until one is finally chosen. Again, this is part of the iterative qualitative research process. A review of the literature for studies similar to yours will reveal what types of theoretical or conceptual frameworks other researchers have utilized. We encourage you to read through the literature review chapters or sections of dissertations and journal articles related to your study because in this way, you will begin to see how this topic was approached by other scholars.

Presenting Your Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

The review and critique of existing literature culminates in a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework is described in detailed narrative form and can also be summarized and displayed as a schematic diagram—that is, a visual device that represents the overall design of a research project including key concepts and their relationships. Thinking and reflective inquiry require that you create structures that will enable you to examine your own assumptions and ask deep questions of your research. In this regard, diagrams of various kinds become useful and relevant.

Diagrams may include mind maps, flowcharts, tree diagrams, and so on. A concept map (Cañas & Novak, 2005; Kane & Trochim, 2006; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles et al., 2014; Novak, 1998; Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2012) is one type of diagram that lays out key ideas related to your area of research and indicates relationships between these areas. Concept mapping entails plotting the conceptual "space" of your research and is a useful medium for thinking about information and visualizing relationships in different ways, developing and testing ideas, and containing the study by indicating and highlighting connections, gaps, and/or contradictions. Concept maps can also assist in data analysis in a number of ways, assisting researchers in the development of deeper insights by recognizing explicit and implicit meanings and assumptions (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2012).

Used as a learning and teaching technique, concept mapping visually illustrates the relationships among a set of concepts and ideas. Often represented in circles or boxes, concepts are linked by words and phrases that explain the connections between the ideas, helping students organize and structure their thoughts to further understand information and discover new relationships. Most concept maps represent a hierarchical structure, with the overall broad concept first, with connected subtopics and more specific concepts following.

Concepts are usually presented as boxes or circles, and are connected to each other (or not) with lines, arrows, or symbols, indicating some type of relationship among them. For a thematic analysis, boxes typically represent concepts such as themes identified in the data (i.e., codes) or higher-level conceptual themes the researcher generates. Current qualitative software packages are becoming increasingly sophisticated in terms of concept-mapping functions that depict complex conceptual relationships. Concept maps can be developed collaboratively with colleagues or advisors and as such can engender the high-level conversation and dialogue that is necessary to promote, stimulate, and expand reflective inquiry.

A diagram is more than just a repository of thought, however; it is a working and living document that arises from analysis. As such, the diagram becomes an important analytic tool in your qualitative research process. As Corbin and Strauss (2015) explain, diagrams "begin as rudimentary representations of thought, and grow in complexity, density, clarity, and accuracy as the research progresses" (p. 117). It is important that while you may choose to present your conceptual framework in diagrammatic or pictorial form, you should be prepared to explain, describe, and articulate that diagram in great detail, including all major constructs or concepts as well as relationships among all the key elements.

Remember that there is no single way to go about developing, using, articulating, and presenting a conceptual framework. A useful starting point is to engage in a process of critical inquiry and self-examination, and to continue this critical stance throughout the research process. Identification of your own personal and professional motivation for engaging in your chosen research topic or phenomenon is a useful beginning. Ask yourself why you have engaged in your research, what about it interests you, how your motivation might impact your research approach, what are your underlying assumptions and hunches, and what informs these assumptions and hunches. Next, proceed to ask yourself questions that relate to the broader intellectual conversations in your field, as these constitute the context and background for your research: Ask yourself what are some of the key arguments, what your stance is vis-à-vis these arguments, what are the key critical questions that you have vis-à-vis conversations in the field, how you conceptualize your research in relation to these conversations, and what you hope your study will contribute to the overall intellectual conversation.

In Section II of this chapter, we explain the development of the theoretical or conceptual framework and illustrate its application. An example of a completed conceptual framework is also included as Appendix E. The intent is that with new insights and knowledge regarding the role and function of a conceptual framework, you will be able to craft one that is distinctively yours and unique to your own study. How the theoretical or conceptual framework functions specifically with regard to data analysis is elaborated upon in Chapter 9 ("Analyzing Data and Reporting Findings").

The reflexive questions that follow can serve as prompts for journaling throughout the dissertation process, and in this case, for Chapter 2 of your dissertation, in which you are developing your literature review and your study's theoretical or conceptual framework.

Remember, the major purpose of reviewing the literature is to determine what has already been examined as it relates to your topic, thereby highlighting the significance of your research problem. This affords you the understanding and insight needed to situate your study within an existing "conversation"; acquire a deep understanding of your topic and research problem; discover what contributions other writers and researchers have made relative to your topic and/or research problem; and become aware of any key issues and debates in the field, thereby beginning to develop a "space" for your own work. A review of the literature guides your study, both during the development phase as well as during analysis. Development of a theoretical or conceptual framework is for the purpose of proposing new relationships and perspectives vis-à-vis the literature reviewed, thereby providing a theoretical or conceptual link between the research problem, the literature, and the methodology selected for your research.

Reflexive Questions for Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature Review

1. Have I considered the key relevant bodies of literature that might relate to my research topic and research questions, thereby adequately framing the context of my research problem?
2. How and in what ways have my assumptions informed the way I understand and define the research problem, based on which I have selected what research to review?
3. Have I addressed the major theoretical conversations and debates in the field(s) around my research topic (both current and historical)?
4. Am I cognizant of the ways in which different studies and fields of study intersect and diverge, and have I reported these relationships accurately?
5. Have I sufficiently considered and addressed how my research topic or research problem is framed or studied differently within and across fields?
6. Have I adequately addressed and critiqued all relevant literature, including elements that I had not expected or perhaps chosen not to address?

Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

1. In what ways will my theoretical or conceptual framework serve as a relevant and meaningful structure for my study?
2. Why did I select this framework, and what are the possibilities for the chosen framework to substantiate my research problem?
3. Have I considered alternative framework options?
4. If there were other options that I considered, why did I choose not to include these?

Chapter Summary Discussion

Broadly speaking, a literature review is a narrative that integrates, synthesizes, and critiques the research and thinking around a particular topic. It sets the broad context of the study, clearly demarcates what is and is not within the scope of the investigation, and justifies those decisions. A literature review should not only report the claims made in the existing literature but also examine it critically. Such an examination of the literature enables the reader to distinguish what has been and still needs to be learned and accomplished in the area of study. Moreover, in a good review, the researcher not only summarizes the existing literature but also synthesizes it in a way that permits a new perspective. Thus, a good literature review is the basis of both theoretical and methodological sophistication, thereby improving the quality and usefulness of subsequent research. As the foundation of the research project, a comprehensive review of the literature in a dissertation should accomplish several distinct objectives:

- Frame the research problem by setting it within a larger context.
- Focus the purpose of your study more precisely.
- Lead to the refinement of research questions.
- Form the basis for determining the rationale and significance of your study.
- Enable you to convey your understanding of your research approach, as well as the specific data collection methods employed.
- Link your findings to previous studies.
- Place research within a historical context to show familiarity with state-of-the-art developments.
- Enable you to justify, support, and substantiate your study's findings.
- Contribute to analysis and interpretation of your study's findings.
- Enable you to develop a conceptual framework that can be used to guide your research.

It should be apparent to you that the literature review is a sophisticated form of research in its own right that requires a great deal of research skill and insight. You are expected to identify appropriate topics or issues, justify why these are the appropriate choices for addressing the research problem, search for and retrieve the appropriate literature, analyze and critique the literature, create new understandings of the topic through synthesis, and develop a conceptual framework that will provide the underlying structure for your study. Your conceptual or theoretical framework emanates from your literature review and is used to limit the scope of the relevant data by focusing on specific concepts and theories and defining the specific viewpoint (framework) that you as the researcher will take in analyzing and interpreting the data to be gathered. Your conceptual framework will also provide the basis for understanding the essence of your study and building knowledge by confirming or challenging theoretical assumptions.

Thinking about the entire literature review process may initially be overwhelming and intimidating. Instead of viewing it as one big whole, think of it as a series of steps—and steps within those steps. Tackle each topic one by one and set small achievable goals within each topic area. Be sure to subdivide your work into manageable sections, taking on and refining each section one at a time. The important point, and one that we stress throughout, is that you should proceed in stages. Like the skier traversing the terrain, the best way to be successful is to divide and conquer!

TABLE Quality Assessment Chapter Checklist

Preparing the Literature Review	✓ Are you clear about the role and scope of the literature review vis-à-vis your chosen qualitative research tradition? ✓ Are you familiar with all available resources, including library indexing systems and electronic databases? ✓ Have you set up your own systems for identifying, retrieving, organizing, and storing your information? ✓ Have you made sure that all information is securely saved by way of electronic storage and backup systems?
Writing the Literature Review	✓ Do you have a clear introduction to this chapter that includes your purpose statement (if required) as well as an explanation of how the chapter will be organized? ✓ Does your review show a clear understanding and critique of each topic? ✓ Do you write with authority and develop a critical perspective in discussing the work of others? ✓ Is the review comprehensive? Does it cover the major issues and thinking around each topic? ✓ Does your review adequately frame the context of your specific research problem? ✓ Does your review highlight the significance of your research problem? ✓ Does the review reflect appropriate bodies of peer-reviewed literature? ✓ Does your review include relevant historical as well as current and most up-to-date coverage? ✓ Have you identified the key readings and authors (including seminal authors) in your area of research? ✓ Does the path of your argument flow logically? ✓ Is the review analytical and critical, and not merely summative and descriptive? Do you include opposing points of view? ✓ Is the review well organized and systematically presented? ✓ Do you include an introductory paragraph that outlines the way you organize the different bodies of literature? ✓ Are the methods for conducting the literature review sufficiently described? ✓ Does the order of headings and subheadings seem logical? ✓ Do you include logical segues between sections? ✓ Do you make use of transitions to link and integrate paragraphs? ✓ Do you include summary paragraphs at the end of each major section as well as an overall summary at the end of the chapter? ✓ Is the writing throughout clear and readable? Refer to "Guidelines for Academic Writing" in Chapter 4. ✓ Have you checked that you have not used somebody's words without appropriate quotation marks or stated the ideas of others as if they were your own, thereby constituting plagiarism? ✓ Have you avoided too much paraphrasing and too many direct quotations that detract from the readability of the chapter? ✓ Are all authors who make the same point combined in a citation?
Developing the Theoretical or Conceptual Framework	✓ Does your framework draw on theory, research, relevant concepts, and experience? ✓ Does your framework depict the overall "territory" of your research? ✓ Does your framework provide theoretical clarification of what you intend to investigate? ✓ Does your framework illuminate the relationships among theoretical or conceptual variables? ✓ Does your framework enable a reader to understand *what* your study seeks to achieve and *how* that will be achieved? ✓ If you have developed a diagrammatic model, is this clearly and accurately presented? In other words, does it make sense and have meaning? ✓ If you have developed a diagrammatic model, is this accompanied by comprehensive descriptive narrative? ✓ If you have developed theoretical or conceptual categories, are these directly tied to the research questions? ✓ Do you have at least one theoretical or conceptual category per research question? ✓ Have you included descriptors that are based on the literature, pilot studies, and your own hunches? ✓ Do these descriptors make sense? ✓ Are there any other descriptors that you may have forgotten to include? ✓ Does your theoretical or conceptual framework add value to the way you and others understand your research? ✓ Does your chosen framework enhance the theoretical or conceptual quality of your dissertation?
Addressing Alignment	✓ Is your research problem aligned with your literature review? ✓ Is your literature review aligned with your theoretical/conceptual framework? ✓ Is your theoretical/conceptual framework aligned with your research questions and research findings?
And . . .	✓ Are all citations included in the reference list? ✓ Have all citations that you have not included been eliminated from the reference list? ✓ Are the majority of your references published in the past 5 years? ✓ Have you checked your recommended style manual for format, punctuation, grammar, and correct use of each and every citation? ✓ Have you edited and reedited your work?

Section II: Application

Having discussed the purpose and function of the literature review and resulting conceptual framework, as well as the various steps involved, we are now ready to introduce what a completed literature review chapter should look like. In this application section, we focus on the specific research problem as outlined in the introductory chapter of the dissertation and explain how to develop and present the associated literature review and conceptual framework.

Please note that because of the nature of the literature review, it would be impractical to present here a full-blown literature review on our topic. Rather, we have identified each of the actual steps that should be followed in completing your literature review and provided illustrative examples in outline or skeleton form. The intent of presenting the application piece in this way is that you could use these steps as a template and present your own literature review in the same order. These steps include the following:

1. Provide a statement of purpose.
2. Identify the topics or bodies of literature.
3. Provide the rationale for topics selected.
4. Describe your literature review process, report all of your literature sources, and identify the keywords used to search the literature.
5. Present the review of each topic.
6. Present your theoretical or conceptual framework.
7. Provide a brief chapter summary of the literature review and its implications for your study.

Steps 1 through 4 constitute all that is necessary to introduce the literature review to the reader. Steps 5 and 6 constitute the "meat" of the review. Step 7 is intended to highlight the main points, thereby providing some closure for the chapter. In the following pages, we put each of these steps into play and provide an illustration of Chapter 2, the literature review of a dissertation. Bear in mind that the application section that follows is a skeleton view of a literature review chapter. Were each section to be more completely and fully developed, as would be required in an actual dissertation, such a chapter would obviously be much more extensive.

Chapter 2 of the Dissertation

Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to explore with 20 doctoral candidates their perceptions of why they have not managed to complete their dissertations. Specifically, the researchers sought to understand how the experiences of these individuals may have inhibited their progress in conducting and carrying out research. To carry out this study, it was necessary to complete a critical review of current literature. This review was ongoing throughout the data collection, data analysis, and synthesis phases of the study.

This critical review explores the interconnectedness of the experiences of participants and the resources that they perceived were available to them. In light of this, two major bodies of literature were critically reviewed: (a) higher education and doctoral programs and (b) adult learning theory. A review of the literature on higher education and doctoral programs provides an understanding of the context, history, structure, rules, and regulations under which candidates must work to obtain doctoral degrees. Adult learning theory is reviewed to provide a context for understanding what knowledge, skills, and attitudes were perceived as needed by the participants and how they attempted to learn what they perceived they needed.

In providing a rationale for your choice of topics, in some instances you might want to include an explicit assertion, a contention, or a proposition that relates to the research problem and that is substantiated by supporting literature. The assertion or contention should be broad and be based on the overall judgments you have formed thus far based on an analysis of the literature.

To conduct this selected literature review, the researchers used multiple information sources, including books, dissertations, Internet resources, professional journals, and periodicals. These sources were accessed through ERIC, ProQuest, eduCAT, and CLIO. No specific delimiting time frame was used around which to conduct this search. Because of the nature of the three bodies of literature reviewed, the historical development, for example, of higher education and doctoral programs was considered significant and therefore an arbitrary criterion, such as a time frame, might preclude the inclusion of substantial relevant material.

Throughout the review, the researchers attempted to point out important gaps and omissions in particular segments of the literature as and when they became apparent. In addition, relevant contested areas or issues are identified and discussed. Each section of the literature review closes with a synthesis that focuses on research implications. The interpretive summary that concludes the chapter illustrates how the literature has informed the researchers' understanding of the material and how the material contributes to the ongoing development of the study's conceptual framework.

The prior section included how the literature was selected, how information was accessed, what, if any, time delimitations were employed, what keywords and procedures were used to search the literature, what databases were used, and, if appropriate, what criteria were used for retaining or discarding the literature. You also may choose to explain the main ideas and themes from the literature that you identified and by which you carried out your analysis.

Topics Reviewed

Having introduced the reader to your review, go on to present your topics in the order in which you have introduced them in the prior section. For each topic, establish an outline for yourself. Typically, the outline is made up of three interrelated sections: (a) introduction, (b) discussion, and (c) summary, conclusions, and implications that relate to the discussion.

For each topic, start off by putting the reader in the picture so that she or he understands where you are going with your review of a particular topic or subject and how you intend to tackle it. This becomes your introduction to the topic. Give the reader a rationale for the topic and a brief overview of how you have organized the discussion. You also should preview the main points that you will make in the body of the discussion.

The introduction is followed by a systematic review of the material and is subdivided by headings and subheadings based on your analysis and synthesis of the literature. Think carefully about how you would like to organize the discussion. Usually, you would start with general material to provide the reader with a comprehensive perspective. You would then proceed to discuss the material that is closely related to your own particular study. Thus, in planning how you will write, arrange your headings and subheadings accordingly because these will allow the reader to follow your train of thought. When appropriate, and especially with research-based literature, you also might employ the summary tables that you constructed when analyzing the literature because these tables reflect the variables or themes inherent in your discussion. At the end of the discussion of each topic, you should offer a concise and cohesive section summary that highlights and clarifies the salient points discussed.

Summary

To provide some form of clarity and closure for the reader, you also need a final concluding summary at the end of the discussion that identifies all the key points mentioned in the review. This final summary should make reference to the line of argumentation that was specified in the introduction and pull the entire discussion together. The point of all the summaries—both those at the end of each topic and the final chapter—is to tell the reader what your review yielded in terms of informing your study.

Conceptual Framework

The review and critique of the literature, combined with the researchers' own experience and insights, has contributed to developing a conceptual framework for the design and conduct of this study. The conceptual framework developed for this study helps to focus and shape the research process, informing the methodological design and influencing the data collection instruments to be used. The conceptual framework also becomes the repository for the data that were collected, providing the basis for and informing various iterations of a coding scheme. As such, this framework provides an organizing structure both for reporting this study's findings and for the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of these findings. In this way, the conceptual framework is essentially a "working tool."

Each category of the conceptual framework is directly derived from the study's research questions as outlined in Chapter 1. The first research question seeks to determine the extent to which participants perceived they were prepared to conduct research and write the dissertation following the completion of their course work. Therefore, the logical conceptual category to capture responses to this question is "Preparedness for Dissertation Process." The second research question seeks to identify what candidates perceive they need to learn to carry out the dissertation process. The category titled "KSA" is all-encompassing and thus appropriate. The third research question is intended to uncover how candidates go about acquiring the knowledge, skills, and abilities they perceive they need. Hence, the appropriate categorization is "How They Learn." The fourth and fifth research questions attempt to get at the factors that either help or hinder people's progress in the dissertation process; thus, "Facilitators" and "Barriers" are appropriate categories. To further explain each of the categories, the researchers drew on the literature, pilot test data, and their own educated guesses about potential responses to the research questions, which resulted in the various bulleted descriptors under each of the respective categories. During the course of data collection and analysis, some of the descriptors within each of the major categories were added, some were deleted, and others were collapsed. The conceptual framework was thus continually revised and refined.

As you may note, the prior narrative introduces your conceptual framework and describes what you mean by a conceptual framework, how you have developed it, and how it will be used in your study—that is, its nature, role, and function vis-à-vis your own particular study. You should be aware that, like so many aspects of the dissertation, the conceptual framework takes time to develop. As with the literature review, you will go through various iterations until you finally arrive at a workable, tight conceptual framework for your study. A completed conceptual framework, based on the example used in this book, is included as Appendix E.

Following are some recommended resources that you might consider perusing regarding enhancing your critical writing skills and developing your literature review and theoretical or conceptual framework.

Annotated Bibliography

Anfara, V. A., & Mertz, N. T. (Eds.). (2015). *Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Recognizing a lack of understanding of the role of the theoretical framework in qualitative research, the purpose of this edited text is to explain through discussion and example what a theoretical framework is, how it is used in qualitative research, and the impact it has on the research process. The book is essentially a "reflective thinking tool": It is presented in the format of a multiplistic conversation about how theory is used in actual qualitative studies. The editors offer a brief summary of the definitions of theory and theoretical frameworks, particularly in relation to methodology, and a wide variety of distinctive, sometimes unusual, theoretical frameworks drawn from a number of disciplines are included. The subsequent chapters present examples of studies by some of today's leading qualitative researchers, all of whom are advocates for further discussion regarding the role and function of theoretical frameworks in qualitative research. The book provides background for beginning researchers about the nature of theoretical frameworks and their importance in qualitative research; about differences in perspective about the role of theoretical frameworks; and about how to find and use a theoretical framework for one's study. In addition to providing guidance regarding integration of theoretical frameworks into solid research designs, this book initiates a thought-provoking discussion about the complexities involved in developing an appropriate theoretical framework.

Cooper, H. (2017). *Research synthesis and meta-analysis: A step by step approach* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This text includes discussion around the complex issues in conducting a literature review, with a particular focus on research synthesis in the social and behavioral sciences. Presenting a trustworthy and convincing integration of the research literature is a task that has profound implications for the accumulation of knowledge. State-of-the-art research synthesis has indeed been impacted by the growth in the amount of research and the rapid advances in computerized research retrieval systems. Developing a list of trustworthy research articles on a topic of interest involves lengthy and tedious scrutiny of available items. The book is written in plain language with four running examples drawn from psychology, education, and health science. The focus is on the basic tenets of sound data gathering with the task of producing a comprehensive integration of past research on a topic. The author highlights critical questions pertaining to gathering information from studies, establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, evaluating the quality of studies, analyzing and interpreting the outcome of studies, and synthesizing information. With ample coverage of literature searching and the technical aspects of meta-analysis, this one-of-a-kind book applies the basic principles of sound data gathering to the task of producing a comprehensive assessment of existing research. The book includes chapter-ending exercises and questions about best practices to prepare readers to conduct their own research syntheses.

Ravitch, S. M., & Riggan, M. (2017). *Reason and rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book presents conceptual frameworks as a method for aligning research design, literature review, and methodology. The authors explore the notion of a conceptual framework—defined both as a process and a product—that helps to direct and ground researchers as they confront common research challenges. Focusing on published studies on a range of topics, and employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the updated second edition features two new chapters that clearly communicate the processes of developing and defining conceptual frameworks. The authors illustrate how developing a conceptual framework is part of the process through which researchers identify questions and key lines of inquiry, develop appropriate data collection strategies for pursuing these questions, and monitor and critically reflect on their own thinking and understanding. The book provides direction regarding making use of existing knowledge (theory, concepts, methods, and empirical research) in combination with emergent observation and experience in an endeavor to ask deeper questions, develop robust and justifiable strategies for exploring those questions, present and contextualize research findings, and explain the significance and limitations thereof. Included are examples from research studies of prominent researchers and scholars from different fields and disciplines. These examples, paired with the authors' insight and reflections on the research process, vividly illustrate how conceptual frameworks inform research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and write-up of the study.

Wallace, M., & Wray, A. (2016). *Critical reading and writing for postgraduates* (3rd ed.). London, England: Sage.

Each aspect of a dissertation merits its own critical literature review. You should expect to critically engage with literature in justifying your investigation of the substantive topic, your choice of theoretical orientation to frame your research, the methodological approach and detailed methods through which you gather your data, and the interpretation of your findings. Reference to this literature is made at various points during your investigation and within your written manuscript. As these authors explain, critical literature reviews reflect the intellect of the reviewer, who has decided the focus, selected texts for review, engaged critically with and interpreted the text, synthesized what was found, and made a convincing argument. Overall, this is a very useful text that clearly signposts a route through the pathways involved in critiquing not only research sources in your field of study but also the "right" sources. The book approaches this in two ways: First, it develops an ability to critically ask questions of a chosen research source in order to help the reader determine its suitability, rigor, level of authority of findings, and conclusions; second, it develops a reflective and self-critical approach to the reader's own research and writing in order to produce a strong research paper or proposal that meets required standards. The volume is carefully structured so as to enable students to apply ideas suggested in the progressive development of their skills of critical analysis and appreciation, while providing illustrative example critiques of texts that encompass disciplinary areas including linguistics, education, business and management. The book's companion website contains additional useful exercises and templates.

8 Presenting Methodology and Research Approach

Chapter 8 Objectives

Section I: Instruction

- Identify the key components of the methodology chapter: (a) introduction and overview, (b) research sample, (c) overview of information needed, (d) research design, (e) methods of data collection, (f) methods for data analysis and synthesis, (g) ethical considerations, (h) issues of trustworthiness, (i) limitations and delimitations of the study, and (j) chapter summary.
- Provide an explanation of how each component of the research methodology must be developed and presented.
- Explain the significance of alignment among research methodology (tradition or genre), research design, data analysis, and presentation of findings.
- Illustrate how all of the components of a methodology chapter combine to form a logical, interconnected sequence and contribute to the overall methodological integrity of the study.
- Develop appreciation for reflexivity on the part of a critical and ethical qualitative researcher.

Section II: Application

- Present a completed example for the methodology chapter of a dissertation.

Overview

Chapter 3 of the dissertation presents the research design and the specific procedures used in conducting your study. A research design includes various interrelated elements that reflect its sequential nature. This chapter is intended to show the reader that you have an understanding of the methodological implications of the choices you have made and, in particular, that you have thought carefully about the linkages between your study's purpose and research questions and the research approach and research methods that you have selected.

Note that in the proposal's Chapter 3, you project *what you will do* based on what you know about the particular methods used in qualitative research, in general, and in your qualitative methodology (tradition or genre), in particular; hence, it is written in future tense. In the dissertation's Chapter 3, you report on *what you have already done.* You write after the fact; hence, you write in past tense. As such, many of the sections of Chapter 3 can be written only after you have actually conducted your study (i.e., collected, analyzed, and synthesized your data).

To write this chapter, you need to conduct a series of mini literature reviews pertaining to the methodological issues involved in qualitative research design. You need to show the reader that you (a) have knowledge of the current issues and discourse and (b) can relate your study to those issues and discourse. In this regard, you need to explain how you have gone about designing and conducting your study while making sure that you *draw supporting evidence from the literature* for the decisions and choices that you have made.

This chapter is usually one of the dissertation's lengthiest because of the amount of material involved, but remember that institutional requirements vary greatly, so be sure to check on what is expected of you. The methodology chapter is essentially a *discussion* in which you explain the course and logic of your decision making throughout the research process. In practice, this means describing the following:

- The rationale for your research approach and choice of qualitative methodology (tradition or genre)
- The research sample and the population from which it was drawn
- The type of information you needed to conduct the study
- How you designed the study and the methods that you used to gather your data (your selected data collection tools)
- The theoretical basis of the data collection methods you used and why you chose these
- How you have analyzed and synthesized your data
- Ethical considerations involved in your study, including informed consent and privacy (anonymity and confidentiality)
- Issues of trustworthiness and how you addressed these, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability
- Acknowledgment of the limitations and delimitations of the study and your attempt to address these issues

As has been pointed out throughout, please be aware that while most institutions will approach the dissertation in common ways, at the same time there are differences in terms of the organization and presentation, and distinct differences in terms of what and how qualitative language and terminology are used. This book presents information as guidelines that are meant to be flexible per institutional expectations and requirements, and subject to modification depending on your institution, department, and program.

Following are the two sections that make up this chapter. Section I offers instruction on how to develop each section of Chapter 3, the dissertation's methodology chapter. Section II illustrates application by way of the example used throughout this book and gives you some idea of what a complete Chapter 3 could look like, depending on your institution's particular requirements and stipulations. Note that Section I includes various "how-to" matrices, charts, and figures. Although not all of these may make their way into the main body of your final dissertation, they can and often do appear as "working tools" in the dissertation's appendix.

Section I: Instruction

The dissertation's third chapter—the methodology chapter—covers a lot of ground. In this chapter, you document each step that you have taken in designing and conducting the study. The format that we present for this chapter covers all the necessary components of a comprehensive methodology chapter. Universities generally have their own fixed structural requirements, so we recommend that before proceeding to write, you discuss with your advisor how to structure the chapter as well as the preferred order of the sections and how long each section should be. Most important, make sure (a) your sections are in a logical sequence and (b) what you write is comprehensive, clear, precise, and sufficiently detailed so that others will be able to adequately judge the soundness of your study. Table 8.1 is a road map intended to illustrate the necessary elements that constitute a sound methodology chapter and a suggested sequence for including these elements.

As pointed out previously, although qualitative research as an overall approach is based on certain central assumptions, it is characterized by an ongoing discourse regarding the appropriate and acceptable use of terminology. Current thinking over the years has caused some qualitative researchers to develop their own terminology to more effectively reflect the nature and distinction of qualitative research, whereas others still borrow terminology from quantitative research. Throughout this chapter, we point out instances in which you should be aware of these differences so that you can make an informed choice.

TABLE 8.1 Road Map for Developing a Methodology Chapter: Necessary Elements

1: Introduction and Overview
Begin by stating purpose and research questions. Go on to explain how the chapter is organized. Then provide a rationale for using a qualitative research approach (i.e., why qualitative research is appropriate for your particular study), as well as a rationale for the particular qualitative methodology (tradition or genre) you have chosen. Provide a brief overview of your study.
2: Research Sample
Describe the research sample and the population from which that sample was drawn. Define and discuss the purposeful sampling strategy that you have selected (see Appendix F), as well as your criteria for sample selection. Depending on the qualitative research tradition, a sample can include people, texts, artifacts, or cultural phenomena. In this section, describe the research site if appropriate (i.e., program, institution, or organization).
3: Overview of Information Needed
Describe the kinds of information you will need to answer your research questions. Be specific about exactly what kind of information you will be collecting. Four general areas of information are needed for most qualitative studies: contextual, perceptual, demographic, and theoretical information.
4: Research Design
This section outlines your overall research design—that is, the way you set up and conducted the study. This includes the list of all steps in carrying out your research from data collection through data analysis. The two sections that follow elaborate in greater detail on the methods of data collection and the process of data analysis. The narrative in this section is often augmented by a flowchart or diagram that provides an illustration of the various steps involved.
5: Data Collection Methods or Tools
Explain that a selected literature review preceded data collection; although this informs the study, indicate that the literature is not data to be collected. Identify and present all the data collection methods or tools that you used, and clearly explain the steps taken to carry out each method. Include in the discussion any field tests or pilot studies you may have undertaken. To show that you have done a critical reading of the literature, you should discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each method of data collection used.
6: Data Analysis and Synthesis
Report on how you managed, organized, and analyzed your data in preparation to report your findings (Chapter 4) and then how you went on to analyze and interpret your findings (Chapter 5). It is important to note also that this section of Chapter 3 can thus be written only after you have written up the findings and analysis chapters of your dissertation. Please note that some universities or programs require that these two chapters be combined.
7: Ethical Considerations
This section should inform the reader that you have considered all ethical issues that might arise vis-à-vis your study and that you have taken the necessary steps to address these potential issues, including informed consent and privacy (anonymity and confidentiality).
8: Issues of Trustworthiness
This section discusses the criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research—credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Moreover, you should indicate to the reader that you have a clear understanding of the implications thereof vis-à-vis your own study specifically, and the strategies you employed to ensure and enhance the trustworthiness of your study. Transparency is key to building trustworthiness.
9: Limitations and Delimitations
Limitations and delimitations identify potential weaknesses inherent in the study and the scope of the study. You need to cite all potential limitations and your means to address these limitations. The discussion should include problems inherent in qualitative research generally, as well as limitations that are specific to your particular study. Regardless of how carefully you plan a study, there will always be some limitations, and you need to explicitly acknowledge these. Note that generalizability is not considered a limitation as this is not the goal of qualitative research; rather, the focus is on transferability—that is, the ability to apply findings in similar contexts or settings. Limitations are external conditions that restrict or constrain the study's scope or may affect its outcome. Delimitations, on the other hand, are conditions or parameters that you, as the researcher, intentionally impose in order to limit the scope of your study (e.g., using participants of certain ages, genders, or groups; conducting the research in one single setting; collecting data only during a certain time frame, etc.).
10: Chapter Summary
A final culminating summary integrates all the elements that you have presented in this chapter. Make sure that you highlight all the important points. Keep your concluding discussion concise and precise. Do not include any new information in the summary that has not already been discussed in the chapter.

Table 8.1

Introduction and Overview

The chapter begins with an opening paragraph in which you restate the study's purpose and research questions and then go on to explain the chapter's organization. You then proceed to discuss how your research lends itself to a qualitative approach and why this approach is most appropriate to your inquiry. Critical to a well-planned study is the consideration of whether a qualitative approach is suited to the purpose and nature of your study. To convey this notion to the reader, it is necessary to provide a rationale for the qualitative research approach, indicating to the reader that you are familiar with all key aspects of qualitative research, as well as justification for this choice. In your discussion, you begin by defining *qualitative inquiry* as distinct from quantitative research. Then you go on to discuss the values and benefits derived from using a qualitative approach—in other words, its strengths. You would not talk about its weaknesses here; you will do that in the last section of the methodology chapter called "Limitations and Delimitations." In addition, you need to explain your reasons for choosing a particular qualitative methodology (tradition or genre), namely, case study (or multiple case study), ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, action research, or one of the many critical genres. You will describe your choice of tradition or genre, and also indicate why this is a good fit with your study.

Make sure that this first section flows logically and that you structure your discussion well by using appropriate headings and subheadings. Once the overall approach and supporting rationale have been presented, you can move on to explain who the research participants are, the sampling strategies you used to select the participants, what kind of data were needed to inform your study, and the specific data collection and data analysis strategies employed.

Research Sample

In this section, you need to identify and describe in detail the method used to select the research sample, including the research site and research participants. This provides the reader some sense of the scope of your study. In addition, your study's credibility relies on the quality of procedures you have used to select the research participants. Some research is site-specific, and the study is defined by and intimately linked to one or more locations. If you are working with a particular site, be it a particular place, region, organization, or program, the reader will need some detail regarding the setting. Although it is typically mentioned briefly in the beginning pages of Chapter 1 of your dissertation (the introduction), in this section of Chapter 3, you need to talk more specifically about how and why the site was selected.

After discussing and describing the site, you will proceed to tell the reader about the research sample—the participants of your study. You also need to explain in some detail how the sample was selected and the pool or population from which it was drawn. This discussion should include the criteria used for inclusion in the sample, how participants were identified, how they were contacted, the number of individuals contacted, and the percentage of those who agreed to participate (i.e., the response rate). You also need to discuss why the specific method of sample selection used was considered most appropriate for the study.

In qualitative research, selection of the research sample is purposeful (Patton, 2015). This type of sampling is sometimes referred to as *purposive sampling* (Merriam, 2009) or *judgment sampling* (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). There are a number of variations of purposeful sampling including typical, maximum variation, homogenous, and snowball sampling, among others. Appendix F presents an overview of the variety of purposeful sampling strategies used in qualitative research. The logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This method is in contrast to the random sampling procedures that characterize quantitative research, which is based on statistical probability theory. Random sampling controls for selection bias and enables generalization from the sample to a larger population—a key feature of quantitative research. Remember, one of the basic tenets of qualitative research is that each research setting is unique in its own mix of people and contextual factors. The researcher's intent is to describe a particular context in depth, not to generalize to another context or population. Representativeness in qualitative research, and extrapolating from the particular to the general, is secondary to the participants' ability to provide rich information about themselves and their setting.

As its name suggests, a qualitative researcher has reasons (purposes) for selecting specific participants, events, and processes. As Reybold, Lammert, and Stribling (2013) point out, in qualitative research, the logic of selection is grounded in the value of information-rich cases and emergent, in-depth understanding not available through random sampling. From this perspective, purposeful selection is a strategy for accessing appropriate data that fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints and challenges being faced. Purposeful selection is more than a technique to access data; our selection choices frame who and what matters as data. Moreover, these selection choices interface the other methods in a study to ultimately become the stories that are told, an extremely important consideration for researchers.

The purposeful selection of research participants represents a key decision in qualitative research. Thus, in this section, you need to identify and describe the sampling method or strategy chosen, and also provide a brief rationale for your choice. The strategy that you choose depends on the purpose of your study, and you need to make that clear in your discussion. For example, in a phenomenological study, you might employ "criterion-based sampling." Criterion sampling works well when all the individuals studied represent people who have experienced the same phenomenon. In a grounded theory study, you would choose the strategy known as *theoretical sampling* (or *theory-based sampling*), which means that you examine individuals who can contribute to the evolving theory. In a case study, you might use the strategy of *maximum variation* to represent diverse cases to fully display multiple perspectives about the cases, or you may choose to use the strategy of extreme or deviant sampling because you choose to focus on potentially rich and unusual sources of information for comparative purposes.

Once you have offered an explanation and rationale for your sampling strategy, you need to go on to discuss the nature and makeup of your particular sample. Describe who these individuals are, disclose how many individuals constitute the sample, and provide any relevant descriptive characteristics. It is also helpful to include charts to augment and complement the narrative discussion. Providing information regarding selection procedures and research participants will aid others in understanding the findings. Having provided a description of the research sample and the setting, you are now ready to proceed to explain exactly what types of information you will need from the participants.

Overview of Information Needed

This section briefly describes the kinds of information you need to answer your research questions and thus shed light on the problem you are investigating. Four areas of information are typically needed for most qualitative studies: contextual, demographic, perceptual, and theoretical. The following sections define the content and the specific relevancy of each of these areas.

Contextual Information

Contextual information refers to the context within which the participants reside or work. It is information that describes the culture and environment of the setting, be it an organization or an institution. It is essential information to collect when doing a case study set in a particular site or multiple similar sites because elements within the environment or culture may, as Lewin (1935) reminds us, influence behavior. Lewin's fundamental proposition is that human behavior is a function of the interaction of the person and the environment. This theory is particularly relevant when one is trying to understand the learning behaviors of a discrete segment of a population in a particular organizational or institutional setting.

Given the nature of contextual information, such a review would provide knowledge about an organization's history, vision, objectives, products or services, operating principles, and business strategy. In addition, information on an organization's or institution's leaders and its structure, organizational chart, systems, staff, roles, rules, and procedures would be included in this area of information. The primary method of collecting contextual information is through an extensive review of organization or institutional internal documents, as well as a review of relevant external documents that refer in some way to the organization or institution. Documentation can be of a descriptive and/or evaluative nature. Refer to Appendix Q for a document summary form template.

Demographic Information

Demographic information is participant profile information that describes who the participants in your study are —where they come from, some of their history and/or background, their education, and other personal information such as age, gender, occupation, and ethnicity. Relevant demographic information is needed to help explain what may be underlying an individual's perceptions, as well as the similarities and differences in perceptions among participants. In other words, a particular data point (e.g., age) may explain a certain finding that emerged in the study.

Demographic information is typically collected by asking participants to complete a personal data sheet either before or after the interview or other data collection methods have taken place. The information is then arrayed on a matrix that shows participants by pseudonym on the vertical axis and the demographic data points (age, gender, education, etc.) on the horizontal axis, as illustrated in Table 8.2. This demographic matrix, which is usually presented in the prior section, in which you discuss your research sample, can also later be used in conjunction with frequency charts. The latter, to be explained further on, table the findings to help you with cross-case analysis, which is required later in the dissertation process. A sample completed participant demographic matrix appears as Appendix G.

TABLE 8.2 Template for Participant Demographic Matrix

Participant Code	Pseudonym	Years Enrolled	Program Concentration/ Discipline	Gender	Age

Table 8.2

Perceptual Information

Perceptual information refers to participants' perceptions related to the particular subject of your inquiry. Particularly in qualitative research when interviews are often the primary method of data collection, perceptual information is the most critical of the kinds of information needed. Perceptual information relies, to a great extent, on interviews to uncover participants' descriptions of their experiences related to such things as how experiences influenced the decisions they made, whether participants had a change of mind or a shift in attitude, whether they described more of a constancy of purpose, what elements relative to their objectives participants perceived as important, and to what extent those objectives were met.

It should be remembered that perceptions are just that—they are not facts—they are what people perceive as facts. They are rooted in long-held assumptions and one's own view of the world or frame of reference. As such, they are neither right nor wrong; they tell the story of what participants believe to be true. Refer to Appendix R for a participant summary form template.

Theoretical Information

Theoretical information includes information researched and collected from the various literature sources to assess what is already known regarding your topic of inquiry. Theoretical information serves to

TABLE 8.3 Template for Overview of Information Needed

Research Questions	Type of Information Needed (a) Contextual (context/background) (b) Demographic (c) Perceptual	Information Yielded (a) Background, History, Culture, Mission, Site Description, etc. (b) Age, Gender, Ethnicity, Discipline, etc. (c) Participants' Attitudes, Perceptions, Ideas, Thoughts, etc.	Method of Data Collection*
Research Question 1			
Research Question 2			
Research Question 3			
Research Question 4			
Research Question 5			

*Lists of documents and instruments for all data collection methods should appear as appendices.

Table 8.3

Lists of documents and instruments for all data collection methods should appear as appendices.

- Support and give evidence for your methodological approach;
- Provide theories related to your research questions that form the development and ongoing refinement of your conceptual framework;
- Provide support for your interpretation, analysis, and synthesis; and
- Provide support for conclusions you draw and recommendations you suggest.

It is recommended that you create a matrix that aligns your research questions with the information you assess and the methods that you will use to collect that information. Creating this type of alignment ensures that the information you intend to collect is directly related to the research questions, therefore providing answers to the respective research questions. For planning purposes, the alignment indicates the particular methods you will use to collect the information. It is useful to array a table similar to Table 8.3, which illustrates how you might go about setting up such a matrix. A completed sample overview of information needed is presented as Appendix H.

Lists of documents and instruments for all data collection methods should appear as appendices.

Research Design

Once you have clearly outlined the information you need and the methods you will use to obtain those data, you are ready to develop and present your research design. The research design is the *plan for conducting the study.* There is no agreed-upon structure for how to design a qualitative study, however, and in fact, books on qualitative research vary greatly in their suggestions regarding research design. Engaging in research involves choosing a study design that corresponds with your study's problem, purpose, research questions, choice of site, and research sample. This calls to the fore the concept of *methodological congruence* (Richards & Morse, 2013), whereby all the study's components are interconnected and interrelated so that the study itself is a cohesive whole rather than the sum of fragmented, isolated, disparate parts. You will also need to consider whether the design is a comfortable match with your worldview and your skills. It is thus important to understand the philosophical foundations underlying different types of qualitative research so that you can make informed decisions as to the choices available to you in designing and implementing a research study. Remember, although all qualitative research holds a number of characteristics and assumptions in common, there are key variations in the disciplinary base that a qualitative study may draw from, what the intent of the study may be, and hence in how a qualitative study may be designed and implemented. Thus, a narrative life history study would be differentiated in terms of design and implantation from a case study that seeks to investigate participants' experiences in a particular bounded context, from an ethnographic study that focuses on culture, and from a grounded theory study that is designed to build a substantial theory. Other considerations regarding choice of research design have to do with identifying a theoretical or conceptual framework that forms the scaffolding or underlying structure of the study.

Once you are clear about the information you need and the methods you will use to obtain those data, you are ready to develop your research design. Whatever combination of methods you choose to use, there is a need for a systematic approach to your data. The main objective of this section of the methodology chapter is to identify and present the data collection methods and explain clearly the process you undertook to carry out each method. Be sure to include in your discussion any field tests or pilot studies you may have undertaken to determine the usefulness of any instruments you have developed. Because the research design in qualitative research is flexible, you should also mention any modifications and changes you might have made to your design along the way. That is, describe all the steps that you took as you moved through the study to collect and analyze your data. Indicate the order in which these steps occurred, as well as how each step informed the next. The narrative can be accompanied by a flowchart or diagram that illustrates the steps involved. A sample research design flowchart appears in Appendix I. Various formats of a flowchart can be used; however, be careful to keep it as simple and as informative as possible. "Pretty," elaborate flowchart designs often miss the point. Simplicity and logic are key.

Appropriate methods are derived from having done your analysis of the kinds of information you need to answer your research questions. A brief statement concerning your literature review precedes the discussion of methods and process. The purpose of this brief predata collection literature review statement is to underscore (a) the theoretical grounding for the study, (b) that the review of the literature was ongoing and related research was continually updated, and (c) that the theoretical or conceptual framework developed from the literature review was used to guide the data analysis, interpretation, and synthesis phases of the research. This literature review statement comes before the identification and description of methods because although the literature review is ongoing, generating new information and supporting evidence, it is not a data collection method per se. You are now ready to discuss the methods you will use in your study.

Methods of Data Collection

Extensive engagement with participants, data, and setting is an essential feature of all qualitative research, whatever modes of data gathering are used. Engagement with participants in their social worlds is essential to understanding subjective meanings, and it is important that the study's findings are informed by the data rather than the researcher's own preconceptions. This requires reflexivity—that is, a deep awareness on the part of researchers of their own preconceptions and assumptions, and reflection on their roles and emerging understandings while engaged in the research process. As Charmaz (2015) explains,

> Methods extend and magnify our view of studied life and, thus, broaden and deepen what we learn of it and know about it. Through our methods, we first aim to see this world as our research participants do—from the inside. Although we cannot claim to replicate their views or reproduce their experiences in our own lives, we can try to enter their settings and situations to the extent possible. (p. 24)

A note of clarification: *Methodology* reflects the overall research design and the way the researcher goes about conducting the study. The term *methods* commonly denotes specific techniques, procedures, or tools used by the researcher to generate and analyze data. Based on the research questions, specific data collection methods are chosen to gather the required information in the most appropriate and meaningful way. It should be noted that a solid rationale for the choice of methods used in your study is crucial, as this indicates *methodological congruence* (Richards & Morse, 2013) and illustrates that the choice of methods is grounded in the study's overall research design. Information gathered during data collection needs to be recorded in a manner that enables the researcher to analyze and meaningfully report the data.

It is critical that you clearly and accurately explain *how* you obtained your findings for the following reasons:

1. Readers need to know how the data were obtained because the methods you chose impact the findings and by extension, how you likely interpreted them.
2. In most cases, there are a variety of different methods you can choose to investigate a research problem. The methodology section of your paper should therefore clearly articulate the reasons *why* you chose a particular procedure or technique.
3. The reader will want to know that the data were collected or generated in a way that is consistent with accepted practice in the field of study. Unreliable method produces unreliable results and as a consequence, undermines the value of your interpretations of the findings.
4. In the social and behavioral sciences, it is important to provide sufficient information to allow other researchers to adopt or replicate your methods. This is particularly important when a new method has been developed or an innovative use of an existing method or combination of methods is utilized.

This section of your Chapter 3 describes what the literature says about each of the methods you used in your study to gather data. In other words, you discuss how the instruments you have chosen are appropriate to your study, making use of the literature to support each of your choices. The discussion regarding data collection methods should include some detail regarding the strengths and weaknesses of each method. This serves to show that you have done a critical reading of the literature and that you acknowledge that data collection methods, although certainly useful, are not without some disadvantages. You should present the methods of data collection in the order in which you used these, and be sure to structure the discussion well by having a separate heading for each method.

A common pitfall in writing this section is the tendency to describe the data collection methods chosen as if they exist in a vacuum without explaining the logical connections among the methods you have chosen, your research questions, and your research methodology (qualitative genre or tradition). Following are the sequential steps that must be covered in this section. Be specific and precise in your discussion as you proceed:

1. Describe each data collection method you used.
2. Provide a rationale for each of the methods selected.
3. Indicate how you have triangulated your methods.
4. Provide complete information about how you used each method.
5. Describe how you developed each of your instruments.
6. Describe how you may have field-tested any of your instruments.
7. Describe how you recorded, managed, and safeguarded your data.
8. Explain the steps you took to preserve confidentiality and anonymity of research participants.
9. Describe any limitations that are inherent in your method of data collection and how, if at all, you have addressed these limitations.

Triangulation of Methods

Multiple data-gathering techniques are frequently used in qualitative studies as a deliberate strategy to develop a more complex understanding of the phenomena being studied. Triangulation strengthens your study by combining methods and is an important strategy for enhancing the quality of data from multiple sources (e.g., people, events), in multiple ways (by using different data collection tools), with the idea that this practice will afford an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study by illuminating different facets of situations and experiences and helping to portray them authentically, in their entirety and complexity. Patton (2015) discusses four types of triangulation:

- Of data sources (data triangulation)
- Among different researchers (investigator triangulation)
- Of perspectives (theory or disciplinary triangulation)
- Of methods (methodological triangulation)

Note that the researcher does not need to meet all of the triangulation methods. Investigator triangulation does not apply to dissertations, as a dissertation is done alone, with one single researcher, unless using collaborative inquiry as a research methodology. Based on your study's research questions, you will choose specific data collection methods (and combinations of methods) to gather the required information in the most appropriate and meaningful way. There are several methods used in qualitative research to choose from: interviews (often the primary method), focus groups, document review, observation, and critical incident reports. A variety of combinations of methods can be employed. Surveys and questionnaires, which are traditionally quantitative instruments, can also be used in conjunction with qualitative methods to provide corroboration and/or supportive evidence. Appendix J provides a summary overview of the qualitative data collection methods from which to choose. Appendix K provides a sample interview schedule. Appendix P provides a sample critical incident instrument. Following is a brief summary and critical overview of each of the most common qualitative data collections tools:

Qualitative Data Collection Methods

Interviews

Intensive interviewing has become the most common source of qualitative data (Charmaz, 2015). The interview is often selected as the primary method for data collection because it has the potential to elicit rich, thick descriptions. Further, this method offers researchers an opportunity to clarify statements and probe for additional information. Marshall and Rossman (2016) state that a major benefit of collecting data through individual, in-depth interviews is that they offer the potential to capture a person's perspective of an event or experience. Remember, the credibility of interview data depends largely on audiotaping and transcription to produce verbatim quotations.

Interviews can range in structure from a list of predetermined questions to a totally free-ranging interview in which there is no structure set ahead of time. Typically, interviews for qualitative research are in-depth in order to capture perceptions, attitudes, and emotions of the interview participant. Interviews aim to elicit participants' views of their lives, as portrayed in their stories, and so gain access to their experiences, feelings, and social worlds. Interviews can be unstructured or semistructured. The former are usually conducted in everyday conversational style. Semistructured interviews are used to facilitate more focused exploration of a specific topic, using an interview guide. The success of an interview depends on the nature of the interaction between the interviewer and the research participant and on the interviewer's skill in asking good questions. Indeed, the generativity of the interview depends on both partners and their willingness to engage in a deep discussion about the topic of interest. As Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) note, an interview is an "inter-view"—that is, an *exchange of views* between two persons.

Although interviews have inherent strengths, there are various limitations associated with interviewing. First, not all people are equally cooperative, articulate, and perceptive. Second, interviews require researcher skill. Third, interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering; they are the result of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, and the context in which they take place, and as such, this method of data collection has been critiqued for representing asymmetrical power relations (Brinkmann, 2018; Fontana & Frey, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2012). The *researcher as interviewer* initiates the interview, determines the interview topic, poses the questions, critically follows up on the answers, and also chooses when to terminate the conversation. As Brinkmann (2018) puts it, "It is illusory to think of the research interview as a dominance-free dialogue between equal partners; the interviewer's research project and knowledge interest set the agenda and rule the conversation" (p. 588). Interviews, of necessity, must be transcribed verbatim. It must be emphasized that transcription is a form of representation and, as such, is not value-free (Gibson & Brown, 2009). The process of transcribing is not just a matter of simply writing down what someone or some people said or did; transcribing involves making analytic judgments on the part of the researcher about what to present and how to re-present it and choosing to display or focus on certain specific features of a piece of talk, action, or interaction. The notion of "re-presentation" implies that transcripts are not neutral documents but are a rendering of the data on the part of the transcriber. As such, it is incumbent upon qualitative researchers to routinely reflect on the ways they choose to direct their interviews, and the ways that they interpret and derive meaning from the statements of others to avoid reducing what we know and how they know it to limited perspectives and interests (Brinkmann, 2018).

Because interviews are, in most cases, the primary method of data collection, it is useful at this point to explain how interview questions are developed. To carry out the purpose of your study, all the research questions must be satisfied. Therefore, designing the right interview questions is critical. To ensure that the interview questions are directly tied to the research questions, type out in bold font each of your research questions, and then underneath each, brainstorm three or four questions that will get at that research question. When you have done this for each of your research questions, you should have a list of 12 to 15 interview questions. To do a preliminary test of your interview questions, think about all probable responses you might get from each interview question and reframe the questions until you are satisfied they will engender the kind of responses that refer directly to the research questions. A sample of a completed interview schedule or interview schedule/protocol based on research questions is presented as Appendix K.

Constructing a matrix that lists the research questions along the horizontal axis and the interview questions down the vertical axis can further indicate the extent to which your interview questions have achieved the necessary coverage of your research questions. Table 8.4 is an illustration of this approach. This type of matrix, which allows a visual overview of the required coverage of the research questions via the interview schedule, in conjunction with pilot interviews, can help you further refine your interview questions.

TABLE 8.4 Template for Research Questions/Interview Questions Matrix

	Research Questions			
Interview Questions	1:	2:	3:	4:
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Table 8.4

Observation

Observation, or participant observation, is a central and fundamental method in qualitative inquiry and is used to discover and explain complex interactions in natural social settings. In the early stages of qualitative research, the emphasis is on discovery. The researcher may enter the setting with broad areas of interest but without predetermined categories or strict observational checklists. Through this type of open-ended entry, the researcher is potentially able to discover recurring patterns of behavior, interactions, and relationships. After these patterns are identified and described through early analysis of field notes, checklists might become more appropriate and context-sensitive. Focused observation may then be used at later stages of the study—for example, to see whether analytic themes explain behavior and relationships over a period of time or in a variety of settings. The term *participant observation*, as its name suggests, explains the researcher as both a participant and an observer through immersion in the setting in order to experience reality as the research participants do. This method of gathering data raises the issue of "positionality"—that is, the researcher's relationship with participants, the nature of that involvement, how much of the study's purpose will be revealed to participants, and how ethical dilemmas will be managed.

Observation differs from interviews in that the researcher obtains a firsthand account of the phenomenon of interest rather than relying on someone else's interpretation or perspective. There are texts that describe what and how to observe, the interdependent relationship between the observer and the observed, how to record observations in the form of field notes, and how to analyze and interpret observation data. As with interviews, to avoid bias, it is incumbent upon qualitative researchers to routinely reflect on the ways they choose to select what will be observed, the criteria used for observing, the ways they direct their observations and record these, and the ways that they interpret and derive meaning from observing others. Transparency with regard to all of these is critical to establishing credible findings.

Focus Groups

Focus groups, or group interviews, are facilitated group discussions and possess elements of both participant observation and individual interviews while also maintaining their own uniqueness as a distinctive research method (Barbour, 2018; Liamputtong, 2011). Participants are usually selected because of shared social or cultural experience or shared concerns related to the study's focus. A focus group is essentially a group discussion focused on a single theme (Kreuger & Casey, 2015; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

One strength of focus groups is that this method is socially oriented, studying participants in an atmosphere that is often more natural and relaxed than a one-to-one interview. As with other types of interviews, the format allows the facilitator the flexibility to explore often-unanticipated issues as they arise in the discussion. The goal is to create a candid conversation that addresses, in depth, the selected topic. The underlying assumption of focus groups is that, within a permissive atmosphere that fosters a range of opinions, a more complete and revealing understanding of the issues will be obtained. Focus groups are planned and structured but are also flexible tools (Liamputtong, 2011). Kreuger and Casey (2015) list various uses of focus groups: (a) elicit a range of feelings, opinions, and ideas; (b) understand differences in perspectives; (c) uncover and provide insight into specific factors that influence opinions; and (d) seek ideas that emerge from the group.

It must be acknowledged that focus groups, while serving a useful function, are not without disadvantages, including issues of power dynamics (some views held by a minority of participants could be minimized or dismissed) or groupthink (there might be a tendency for participants to agree with others and reflect the collective views of group members). Furthermore, logistical difficulties could arise from the need to manage conversation while attempting to extract data, requiring strong facilitation skills. As such, should researchers choose to use this method, they will need to develop strong facilitation skills (Fontana & Frey, 2013).

Critical Incidents

Critical incident reports are a data collection method first formulated by Flanagan (1954), useful because qualitative research methodology emphasizes process and is based on a descriptive and inductive approach to data collection. Qualitative researchers often select critical incident instruments with the intention of corroborating interview data and, further, to allow the uncovering of perceptions that might not have been revealed through interviews. Of particular importance is that written critical incident reports probe assumptions, allowing time for reflection.

Although there is support in the literature for the use of the critical incident as an effective technique for enhancing data collection, researchers should be mindful of Brookfield's (1991, 2005) repeated caution that critical incidents cannot be the sole technique for collecting data. Critical incidents are too abbreviated to provide the rich descriptions that can be obtained in interviews and observations. A further concern regarding the use of critical incident reports has to do with the accuracy of data because this technique relies solely on the respondents' recall. A related concern is that, although reporting information that respondents perceive is important, the researcher may fail to report salient incremental data and the information, as such, may be incomplete.

Document Review

Another primary source of qualitative data is document review. Documents provide a major source of data. The term *document* is broadly defined to cover a variety of written records, visual images, artifacts, and even archival data. Although some documents may be developed at the researcher's request, most are produced independently of the research study and thus offer a valuable resource for confirming insights gained through other methods of data collection. *Elicited documents* involve research participants in producing the data. Material such as questionnaires, diaries, logs, journals, personal accounts, letters, pictures, and photographs can all generate elicited texts. *Extant documents* contrast with elicited materials in that the researcher does not affect or influence their construction. Among extant materials are public records, policy reports, mass media images, charts, and diagrams. Researchers often supplement observation and interviewing with gathering and analyzing documents. As with other methodological decisions, the decision to conduct document review should be linked to the study's research design and will indicate the need for seeking corroboration of the meaning of the documents through other data collection methods. There are many useful texts that cover this method of data collection, including the various kinds of documents, their use in qualitative research, ethical issues involved, and the strengths and limitations associated with documents as sources of data.

As Charmaz (2015) states, "Documents enter research in multiple ways that reflect contemporary worlds" (p. 45), and "People create documents for specific purposes and they do so within social, economic, historical, cultural, and situational contexts" (p. 46). While the analysis of documents is potentially rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting, documentary materials cannot be considered neutral or transparent reflections of organizational or social life. Care must be taken to assess the less conscious shaping of what is represented in written reports, as there is bound to be some social filtering, possibly because these are produced by interested parties to suit their own views and preconceptions; dictated by particular administrative needs; influenced by currently dominant models, theories, or interpretations among scholars; and so on. It is worth remembering that a source purporting to represent generally held views or an "objective assessment" of a situation often expresses the views of a minority or of the dominant interest group. It is important, therefore, that qualitative researchers pay careful attention to the collection and analysis of documentary realities (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011; Boreus & Bergstrom, 2017; Charmaz, 2015; Prior, 2017). It is also important to recognize that while the writers of documents bring to bear their knowledge, often tacit, into developing documents, readers too bring to bear their own conventional understanding in terms of making sense of and interpreting such documents. Moreover, readers do not all share the same culture, and so do not all bring to bear the same cultural knowledge. A caveat in using documents in qualitative research is that analysis needs to focus on how organizational realities are (re)produced through textual conventions. As such, qualitative researchers should be concerned with situating documents in context and connecting these to a broader narrative, including the political, cultural, and social infrastructure that contain and also exist outside of the text. Analysis of documents is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9.

Survey

Surveys, while typically a quantitative data collection method, can be used as an adjunct to many of the methods described previously. An advantage of survey methodology is that it is relatively unobtrusive and relatively easily administered and managed (Fink, 2013; Fowler, 2014). It must be acknowledged, however, that surveys alone can be of limited value for examining complex social relationships or intricate patterns of interaction. In keeping with the qualitative research tradition, surveys often include some open-ended questions that seek to tap into personal experiences and shed light on participants' perceptions.

Internet as Work in the Field: Collecting Data Online

The Internet is a social phenomenon, a tool, and also an emerging and burgeoning field site for qualitative research. The term *Internet* serves as an umbrella for multiple and multimodal digital technologies, capacities, uses, and social spaces, including social media, social networking sites, and discussion forums. The selection of technology tools and settings for collecting data online influences the kinds of communication possible with participants and the types of data collected, whether text, verbal or visual, synchronous or asynchronous. Qualitative data collection is typically characterized by the method used, including interviews, observations, and document or archival analysis. Numerous variations and schools of thought exist about each approach and associated skills, techniques, and practices. As Salmons (2017) points out, digital qualitative approaches require the researcher to do more than simply repurpose real-world data collection techniques. Moreover, given the unique characteristics of the online environment and communication, different ways are needed to classify the types of data collected. Salmons (2017) describes three types of online data collection:

- *Elicited:* The researcher elicits consenting participants' responses and has direct interaction with participants who consent to participate. Data collection can occur either synchronously or asynchronously.
- *Extant:* Much online communication involves posting text, images, or other materials on websites, blogs, social networking sites, or various communications applications. Collecting this kind of data involves adapting traditional qualitative data collection tools, and data collection can occur synchronously or asynchronously. The difference is that the researcher usually has no direct contact with users unless the study entails consent or permissions.
- *Enacted:* Approaches for generating data through some kind of online activity that engages the researcher and participants in the generation of data. As with elicited data collection, the researcher interacts directly with consenting participants.

Conducting research online is certainly a convenient and accessible way to interact with research participants who may be broadly dispersed. However, there are certain concerns that need to be considered when gathering data this way. One concern addresses where the data resides and how the researcher accesses it. Another concern pertains to the relationship of the researcher to the participants and to the data. Given the diverse options for online data collection, thoughtful consideration is necessary regarding the implications of choice of research design, conduct, and ethical issues (Markham & Stravrova, 2017; Salmons, 2017).

The Internet is often chosen as a method of collecting information because of the ease with which researchers can gain access to individuals and groups, download texts or media, capture conversations, observe individual and group behaviors, or interact with participants in the field. The ethics associated with Internet research are therefore complex because researchers come from many disciplines, bringing myriad theories, methods, techniques, and norms for research practices. Important ethical issues include the rationale for the selection of credible participants (including sampling criteria and procedures); verification of participant identity and other relevant criteria; selection of methods; permissions needed; ensuring informed consent and verifying consent (in the case of elicited or enacted approaches); choosing, finding, and creating conducive meeting spaces; respect for the research site; safeguarding of data; and protection of participants' identities. Especially important in Internet research is the concept of privacy, which can be generally defined as individuals' ability to control the terms by which their personal information is collected and used. Also challenging is guaranteeing anonymity and identifying vulnerable persons. For example, age is difficult, if not impossible, to verify in many online environments.

Given the variation in ethical stances as well as the diversity of methodological choices, it is therefore incumbent upon researchers to explore and follow "best practice" guidelines and to articulate their ethical choices in written reports. Salmons (2017) provides what she refers to as a "qualitative e-research framework" that provides a conceptual schema of critical questions pertaining to all the interrelated elements of an ethical online qualitative study. This framework offers guiding topics and questions to review and can be used to assess the design and research quality of dissertations that involve online research and also to evaluate proposed or published studies in this emerging and evolving field of research.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Having presented the methods that you have used to gather data, you are now ready to go on and explain how the data have been recorded and managed, as well as your strategies for data analysis. In this section of the methodology chapter, you report on how you managed, organized, and analyzed your data in preparation to write up and present your findings (more fully presented in Chapter 9) and then how you went on to analyze and interpret your findings (more fully presented in Chapter 10). Thus, it is important to note that this section of Chapter 3 of your dissertation (Methodology) can be written only *after* you have written up the findings and analysis chapters of your dissertation.

It is critical to remember that your methods of analysis must align with your chosen research methodology (tradition or genre). The various qualitative traditions gather and analyze data differently. For example, case study will use interview data to provide thick description in order to develop themes and categories. Ethnographers will use interview data to develop a deeper understanding of cultural nuances. Narrative inquiry uses the strategy of textual analysis to develop "stories" from the interview data. Phenomenological research makes use of "significant statements" in the narrative, the generation of "meaning units," and the development of an "essence" description. Grounded theory researchers approach interviews for the theoretical usefulness of the data, seeking to analyze the meaning that the data convey, and thereby develop theoretical categories. Narrative inquiry approaches document review for the purpose of textual analysis within context, whereas grounded theory approaches document for its potential for theorizing. As such, there is no one size fits all when it comes to qualitative data analysis and its outcomes. Your study's analysis must of necessity, therefore, be grounded in and aligned with the methodology that you have selected and should respect disciplinary expectations.

One of the most common shortfalls in presenting qualitative research (and hence one of the most common critiques of published qualitative research methodology) is what Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) refer to as the "black box approach to data analysis"—that is, inadequate description of analytic procedures and reasoning. Oftentimes, researchers simply state that they conducted thematic analysis in the belief that this constitutes sufficient information. Appropriate methods of data analysis depend on the research purpose and nature of data collected, but certain fundamental steps must be taken to constitute a comprehensive and trustworthy (credible and dependable) account of the analytic process. Describing decisions taken for arriving at certain judgments during data analysis—that is, an "audit trail" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014)—enhances transparency and is an indication of good methodological practice. This would include details such as how codes were developed and applied to the data, code definitions (and any changes and/or redefinitions that might have occurred in the process), methods used to address coding reliability, and methods of assessing intercoder agreement (in cases where multiple coders are involved). If qualitative data software is used, the name and version of the program should be provided along with the reporting functions used in the analysis. As a further indication of credibility, where possible, researchers should document feedback on their interpretation of data from study participants—that is, "member checks."

The process of data analysis begins with putting in place a plan to manage the large volume of data you collected and reducing it in a meaningful way. You complete this process to identify significant patterns and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed given the purpose of your study. Here your theoretical or conceptual framework becomes the centerpiece in managing the data because the categories that constitute your framework become the repositories of your data. Thus, as you look at your raw data, categorize them within the construct of your theoretical or conceptual framework and assign initial codes to relevant quotes. This iterative process of open coding leads to the ongoing refinement of what will become your final coding schema. Generally, for purposes of transparency, it is advisable to include your coding schema or coding legend as an appendix. Appendix L is an illustration of a completed coding scheme sample. In addition, it is useful to show the reader how your coding scheme emerged and developed over time. Appendix M offers such an illustration.

The process of analysis, overall, is both deductive and inductive. The initial categories of your conceptual framework were deductively obtained from the literature. From your own experience and the data as they emerged from pilot tests, you begin to see patterns and themes. In this way, coding occurs inductively. As the coding schema continues to emerge, you must obtain inter-rater reliability by requesting colleagues, usually three, to read one of your interview transcripts to test your codes. Any discrepancies that result from the independent review by your colleagues must be discussed and reconciled with each of them. Such discrepancies may result in additional exploration of the data. Exploration of such discrepancies in which further clarification is needed will help you, as the researcher, to refine how you state your findings, as well as subsequent analysis and recommendations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). You also can have these same colleagues act as "devil's advocate" or peer reviewers throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Computer software programs can be useful in both managing and analyzing your data. Various programs enable the researcher to store, categorize, retrieve, and compare data (see Appendix Z). At the same time, there are other researchers who prefer to manage and analyze their data manually—to see visual displays of the data as they move through the analysis process. These researchers also are concerned with what they perceive as a limitation related to mechanical handling of data (Merriam, 2009), and so they may feel more comfortable using flip charts, tables, charts, and matrices. We are not suggesting one approach over the other, because the method you select to manage and analyze your data is a matter of personal preference and depends on what you are most comfortable with, and/or institutional requirements.

Whether you use a computer-based system or a manual one, the development of visuals—tables and/or figures—can be useful in helping you organize your thinking in preparation for writing. Aside from helping you develop your own thinking, visuals also are useful for displaying your data so your readers can better understand them. Various types of charts can be constructed, and you can indeed be quite creative in devising these charts. For presenting and analyzing findings, we have found three charts to be particularly effective: data summary tables, the analysis outline tool, and consistency charts.

Data summary tables, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9 ("Analyzing Data and Reporting Findings"), can help you in preparing to present the findings from the data. These tables are used for recording the number and types of participant responses, tracking the frequency of participant responses against the categories on your conceptual framework, and formulating overall finding statements with respect to each of your research questions. Sample data summary tables are presented as Appendices T through Y.

To further help in the analysis and interpretation of findings, we suggest using what we call an interpretation outline tool. This tool, discussed in more detail in Chapter 10 ("Analyzing, Interpreting, and Synthesizing Findings"), prompts you to probe beneath the surface of your findings to uncover the deeper meanings that lie beneath them. A sample interpretation outline tool appears as Appendix CC. Consistency charts, discussed further in Chapter 11 ("Drawing Trustworthy Conclusions and Presenting Actionable Recommendations"), help align your thinking with respect to how each finding can generate suitable conclusions and recommendations. A sample completed consistency chart is presented in Appendix EE.

Because qualitative research is, by its nature, flexible, and because there are no strict guidelines and standards for qualitative analysis, every qualitative researcher will approach the analytic process somewhat differently. Therefore, it is necessary to (a) provide a detailed description of how you went about analyzing your data, (b) refer to the matrices that you used to display your data, and (c) identify the coding processes used to convert the raw data into themes for analysis. Your description should include specific details about how you managed the large amount of data. Include information about the computer software, sticky notes, index cards, flip charts, or other processes that you used. This list helps the reader clearly understand how and in what ways you reduced or transformed your data.

As a last point in this section, it is important that researchers understand what is meant by *synthesis of the data.* Whereas analysis splits data apart, synthesis is the process of pulling everything together: (a) how the research questions are answered by the findings, (b) how the findings from interviews are supported from all other data collection methods, (c) how findings relate to the literature, and (d) how findings relate to the researcher's going-in assumptions about the study. This process is not linear; rather, you describe your findings, interpret and attach meaning to them, and synthesize throughout your discussion.

Ethical Considerations

As researchers, we are morally bound to conduct our research in a manner that minimizes potential harm to those involved in the study. We should be as concerned with producing an ethical research design as we are an intellectually coherent and compelling one.

Colleges, universities, and other institutions that conduct research each have an institutional review board (IRB) whose members review research proposals to assess ethical issues. Although all studies must be approved by your institution's IRB committee, there are some unique ethical considerations surrounding qualitative research because of its emergent and flexible design. Ethical issues can indeed arise in all phases of the research process: data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and dissemination of the research findings. For the most part, issues of ethics focus on establishing safeguards that will protect the rights of participants and include informed consent, protecting participants from harm, and ensuring confidentiality. As a qualitative researcher, you need to remain attentive throughout your study to the researcher–participant relationship, which is determined by roles, status, and cultural norms. Some clarification of the terms *privacy, anonymity,* and *confidentiality* are warranted:

Privacy refers to controlling other peoples' access to information about research participants. There are two aspects to this concept:

- Freedom to identify the time and/or circumstances under which information is shared or withheld from others.
- The right to decline receiving information that he or she does not want.

Respecting the privacy of research participants is at the heart of the conduct of ethical research. Researchers attempt to ensure the privacy of research participants by collecting anonymous information and ensuring that the information collected is kept confidential. You may be wondering what is the difference between anonymity and confidentiality, and how do each of these relate to the concept of privacy?

Explaining Anonymity

Ensuring anonymity of information collected from research participants means:

- The study does not include any identifying information of individual participants (e.g., name, address, e-mail address, phone numbers, etc.).
- The study cannot in any way link individual responses with participants' identities (e.g., name, age, date of birth, etc.).

True anonymity means that the identity of research participants is not known to the researcher. However, this is usually not the case. To ensure that individuals will not be identified by readers, however, pseudonyms (fictitious names) or codes must be assigned instead of participants' actual names. The site must also be protected and referred to by a pseudonym.

Explaining Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an agreement with the researcher about what can be done with the information obtained about a research participant. This is specified in the informed consent document.

- When data are collected and held confidentially, only the researcher can identify the participants, and participants' identities are not revealed to anybody else. One way of identifying research participants is to assign each one a unique identifying number or code or fictitious name.
- The ethical duty of confidentiality includes obligations to protect information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss, or theft.

Fulfilling the ethical duty of confidentiality is essential to building and maintaining the trust relationship between researcher and participant and contributes to the overall integrity and trustworthiness of the study

In the ethics section of Chapter 3 of your dissertation, you need to show the reader that you have considered the ethical issues that might arise vis-à-vis your own study, that you are sensitive to these issues, and that you have taken the necessary steps to address these issues. In most instances, you will be talking in generalities; the potential issues that could arise apply to any qualitative research study and are usually not specific to your own. Because protection of human subjects is such an important issue in social science research, the main point is that you acknowledge and convey to the reader that you have considered and taken heed of the issues involved. Remember, informed consent is central to research ethics. It is the principle that seeks to ensure that all human subjects retain autonomy and the ability to judge for themselves what risks are worth taking for the purpose of furthering scientific knowledge. In this regard, it is important that you include in your appendix a copy of the consent form that you used in your study. A sample research consent form appears in Appendix N.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In quantitative research, the standards that are most frequently used for good and convincing research are validity and reliability. If research is valid, it clearly reflects the world being described. If work is reliable, then two researchers studying the same phenomenon will come up with compatible observations. Criteria for evaluating qualitative research differ from those used in quantitative research in that the focus is on how well the researcher has provided evidence that her or his descriptions and analysis represent the reality of the situations and persons studied. In this section of Chapter 3 of your dissertation, you need to clarify to the reader how you have accounted for trustworthiness regarding your own study.

As mentioned previously, qualitative research is characterized by an ongoing discourse regarding the appropriate and acceptable use of terminology. Current thinking has led some qualitative researchers to develop alternative terminology to better reflect the nature and distinction of qualitative research, whereas others still feel comfortable borrowing terminology from quantitative research. Some qualitative researchers argue for a return to terminology for ensuring rigor and refer to various "validation strategies" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). Others object to the use of traditional terms such as *validity* and *reliability,* preferring instead *credibility* and *dependability.* Guba (1981), Guba and Lincoln (1982), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) were the first scholars to originally make the argument for the importance of *trustworthiness* in qualitative research as a means for reassuring the reader that a study was of significance and value. Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2000), among others, belong to the latter camp, proposing various specific criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research. These include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Table 8.5 provides a cursory overview of trustworthiness criteria for qualitative research.

Credibility

Credibility refers to whether the participants' perceptions match up with the researcher's portrayal of them. In other words, has the researcher accurately represented what the participants think, feel, and do? The criterion of credibility addresses the researcher's ability to take into account and explain all the complexities that present themselves in a study and to address the patterns, themes, and issues that might not be easily or simply understood. This criterion parallels the criterion of internal validity in quantitative research. Evidence of several strategies can support the credibility of your study:

TABLE 8.5 Overview of Trustworthiness Criteria

Qualitative Terminology	Quantitative Terminology	Research Strategies
Credibility	Internal validity	* Journaling/reflexivity * Prolonged field engagement * Thick description * Triangulation * Seeking negative instances * Member checks * Peer debriefing
Dependability	Reliability	* Triangulation * Audit trail * Peer examination
Confirmability	Objectivity	* Audit trail * Triangulation * Journaling/reflexivity
Transferability	External validity	* Purposeful sampling * Thick description * Detailed information

Table 8.5

1. Clarify up front any biases that you, as the researcher, bring to the study. This self-reflection creates an open and honest attitude that will resonate well with readers. You should continually monitor your own subjective perspectives and biases by recording reflective field notes or keeping a journal throughout the research process.
2. Discuss how you engaged in repeated and substantial engagement in the field. Prolonged involvement facilitates a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, conveying detail about the site and the participants, thereby lending credibility to your account.
3. Ensure that your report contains the necessary detail so that readers can adequately understand the research process. Presenting "thick description" is necessary in this regard.
4. Check on whether your interpretation of the processes and interactions in the setting is indeed realistic. Typically, qualitative researchers collect multiple sources of data. The information provided by these different sources should be compared through triangulation to corroborate the researcher's conclusions.
5. Triangulate by using multiple methods to corroborate the evidence that you have obtained via different means.
6. Present negative instances or discrepant findings. Searching for variation in the understanding of a phenomenon entails seeking instances that might disconfirm or challenge the researcher's expectations or emergent findings. Because real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce, discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of your account.
7. To ensure that the researcher's own biases do not influence how participants' perspectives are portrayed and to determine the accuracy of the findings, make use of "member checks," which entails sending the transcribed interviews or summaries of the researcher's conclusions to participants for their review. Note that member checks are done on a case-by-case basis. This strategy involves a fair amount of complexity, and so you should refer to the qualitative research literature for additional information.
8. Use "peer debriefing" to enhance the accuracy of your account. This process involves asking colleagues or "thought partners" to review your field notes and data and then ask you questions that will help you examine your assumptions and/or consider alternative ways of looking at the data.

Dependability

To achieve dependability, the researcher must ensure that the research process is clearly documented, logical, and traceable. Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of data over time. In addition, the implication is that data are dependable in the sense that they are answering your research questions. This criterion parallels the quantitative notion of reliability, although it is not assessed through statistical procedures. Dependability refers to whether one can adequately track all the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret the data, and there are various ways to address and support the dependability of your study:

1. Your discussion should include triangulation and sequencing of methods and present a well-articulated and transparent rationale for these choices. This will confirm for the reader that you have created an appropriate and viable research design and data collection plan given your research questions.
2. Including detailed and thorough explanations of how the data were collected and analyzed, as well as maintaining a clear record of field notes and transcripts, provides what is known as an "audit trail" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Although it is not possible to include all of your data in the findings chapter, many qualitative researchers make it known that their data are available for review by other researchers. As such, all field notes and transcripts should be preserved for this purpose.
3. Ask colleagues to code several interview transcripts, thereby establishing inter-rater reliability. Peer review, the process of checking on the consistency between raters, reduces the potential bias of a single researcher collecting and analyzing the data.

Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the researcher's findings and interpretations are clearly derived from the data, requiring the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions have been reached. Confirmability is often described as corresponding to the notion of objectivity in quantitative research but takes into account the premise that qualitative researchers do not claim to be objective, nor do they strive to achieve objectivity. The implication is that the findings should be shown to be the result of the research rather than an outcome of the biases and subjectivity of the researcher. A goal of confirmability is to acknowledge and explore the ways that our biases and prejudices impact our interpretations of data, and to address those to the fullest extent possible through reflexivity, dialogic engagement, and reflective discourse. Because the qualitative researcher is the primary instrument, the researcher must be conscious of challenging herself or himself and also be open to be challenged by others in systematic and ongoing ways with regard to all aspects of the research design and throughout all stages of the research process. To achieve this end, and remain as transparent as possible, the qualitative researcher needs to identify and uncover the trail of decisions made throughout the research process.

1. Although qualitative researchers realize the futility of attempting to achieve objectivity, they must nevertheless illustrate how their data can be traced back to its origins. This means that reasons must be provided for all methodological, theoretical, and analytic choices throughout the entire study so that readers can understand how and why decisions were made. As with dependability, the audit trail as well as triangulation strategies are used to demonstrate confirmability.
2. Ongoing critical reflection and reflexivity by way of journaling and memo also offers the reader an opportunity to assess the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Transferability

Transferability is described as corresponding to the notion of external validity in quantitative research. In quantitative research, generalization rests upon statistical representativeness—that is, the extent to which the study's results can be related to the broader population. In qualitative research, it is possible to make connections across studies to establish the applicability of the research (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007). The goal of qualitative research is therefore not to produce "truths" that can be generalized to other people or settings but rather to develop descriptive context-relevant findings that can be applicable to broader contexts while still maintaining their content-specific richness. Although qualitative researchers do not expect their findings to be generalizable to all other settings, it is likely that the lessons learned in one setting might be useful to others. Transferability does not concern whether the study includes a representative sample. Rather, it is about how well the study has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes will be at work in their own settings and communities by understanding in depth how they occur at the research site. Purposeful sampling and thick description (Geertz, 1973) connote a depth of contextual detail that allows readers to understand the contextual factors, participants, and experiences that you have included in your study. Thus, transferability refers to the fit or match between the research context and other contexts as judged by the reader. As a criterion of trustworthiness, transferability is assessed by the following factors:

1. Outlining the purposeful sampling strategy used in the study provides an idea of the participants, their experiences, and the context of your study, thereby allowing readers to form their own opinions about the quality of the research, the meaning of the findings, and the authenticity and relevance of the researcher's interpretations.
2. The depth and richness of the researcher's descriptions included in the study give the study an element of shared or vicarious experience. Thick description is an important aspect in enhancing the complexity of the research by thoroughly describing the study's setting, research participants, and related experiences so as to produce findings and interpretations that will allow readers to make contextualized meaning. Description thereby becomes the vehicle for communicating a holistic and understandable picture of the setting, the research participants, and related experiences and interaction.
3. The amount of detailed information that the researcher provides regarding the context, background, data, and findings also offers an element of shared experience so that readers can make comparisons with other similar contexts based on as much information as possible. This level of detail allows readers to transfer aspects of a study's design and findings by taking into consideration and acknowledging different contextual factors instead of simply attempting to replicate the research design and the study's findings.

Triangulation Strategies to Address Trustworthiness

In sum, triangulation addresses the trustworthiness of qualitative studies in various ways by building into your study and research process a systematic cross-checking of information and conclusions through the use of procedures and/or sources to determine where research findings converge or "triangulate," and therefore interpret and explain them. Triangulation encompasses various forms, including methodological triangulation (use of multiple methods), data triangulation (searching for as many data sources as possible in order to examine data at varying times and places as well as with different individuals so as to capture multiple perspectives and experiences), investigator triangulation (collaborative research activities produce more complex data given the generative exchange, interaction, and multiplicity of perspectives among researchers), and theoretical triangulation (inclusion of a range of theoretical or conceptual perspectives to frame the study's topic in context, thereby broadening the relevance of the study).

There are some common practices, typical aspects of any qualitative study, that can help ensure the trustworthiness of your research. These practices include the following strategies:

- Engage in persistent and prolonged participation in the research site. The idea is that the more time spent in the field gathering data and interacting with participants, the richer the data collected and the deeper the insights that will emerge on the part of the researcher.
- Conduct member checks in order to make sure that you have represented your participants and their ideas accurately.
- Engage in peer debriefing by securing additional professional perspectives to review and evaluate the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation.
- Be sure to address analysis of any negative cases that may not fit the pattern that has been observed.
- Engage in reflexivity throughout the research process by developing detailed descriptions and notes that document initial assumptions, interpretations, or any potential biases.
- Remember that *transparency* is key to building credibility (believability), dependability (consistency), confirmability (ability to corroborate), and transferability (applicability) into your methodology.

This section of the dissertation's Chapter 3 therefore addresses this central question: How do we know that the qualitative study is believable, accurate, and plausible? To answer this question, one must have some knowledge of the criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative research and the approaches to addressing these criteria. You need to discuss the criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research and to indicate to the reader that you have a clear understanding of the implications thereof vis-à-vis your own study. As the researcher, you are expected to display sensibility and sensitivity to *be* the research instrument. Begin this section by discussing what trustworthiness in qualitative research entails, using references from the literature to support your statements. Then go on to talk about the strategies that you have employed to enhance the trustworthiness of your own study, including all relevant trustworthiness criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Confusion sometimes exists around the terms *limitations* and *delimitations,* and this issue deserves some clarification.

Limitations of the study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from your research. These are the constraints regarding transferability, applications to practice, and/or utility of findings that are the result of the ways in which you chose to design the study. *Limitations* of the study expose the conditions that may weaken the study (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

- Every study, no matter how well it is designed and conducted, has certain inherent limitations. Be sure to always acknowledge your study's limitations. It is far better for you to identify and acknowledge your study's limitations than to have them pointed out because you appear to have ignored them.
- Keep in mind that acknowledgment of your study's limitations is an opportunity to make suggestions for further research. If you do connect your study's limitations to suggestions for further research, be sure to explain the ways in which these unanswered questions may become more focused because of your study.
- Acknowledgment of your study's limitations also provides you with an opportunity to demonstrate that you have thought critically about the research problem, understood the relevant literature, and correctly assessed the methods chosen for studying the problem. A key objective of the research process is not only to discover new knowledge but also to confront assumptions and explore the unknown.
- Claiming limitations is a subjective process because you must evaluate the impact of those limitations. Don't just list key weaknesses and the magnitude of a study's limitations. Limitations require a critical, overall appraisal and interpretation of their impact. You should answer the question: Do these problems with errors, methods, trustworthiness, and so on, eventually matter, and if so, to what extent?

Delimitations refer to the initial choices made about the broader, overall design of your study and should not be confused with documenting the limitations of your study that were discovered after the research has been completed. Delimitations are those characteristics that define and clarify the conceptual boundaries of your research. Unlike limitations which flow from implicit characteristics of design and methods, delimitations arise from specific and intentional choices made by the researcher. These are a way to indicate to the reader how you narrowed the scope of your study. As the researcher, you control the delimitations, and you should make this clear by stating the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions you made about how to investigate the research problem. In other words, not only should you tell the reader what it is you are studying and why, but you must also acknowledge why you rejected alternative approaches that could have been used. The point is not to document every possible delimiting factor but to make your reasoning as explicit as possible by highlighting why obvious issues related to the research problem were not addressed. Examples of some typical delimitating choices would include:

- Choice of research problem and purpose
- The research questions that you have chosen to address
- The various elements and features of the phenomenon being studied
- The time period of your study
- Location of the study
- The population selected (the pool from which you draw your research sample)
- The research sample selected
- Methods of data collection and data analysis
- The researcher's theoretical perspectives
- Any relevant alternative theoretical or conceptual frameworks that could have been adopted but were not.

You will need to review each of these research decisions. Not only do you need to clearly establish what you intend to accomplish in your research, but you should also include a declaration of what the study does not intend to cover. Do not view delimitating statements as admitting to an inherent failing or shortcoming in your research. Delimitations are an accepted element of academic writing intended to keep the reader focused on the research problem by explicitly defining the conceptual boundaries and scope of your study. Acknowledging delimitations addresses any critical questions in the reader's mind of "Why did the author not examine this?"

In this section of Chapter 3 of your dissertation, you cite potential limitations and your means of addressing and guarding against these limitations. Regardless of how carefully you plan a study, there are always some limitations, and you need to explicitly acknowledge these. This section describes the problems inherent in qualitative research and how you can control for these limitations to the extent possible. In most instances, you can control for limitations by acknowledging them. Limitations arise from, among other things, restricted sample size, sample selection, reliance on certain techniques for gathering data, and issues of researcher bias and participant reactivity. Discussing limitations is intended to show the reader that you understand that no research project is without limitations and that you have anticipated and given some thought to the shortcomings of your research. Stating the limitations also reminds the reader that your study is situated within a specific context, and the reader can make decisions about its usefulness for other settings.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of a final culminating summary of your methodology chapter is to tie together the many components that you have presented in this chapter, including research sample, information needed to conduct the study, research design, data collection methods, data analysis methods, ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and the limitations and delimitations of the study. Provide a short summary overview, making sure to cover all the sections of this chapter, highlighting all the important points. Keep the discussion concise and precise. As with all chapter summaries, be sure not to add any new details or information that has not been addressed in this chapter.

The reflexive questions that follow can serve as prompts for journaling throughout the dissertation process, and in this case for Chapter 3 of your dissertation, in which you are presenting your study's methodology, including all its critical components.

Your study's design is the way you have "set up" the study and the way you have gone about actually conducting the research. All of these decisions impact the research process as well as the outcomes of the study. As such, you should be aware of the potential impact of all the choices you make regarding your study's design, including identification, justification, and acknowledgment of all possible limitations regarding your methodological choices. Consider in what ways might your positionality impact all aspects of the research design, including selection of site and research participants, choices regarding data collection, and the many appropriate ways in which you have attempted to address the trustworthiness of your research.

- Sampling decisions may be motivated by different goals and purposes—empirical and theoretical—sometimes in the same study. These decisions should be articulated in a systematic and well-defined sampling plan.
- As the "research instrument," you are integral to the data collection process, on multiple levels.
- Trustworthiness is the means of ensuring that a qualitative study is of significance and value. There are many questions you can ask yourself regarding what makes a qualitative research study trustworthy, and what strategies you can implement to address the various dimensions of trustworthiness as these relate to your study.

Reflexive Questions for Chapter 3: Methodology

Sample Selection

1. Since qualitative research employs purposeful sampling, what did I consider important in setting my site selection criteria and sampling strategy, including sample size and unit of analysis? Why?
2. Was there anything in my sampling process that I may have failed to consider given the specific research site and research participants?
3. How much diversity was needed to represent the variations known to exist within the population? Have I addressed this adequately?
4. What and who are being included or excluded from my study? Why? On what basis?
5. Were ethical recruitment procedures used, and appropriate permissions received?
6. How did I or should I classify people for the purpose of the study? On what basis? Why?

Data Collection

1. What is my perspective regarding “researcher-generated data” and “co-constructed data” as opposed to “collection of data”? Have I given this sufficient thought?
2. What assumptions underlie the selection of my data collection instruments and the ways in which I implement these?
3. Am I aware of how and in what ways I may have impacted participant reactivity?
4. Have I collected enough background data about people, processes, and settings to understand and portray the full range of experiences in the study?
5. What kinds of comparisons can I make between data? How do these comparisons generate and inform my ideas?
6. Have I engaged sufficiently in reflexive approaches for ongoing monitoring of my data collection process, including any changes that were considered or actually made?

Trustworthiness

1. CREDIBILITY (Believability)
    1. Am I imposing my own biases, assumptions, and/or prejudices on this study? If so, how and in what ways?
    2. What reflective and reflexive strategies am I employing (if at all) to check my biases, assumptions, and/or prejudices?
    3. Does my research design allow for collecting rich data that will be provided by multiple data sources?
    4. How do my site selection criteria and sampling strategy contribute to an authentic and genuine rendering of the context and setting, as well as participants' experiences?
    5. What do the data reveal, and to what extent (if at all) am I allowing the data to "speak for themselves"? In other words, how am I shaping and informing this study by way of my own assumptions and biases?
    6. What steps am I taking to remain open to new possibilities and alternative explanations? If I am not taking them, why?
    7. How will I analyze, interpret, and make sense of my data so that my own assumptions and biases are at least acknowledged, and hopefully challenged?
    8. Am I aware of issues relating to power, privilege, and positionality with regard to all aspects of my study? Have I addressed these issues sufficiently and/or appropriately? If so, in what ways have such issues been acknowledged and/or addressed?
2. DEPENDABILITY (Consistency)
    1. What was the basis for choosing my data collection methods? Why do I think these are the most appropriate methods to answer each of my research questions?
    2. Have I designed a rigorous study? How so? In what ways, if any, could my research design be improved?
    3. What might be some of the weaknesses regarding the research design? Are there any potential design flaws? How can I address these weaknesses, flaws, or concerns?
    4. What might be some of the weaknesses regarding site selection and sampling procedures?
    5. What might be some of the weaknesses regarding my data collection tools and process? How can I address these weaknesses or concerns?
    6. What might be some of the weaknesses regarding my analytic process? How can I address these weaknesses or concerns?
3. CONFIRMABILITY (Ability to corroborate)
    1. Would somebody else interpret the data in a similar way? If not, what might be other alternative explanations?
    2. Would somebody else arrive at similar conclusions? If not, what might be some other conclusions to consider?
    3. Have I sufficiently challenged my thinking and assumptions regarding my overall research design to acknowledge any limitations and critiques and to know what other methodological possibilities could be considered?
    4. Whom can I engage with in the research process itself to challenge my thinking and assumptions? Have I considered this? Why or why not?
    5. At what points throughout the study should I seek out colleagues or "thought partners" to explore issues related to my power and positionality as the researcher, uncover assumptions, and examine omissions? Have I considered this? Why or why not?
4. TRANSFERABILITY (Applicability)
    1. Am I sufficiently describing the contextual elements that ground and shape my study so that readers can use this to develop a deep understanding of the study's context, including the site/setting as well as all research participants?
    2. Is there sufficient thick description to authentically convey the meaning of the findings?
    3. Do I make sense of and interpret my findings in ways that are authentic, genuine, and contextually embedded?
    4. Have I made the contextual relevance sufficiently clear both in my analysis and interpretation, and included all relevant uniquenesses, exceptions, idiosyncrasies, outliers, and oddities?
    5. Have I made the contextual relevance sufficiently clear so that my study's conclusions and recommendations are context specific and also have possible and relevant applicability across contexts?

Chapter Summary Discussion

Writing the methodology chapter of your dissertation requires time, mind work, and a great deal of reflection about the nature of your inquiry. You most certainly want to present well-reasoned research that will illustrate the integrity of your study. Be sure to give careful thought to how you present the discussion, and, as always, remember to work from an outline. Your headings and subheadings in this chapter are contingent on your particular university's requirements. How well you present this chapter illustrates to the reader that you have carefully designed and produced a sound study based on the principles of qualitative research.

As emphasized throughout this book, writing a dissertation is not a linear process. Rather, it is an iterative and recursive one that requires much back and forth, reminder notes to yourself, and memos to change, revise, and update what you have already written. Chapter 3 is one of those chapters that must remain flexible and open to change right up to the very end. Frustration is inevitable, but don't despair! This is all part and parcel of managing and organizing the research and writing process.

TABLE Quality Assessment Chapter Checklist

Introduction	✓ Do you restate the research purpose? ✓ Does the introduction describe the general organization of the chapter?
Research Sample	✓ Do you provide a comprehensive description of your research sample and the population from which it was drawn? ✓ Do you discuss and explain the research site (organization/program/institution)? ✓ Do you discuss in detail your purposeful sampling strategy, citing appropriate literature? ✓ Are the criteria for sampling selection stated and explained? ✓ Are the details and characteristics pertaining to the sample adequately discussed? ✓ Have you discussed issues of access and consent?
Information Needed	✓ Is the information that is needed to conduct the study clearly and specifically outlined? (This should include demographic, perceptual, and contextual information.) ✓ Are you clear how and from whom the necessary information will be obtained? ✓ Do you provide a logical connection between the type of information needed and the methods you have selected to obtain that information?
Research Design Overview	✓ Do you describe qualitative research as your chosen research paradigm, citing appropriate literature? ✓ Do you offer a convincing argument for choosing qualitative research? ✓ Do you provide a convincing argument for the particular qualitative tradition or genre (or combination of traditions) that you have chosen? ✓ Do you describe your chosen qualitative research methods, including rationale for suitability regarding addressing the research questions? ✓ Have you cited appropriate methodological literature? ✓ Do you list all the steps entailed in carrying out data collection? ✓ Do you list all the steps entailed in carrying out data analysis? ✓ Are all your methodological steps reported in sufficient detail so that the study could be replicated? ✓ Do you include explanation of any field tests or pilot studies, including administration and description of findings (if appropriate)? ✓ Do you include a timeline? If so, have you described in chronological order each step taken in conducting the study? ✓ Are all charts and/or figures that you have included comprehensive and relevant?
Data Collection	✓ Are the data collection methods sufficiently described? The description of each instrument should relate to the function of the instrument in the study and what the instrument is intended to measure. ✓ Do you provide a rationale for the selection of instruments used? ✓ Have you provided a comprehensive literature review of the data collection methods used and included details regarding the strengths and limitations of each method? ✓ If an instrument was developed specifically for this study, have you described procedures involved in its development, validation, and administration? ✓ Do you describe how, when, where, and by whom data were collected? ✓ Are the data collection methods congruent with the problem being investigated and the specific qualitative tradition employed? ✓ Has triangulation of data collection methods been achieved? ✓ Have I gained detailed descriptions of a range of participants' views and actions? ✓ Do the data have the potential to reveal what lies beneath the surface? ✓ Are the data that were collected sufficient to reveal changes over time?
Data Analysis and Synthesis	✓ Do you report on how you have managed and organized your data? ✓ Do you report in detail on how you coded and analyzed your data in order to report on the study's findings (Chapter 4)? ✓ Do you report in detail on how you analyzed and interpreted your findings (Chapter 5)? ✓ Are your methods of data analysis congruent with the principles of qualitative research? ✓ Are all themes and patterns adequately described? ✓ Are all charts and/or figures that you have included comprehensive and relevant?
Ethical Considerations	✓ Do you discuss all relevant ethical issues, including informed consent and protection of privacy (anonymity and confidentiality)? ✓ Do you explain how you have addressed all relevant ethical issues? ✓ Do you include how you have satisfied IRB requirements and ethical standards?
Issues of Trustworthiness	✓ Do you articulate the criteria for evaluating trustworthiness in qualitative research, citing appropriate literature? ✓ Is all the terminology you include appropriate for qualitative research? ✓ Do you discuss how you have addressed issues of credibility and the various strategies you have employed? ✓ Do you discuss how you have addressed issues of dependability and the strategies you have employed? ✓ Do you discuss how you have addressed issues of confirmability and the strategies you have employed? ✓ Do you explain the issue of transferability in relation to your study?
Limitations and Delimitations	✓ Do you clearly delineate all limitations pertaining to your study and your means to address these? ✓ Do you articulate all appropriate and relevant delimitations pertaining to your study?
Summary	✓ Does your culminating summary integrate all the elements presented in this chapter? ✓ Do you include all key points? ✓ Is your summary comprehensive and focused?
Addressing Alignment	✓ Are your research methods aligned with your research methodology (qualitative tradition or genre)? ✓ Are your research methods aligned with your research design? ✓ Is your research design aligned with your research methodology?
And . . .	✓ Does the discussion illustrate that you have a good understanding of the assumptions and principles of qualitative research? ✓ Does the discussion demonstrate a logical flow? ✓ Are headings and subheadings used effectively to structure and present the discussion? ✓ Does the discussion in each section flow logically? ✓ Are transitions from one section of the chapter to another clear and logical? Have you made use of effective segues? ✓ Are all tables, figures, and appendices used effectively and appropriately? ✓ Do all tables and figures follow the format specified by your required style manual? ✓ Are columns and rows of each table labeled correctly? ✓ Does the title of each table and/or figure indicate exactly (clearly and concisely) what the table or figure is intended to represent? ✓ Have you checked for institutional and/or program-related differences regarding the content and structure of Chapter 3? ✓ Have you checked for institutional and/or program-related differences regarding the appropriate use of qualitative language and terminology? ✓ Is the writing throughout clear and readable? Refer to "Guidelines for Academic Writing" in Chapter 4.

Section II: Application

Now that we have reviewed and explained the essential elements required to conceptualize and systematically develop your methodology chapter, we are ready to see what an actual written-up third chapter of a dissertation would look like using the research problem and purpose previously identified. The application section that follows is a skeleton view of a methodology chapter. Were each section to be more completely and fully developed, as would be required in an actual dissertation, such a chapter would be more extensive. In addition, as emphasized throughout this book, there are many options with regard to qualitative research presentation, and requirements vary among institutions and programs. Therefore, as with other components of the dissertation, you will need to check with your chair about the content and presentation of your study's methodology chapter. The methodology chapter, as evidenced from the prior instructions, is lengthy, and much detail is required in each section. In an actual dissertation, each section of this chapter would be more thoroughly elaborated, and hence would require a much more extensive discussion.

Chapter 3 of the Dissertation

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to explore with a sample of doctoral candidates their perceptions of why they have not managed to complete their dissertations. The researchers believed that a better understanding of this phenomenon would allow educators to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of design and facilitation of doctoral programs. In seeking to understand this phenomenon, the study addressed five research questions: (a) On completion of their course work, to what extent did participants perceive they were prepared to conduct research and write the dissertation? (b) What did participants perceive they need to learn to complete their dissertation? (c) How did participants attempt to develop the knowledge and acquire the skills and attitudes they perceive are necessary to complete their dissertations? (d) What factors did participants perceive might help them to complete the dissertation? (e) What factors did participants perceive have impeded and/or continue to impede their progress in working toward completing their dissertations?

This chapter describes the study's research methodology and includes discussions around the following areas: (a) rationale for research approach, (b) description of the research sample, (c) summary of information needed, (d) overview of research design, (e) methods of data collection, (f) analysis and synthesis of data, (g) ethical considerations, (h) issues of trustworthiness, and (i) limitations of the study. The chapter culminates with a brief concluding summary.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research is grounded in an essentially constructivist philosophical position, in the sense that it is concerned with how the complexities of the sociocultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood in a particular context and at a particular point in time. The intent of qualitative research is to examine a social situation or interaction by allowing the researcher to enter the world of others and attempt to achieve a holistic rather than a reductionist understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Locke et al., 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Patton, 1990; Schram, 2003). Qualitative methodology implies an emphasis on discovery and description, and the objectives are generally focused on extracting and interpreting the meaning of experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Merriam, 1998, 2009). These objectives are contrasted with those of quantitative research, where the testing of hypotheses to establish facts and to designate and distinguish relationships between variables is usually the intent.

It was the researchers' contention that purely quantitative methods were unlikely to elicit the rich data necessary to address the proposed research purposes. In the researchers' view, the fundamental assumptions and key features that distinguish what it means to proceed from a qualitative stance fit well with this study. These features include (a) understanding the processes by which events and actions take place, (b) developing contextual understanding, (c) facilitating interactivity between researcher and participants, (d) adopting an interpretive stance, and (e) maintaining design flexibility.

Rationale for Case Study Methodology

Within the framework of a qualitative approach, the study was most suited for a case study design. As a form of research methodology, case study is an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon, social unit, or system bounded by time or place (Stake, 1995, 2005). As Merriam (1998) indicates, qualitative case study is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting educational phenomena. As she describes it,

> A case study design is employed to gain an in depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (Merriam, 1998, p. 19)

The present research fit well with Merriam's criteria because it sought to better understand why certain people who complete the course work do not go on to complete the dissertation and hence do not graduate with a doctoral degree.

The Research Sample

A purposeful sampling procedure was used to select this study's sample. To yield the most information about the phenomenon under study, purposeful sampling is a method that is typical of case study methodology (Patton, 2015). The researchers sought to locate individuals at a variety of universities. Thus, a snowball sampling strategy, sometimes referred to as network or chain sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2015), was employed, whereby participants were asked to refer other individuals whom they knew to be ABD (all but dissertation). The criteria for selection of participants were as follows:

- All participants were enrolled in a doctoral program for at least 3 years.
- All participants completed the course work and passed the certification examination.

A delimiting time frame of 3 years was decided on by the researchers to ensure adequate experience in a doctoral program. Purposeful sampling allowed for sampling across various locations in the United States. The research sample included 20 individuals. Included in the sample were individuals from doctoral programs at nine universities, including Columbia University, Wayne State University, University of Massachusetts, University of Georgia, University of Southern California, University of Michigan, Rutgers University, Fordham University, and Northwestern University. Purposeful selection also was based on variation across certain distinguishing characteristics. Although participants were all ABD doctoral candidates, there were differences among them along the following parameters: length of time spent in doctoral program, university and discipline, gender, age, and occupation.

Information Needed to Conduct the Study

This case study focused on 20 doctoral candidates from nine universities located in different regions of the United States. In seeking to understand why these doctoral candidates have not obtained doctoral degrees, five research questions were explored to gather the information needed. The information needed to answer these research questions was determined by the conceptual framework and fell into three categories: (a) perceptual, (b) demographic, and (c) theoretical. This information included

- doctoral candidates' perceptions of what they needed to know and how they went about obtaining what they needed to conduct their research and complete their dissertations;
- demographic information pertaining to participants, including years in program, doctoral program concentration/discipline, age, gender, and ethnicity; and
- an ongoing review of the literature providing the theoretical grounding for the study.

Overview of Research Design

The following list summarizes the steps used to carry out this research. Following this list is a more in-depth discussion of each step.

1. Preceding the actual collection of data, a selected review of the literature was conducted to study the contributions of other researchers and writers in the broad areas of higher educational programs and adult learning theory.
2. Following the proposal defense, the researchers acquired approval from the IRB to proceed with the research. The IRB approval process involved outlining all procedures and processes needed to ensure adherence to standards put forth for the study of human subjects, including participants' confidentiality and informed consent.
3. Potential research participants were contacted by telephone, and those who agreed to participate were sent a questionnaire by mail. The survey was designed to collect demographic as well as perceptual data.
4. Structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 ABD doctoral candidates in nine universities located across the United States.
5. Interview data responses were analyzed within and between groups of interviewees.
6. Critical incident instruments were given to participants at the end of each interview to check data collected through other means. Of the 20 participants, 12 responded.
7. A focus group was conducted with six ABDs who were drawn from the pool of participants identified for this study to cross-check data from that group with the data collected through interviews.

Literature Review

An ongoing and selective review of literature was conducted to inform this study. Two topics of literature were identified: higher-education doctoral programs and adult learning theory. The focus of the review was to gain a better understanding of what prompted participants to enroll in doctoral programs, the requirements and challenges inherent in these programs, and the effect on participants and the means they took to meet the requirements and overcome the challenges they faced.

IRB Approval

Following the literature review, the researchers developed and successfully defended a proposal for this study that included the background/context, problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions outlined in Chapter 1; the literature review included in Chapter 2; and the proposed methodological approach as outlined in Chapter 3.

Data Collection Methods

The use of multiple methods and triangulation is critical in attempting to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. This strategy adds rigor, breadth, and depth to the study and provides corroborative evidence of the data obtained (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, this study employed a number of different data collection methods, including a survey, interviews, critical incident reports, and a focus group.

Phase I: Survey

Potential participants were contacted. Of those who were contacted to participate, three individuals declined. The 20 individuals who agreed to participate were sent a questionnaire by mail and were asked to return the completed forms by way of a self-addressed envelope. The questionnaire was designed to collect profile data and also asked participants their purposes for enrolling in a doctoral program. The survey appears as Appendix O.

An advantage of survey methodology is that it is relatively unobtrusive and relatively easily administered and managed (Fink, 2013; Fowler, 2014). It must be acknowledged, however, that surveys can be of limited value for examining complex social relationships or intricate patterns of interaction. In keeping with the qualitative research tradition, the survey used in the present study included some open-ended questions that sought to tap into personal experiences and shed light on participants' perceptions. For the purposes of the present study, the survey had a distinct place in the study's methodological design and served as a useful complement or adjunct to other data collection methods.

Phase II: Interviews

The interview was selected as the primary method for data collection in this research. The interview method was felt to be of the most use in the study because it has the potential to elicit rich, thick descriptions. Further, it gave the researchers an opportunity to clarify statements and probe for additional information. A major benefit of collecting data through individual in-depth interviews is that this offers the potential to capture a person's perspective of an event or experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The interview is a fundamental tool in qualitative research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Seidman, 2012). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) describe the qualitative research interview as an "attempt to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of the subject's experiences, to uncover their lived world" (p. 1). As Patton (1990) similarly claims, "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (p. 278). The researchers' logic for using this data collection method was that a legitimate way to generate data is to interact with people (i.e., talk to and listen to them), thereby capturing the meaning of their experience in their own words.

Although interviews have certain strengths, there are various limitations associated with interviewing. First, not all people are equally cooperative, articulate, and perceptive. Second, interviews require researcher skill. Third, interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering; they are the result of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee and the context in which they take place (Fontana & Frey, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2012).

Interview Schedule and Pilot Interviews. With guidance from their advisor, the researchers used the study's five research questions as the framework to develop the interview questions. Matrices were constructed to illustrate the relationship between this study's research questions and the interview questions as they were being developed. Three doctoral colleagues were then asked to review and provide feedback to the researchers. Their comments were incorporated, and the researchers resubmitted the schedule of questions to their advisor. With the advisor's approval, two pilot interviews were conducted by phone. The preliminary themes that emerged from the pilot interviews revolved around reasons that individuals enroll in doctoral programs and their learning during the process. From the pilot interviews, a series of open-ended questions was developed, which enabled the researchers to allow new directions to emerge during the interview. The final interview schedule is included as Appendix K.

Interview Process. The researcher sent individual e-mails to prospective participants describing the purpose of the study, inviting their participation, and requesting a convenient date and time for a telephone interview. The researcher sent confirming e-mails to the 20 individuals who agreed to be interviewed. The interviews took place between August and October 2008. Before each interview commenced, the interviewee was asked to review and sign a university consent form required for participation in this study (see Appendix N). All interviews were conducted telephonically and were tape-recorded in their entirety. At the end of each interview, the interviewee was asked to complete and return by e-mail the critical incident instrument, which had been prepared by the researchers. On completion of the interview, the audiotape was transcribed verbatim.

Phase III: Critical Incidents

The researchers selected critical incident instruments with the intention of corroborating interview data and, further, to allow the uncovering of perceptions that might not have been revealed through the interviews. Critical incident reports, a data collection method first formulated by Flanagan (1954), are useful because qualitative research methodology emphasizes process and is based on a descriptive and inductive approach to data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Of particular importance is that written critical incident reports probe assumptions, allowing time for reflection (Brookfield, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Although there is support in the literature for the use of the critical incident as an effective technique for enhancing data collection, with several authors noting its advantages (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Brookfield, 1991; Flanagan, 1954), the researchers were mindful of Brookfield's repeated caution that critical incidents cannot be the sole technique for collecting data. Critical incidents are too abbreviated to provide the rich descriptions that can be obtained in interviews and observations. A further concern regarding the use of critical incident reports has to do with the accuracy of data because this technique relies solely on the respondents' recall. A related concern is that, although reporting information that respondents perceive is important, the researcher may fail to report salient incremental data and the information, as such, may be incomplete.

The critical incident instrument was developed by the researchers and further refined by their advisor. The instrument was field tested in conjunction with the pilot interviews. The results of the field test called for minor revisions, and these were incorporated into a final critical incident form/instrument. This instrument is included as Appendix P. The researchers subsequently gave the critical incident instrument to the 20 participants in this study at the end of each interview. The instrument asked respondents to think about a specific time when they felt ill prepared to conduct some part of the dissertation process. Specifically, participants were asked to briefly describe the incident, indicating who was involved, what they learned, and how they thought their learning would influence how they would handle similar situations in the future. Participants were given a self-addressed envelope and were requested at the end of the interview to return completed critical incidents to the researchers as soon as possible. The researchers received 12 completed critical incidents from among the 20 participants. Although the researchers had hoped for a greater response, when analyzed, the returned critical incidents served as a "credibility check" on some aspects of the data uncovered in the interviews.

Phase IV: Focus Group

Focus groups, or group interviews, possess elements of both participant observation and individual interviews while also maintaining their own uniqueness as a distinctive research method (Liamputtong, 2011). A focus group is essentially a group discussion focused on a single theme (Kreuger & Casey, 2015; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). The goal is to create a candid conversation that addresses, in depth, the selected topic. The underlying assumption of focus groups is that, within a permissive atmosphere that fosters a range of opinions, a more complete and revealing understanding of the issues will be obtained. Focus groups are planned and structured but are also flexible tools (Liamputtong, 2011). Kreuger and Casey (2015) list various uses of focus groups, many of which fit well with this study's purpose. These are to (a) elicit a range of feelings, opinions, and ideas; (b) understand differences in perspectives; (c) uncover and provide insight into specific factors that influence opinions; and (d) seek ideas that emerge from the group.

It must be acknowledged that focus groups, while serving a useful function, are not without disadvantages. Among these disadvantages is groupthink as a possible outcome (Fontana & Frey, 2013). Furthermore, logistical difficulties might arise from the need to manage conversation while attempting to extract data, thus requiring strong facilitation skills.

One 1½-hour formative focus group was convened with six participants who were not part of the study sample. These participants were purposefully selected based on the established criteria. The purpose of this focus group interview was twofold: (a) to augment the information obtained and (b) to provide additional data to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. In the open-ended format that was used, the researchers asked the group to explore two issues. First, what did they feel helped them the most in the research process? Second, what challenges and obstacles did they encounter that impeded their progress?

The researchers contacted the 20 study participants seeking their interest in joining a focus group discussion. The study participants were advised of the purpose and were told that the discussion would be held over an Internet conference call system and would be audiotaped. Eleven of the 20 participants responded that they would be willing to join the discussion, and the first six respondents were selected. A general e-mail was sent by the researchers thanking the participants who had expressed interest. Following that, the researchers contacted each of the focus group members to schedule a convenient time to hold the discussion.

Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

The challenge throughout data collection and analysis was to make sense of large amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework. In this regard, Merriam (1998, 2009) cautions researchers to make data analysis and data collection a simultaneous activity to avoid the risk of repetitious, unfocused, and overwhelming data.

The formal process of data analysis began by assigning alphanumeric codes according to the categories and descriptors of the study's conceptual framework. The researchers prepared large flip chart sheets. Each sheet identified the descriptors under the respective categories of the conceptual framework. As the process of coding the transcripts proceeded, new flip chart sheets were prepared to capture other themes as they emerged.

Before cutting and pasting coded participant quotations, the researchers shared samples of coded interviews with two colleagues. Discussion with both colleagues confirmed the researchers' designations. The researchers also prepared written narratives on each of the sheets after all the data had been assigned. These narratives were helpful in cross-checking the data and served as a secondary analysis.

As a final step, to see whether there were any variables that would account for similarities or differences among participants, the researchers tested the coded data on the sheets against the frequency charts prepared for each finding and the numerically coded profile data on the participants. This step aided the researchers in their cross-case analysis of the data, which is described more fully later.

The coding process fragments the interview into separate categories, forcing one to look at each detail, whereas synthesis involves piecing these fragments together to reconstruct a holistic and integrated explanation. Overall, the researchers' approach was to produce a number of clusters, patterns, or themes that were linked together, either similarly or divergently, and that collectively described or analyzed the research arena. Toward this end, the researchers essentially followed a three-layered process in thinking about the data. First, they examined and compared threads and patterns within categories. Second, they compared connecting threads and patterns across categories. Third, the current work was situated with respect to prior research and was compared and contrasted with issues that had been raised by the broader literature. These three layers were not separate but rather interlocked and iterative throughout the synthesizing process.

Based on analysis and synthesis, the researchers were able to move forward and think about the broader implications of this research. Toward this end, they formulated several conclusions and developed various practical and research-related recommendations.

Ethical Considerations

In any research study, ethical issues relating to protection of the participants are of vital concern (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Schram, 2003). A social science researcher is responsible for both informing and protecting respondents. The research process involves enlisting voluntary cooperation, and it is a basic premise that participants are informed about the study's purpose. The central issue with respect to protecting participants is the ways in which the information is treated. Although it was anticipated that no serious ethical threats were posed to any of the participants or their well-being, this study employed various safeguards to ensure the protection and rights of participants.

First, informed consent remained a priority throughout the study. Written consent to voluntarily proceed with the study was received from each participant. Second, participants' rights and interests were considered of primary importance when choices were made regarding the reporting and dissemination of data. The researchers were committed to keeping the names and/or other significant identity characteristics of the sample organizations confidential. All participants remained anonymous, as did the research sites, and pseudonyms were assigned accordingly. Cautionary measures were taken to secure the storage of research-related records and data, and nobody other than the researchers had access to this material.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness features consist of any efforts by the researcher to address the more traditional quantitative issues of validity (the degree to which something measures what it purports to measure) and reliability (the consistency with which it measures it over time). In seeking to establish the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, Lincoln and Guba (2000) use the terms *credibility, dependability, confirmability,* and *transferability,* arguing that the trustworthiness of qualitative research should be assessed differently from quantitative research. Regardless of the terminology used, qualitative researchers must continue to seek to control for potential biases that might be present throughout the design, implementation, and analysis of the study.

Credibility

The criterion of credibility suggests whether the findings are accurate and credible from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, and the reader. This criterion becomes a key component of a trustworthy qualitative research design (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Credibility involves consideration of the interrelationship between the research design components—the study's purpose, theoretical or conceptual framework, research questions, and methods. To enhance the credibility of this study, the researchers triangulated data sources as well as data collection methods. Gathering data from multiple sources and by multiple methods yields a fuller and richer picture of the phenomenon under review. The researchers employed various strategies. First, they clarified their assumptions up front, and the steps through which interpretations were made also were charted through journal writing. Second, the researchers used various participatory and collaborative modes of research, including the search for discrepant evidence and peer review, which has been discussed at length by Lincoln and Guba (2000). This entailed looking for variation in the understanding of the phenomenon and seeking instances that might challenge the researcher's expectations or emergent findings. Reviewing and discussing findings with professional colleagues was a further way of ensuring that the reality of the participants was adequately reflected in the findings.

Dependability

Reliability in the traditional sense refers to the extent that research findings can be replicated by other similar studies. Qualitative research usually does not cover enough of an expanse of subjects and experiences to provide a reasonable degree of reliability. As argued by Lincoln and Guba (2000), the more important question becomes one of whether the findings are consistent and dependable with the data collected. As the researchers understood it, in qualitative research the goal is not to eliminate inconsistencies but to ensure that the researcher understands when they occur. Thus, it becomes incumbent on the researcher to document his or her procedures and demonstrate that coding schemes and categories have been used consistently.

Toward this end, inter-rater reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was established by asking colleagues to code several interviews. Although coding was generally found to be consistent, there were certain instances where the raters made some inferences that could not be fully supported by the data. In these cases, the researchers reviewed the data and reconciled differences in interpretations. In addition, the researchers maintained an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that chronicled the evolution of their thinking and documented the rationale for all choices and decisions made during the research process. This trail, which Merriam (1998) describes as offering "transparency of method," depended on the researchers keeping a journal as well as a record of memos that included detailed accounts of how all the data were analyzed and interpreted.

Confirmability

The concept of *confirmability* corresponds to the notion of objectivity in quantitative research. The implication is that the findings are the result of the research rather than an outcome of the biases and subjectivity of the researcher. To achieve this end, a researcher needs to identify and uncover the decision trail for public judgment. Although qualitative researchers realize the futility of attempting to achieve objectivity, they must nevertheless be reflexive and illustrate how their data can be traced back to its origins. As such, an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) was used to demonstrate dependability, including ongoing reflection by way of journaling and memo, as well as a record of field notes and transcripts, thereby serving to offer the reader an opportunity to assess and evaluate the findings of this study.

Transferability

Although generalizability is not the intended goal of this study, what was addressed was the issue of *transferability* (Lincoln & Guba, 2000)—that is, the ways in which the reader determines whether and to what extent this particular phenomenon in this particular context can transfer to another particular context. With regard to transferability, Patton (1990) promotes thinking of "context-bound extrapolations" (p. 491), which he defines as "speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions" (p. 489). Toward this end, the researchers attempted to address the issue of transferability by way of thick, rich description of the participants and the context. Depth, richness, and detailed description provide the basis for a qualitative account's claim to relevance in some broader context (Schram, 2003).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations

This study contains certain limiting conditions, some of which are related to the common critiques of qualitative research methodology in general and some of which are inherent in this study's research design. Careful thought has been given to ways of accounting for these limitations and to ways of minimizing their impact. Unique features of qualitative research methodology present potential limitations in its usage.

Because analysis ultimately rests with the thinking and choices of the researcher, qualitative studies in general are limited by researcher subjectivity. Therefore, an overriding concern is that of researcher bias, framing as it does assumptions, interests, perceptions, and needs. One of the key limitations of this study is the issue of subjectivity and potential bias regarding the researchers' own participation in a doctoral program first as students and currently as faculty members.

A related limitation was that interviewees may have had difficulty adjusting to the researchers taking on the role of interviewers, a phenomenon referred to by Maxwell (2013) as *participant reactivity.* Because a few of the participants knew the researchers, their responses may have been influenced or affected. They may have tried overly hard to cooperate with the researchers by offering them the responses they perceived the researchers were seeking or might be helpful to them. Alternatively, because of familiarity with the researchers, these few participants might have been guarded and therefore less candid in their responses.

Recognizing these limitations, the researchers took the following measures. First, they acknowledged their research agenda and stated their assumptions up front. Coding schemes were scrutinized by advisors and through peer review, as were coded documents and transcripts. To reduce the limitation of potential bias during data analysis, the researchers removed all participant names and coded all interview transcripts blindly so as not to associate any material or data with any particular individual. To address the problem of participant reactivity, the researchers continued to reflect on how and in what ways they might be influencing participants. Furthermore, they made a conscious attempt to create an environment that was conducive to honest and open dialogue. Experience as interviewers, as well as prior research experience, was helpful in this regard.

Delimitations

A major delimitation of this study was that the scope of the study and the research sample were restricted to 20 ABD doctoral students in the United States. Therefore, a critique of this research might be the limited possibility of generalizing this study to groups of ABD students or programs in other countries. Although generalizability was not the intended goal of this study, what the researchers addressed is the issue of transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). By way of thick, rich description, as well as detailed information regarding the context and background of the study, it was anticipated that knowledge produced by this study could be assessed for its applicability and applied appropriately in other similar contexts.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter provided a detailed description of this study's research methodology. Qualitative case study methodology was employed to illustrate the phenomenon of why some people who complete all the doctoral course work do not go on to complete the dissertation, never obtain the doctoral degree, and hence remain ABD. The participant sample was made up of 20 purposefully selected individuals. Three data collection methods were employed, including individual interviews, critical incidents, and a focus group. The data were reviewed against literature as well as emergent themes. Credibility and dependability were accounted for through various strategies, including source and method triangulation.

A review of the literature was conducted to devise a conceptual framework for the design and analysis of the study. A process analysis enabled the key themes from the findings to be identified. Through a comparison with the literature, interpretations and conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were offered for both educational practice and further research. The intent was that this study would make a contribution to the understanding of doctoral students, current and future, with regard to their completing a dissertation. In addition, it is hoped that this study will be of value to those educators who are responsible for doctoral programs.

Following are some recommended resources that you might consider perusing regarding developing your methodology chapter and all its many key components.

Annotated Bibliography

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Interviewing is an essential tool in the repertoire of any qualitative researcher, yet the "hows" and "whys" of the interview process are not always easily understood. Geared for researchers and graduate students in the social sciences, this book does a good job of explaining the theoretical underpinnings and the practical aspects of the interview process. After examining the role of the interviewer in the research process, the authors consider some of the key epistemological, practical, and ethical issues involved with interviewing. They then take the reader through what they call "the seven stages of the interview investigation," from designing a study to writing it up. Included are discussions around cutting-edge developments in qualitative interviewing, the "craft" of interviewing, and linguistic modes of interview analysis. Practical and conceptual assignments as well as "toolboxes" provide a means to dig deeper into the material gleaned from interviews, and thereby achieve a more meaningful level of understanding. Particularly useful are the chapters on interview transcript analysis (Chapters 11–14); trustworthiness of interview knowledge, including the social construction of validity (Chapter 15); and ways of reporting interview knowledge (Chapter 16). The text includes useful discussion of more recent developments in qualitative interviewing, including narrative, discursive, and conversational analyses.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2013). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This is Volume III of the three-volume paperback versions of *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, fourth edition. The comprehensive collection of chapters, written by "experts" in the field, is geared for graduate students in the social sciences and humanities and covers a variety of qualitative methodological issues related to gathering, analyzing, and interpreting empirical materials. Unlike most of the other books recommended in this section's annotated bibliography, this book is not a "how-to" handbook; rather, it uncovers and examines the philosophical and political implications of qualitative research methodology, addressing issues of equity and social justice. Part I includes discussion around methods of empirical data collection, including interviews, observation, documents and material culture, focus groups, critical arts-based inquiry, oral history, visual methodologies, and autoethnographic methods. The chapters in Part IIdiscuss interpretive adequacy, forms of representation, post-qualitative inquiry, the new information technologies and research, the politics of evidence, writing, and evaluation practices. Also included is a chapter on qualitative research and technology. The book presents a glossary of terms that offers students and researchers a ready resource to help decode the language of qualitative research, as well as a list of recommended readings that provide additional sources on specific topic areas related to one's research.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This text addresses the complexity and flexibility of qualitative research and offers comprehensive instruction regarding the challenges involved in the design of a sound qualitative study. Chapter 6 offers useful guidelines regarding the various primary data collection methods including observation, in-depth interviews, life history, narrative inquiry and digital storytelling, document and historical review, and objects and artifacts of material cultures. In Chapter 7, the authors provide discussion around secondary and specialized methods of data collection and combinations of methods, among them interaction analysis, multimodal approaches, dilemma analysis, and Internet and digital applications. The focus is on how to design a data collection strategy by way of thoughtfully combining methods so that they build on and complement one another. Chapter 8 includes recording, managing, analyzing, and interpreting data. This chapter deals with defending the value and logic of qualitative research and offers some useful insights and background reading around issues of trustworthiness and ethics in qualitative inquiry. The book also includes thoughtful discussion around dealing with trustworthiness and political stressors inherent in the research process. Included are vignettes that illustrate common methodological challenges, and the authors expand on these by offering extended coverage of ethics, data analysis, and research design techniques. Particularly useful are the exhaustive and well-organized bibliographies, lists of key concepts, and notes at the end of each chapter.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton's classic book brings together theory and practice, offering many useful strategies for designing and conducting qualitative studies. The text engages the multiple philosophical and historical trajectories within a variety of qualitative research traditions while integrating this discussion with the practice of research design, fieldwork strategies, and data analysis. The text illuminates all aspects of qualitative inquiry through examples, stories, and cartoons; summarizing and synthesizing exhibits; and a wide range of highlight sections/sidebars that elaborate on important and emergent issues. Full case studies are included to illustrate extended research and evaluation examples. In addition, each chapter features an extended "rumination" about a core issue of persistent debate and controversy. The rich variety of examples serves to clarify and deepen understanding of the qualitative research process in its many facets. Especially useful are the sections on the defining characteristics of qualitative research, the variety of qualitative research traditions, sampling procedures, methods and techniques of data collection (there are detailed and thorough chapters dealing with observation methods, interviews, and other creative modes of data collection), data analysis and interpretation (including computer-assisted analysis), ethical issues, and criteria for enhancing credibility and addressing transferability. Patton is one of the forebears of qualitative research. This often-quoted book set the standards for the field in the 1980s and 1990s. Recently revised, it brings readers up to date with the variety of current perspectives about (as well as the variety within) qualitative inquiry. In addition, the book includes a student study site with access to full-text Sage journal articles that have been selected for each chapter.

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nichols, C., & Ormston, R. (Eds.). (2014). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Written by a team of leading researchers, this edited volume guides students through the process of qualitative research from beginning to end, through design, sampling, data collection, analysis, and reporting. This is a practical account of how to carry out qualitative research that recognizes a range of current approaches and applications. Chapter 3 deals with design issues and includes selection of data collection methods based on chosen research topics and research questions. Chapter 4 deals with ethical considerations in qualitative research and includes guidelines and codes for ethical practice. The chapter discusses key issues such as undue intrusion, informed consent, confidentiality, enabling participation, and protecting researchers from adverse consequences. Chapter 5 discusses the design and selection of samples, including strategies (theoretical, convenience, and purposive sampling), key features of qualitative sampling, and implementation of sample design. Chapters 7 through 9 bring to the fore the complexity of data collection and the methods most commonly used—namely, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observation. Each of these methods is explored in detail, and the emphasis is on practical application. This book is an ideal guide for both researchers and practitioners faced with the challenges of conducting qualitative research in both applied and theoretical settings in complex real-life contexts.

Rossman, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2017). *An introduction to qualitative research: Learning in the field* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The authors creatively integrate the scientific and artistic dimensions of qualitative research, explaining how the research process unfolds from planning and design, through fieldwork and data gathering, to the presentation of findings, analysis, and interpretation. To help the reader better visualize and grasp the complexities inherent in the research process, the authors introduce each chapter with discussions among three "characters"—students whose research projects demonstrate the challenges and excitement of qualitative inquiry. The underlying theme cutting across all the chapters is that research is a process of learning and that the utility of research requires clarity of purpose. This book is excellent for novice researchers and introduces the puzzles and tensions that one faces in embarking on a qualitative study, offering assistance in grasping the core concepts, issues, and complexities involved. This fourth edition updates material on qualitative genres, includes new discussions pertaining to systematic inquiry and developing a conceptual framework, and places a clear focus on maintaining ethical standards to ensure the trustworthiness of research studies.

Salmons, J. (2017). *Doing qualitative research online.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

With a strong focus on ethics, and a large range of features to guide students both in the book and on the accompanying website, this resource provides readers with valuable tools to conduct online research. The selection of technology tools and settings for collecting data influences the types of communication possible with participants and the types of data collected, whether text, verbal, or visual, synchronous or asynchronous. Included in the book are methodologies, methods, and design for online studies; choosing information and communication technologies; collecting and eliciting data online; organizing, analyzing, and interpreting data; and writing up and reporting findings, as well as ethical issues in research design and ethical relationships with participants. The text and accompanying companion website resources—including media, templates, and exercises—offer useful guidelines regarding qualitative research online. Especially useful is the "qualitative e-research framework" that provides a conceptual schema of key questions pertaining to all elements of an ethical online qualitative study. This framework offers guiding topics and questions to review and includes dimensions that can be used to assess the design and research quality of dissertations that involve online research. The tool can also be used to evaluate proposed or published studies in this emerging and evolving field of qualitative research.

Tolich, M. (Ed.). (2016). *Qualitative ethics in practice.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Neither ethics committees nor qualitative researchers can predict the types of ethical dilemmas that can confront researchers in the field. In this book, a team of 15 top researchers across various disciplines offer ethical strategies unique to qualitative researchers. Issues are drawn from a variety of cases in the fields of education, community development, and other social science settings to examine how researchers have attempted to address ethical dilemmas in practice, including the infamous Belfast Project. The issues that are presented highlight some relevant models and programs being developed that may offer solutions and call for a much needed ethical code unique to the practice of qualitative inquiry.

Van Den Hoonaard, W. C., & Van Den Hoonaard, D. K. (2013). *Essentials of thinking ethically in qualitative research.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

This text is part of the Qualitative Essentials book series that provides a comprehensive but succinct overview of topics in qualitative inquiry. Ethical dimensions of qualitative research are constantly emerging and shifting. This volume identifies several ethical principles to guide novice researchers through the research process with the necessary wisdom and insight to shape a project in sound, meaningful, and thoughtful ways. The authors outline the domains on which ethics most often tend to impinge, and address key ethical issues arising in different qualitative traditions and contexts. The volume concludes with guidelines regarding how to navigate formal ethics reviews. Illustrative examples and other helpful resources effectively promote student engagement in the complex literature surrounding this topic.

Chapter 9 Objectives

Section I: Instruction

- Provide a conceptualization of the process of qualitative data analysis.
- Identify the specific strategies involved in analyzing qualitative data.
- Explain how to organize, reduce, and prepare raw data through coding and categorization.
- Explain how to formulate clear and precise findings statements based on analysis of the data.
- Emphasize and reiterate the significance of alignment among research methodology (tradition or genre), research design, and data analysis.
- Describe how to report and present findings in a clear, comprehensive, and systematic manner so that these findings clearly and directly address the research problem and provide a response to each of the study's research questions.

Section II: Application

- Present a completed example for the findings chapter of a dissertation.

Overview

Analysis is both an exciting and a challenging aspect of the qualitative research process, requiring a degree of systematic searching and creativity. Although there are stages dedicated to formal analysis, analysis is an inherent and ongoing part of the research and writing process. As Spencer, Ritchie, and Ormston (2014) explain,

> Analysis does not begin when the researchers have finished collecting their data, but is an ongoing and inherent part of the whole process of qualitative research and should infuse all aspects. The analytical part of a researcher's brain should always be alert to the implications of their choices at each stage of the research process. (p. 275)

Once you have collected your data by way of the various data collection methods (and combinations thereof) that you have chosen to use, your next step is to manage, organize, and make sense of all the separate pieces of accumulated information. Qualitative data include excerpts from documentation, interview transcripts, survey comments, focus group transcripts, critical incident forms, field notes from observations, and so on. In addition, you may have collected some quantitative data by way of survey methodology, yielding numbers, frequencies, and percentages. All of these data are called *raw data* because they are as yet untouched by you. Your task is to transform them into something meaningful by analyzing them and making inferences from these discrete pieces of information.

Many students become overwhelmed at this point of the dissertation process, having completed or still being immersed in data collection and faced with mounds and mounds of "stuff" and unsure about what needs to be done first. Frequently, the comment is that they are overloaded with data and drowning. Many students have some notion of *what* they must do but are uncertain about *how* to really go about doing it. A common problem facing qualitative researchers is the lack of agreed-on approaches for analyzing qualitative material. Although there is some information regarding how and why to use qualitative research methodologies, there is considerably less information on the actual "nuts and bolts" of what to do with the data after the research has been conducted.

Although most research courses and textbooks describe the basic structure of research, few move the student into the areas of data organization and analysis. Much is made of the process of *coding*—assigning an alphanumeric system to segments of transcripts. Less attention is paid, however, to application—that is, how to use coded material. Typically, the results are that students come up with excellent ideas for research, conduct solid literature reviews, produce what sound like viable research designs, and even collect massive amounts of data. The problem arises, however, at this point: What do you do with the collected data? In this chapter, we provide the "what" as well as the "how" regarding transforming raw data into meaningful findings. Section I, "Instruction," describes what needs to be done and explains in a series of steps how to go about this. Section II, "Application," provides an example of a findings chapter. Using the research problem carried throughout this book, we present the actual findings of the research that we conducted.

When you reach this point in the research process, it is essential to keep an open mind, remembering that qualitative research is all about discovery. You need to look carefully at all of your data, seeking to uncover important insights regarding the phenomenon that you are researching. These are your "findings." The procedures you use to accomplish this need to be well thought out, explicitly documented, and directly connected to your research questions. Subsequently, in the following chapter, "Analyzing, Interpreting, and Synthesizing Findings," you will synthesize all your data sources and insights, creating an interpretation that is holistic and integrated.

There is often confusion around the idea of data analysis in qualitative research and what this actually entails. Qualitative data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the masses of data collected. Broadly speaking, qualitative data analysis is the researcher's attempt to summarize all the collected data in a dependable and accurate manner. This process is based on induction: The researcher starts with a large set of data and seeks to progressively narrow this into smaller important groups of key data. There are no predefined variables to focus analysis as there are in quantitative research. Qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to be patient and reflective in a process that strives to make sense of multiple data sources. The analytic procedure falls essentially into the following sequential phases: organizing the data, generating categories, identifying patterns and themes, and coding the data.

We want to draw your attention to the fact that, although Chapter 5 of the dissertation deals with analysis and interpretation, it should become evident to you that the process of analysis begins occurring in Chapter 4 by way of organizing and transforming raw data into what are called the "research findings." Essentially, Chapter 4 of the dissertation involves the analysis of data to produce findings. The following chapter, Chapter 5, involves the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of those findings. Both chapters involve analytic decisions. These two chapters together should convince a reader that you, the researcher, are sufficiently knowledgeable about the interlocking analytic processes that constitute qualitative research. Note that in some universities and programs the two chapters, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, are required to be combined.

Section I: Instruction

Organizing and Preparing Data for Analysis

Data Management Strategies

The data generated by qualitative methods are voluminous, and the sheer quantity of raw data can indeed be quite daunting. If data are to be thoroughly analyzed, they must be well organized. Understanding the ways in which the data can be organized and managed is hence important. As mentioned in Part I, attention to detail in managing data is important at every stage of the research process. This notion becomes all too clear when it is time to write up the research. Once you are sure that your data are well organized, the analysis can begin in earnest.

Transcribe your interviews as soon as possible, and assign identification codes to each transcript. Bear in mind that you must know your data intimately. Although extremely tedious, transcribing your interviews yourself is one way of immersing yourself in your data and becoming more familiar with it. Remember that doing your own transcriptions, or at least checking them by listening to the tapes as you read them, can be quite different from just working off transcriptions done by somebody else.

Although extremely time consuming, it is imperative that interviews be transcribed verbatim. The exact words of participants must be recorded, along with any aspects of nonverbal communication, such as pauses, laughter, or interruptions. These nonverbal nuances are usually noted within parentheses as they occur. If you are having your transcriptions done by a professional transcriber, you need to make these instructions clear. Also, if computerized data analysis tools are going to be used, the data might have to be converted into a format that is compatible with the software program to be used.

Make sure all your information is complete and legible. Write dates on all transcriptions and field notes. Label all notes according to type (observers' notes, memos, transcriptions, etc.). Be sure to make copies of all your material, and from an early stage, find a way to securely store the data in well-labeled computer files so that you know where to locate the different pieces of information. It is prudent—and indeed highly advisable—to back up all your data, putting one master copy away someplace for safekeeping. As mentioned in Part I, it is essential to sort and order your data for easy retrieval. Safely storing the data also ensures that you are honoring the confidentiality of participants—an essential ethical consideration.

If you have collected any quantitative material, you need to summarize the data to illustrate patterns. In a qualitative study, quantitative findings are secondary and are used to supplement and/or augment the primary qualitative findings. We recommend that you "chunk" your data and prepare the quantitative component at the outset prior to embarking on qualitative data analysis. While you analyze quantitative and qualitative data separately and in different ways, as you see later in this chapter, in qualitative research, reporting the findings means that data from all sources are seamlessly woven to provide an overall integrated and holistic presentation.

Inductive, Deductive, and Abductive Analysis

Qualitative data analysis encompasses the processes that are needed to make sense and meaning of the data. Let us interject at this point to offer a very brief outline of three quite general forms of qualitative analysis. The well-known models of reasoning, commonly referred to as induction, deduction, and abduction, illustrate the basic "thinking" behind analysis. Understanding these models thus allows us to make decisions regarding how we will go about *using our data.*

First, induction is data-driven analysis. The idea is that data lead to theory, and in pure form, an inductive approach builds on the idea that data can more or less "speak for themselves" and may offer us a truly "grounded theory." The metaphor driving this model is the metaphor of "collecting" (Brinkmann, 2014). Researchers collect data to form a bouquet that is informative about something more general than any individual flower is capable of. The inductive approach involves the reduction of information that has been collected by organizing it with the help of a coding scheme into significant patterns and themes. The critique of this approach is that the point of research is not to develop general theories but to understand particulars.

Second, deduction is a theory-driven analysis. The idea is that theory determines data, in the sense that hypotheses and assumptions are articulated within the background or context of theory, which is then tested in confrontation with the so-called empirical world—that is, raw data. The metaphor for this approach is a "framework" or "paradigm." Qualitative researchers often talk about having a "theoretical framework" or "conceptual framework" to guide the entire study from conceptualization through data analysis. This is the general approach to qualitative data analysis (unless one is doing a pure grounded theory study), and the one adopted in this book.

Brinkmann (2014) introduces a third approach to qualitative analysis, which he sees as an alternative to the "inductive collector" and the "deductive framer." He introduces the image of the "abductive tool-user": the *bricoleur* or craftsperson. As he explains, unlike induction and deduction, both of which address the relationship between data and theory, abduction is seen as a form of reasoning that is concerned with the relationship between *situation* and *inquiry.* Abductive reasoning can come into play when the researcher has an insight or makes an assumption that a connection exists in an incomplete or seemingly unrelated set of data. As Brinkmann (2014) explains, "It [analysis] occurs in situations of breakdown, surprise, bewilderment, and wonder" (p. 722). Abduction is thus a form of reasoning used in situations of uncertainty when we seek an understanding or explanation of why something happens. The goal of the abductive process is not to arrive at fixed or universal knowledge through the collection of data. Rather, the goal is to be able to act in a specific situation. Hence, this approach has its roots in the Pragmatism of Charles S. Peirce. Inquiry is thus seen as the process of trying to understand a situation by "sense-making." The result of sense-making (which may be a concept or a theory) is then tested to see whether the situation is resolved. According to the abductive model, then, we engage in research, inquiry, and analysis for purposes of living, and theories and methods are some of the tools used in the process.

In essence, data analysis includes a variety of structured processes for looking across your data set to identify patterns and construct analytic themes (reflects important concepts in the data), and then turn these themes into what ultimately become your findings. The findings will ultimately provide answers to your research questions.

Deciding on an Analytic Approach

It must be pointed out at the outset that different qualitative research traditions or genres promote specific strategies for data analysis. To achieve methodological congruence, and to ensure that all key elements throughout your dissertation are aligned, appropriate methods of data analysis should be informed by and contingent upon your chosen methodology (qualitative tradition or genre) and your study's research design. The analytic strategy is typically described as part of the research design. As such, it should be grounded in and aligned with the methodology that you have selected and should respect disciplinary expectations. This is explained in greater detail in Chapter 5, "Achieving Alignment Throughout Your Dissertation."

Data analysis in the different traditions is similar, but there are some fundamental differences. For example, grounded theory is systematic in its approach: Categories of information are generated (open coding), one of the categories is selected and positioned within a theoretical model (axial coding), and a story is explicated from the interconnection of the categories (selective coding). Coding and categorizing involve the "constant comparison" method that continues throughout the study. As the name implies, this method involves systematically comparing sections of text and noting similarities and differences between these sections. Through the emergence of major categories, theory can evolve. Case study and ethnographic research involve a detailed description of the setting or individuals, followed by analysis of the data for themes, patterns, or issues (Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 1994). Phenomenological research makes use of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of an "essence" description (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers who use this approach are reluctant to describe specific analytic techniques, fearing that these might be seen as rules and become inflexible (Hycner, 1985). As such, the focus is on attitude and the response to the phenomenon under study. The aim is to achieve an analytic description of the phenomena not affected by prior assumptions.

While there are a range of approaches to qualitative analysis, they all share a common focus on extracting and illustrating the underlying essence, patterns, processes, and structures. Whatever tradition or genre one adopts, perhaps the most fundamental underlying operation in the analysis of qualitative data is that of discovering significant sets or groups of persons, issues, and experiences and the properties that characterize them. As you move through the analytic process, you will be constantly reviewing and refining your labeling practices and noticing how ideas combine, relate, and diverge. You will move toward focusing more on specific issues, and you will be discarding ideas that are no longer central. You will also be drilling down to explore the detail and dimensions of key issues. Engaging in rounds of data collection and periodic analysis can enable you to explore, check, and refine your emerging ideas. Journaling and memoing over the life of the study will help you reflect on and develop your analytic thinking.

As qualitative researchers, we are interested in the language of the participants or texts. When transcribing interviews, however, it is recommended that you make notations of body language, long pauses, and other communicative body language actions and gestures, as these, aside from the participants' actual words, are telling too. We work with the data (mostly words) to identify units of information that contribute to themes or patterns —the study's findings. This process generates an enormous amount of text. To make the data more readily accessible and understandable, the vast array of words, sentences, and paragraphs has to be reduced to what is of most importance and interest and then transformed to draw out key themes and patterns. Although there are some specific analytic distinctions among the numerous qualitative methodologies (traditions or genres), data analysis is somewhat of a stepwise process. You will be expected to be able to describe in detail your analytic approach and show that you are able to demonstrate how you got from your data to your conclusions. This is necessary to enhance both the credibility and the dependability of your study.

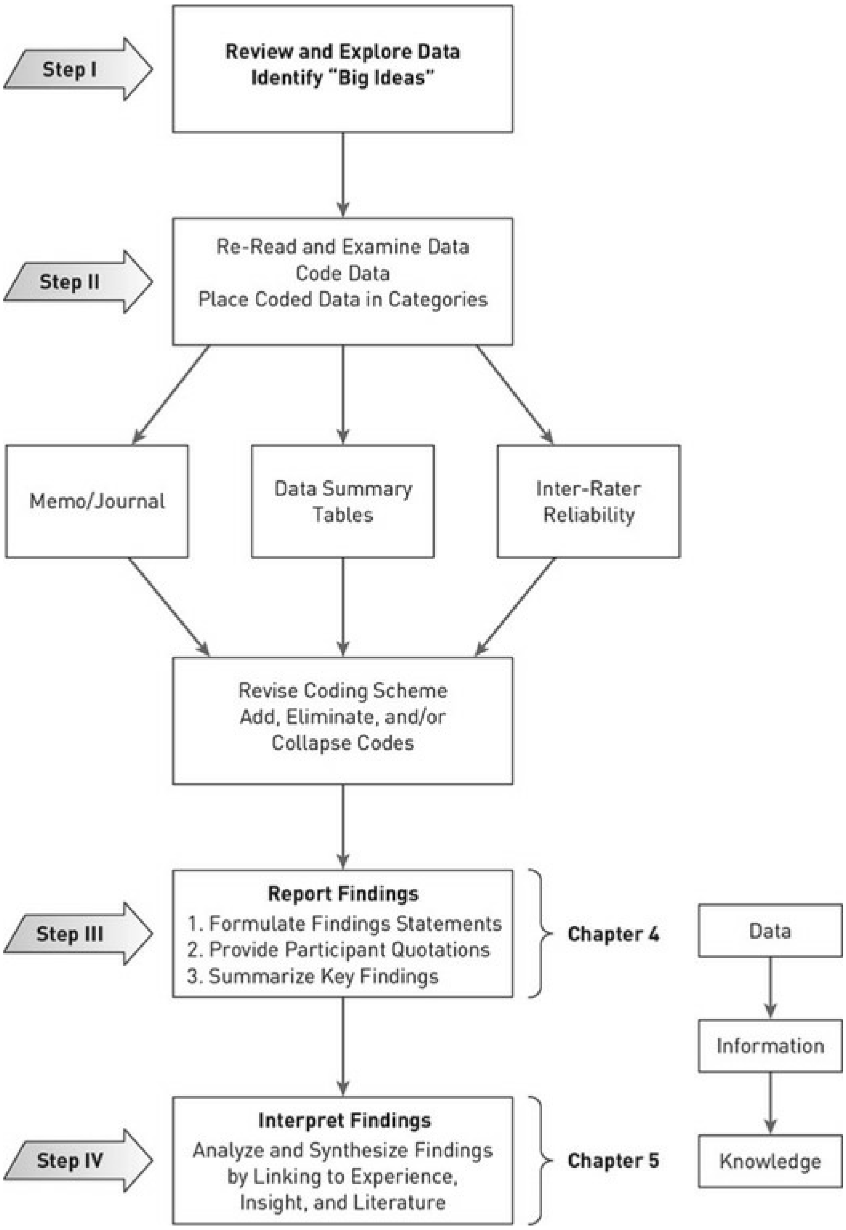
A Systematic Procedure for Data Analysis

Although we offer a stepwise procedure to prepare and analyze the data, please bear in mind that we are *not* implying in any way that the interrelationship among these steps is necessarily linear. Each phase in this multistage process leads logically to the next, yet you will most likely cycle through the phases more than once, looping back and revisiting earlier phases in an ongoing effort to narrow and make sense of the data. The steps that you take will overlap one another as you continue to read and collect data. As you increasingly internalize and reflect on your data, the initial ordered sequence most likely will lose its structure and become more flexible.

Data analysis is typically an iterative and recursive process, and rather than an isolated moment, analysis is integrated with and occurs *throughout* the research process, involving much deliberation and critical thinking. Researchers may find that more than one style of thinking is needed at different stages of the analysis—that is, at the analytic strategy planning stage, the coding stage, and the interpreting and meaning-making stages. As with the research design, every choice that is made influences the findings that are generated, but determining those choices in advance of the study is not entirely realistic. Discoveries may also emerge that take the analysis process in a new or unexpected direction. It should be noted that while the qualitative researcher moves through distinct phases, analysis involves a deeply reflexive component. A question that is often asked is when analysis actually starts. For some studies, it is important to begin after collecting all of the data, and analyze it all together. In other cases, the researcher may prefer to look at all the data and find common or contrasting themes. For other studies, the analysis process may occur in stages that are interspersed with data collection. Each of the qualitative traditions or genres have specific ways of addressing data collection and analysis.

Just how long the analytic process lasts is also difficult to predict. This depends largely on the nature of the study, the amount of data collected, and the analytic and synthesizing abilities of the researcher. The process can be repetitious, tedious, and time consuming. However, there is no substitute for fully immersing yourself in your data. Take the time to read and reread. Really live with your data. Getting to know intimately what you have collected, and struggling with the nuances, subtleties, caveats, and contradictions, is an integral part of the process, and a very worthwhile one. Keep an open mind, and be prepared for the unexpected. Remain patient. Accept that the process in its entirety will take some time, and be aware of not making premature judgments. Figure 9.1 includes the iterative steps of the analytic process. Following the figure is a more detailed discussion of the key activities involved in the process.

Figure 9.1 Road Map for the Process of Qualitative Data Analysis: An Outline



Source: This figure first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2007b). *Understanding qualitative inquiry: Content and process* (Part I). Unpublished manuscript.

Review and Explore the Data

Once you have taken the practical steps of organizing and sorting through the different types of data, and becoming familiar with the scope and substance of what data were collected, you will need to examine each specific piece of information. Building on insights and hunches gained during data collection, you will now attempt to make sense of the data as a whole. To achieve this goal, begin by carefully reading over all the data provided by the various data collection sources. Read the transcriptions of your interviews, critical incidents, and/or focus groups. If you have used document review, read over your documentation too. What you are really doing is reading to get some feel for the "story line," including the major and minor stories that are being told within the data. This initial reading of all the data is done to gain an overall sense of the whole before you break it into its constituent parts.

It is important that you get a good feel for your data—an experience that usually generates emergent insights. In reading over the data, try to make sense of what people are saying. Also try to integrate what different people are saying. The more familiar you are with the details of your data, the better you will be able to present them and the better your analysis of them will be. In this first go-around, read through each transcript and try to identify the "big ideas." Although the big ideas are likely to become altered or refined, they provide an initial framework for the development of the study's findings.

Qualitative analysis usually results in the identification of recurring patterns, which are essentially themes that cut through the data. Saldana (2016) defines a theme as "an *extended phrase or sentence* that identifies what a unit of data is *about* and/or what it *means*" (emphasis in original, p. 199). Some themes may have been deductively determined based on the research problem, purpose, research questions, and the relevant literature surrounding the topic. Other themes should be inductively determined regardless of what you were seeking or assumed about the research problem. Note that sometimes the word *theme* is used interchangeably with the word *category* (Saldana, 2016). As Ryan and Bernard (2003) explain, you know you have found a theme when you can answer the question "What is this expression an example of?" (p. 87). Repetition is the most common theme recognition technique and is based on the premise that if a concept reoccurs throughout and/or across transcripts, it is likely a theme (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Data analysis demands a heightened awareness of the data and an open mind to recurring and common threads, some of which may be subtle (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). The real purpose of this initial read is to *really* immerse yourself in your data and gain a sense of their possibilities. As you read, make notes of or highlight relevant words and phrases that you think capture important aspects of the data. Remember that these should bear some relationship to the research questions and should not simply be some random words that seem to occur with regular frequency. Ask yourself: "What is this about? What seems to be emerging?" Check these ideas against the categories and descriptors of your conceptual framework. Missing data and similarities and differences about a topic area are also important to look for as you examine your text (Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2017). While we have already discussed this in greater detail in Chapter 7 ("Developing and Presenting Your Literature Review"), we return for a moment with a brief reminder of how the theoretical or conceptual framework functions with regard to data analysis and the role that this framework plays in terms of organization and presentation of findings:

Step 1: Developing Categories

Give careful thought to developing conceptual categories that are based on and directly tied to your study's research questions. To be comprehensive, you need to make sure there is at least one category that relates to each research question. These categories form the backbone of your study. As you will see, they become the repository for presenting your findings. They also translate into analytic categories later on in your study, and so become an essential analytic tool. Developing categories includes looking for themes, clusters of themes, and relationships among themes by determining similarities and differences. This stage also includes a close review of any outliers or unusual cases that will need to be highlighted and explained and that may lead to questions for future research.

Step 2: Developing Descriptors for Each Category

Under each category, you lay out the categories' descriptors. These descriptors reflect what you have learned from the reviewed literature, data from your pilot studies, and your own educated guesses or hunches based on your own experiences and knowledge about how people might respond to each of your research questions. Not all of your descriptors will be useful, and you will certainly refine these as the study proceeds. The conceptual framework remains flexible and emergent. Based on the data you collect, some of the descriptors may remain intact, others may be deleted, or new ones may be added. Each category and descriptor will be assigned a code that maps participants' responses to the research questions, forming categories and subcategories. In the findings chapter of the dissertation, the categories and descriptors become the headings and subheadings for organization and presentation of findings. The conceptual framework is included in the dissertation's appendix. Here the title changes to "Coding Legend" or "Coding Scheme," as you assign symbols (codes) to each main category and each of the respective descriptors.

As you read through your transcripts, in addition to highlighting parts of the text and underlining sections and issues that seem important and relevant, jot down in the margins any ideas, thoughts, reflections, and comments that come to mind. This process will provide you with a record of your initial sense of the data. Later, when you are deeper into the analytic process, you may find that some of these early impressions are useful and hold up throughout.

If your study includes document review, a useful tool to help collate and organize all the information that you are able to glean from documents is a document summary form. With regard to interviews, critical incidents, and focus groups, after reading each transcript carefully, make summary notes for each participant. Summarizing data in this way is important because it creates a profile of each document and/or each individual research participant. Moreover, much of what occurs in later analytical steps requires reducing the data to units. Reduction of data requires a researcher to think about smaller bits of data, and this step runs the risk of missing the forest for the trees. Templates for the document summary form and the participant summary form are included as Appendices Q and R, respectively.

Reread and Code the Data

The first major step in the analytic process is to consider the "big ideas" or themes. Saldana (2016) refers to this process as "theming the data" (pp. 198–204). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) call this same process "thematizing" (p. 105). Following this step, the second step is to dissect and classify the data and place sections of material into categories. Although it is important initially to become familiar with your data, you do not want to drown in it. Thus, an important step is to reduce all that you have collected to a manageable database, grouping it in useful ways. This step is essentially what Seidman (2012) and Guest et al. (2012) refer to as a "winnowing process." Often, you will notice many more potential themes than you actually end up elaborating in a given analysis. Just because something is noticeable does not mean that it is meaningful or noteworthy in terms of your study's analysis. On an initial reading of the text, often certain ideas, phrases, or expressions catch a coder's attention, but these may not be relevant to the analysis at hand. Conversely, the relevance of some themes is not immediately apparent during the analytic process. A good rule of thumb, therefore, is to err on the side of caution. If you are unsure of the significance of a potential theme as you read through your data, flag it for later attention. (All qualitative software analysis programs provide options for doing this.) It is important to recognize that not everybody will perceive exactly the same themes in the same way. Breadth and depth of knowledge and experience with the research setting and topic will influence what a reader perceives. As such, systematic procedures are needed for finding, defining, and coding themes. From your large stacks of papers that contain your raw data, you have to find ways to distill the information into smaller sets of notes that characterize your total data. To do this, you need to develop a systematic and manageable system of classification (i.e., a coding scheme). In essence, analytic objectives keep you focused on the task at hand, and this should help you prioritize which themes to develop in the analysis. This is one of the key functions of the theoretical or conceptual framework.

The reduction process includes questioning the data, identifying and noting common patterns in the data, creating codes that describe your data patterns, and assigning these coded pieces of information to the categories of your theoretical or conceptual framework. Your framework is the centerpiece in managing and reducing the data. A sample framework is included as Appendix E. The categories that make up your framework become the repositories of your data. In effect, you turn this framework into a coding scheme/legend by assigning codes to each category and each subcategory (or descriptor). That coding scheme should be included in your dissertation's appendix. At the same time, the uncoded theoretical or conceptual framework should remain intact and is usually presented as part of your literature review chapter. A sample coding legend/scheme is included as Appendix L.

What Is Coding?

Much is made about coding as a fundamental skill for qualitative analysis. Although there is really nothing that mysterious about it, the literature on data analysis and coding in particular is voluminous, and the vast amount of information can certainly be overwhelming. There are some cutting-edge texts that offer comprehensive and authoritative accounts of coding and the different options and variations available to the qualitative researcher. For a more in-depth account of the practical strategies associated with qualitative data analysis, the following texts are highly recommended: Bazeley (2014), Harding (2013), Kuckartz (2014), and Saldana (2016).

Coding is essentially a system of classification—the process of noting what is of interest or significance, identifying different segments of the data, and labeling them to organize the information contained in the data. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explain coding as "a mixture of data [summation] and data complication . . . breaking the data apart in analytically relevant ways in order to lead toward further questions about the data" (pp. 29–31). Saldana (2016) captures it well, providing a succinct definition of a "code":

> A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data . . . In qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory-building, and other analytic processes. Just as a title represents and captures a book, film, or poem's primary content and essence, so does a code represent and capture a datum's primary content and essence. (p. 4)

Richards (2015) adds a new angle about the term "coding." As this author points out, in common use, coding refers to data reduction, either by a system of symbols or numbers. While quantitative coding *reduces* data, qualitative coding is about data *retention.* Similarly, Bazeley (2014) views coding not as a mechanistic data reduction process but rather one designed to stimulate and facilitate analysis by providing a means of access to evidence, for querying data, and for testing assumptions and conclusions. The goal of qualitative research is to learn from the data and to keep revisiting data extracts until you see and understand emergent patterns and explanations. In the same vein, Saldana (2016) refutes the critique that coding in qualitative research is reductionist, explaining that coding approaches the analytic act as one that assigns rich symbolic meanings through discovering and capturing the essence in the data (including the participant's voice, emotions, motivations, values, attitudes, beliefs, judgments, conflicts, cultures, identities, life course patterns, processes, etc.) and that these are not reductionist outcomes but multidimensional facets of the research participants and their experiences. Viewed in this way, the purpose of coding is *not just to label* all parts of your documents about a topic but rather to *bring them together* so they can be reviewed and your thinking about the topic developed. Coding also allows you to return to the data you want to inspect, interrogate, revisit, and interpret. Bear in mind that coding is a cyclical act (Saldana, 2016). Rarely is the first cycle of coding perfect. You will be revising codes and adding new codes as they emerge. Subsequent cycles of recoding further filters, focuses, and highlights the salient features of your data, providing the potential for generating and expanding on categories, themes, and concepts and for grasping meaning and/or building theory. Remember, the development of an original theory is not always a necessary outcome for qualitative inquiry. However, it is preexisting theories that drive the entire research process—hence, the centrality of the theoretical or conceptual framework throughout the research endeavor. Indeed, the integral role played by the conceptual framework is something we try to emphasize throughout this book.

Codes are, in effect, a type of shorthand—the names or identifiers that you attach to chunks or segments of data that you consider relevant to your study. As such, you can use any system that works for you, be it alphanumeric or some form of symbol. Some people find it useful to use highlighting pens to color code their data. Whatever system you choose to use, as you read your material, the codes that you assign signal what you think is going on in a piece of data. Remember, coding is *more than counting.*

Coding Versus Content Analysis

A brief word here about content analysis is warranted to establish the differences between this method and qualitative data analysis. Traditional content analysis is widely cited in the social sciences and media studies as an objective systematic statistical method. Content analysis is also a qualitative research method utilized in document or archival research and is used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts (Cozby & Bates, 2012; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Qualitative content analysis is sometimes referred to as textual analysis because nothing is counted or measured (Boreus & Bergstrom, 2017). A key component of content analysis is the coding of the material to be investigated, and this can be approached inductively or deductively (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014). If approached inductively, the researcher begins the research with a brief list of themes and identifies more as the coding and research process occurs. In the deductive approach, the researcher begins with a list of themes, and codes the material according to the predetermined list (although the researcher does typically allow for adaptability if the material suggests other themes). Regardless of the approach, the researcher must create a coding scheme that places the content of the text into systematic categories that can be related back to the research questions (Cozby & Bates, 2012; Finfgeld-Connett, 2014).

To begin, the text is coded (that is, broken down) into manageable categories on a variety of levels—word, word sense, phrase, sentence, or theme—and then examined using one of content analysis' basic methods: conceptual analysis or relational analysis. *Conceptual analysis* establishes the existence and frequency of concepts most often represented by words or phrases in a text. *Relational analysis* goes one step further by examining the relationships among concepts in a text. Content analysis helps to construct research questions by defining the categories to be applied, defining and developing the coding process, and analyzing the results of the coding process (Cozby & Bates, 2012). Content analysis allows closeness to the text, which can alternate between specific categories and relationships, and also statistically analyzes the coded form of the text. While content analysis offers researchers a systematic analytic method for producing categories, this method is *inherently reductive,* particularly when dealing with complex texts, in that it tends often to simply consist of word counts and often disregards the context within which the text was produced. A major limitation of content analysis vis-à-vis qualitative research is the tendency to exclude implicit meanings from coding operations, as the method tends to focus on manifest content, breaking visual messages into elements solely by way of presence, absence, or frequency. Hence, qualitative content analysis may not work well as a single method of inquiry but may be an effective addition to a well-designed triangulation strategy.

In content analysis studies, therefore, *counting the number of times a particular set of codes occurs* is an important measure in assessing the frequency of items or phenomena. However, in the qualitative coding process, frequency of occurrence is not necessarily an indicator of significance. As Saldana (2016) describes it, the coding process asks you not to count but rather to ponder, scrutinize, speculate, organize, categorize, connect, integrate, synthesize, conceptualize, and abstract. Coding *well* requires that you reflect deeply on the meanings of each and every piece of data. And coding *well* requires that you read and reread as you code and recode. Coding *well* leads to total immersion in and closeness with your data and becoming intimately familiar with its details, nuances, and subtleties. Coding is a first step to really *rethinking* your data. As such, coding should be regarded as having a purpose rather than being an end in itself. Some of the many purposes of qualitative coding include:

- A method of discovery to stimulate deeper thinking about the data you have collected
- To reflect on what the coded segments tell you about the category and its underlying meanings
- Enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or themes based on shared characteristics or features
- Ask questions about how the category relates to other ideas that develop from the data
- Create further finer categories from discovering different dimensions in the data gathered in the first round of coding
- Search for blends or combinations of categories and compare different categories
- Note how categories that are consolidated in various ways begin to transcend the "reality" of the data and progress toward the thematic, conceptual, and theoretical levels
- Compare and contrast how different researchers interpret data in different ways

Beginning the Coding Process

As you read your material, reference segments or units of text by highlighting or bracketing them. These segments can be single words, phrases, sentences, or even whole paragraphs. Codes can be written in the margins or alongside the appropriate segments of text. A sample coded interview transcript segment is presented as Appendix S. As with all aspects of the research process, precision is key. It is of the utmost importance to know who said what. Therefore, do not forget to include participant identification with each unit of information. In addition, label each passage with a notation system that will designate its position in the original transcript. Later, when considering an excerpt taken from its original context, you may want to check the accuracy of the text, perhaps going back to the audiotape. Specific labeling of each excerpt allows for such retracing.

At this point in the reading, marking, and labeling process, it is important to keep labels tentative. As you read and mark units or sections from the material, one way is to begin to label them using terms based on the actual language of the participants—known in the language of grounded theory as an *in vivo* term. This process is called *open coding*, a grounded theory concept where the descriptors emerge from the data, and is essentially the same as what Patton (2015) refers to as *inductive analysis.* While using in vivo labels, note whether there is something in the data that might fit one of the descriptors of your conceptual framework. The procedure of using predetermined coding categories and seeking to fit the data into such categories is against the spirit of pure grounded theory. Although we make use of some concepts from grounded theory, please note that the approach we adopt in this book is not a pure grounded theory approach.

If you use predetermined categories, you run the risk of analyzing data by coding text units according to what you expect to find. Your conceptual framework must remain flexible and open to change throughout the entire analytic process. Remember, the reason you have spent so much time and energy talking to participants is to find out what *their* experience is and to endeavor to understand it from *their* perspective. In the process of working with excerpts and seeking connections among them, be aware that not all of your data will fit your predetermined categories. Rather than trying to force data into categories, you will most likely have to create some new, emergent descriptors and/or collapse and/or eliminate some of them. As you go along, you will see that some categories may contain clusters of coded data that merit further refinement into subcategories. You will see too that some coded excerpts might fit under more than one category. For now, place them wherever seems most appropriate. Instead, you might choose to place the same excerpt of text under more than one category. When making tentative placements, make notes. Later on you will proceed to sort coded text more specifically.

At this stage of the process, you, as the researcher, are exercising judgment as to what you think is significant in each interview transcript. Some passages stand out because they are striking to you in some way. Others stand out because they are contradictory and seem inconsistent with your conceptual framework. Although it may be tempting to put those aside, you should exercise caution and not submit to researcher bias. In this regard, you must be vigilant in seeking not only material that supports your own opinions and remaining open to the unexpected.

As you will come to realize, too, any given segment of data might be viewed differently by two different researchers or even coded using more than one label by one researcher. There is no single "correct" way to organize and analyze the data. Moreover, rarely will anyone get coding "right" the first time. Therefore, it is necessary that you read, reread, and reexamine all of your data to make sure that you have not missed something or coded something in a way that is inappropriate given the experience of participants. At this point, inter-rater reliability is also required. Have a colleague review your work to see whether your codes are appropriate and relevant to your research questions. Alternatively, have a colleague code some of the same transcripts that you have been working on to check for consistency. Compare and discuss similarities and differences. There are many reasons that different researchers would view and interpret the data in different ways, including researcher bias, personal interests, style, and interpretive focus. As Saldana (2016) stresses, intercoding agreement is not about trying to be objective but rather about achieving similar results between two or more people. Assigning symbolic meanings (i.e., a code) to qualitative data is a subjective act. And naturally, since each of us perceives the social world differently, we analyze it differently and therefore code it differently. As such, you would not expect consistency of qualitative coding between colleagues, and so inconsistency is not a cause for concern (Richards, 2015). Indeed, exploring reasons for inconsistency is a worthwhile exercise, as important insights can and *often do* emerge from the different ways in which people look at the same set of data. Moreover, as Guest et al. (2012) put it, "Recoding is not a sign you have done things wrong, it is simply part of doing things well" (p. 76). And remember, because coding is a cyclical act, recoding usually occurs with a more attuned perspective.

As you read, sort, and code, two other processes should be occurring simultaneously: (a) preparing data summary charts and (b) writing memos and/or journaling. The first thing you need to do is fill out data summary tables—

one for each research question. These tables are tools that help you compile what participants have said about each of the categories in the conceptual framework and record how many participants' comments fall under the same categories. These tables are a way to summarize participant data. They provide a way to highlight the evidence to support what the researcher says she or he has found. In the absence of such a summary, identification of pervasive themes and findings is up to either the discretion of the researcher or the interpretation of the reader.

To accurately report and analyze the findings of your research, you have to be rigorous about recording participant responses. Toward this end, get in the habit of filling out data summary tables as you code. Perform the two activities in tandem so that no information is lost. It is useful to array data summary tables as outlined in Table 9.1. These tables are essentially matrices in which the participants (under pseudonyms) are listed down the vertical axis, with the descriptors (the different aspects of each category) being listed along the horizontal axis. These descriptors should be listed exactly as they appear under each category of your conceptual framework. How each participant responds to each of the descriptors on the horizontal axis is then checked off, and tallies (raw frequencies as well as percentages) are noted at the bottom of each column. A data summary table should be developed in this same format for each category of your theoretical or conceptual framework. In this way, you have a consistent record of findings regarding all your participants' responses across all of your categories. The categories are directly tied to your research questions. Samples of completed data summary tables are presented as Appendices T through Y.

TABLE 9.1 Template for Data Summary Table

	Descriptor 1	Descriptor 2	Descriptor 3	Descriptor 4	Descriptor 5	Descriptor 6	Descriptor 7
Pseudonym1							
Pseudonym2							
Pseudonym3							
Pseudonym4							
Pseudonym5							
Pseudonym6							
N = X	# = x %	# = x %	# = x %	# = x %	# = x %	# = x %	# = x %

Table 9.1

Although qualitative research is not about quantifying data, and although the intent is not to reduce the data to numeric representations (as in the case of quantitative research), tallies and frequencies in qualitative research are acceptable and are essentially a supplement to the narrative. Data summary tables are working tools that create a record of who said what and how many times a particular response occurs. As such, these tables are an essential precursor to interpretation, where you will need to look closely at both individual participants and the overall group of participants—that is, cross-case analysis.

As you read through your data, different ideas come into your mind. These ideas might be the basis for interpretations or even conclusions and recommendations later on. Therefore, you need to record all of these thoughts so that you do not lose them. You might consider keeping a journal and/or some system of memo as to what is going on with the data. *Memoing*, a concept originally referred to by Strauss (1987), involves recording and writing notes about certain occurrences or sentences that seem of vital interest. Memos can trigger thinking processes and, as Strauss explains, are the written versions of an internal dialogue going on during the research. By recording what you think is going on, you can capture new descriptors as they emerge through your reading and coding, which descriptors seem to overlap, and which descriptors are not appearing, thus needing to be eliminated. In this way, your notes serve to inform your coding scheme and become the basis for a coding scheme development chart (see Appendix M). The notes that you jot down, either in the form of memos or as part of a research journal, also can form the basis for an interpretation outline tool (see Appendix CC), an analytic category development tool (see Appendix DD), and a consistency chart of findings, interpretations, and conclusions (see Appendix EE). These charts are working tools that help guide and clarify your thinking and, as such, can be included in the appendix of your dissertation. These charts also form part of your audit trail—a necessary element for establishing your study's dependability; that is, the extent to which a reader can adequately track all the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret the data based on the researcher's account.

Sort and Categorize Quotations

Once you have coded your material, you are ready to copy and paste or cut out and place the quotes in their appropriate analytic categories (i.e., categorize your units of information). In categorizing material, some people prefer pasting quotes to index cards and stacking these in piles. Others prefer cutting out quotes and placing these in manila envelopes marked with the category name. We promote the idea of flip charts—either actual or electronic—because they are visual. Whatever system you choose, make sure that, before you begin cutting (literally or figuratively), you have copied or scanned your original data and that these are safely stored.

If you decide to use the method of flip charts, you need to create a separate chart for each category. On each chart, list the category name and underneath that the category's descriptors. Bear in mind that the categories of your conceptual framework are the superordinate headings that provide the organization for the units of data. The descriptors within each category become the subordinate headings. Actual flip charts can be pasted to your walls, and the quotes can be pasted to these. "Electronic flip charts" are essentially a computerized version, whereby the charts are Word documents on your computer, and quotes from your transcripts are copied and pasted electronically. This method is efficient and might be less cumbersome than using actual charts. Whichever mode you choose to use—be it actual or electronic—is a matter of personal preference. In either case, what is useful about the chart approach is that it enables you to visualize your data, live with it, and think about it.

As you paste quotations in the appropriate categories, look for any units of information that do not fit any of your existing descriptors. Keep these in a pile marked "Miscellaneous." Once you have finished going through all of your transcripts, revisit these and see where they should fit, or alternatively, create a new place for them under emergent descriptors. When you identify passages that are important but you are unsure of which category in which they should fall, write a memo about those passages. In writing about them, their properties might become clearer, leading you to discover what it is you find important in them both individually and relatively. *This step becomes important for interpretation*.

Once all the units of information have been placed under categories, review the descriptors for any overlap. Sometimes descriptors have similar characteristics or properties; that is, they really mean one and the same thing. Splitting two descriptors is sometimes arbitrary, and they can be better collapsed into one. At other times, a descriptor may be too broad or too nuanced and would make more sense if it were subdivided into more than one.

Reread your miscellaneous units of information and reconsider them in the light of the newly revised categories. First, if any can be appropriately placed under any of the new descriptors, do so. Second, it is possible that some units of information are still simply not relevant, and in these cases, discard them. Third, some units provide relevant information that contributes to understanding of the research problem but still do not fit with any of the existing categories. These information units do not warrant being discarded. Rather, they might become categories of their own. In other words, to accommodate your findings, it is imperative that your coding scheme and conceptual framework remain flexible throughout.

On Exceptions

Exceptions *will* occur! As you look over your transcripts, field notes, or text, you will be focusing not only on what these tell you about the phenomenon but also how these compare with what you already know. Exceptions exist when you find yourself asking: Where does that go? In the early stage of analysis, finding exceptions that make you change your ideas or labeling practices is routine. Each new line or page of text can make you question your ideas, and something new often emerges, which means you have to generate a new label or code, thereby expanding your thinking. You often find something that could potentially fit into multiple codes. Over time, as you immerse yourself in your data, these exceptions become less apparent. At this point, when you do happen to notice something that stands out, and that does not fit with what has gone before, it can become vital for your argument, as it can either make you rethink your ideas or illuminate and strengthen your thinking. At these later stages, where the issue does not fit with your current understanding of the phenomenon, exceptions take three forms and are referred to as *negative* or *deviant cases*. All of these lead to having to check or refine your ideas and assumptions:

- Those that, despite being different, actually support your findings and illustrate the "rule," thereby becoming an "exception to the rule."
- Those that, through their difference, mean that you will need to reflect on, revaluate, and possibly refine your ideas.
- Those that are different for very specific, idiosyncratic, or contingent reasons that do not support your findings, which may lead to reevaluating or refining your ideas.

As such, *use your exceptions* as part of the story you are telling. Do not throw these away!

Text, Discourse, and Visual Analysis

Analyzing Text and Discourse

A significant amount of qualitative fieldwork takes place in literate societies—in organizational and educational settings in which documents are written, read, stored, and circulated. In addition to keeping records, organizations also produce documents that are concerned with their self-presentation, including written, electronic and digital resources, and visual materials. Recognizing that organizations in contemporary society are major producers of documentary materials, it is important that qualitative researchers pay close (and critical) attention to the various forms and functions (both implicit and explicit) of such documents.

Documentary reality does not just consist of descriptions of the social world that can be used directly as evidence about it. Nor can one assume that documentary accounts are accurate portrayals but rather that they create different realities and actively construct the very organizations they purport to describe. As such, documents cannot and *should not* be seen as neutral or transparent reflections of organizational or occupational life. Analysis therefore needs to focus on how organizational realities are (re)produced through textual conventions (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011; Prior, 2017). It is important to recognize that while the writers of documents bring to bear their knowledge—often tacit—into developing documents, readers too bring to bear their own conventional understanding in making sense of and interpreting such documents. Moreover, readers do not all share the same culture or cultural competence and therefore do not all bring to bear the same cultural knowledge. Atkinson and Coffey (2011) focus on significant issues of authorship and readership (actual or implied) and introduce the concept of *intertextuality*—that is, the relationships among texts where documents reflect and refer, often implicitly, to other documents, often with hierarchical implications. Indeed, as these authors state, "A dense network of cross referencing, and shared textual formats, can create a powerful version of social reality" (2011, p. 90). These authors introduce a useful and critical analytic perspective that examines how documents can be treated as systems of signs and modes of representation, including the form and function of textual materials, the distinctive uses of language and rhetorical features that may be displayed (i.e., how the text works to persuade readers), implied claims of authorship, relationships between texts, and the conventions of qualitative research.

Based on the seminal work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), Prior (2017) outlines four distinct approaches to the study of documentation: focusing on the document as resource, focusing on the document as topic, studying documents in use, and studying documents in action. In all four approaches, analysis occurs not only by content but by use and function as well. The focus is on how documents are produced, consumed, or used, and how they circulate within schemes of social action. Historically, in the social sciences there has been an emphasis on conceptualizing documents as inert objects that need to be studied only for their content. Analysis of documents in qualitative research therefore extends beyond a systematic content analysis by examining the data for recurrent instances to extend a deeper understanding of "networks of influence" and the "interconnection of actants" (Prior, 2017). This is accomplished by situating and connecting the document to a broader narrative, including the political, cultural, and social infrastructure that contain and also exist outside of the text. Indeed, texts exist on different levels (organizational, institutional, community, society), or in different dimensions, and can be more or less abstract. Analysis provides insight into something larger or more general, and such generalization can take place only if specific micro-level texts are related to accumulated or macro-level and recurrent themes, which often take the form of taken-for-granted assumptions about how the world looks and works.

Boreus and Bergstrom (2017) offer a thorough overview of the key analytical approaches and tools for analyzing text and discourse (talk, dialogue, or conversation). Similar to Atkinson and Coffey (2011) and Prior (2017), the view of these authors is that texts, in one way or another, relate to groups of people and mirror conscious and unconscious ideas. As such, texts reproduce, strengthen, or challenge power relationships in groups, organizations, communities, and societies. As such, conceptualizing and locating power becomes the key focus of analysis. Boreus and Bergstrom (2017) address issues including positionality, subject positions, antagonism, chains of equivalence, cultural hegemony, gender power, methods of exclusion and inclusion, ideology, values, and analysis of change. As these authors explain,

> Common to concepts of discourse used in the social sciences is that they refer to some kind of social practice as regards language use or the use of other sign systems in particular social contexts . . . Discourses are wholly or partly made up of language use as part of wider social practices . . . Texts are concrete manifestations of discourses. (pp. 6–7)

To analyze something, therefore, is to scrutinize its components (specifically the power *in* discourse and the power *behind* discourse). Thinking about how sources have come into being leads to questions related to assessing the use of documentary sources as research data. There are a number of factors to take into consideration:

1. What kinds of selection choices has the researcher made in her or his use of the sources, and on what basis?

   Sometimes, the amount of source material potentially relevant to a particular issue is great, and some selectivity is necessary. Selectivity also depends on the aims and parameters of the research. But with documents, as with any other source, *how* the selection is made is crucial. It cannot be assumed that to consult just the available documentary sources provides fair coverage. Questions should be asked about whether and to what extent the researcher adopted any principles or criteria to ensure fair and representative coverage of the issues to be investigated. A question could also be asked of the researcher's conscious or unconscious selection among the sources available.
2. To what extent has the researcher taken account of any "altering" or selection of the information presented in the sources?

   Care must be taken to assess the less conscious shaping of what is represented in written documents and texts. Whatever form these sources take, there is bound to be some social filtering, possibly because they are produced by interested parties to suit their own views and preconceptions, dictated by particular administrative needs and arrangements, and influenced by currently dominant models, theories, or interpretations among scholars. It is worth remembering that a source purporting to represent generally held views or an "objective assessment" of a situation often expresses only the views of a minority or of the dominant interest group. Bias or selectivity need not be deliberate or ill motivated to be pervasive in sources. When a researcher is using documentary sources to gather information, she or he should be aware of these possible distorting effects and take these into account. In addition, with statistical sources, questions should be asked about the assumptions according to which the statistics were collected and presented, how the data were derived, and how (and why) these records are defined and used.
3. What is the relevance of the context of the source?

   The particular points described or emphasized in the source will need to be interpreted in light of the social, political, and historical context in which the source emerged—that is, all the background factors that influence how both the author and the intended audience would understand the words in the context in which they were originally said or written. Taken out of context, this original meaning may be misunderstood or misconstrued. Similarly, the context in which particular administrative records were compiled or the constraints under which the compilers acted are all part of the background that a critical researcher will need to consider.
4. Finally, in assessing the relevance and value of the sources, has the researcher reached a reasonable interpretation of the meaning of the sources?

   Irrespective of all the care we take in considering the background and analyzing the contents, sources are not transparent purveyors of clear-cut and objective "truth." Interpretation is always inherent, not only by those constructing the documents but also by those intended and unintended audiences who consult these documents. A document may be perceived in one way by one reader and in another way by others. Interpretations will inevitably vary between different interested parties, historical periods, and cultures. Moreover, there is always the possibility that a document may be an excellent source if interpreted as evidence for one purpose but could be misleading to interpret as evidence for a different purpose.

There are various analytic and interpretational methods with regard to text and discourse including content analysis, argument analysis, discursive psychology, qualitative analysis of ideas and ideological content (ideology critique), narrative analysis, metaphor analysis, critical linguistics, semiotics, discourse analysis, and multimodal discourse analysis. It is beyond the scope of this book to provide an in-depth overview of each of these specific analytic approaches. The reader is referred to Boreus and Bergstrom (2017) and Bischoping and Gazso (2016) for further details. It is important to realize that different tools perform somewhat different functions, and so it is therefore important to know how to use different tools and to choose the appropriate ones for the task at hand. There is no "one best method." What works best depends on the skills of the individual researcher and the research questions guiding a given study. Tools should of necessity be aligned with research problem, research purpose, and, of course, research methodology (qualitative tradition or genre).

Analyzing Visual Data

Visual imagery ranges from archival photography and documentary film to fine art, advertising, video, television, comics, cartoons, websites, maps, diagrams, and social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. An important aspect of analyzing visual material as "visual culture" is the attention paid to audiences and viewing publics. This raises issues regarding the significance of ethical practice, including the practical aspects of using critical visual methods, cultural representation, dissemination, circulation, and accessibility of research through visual techniques.

Rose (2016) argues for the power relations inherent in and articulated through visual images, and points out four sites at which "meaning is made" and whereby an image becomes culturally meaningful: the site of production, the site of the image itself, the site of its circulation, and the site of its *audiencing.* Rose (2016) outlines numerous critical questions that a researcher should be asking in terms of analyzing an image, including:

Questions about the production of an image:

- Where, when, and why was the image made?
- Who made it?
- What was the social identity of the maker?
- What were the relations between the maker, the owner, and the subject?
- Does the form of the image reconstitute those identities and relations?

Questions about the image itself:

- What is being shown?
- Where is the viewer's eye drawn to, and why?
- What do the different components of the image signify?
- Whose knowledge is being deployed?
- Whose knowledge is being excluded from this representation?
- Is this a contradictory image?

Questions about the circulation of an image:

- In what forms does this image circulate?
- In what forms is it materialized in different places?
- How is its circulation organized and controlled?
- Who controls its circulation?

Questions about *audiencing:*

- Who was the original audience(s) for this image?
- Where and how would the image have been displayed originally?
- How is it redisplayed?
- Who are the more recent audiences for this text?

- Where is the spectator positioned in relation to the components of the image?
- What relation does this produce between the image and its viewers?
- Have the technologies used to display it affected the audience's interpretation of this image?
- Is more than one interpretation of the image possible?
- How do different audiences interpret this image?
- How do these axes of social identity structure different interpretations?

Critical visual methodology concentrates on closely examining the effects of visual images, and is concerned with making an argument for both representation and nonrepresentation within visual data. All social science inquiry ultimately aims to advance our knowledge of the cultures, structures, and processes that constitute, and are constituted by, human social behavior. Critical visual methodology is in essence concerned with the social effects of the visual materials it is studying. As Emmison (2017) points out, the focus in analyzing visual images is not so much on the discovery of cultural meanings by the academic analysist but rather the ways in which ordinary actors use or make sense of visual information and incorporate this into their everyday routines and lives. The idea is that the visual is a realm of data, and what is significant is how the information contained in visual imagery is *brought to bear upon social and cultural interpretation and application.* What is important is that the researcher acknowledges the differentiated effect of both an image's way of "seeing" and one's own (Rose, 2016). Theoretical debates about how to interpret images influence choice of methods used. Researchers interested in pursuing a critical visual methodological approach would select a specific method such as content analysis, cultural analytics, semiology (sometimes referred to as social semiotics—that is, research with advertising and signs), psychoanalysis, discourse analysis, audience studies, and digital methods. For further details pertaining to these methods, their associated coding and interpretive strategies, as well as research ethics related to visual methods (anonymity, confidentiality, copyright issues, consent, and morals), readers are referred to Rose (2016). This text provides a comprehensive outline regarding research with visual materials and the use of images to disseminate research findings and includes clear and in-depth explanations, numerous useful exercises, and references for additional reading.

Using Computer Software for Data Analysis

As you can see, the approach used in this book for data analysis is a manual one. We have explained the process of data analysis as it is done traditionally to intentionally highlight the thinking and the mechanics involved. While computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) has become more prevalent over the last few years, you need to be aware that although various different types of software programs for qualitative research are available, the principles of the analytic process are the same whether one is doing it manually or with the assistance of software. Appendix Z presents a brief overview of the most frequently used and currently available qualitative data analysis software resources.

Software can indeed be of great assistance in classifying, sorting, filing, storing, and reconfiguring data to enable analytic reflection. The programs currently available are useful in mechanically organizing data and performing a number of analytic operations. With the use of these programs, for instance, you can create shorthand versions of themes or categories. After you sort your data, how many times a theme has been placed in a given category can be done automatically, and some programs can make connections among the categories to develop higher-order conceptual structures. Another useful feature is concept mapping, which enables researchers to visualize relationships among codes and themes using a visual model. With the numerous creative visual representation tools, data visualizations are possible through charts and graphs to better understand the data and to communicate outcomes to readers. Moreover, software can facilitate collaboration between researchers, allowing easy storage and time-saving access to large amounts of data. In addition, as mentioned previously, qualitative analysis software provides various options for tagging text for later review. Included in software programs are functions whereby footnotes, comments, and highlights from different readings of a particular document can be merged into a master document, as well as techniques for tagging generic "unique" codes to apply to segments of text that might be of importance with regard to fitting with the bigger analytic picture.

Software analytical packages are essentially tools that can make the numerous tasks of the analytic process efficient in many ways, and the software is certainly useful in assembling and locating information. However, be aware that there are various limitations involved with this method that you should be aware of. Software cannot interpret the emotional tone that is often critical to understanding the findings and therefore neglects to take into account the contextual basis of information. In our experience, we have found that in searching out and producing every coded item each time these appear, the software tends to produce data—mostly in the form of discrete words and phrases—in the absence of their surrounding context. In so doing, although precise and concise, some of the richness of the data can become lost in the process. Moreover, with so many instances of discrete items, this method can produce a data glut, which can be overwhelming to the researcher. A further caveat regarding the use of computer-aided analysis is that, although books for learning the programs are widely available, for many students qualitative software programs may require time and skill to learn and employ effectively.

As many authors point out, it is impractical to prescribe which software program is "best." In addition, what worked for somebody else might not work for you or your particular study. As the researcher, you are the best judge of your needs and your personal preferences, so it would be wise to explore several of the available programs to make an informed decision. Be aware of the options, and be careful to select your tools wisely so that they help rather than hinder your analysis efforts. The method you select to manage and analyze your data is ultimately a matter of personal preference and depends on what you are most comfortable with and/or institutional requirements. Therefore, we do not advocate one way over another. If you are choosing software, it is important that you differentiate between programs that manage data and programs that actually perform data analysis. The former allows the researcher to store, index, sort, and retrieve data, whereas the latter actually does content analysis. Information regarding the features, functions, and capabilities of the software is included in each of the program websites. Two resources might also be useful in this regard: Friese (2014) provides a step-by-step guide to using Atlas.ti, featuring methodological and technical support, practical exercises, and a companion website with online tutorials. Similarly, Bazeley and Jackson (2014) offer a useful introduction to planning and conducting qualitative data analysis with NVivo. This text is a mix of practical instruction, methodology, and real-world examples, illustrating how NVivo can accommodate analysis across a wide range of research questions, data types, perspectives, and methodologies.

Presenting Research Findings

Overview

It is always important to remember that your study's findings *must* address the research problem and *must* of necessity provide a response to each of the research questions. Don't lose sight of this, as that is the essential purpose of the study to begin with! You, the researcher, are the storyteller. Your goal is to tell a story that should be vivid and interesting while also accurate and credible. In your report, the events, the people, and their words and actions are made explicit so that readers can experience the situation as real in a similar way to the researcher and experience the world of the participants. It must be remembered that the reader cannot always see the hard work that has gone into the development of the story or the complexity of strategies and procedures that produced it.

Qualitative analysis is a creative and ongoing process that requires thoughtful judgments about what is significant and meaningful in the data. Your study is only as good as the data you have to analyze and the care that you take in analyzing the data. What you have done up until now is transform your raw data into some format that will facilitate your analysis. Through coding, you have reduced your data and created groupings and subgroupings of information. Reducing is the first step toward presenting your data. Having reduced your data, you now have to shape it into a form in which it can be shared or displayed (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). What you share and display are essentially the multiple perspectives supported by the different quotations that your research yields in direct response to the study's research questions. The goal is to provide rich descriptions, often referred to as "thick description" (Denzin, 2001; Geertz, 1973)—an essential aspect of qualitative research. Exemplary studies indeed make readers feel as if they are *living* the experiences described. This is the real power of qualitative research!

Verbatim quotations play an important role in grounding complex analyses in the participants' own accounts. There are a number of issues, however, in relation to how quotations are used, how participants are represented, and whether they are consulted both regarding how they are represented as well as their views about analytic interpretations. O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) argue that writing up findings is not a neutral process. As such, decisions are tied to the subjectivity and positionality of the researcher. As Glesne (2006) states, "Writing is a political act" (p. 191). Thinking critically about writing your findings, and the ways in which you will be representing the site or setting and the research participants, involves asking key questions such as: "For whom do I speak?" "With what voice?" and "Toward what end?" It is indeed an ethical responsibility to examine our roles as researchers and to challenge our biases, assumptions, and epistemologies. The final qualitative report, no matter what shape it takes, should reflect these examinations.

As a general rule, the findings that you present in this chapter of your dissertation should be represented *without speculation*—that is, free from researcher bias to the extent possible. The presentation of findings also is extremely important. Your presentation will hopefully lead your readers to understand your findings as clearly as you do. Therefore, the way you set up and structure this chapter must be neat and precise. Moreover, if your findings chapter is well organized, the analysis chapter that follows, where you move forward and interpret your findings, will be much more easily accomplished.

In qualitative research, interviewing is usually the major source of the data needed for understanding the phenomenon under study. The findings of qualitative research are typically reported in a narrative manner. Reports of qualitative studies usually include extensive samples of quotations from participants. These quotations provide the detail and substantiate the story that you are telling. By using the participants' own words, the researcher aims to build the reader's confidence that the reality of the participants and the situation studied is accurately represented. In a qualitative study, quantitative findings, if there are any, are secondary and are used to supplement and/or augment the qualitative findings. The quantitative material should therefore be seamlessly woven into the discussion, either in narrative form (where you would state explicitly how the quantitative results either support or refute the qualitative findings) or in graphic form (tables and charts can be used to augment the discussion by way of clear visual depictions).

Be aware that findings are often written up in different ways depending on the research tradition or genre adopted. If you have used a pure approach, we suggest that you consult with your advisor and the relevant literature regarding appropriate and distinctive forms of presentation. The narrative can be presented by way of several different formats, and various authors have offered suggestions as to how qualitative research findings might be presented (Guest et al., 2012; Henderson & Segal, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2012). One way to present your findings is to develop and craft participant profiles or vignettes of individual participants and to group these into categories. Miles and Huberman (1994) and Miles et al. (2014) describe a vignette as "a concrete focused story" (p. 83). Van Maanen (1988, 1995) recommends presenting ethnographic research through different styles of "tales" as a way of presenting truthful cultural portraits. Yet another approach to presentation—one that is often used in case study research—is to mark individual passages or excerpts from the transcripts and group these in thematically connected categories. The latter is the more conventional and commonly used way of presenting qualitative findings. Because it is a flexible format that fits a wide range of topics, we describe this approach in some detail as follows:

Presentation of Findings as Quotation Categories

Begin with an introductory paragraph or two in which you restate the purpose of your study (if required) and tell the reader how the chapter will be organized. Provide the reader with an outline that illustrates the way in which you will go about discussing your findings. This outline enables the reader to create a mental map of your presentation and then find that information as he or she peruses your text. If you have used computer software to aid your data analysis, you need to identify the program that you used and the steps you undertook in its use. You will tell the reader what your intention was in choosing the software and what it accomplished.

If you have a bounded case study—that is, if your research takes place at a particular site or location, or if it is tied to a particular institution, organization, or program—you need to offer the reader a detailed description of the physical setting. In some cases, where appropriate, an entire chapter is devoted to describing the setting. In others, a section of several pages in the findings chapter is set aside for this; usually, this precedes a presentation of the themed participant responses classified by way of coded categories. In some instances, the identity of the research setting is required to remain anonymous. In the interest of confidentiality, you need to account for anonymity by assigning the research setting a pseudonym.

Description of the setting is drawn primarily from the review of available documents. Documents can be of a public or private nature and can include descriptive and/or evaluative information pertaining to the research context. A review of the available documents provides descriptions and factual evidence regarding the context and its culture, and it also uncovers environmental factors and issues that may impact participants' perceptions about this context. Following a review of each document, you should summarize the relevant findings and record these systematically. A template of a document summary form is included as Appendix Q. An examination of all the summaries of all your documents will provide the information you need to write this section of your findings chapter.

Description of the setting should incorporate all the important aspects of the context and environment in which the study takes place, including such things as descriptions of the organizational structure, background and history, mission, vision, policies and procedures, culture and environment, and the population from which the research sample was drawn. In describing the setting, be sure to clarify what is unique about it, as well as what characteristics of the setting are compelling and/or unusual. Thus, discussion of the setting serves to situate your study within a context. In addition, in your analysis, data revealed from the document review can be used to confirm or disconfirm data collected by other methods.

The most common means of organizing a findings chapter, and the approach that we use in this book, is through a discussion of the research questions one by one and the evidence you have from the data about how they might be answered. As you prepare to present your findings, remember that you should have at least one finding per research question. Because you are seeking to shed light on your problem, no research question should be left unanswered. All research questions must be answered. Formulating strong comprehensive finding statements requires that you study your data summary tables. Look at what each participant says in terms of each of the aspects of each finding, and ask yourself: What do I see here? What do I now understand is the answer to each research question?

An overwhelming question facing any researcher embarking on the write-up of the research report is “Where do I begin to tell my story?” Data are complex, particularly thematic data that involve crosscutting and hierarchical themes. Adding multiple sites and/or populations increases this complexity exponentially. Complexity can be represented in many ways, each potentially as valid and informative as the next. The first step in presenting findings, therefore, is what Guest et al. (2012) refer to as “finding your anchor.” In other words, what will you lead your story with? What is the primary finding or set of findings you wish to highlight in your findings section? What are your most significant or robust data as they relate to your research problem and purpose? Once you have established this “anchor” or meta-theme, the rest of your findings should follow logically.

To plan and lay out the discussion that should follow each of your findings statements, we suggest doing an outline, or what we call a “findings road map.” A sample findings road map is presented as Appendix BB. This tool is constructed from your theoretical or conceptual framework in conjunction with your data summary tables. The overall intent is not to quantify qualitative data; tallies and frequencies are essentially a supplement to the narrative. What *is* important to report is the concentration of individual responses and the concentration of responses across individuals.

The headings and subheadings on the findings road map provide the organizational structure for the discussion. In constructing your road map, keep in mind that nobody wants to read pages and pages of findings. The tension is this: When reporting findings, the idea is to be concise. Yet the idea is also not to split hairs too finely. Therefore, look for any headings that overlap and can be collapsed.

In qualitative research, you as the researcher are telling the story of what you learned from participants. As such, participants’ quotes are used to illustrate the points that you are making. In other words, you are telling the story of your research as you see it; as you make your points, you are giving “clues” to the reader about what people said. It is important to mention this because those clues or lead-in sentences are the very points that you are making. You cannot leave it to the reader to decide what the point is; you have to tell the reader the gist of what the research participant is saying that supports the points in your story. If you took the quotes out of your findings chapter, however, one would still have to be able to see the story. Remember that, although the quotes are your support and your evidence, if you had to remove all your quotes, your clues should be able to stand alone and “tell the story.” Therefore, make sure that all of your lead-in sentences are, in each case, specific. Your careful choice of words will reflect your clear understanding of your findings. If you mislead the reader or cause readers to “do the work” themselves, you jeopardize your study, introducing the possibility of it being misinterpreted or worse still, rejected.

With short quotes (those that are no longer than a sentence or two), lead in with the participant’s name (pseudonym) and be sure that the quoted material is placed within quotation marks. With longer quotes (those that are 40 words or more), use block indentation rather than quotation marks, and place the participant’s name at the end of the quote. (Always be sure to refer to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, sixth edition, with regard to correct format and style.) Then if you have two strong quotes, indent each with respective names at the end of the quotes. Two strong quotes can and should be presented one after the other with no sentence in between. Your lead-in sentence makes your point, and it represents what some of the participants said. In effect, therefore, the two (or three) quotes that you use are representative of what has been said by some others as well. In reporting the findings, what you should be doing is not reporting what every individual said, but rather reporting how various individuals, even though they are expressing it in a slightly different way, are making the same point.

Following are some further useful pointers in planning your discussion:

- Under each findings statement, report your findings from the highest to the lowest frequency. That is, talk first about those aspects of the findings that are most prominent, and continue to report on findings in descending order.
- Make sure that percentages and words that you use match (100% would translate to "all," 95% would be an "overwhelming majority," 75% would be "a majority," 30% would be "some," 10% would be "a few," etc.).
- Be selective in your choice of quotes, and do not overuse quotes, as that makes the manuscript read like one long transcript. Remember, the function of quotes is not to illustrate the perceptions or experiences of just one single individual or of every individual. Rather, they should be representative of a group of people who share the same sentiment. That is, quotes are intended essentially to demonstrate and give examples of patterns that have emerged in the data. Aim for richness and precision, and use only the strongest quotes that clearly show evidence of the points you are trying to make.
- Make sure that all the quotes you use are focused on the point you are trying to make. Quotes should clearly illustrate the concept, idea, or issue being discussed. Be concise. Get to "the meat of the quote"—the essence that refers to and supports the point you are making—by eliminating redundancy, wordiness, and repetition. Use ellipses (. . .) to connect supportive phrases that you want to use. Tell the reader only that which she or he needs to know—only that which is directly related to the points you are making. Although there is usually a lot of interesting information, and although much of it might be tempting to include, be sure to include only that which is relevant in terms of providing answers to your research questions.
- Begin looking for and flagging "good" (relevant and rich) quotes as soon as you start reviewing your data. Be sure to tag these quotes so that you can easily find them when it comes to writing up your findings chapter. Focusing so intently on what participants are saying has an added advantage, as this allows you to become fully immersed in the data, affording you rich insights and awareness.
- Keep in mind that quotations never stand on their own but are linked to the context in which they occur and the claim that the researcher wishes to make. This way, the quotations provide evidence for their assertions. As such, great care should be taken not to take quotes out of context, as this can mislead or misinform the reader about their authenticity and meaning.
- Exercise skill in dissecting quotes in the right places. Be careful not to change or distort the quote in any way, but rather to pick out those phrases that highlight or stress the main points you are making.
- Always use participants' words *verbatim*, including errors of speech and repetition. Irrelevant sentences and comments can be removed, and this is indicated by ellipses within the quotation.
- Indicate laughter, coughing, pauses, facial expressions, or any other gestures or emotions by way of including these instances within parentheses when these occur within the quote. Use italics where a word or phrase is emphasized.
- If you make the determination that adding an explanatory word and/or phrase will assist the reader in better understanding the quote, use square brackets. The same applies for localized colloquial expressions with which readers may be unfamiliar.
- Provide a label for each quote that indicates which type of participant is speaking. The label is provided in parentheses following the quote and can indicate participant identity by way of age, sex, occupation, and/or participant pseudonym. Be sure never to use actual names or include any identifying information about the research site or participants in your report.
- Do not repeat the same quotes.
- Try not to over- or underquote any one individual. That is, make sure there is fair representation among participants. It should not appear that your findings are based on information from only a few sources, but rather that the findings represent the full range of participants.

When you reach the end of the presentation of your findings, which is usually extremely detailed, you owe it to the readers to tie the whole chapter together, reminding them of what they have learned in the preceding pages. Write a concluding paragraph, in which you briefly explain what you have found. Explain in summary form what the chapter has identified, and prepare the reader for the chapters to follow by offering some foreshadowing as to the intent and content of the final two chapters of your dissertation.

Thematic Presentation of Findings

While the standard form of presenting quotes in qualitative research is to weave them into your narrative, this is not the only form. Quotes can also be presented according to themes as part of tables, figures, or charts. A good way to begin is to make sure that the reader has a clear idea of how, for each of your study's research questions, you developed themes from your codes. Toward this end, you might consider presenting a series of charts that illustrate these connections between your research questions and your study's themes, and how the themes were created from the codes. Remember, the clearer and more transparent your explanations regarding all aspects and steps of the research process will contribute significantly to the rigor and trustworthiness of your study. Table 9.2 is an illustration, and to be comprehensive in your presentation, you would systematically include a similar chart for each of your study's research questions and associated themes and codes.

The overall goal is to convey the story line of your research in an engaging, meaningful, and credible manner. The challenge throughout data collection and analysis is to reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns or categories, and construct a meaningful and workable framework for communicating the data. One way of presenting categories of findings on a macro level is to crystallize the narrative by theme or phenomenon, and present this in chart form. As can be seen in Table 9.3, provide the reader with (a) an overview description of each emergent theme (phenomenon or issue) with keywords derived from a factor or other type of analysis; (b) an outline of findings that contribute to the theme; (c) a comparative summary of the range of key points made by individual participants or groups of participants supported by brief, direct quotations; and (d) an action step—that is, key associated questions for further discussion and consideration. A separate chart should be compiled for each theme that emanates from your findings. Sample thematic charts are presented as Appendix AA.

TABLE 9.2 Coding and Theme Development

RESEARCH QUESTION* (State the research question)		
Theme 1: (State the theme)	Theme 2: (State the theme)	Theme 3: (State the theme)
Codes:	Codes:	Codes:
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
List codes as needed	List codes as needed	List codes as needed

Table 9.2 *Present a similar table for each research question.

Present a similar table for each research question.

TABLE 9.3 Template for Thematic Chart

THEME A
Name the theme or phenomenon. List keywords that describe the theme. These words can be gleaned from supporting quotations and from the literature.
OVERVIEW
Explain and describe the theme or phenomenon.
FINDINGS/OUTCOMES
List studies' findings that contribute to and are evidence of your stated theme.
PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES
To ensure that you are providing a representative sampling of research participants' perspectives, you will need to support your theme by including a comprehensive range of views that explain and illustrate the theme. To do this, select a broad variety of relevant and illustrative verbatim quotations.
MOVING FROM FINDINGS TO ACTION
List key questions that will stimulate further discussion and critical reflection. These questions serve as a springboard into analysis and interpretation for the next chapter. Questions should be open ended so as to elicit deep responses. In addition to "What?" and "How?" ask: "Why?" "Why not?" "What if?" "What if not?" "What else?" "How else?" "In what way(s)?"

Source: This table first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2011). *Understanding qualitative inquiry: Content and process* (Part III). Unpublished manuscript.

Table 9.3

Source: This table first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2011). *Understanding qualitative inquiry: Content and process* (Part III). Unpublished manuscript.

The reflexive questions that follow can serve as prompts for journaling throughout the dissertation process, and in this case, for Chapter 4 of your dissertation, in which, based on analysis of raw data, you are now writing up and presenting your study's findings.

The issue of the "Other" in research representation has a long history and legacy, and questions around voice, language, and participant portrayal are a source of ongoing discussion. There are many aspects to consider when formally writing up qualitative research in order to authentically represent research participants, their contexts, their diversity, and aspects of their experiences, with the goal of producing an authentic, respectful, and ethical representation of individuals, groups, and communities.

Reflexive Questions for Chapter 4: Analyzing Data and Reporting Findings

1. What am I hoping to convey with my findings? What shapes my research agenda?
2. Who is the audience I am writing for? Why?
3. How does my intended audience shape my sense regarding the structure and write-up of the findings?
4. Are there other potential audiences that could benefit from my learning and knowledge? What are these other audiences? How and in what ways might they benefit from this knowledge?
5. How might I structure my writing to fit the needs of other audiences?
6. How do I, as the researcher and author, represent myself in the narrative? Why?
7. What forms of authority do I use to make my case? What mediates these choices?
8. Has my representation of the site/setting, research participants, and participants' experiences accurately, ethically, and with integrity portrayed the lived experiences of those involved in this research?
9. Whose voice(s) will be privileged in this study, and whose voice(s) may be silenced? Why?
10. Who is heard in my writing, and why? Who is not heard, and why?
11. How do I bring in participants' voices? What informs these choices?
12. What choices do I make about how I portray the participants and their experiences? Why?
13. How will these choices influence the way(s) I include (or exclude) data?
14. Have I provided sufficient information for readers to understand the contextual factors at play, and therefore better understand the findings of my study "in context"?
15. How will I structure the report so that data are meaningfully contextualized and do not appear "out of context"?
16. In writing up my study's findings, have I fully respected participants (without judgment) and attempted to the best of my ability to do justice to their lived experiences?
17. Is there a possibility that readers could identify participants? What are the risks to confidentiality? How and in what ways can I address these concerns to ensure that all ethical principles are upheld?
18. If my research participants were reading my study, how would they feel? Would my findings and the way I have represented the site/setting and the participants themselves resonate with them?
19. Will my writing be accessible to the participants? Why or why not?
20. Do participants have a say in how they are represented? Should they? Why or why not?
21. In what ways could I collaborate with research participants by including them in some of the choices pertaining to voice and/or language? What might be possible challenges or benefits to this?
22. Have I carefully attended to participants' language, culture, contexts, and perspectives? Have I taken into account that these may be different from my own?
23. Am I clear about the role of sociopolitical realities (historical and current), and how these realities impact the study's findings and the way that I report these?
24. How, if at all, do I deal with and represent power asymmetries, including the researcher–participant relationship, and possible implications?
25. Have I engaged in dialogue and collaboration with colleagues or "thought partners" regarding the way I have presented the study's findings, including researcher identity, power differentials, and positionality? If not, why? If so, how have I responded to questions or concerns? Am I receptive to critical feedback?

Chapter Summary Discussion

Qualitative data analysis is an attempt to summarize the data collected from multiple data sources in a dependable and accurate manner. When analyzing qualitative data, you need to challenge yourself to explore every possible angle to find patterns and relationships among the data. The amount of data that need to be transcribed, organized, and reduced can indeed be overwhelming. This chapter explains how to go about organizing and preparing the data for analysis and includes discussion around data reduction and data display. Organizing, preparing, and presenting the findings of your research is, as described in this chapter, a somewhat objective exercise; the researcher is, in this instance, a reporter of information.

Although the mechanics of data analysis vary greatly and are undertaken differently depending on genre and theoretical framework, some general guidelines can be useful. Although the guidelines we provide describe the analytic process as if it were a series of separate sequential steps, it must be remembered that qualitative data analysis is an interactive and recursive process rather than a linear one. The steps are repeated several times until the researcher feels that there has been sufficient immersion in the data, that sufficient information has been extracted from the data, and that the research questions have been adequately addressed. It is important to recognize that in qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are intimately interconnected processes. Having said that, our view is that for purposes of a dissertation, although it might seem a little contrived, it is most effective to present the findings (an objective exercise) and the analysis of those findings (a subjective exercise) as two separate chapters. (Note that some universities may require that these chapters are combined, thereby producing a five-chapter dissertation.)

Qualitative research is typically reported in a narrative manner. Although the overall intent is not to quantify qualitative data, tallies and frequencies in qualitative research are essentially a supplement to the narrative. Essentially, you are forming a record of frequently occurring phenomena or patterns of behavior. Once you have established patterns, these need to be explained. You have to consult the literature and consider your pattern findings in light of previous research and existing theory. Do your findings confirm similar research? Do they contradict previous studies? How can you explain these differences or similarities? As you begin to consider answers to these sorts of questions and provide convincing explanations, you are interpreting and synthesizing. This is the stuff of Chapter 10.

TABLE	Quality Assessment Chapter Checklist
Introduction	✓ Do you have a clear introduction that includes your purpose statement (if required)? ✓ Does your introduction inform the reader as to how the chapter is organized? ✓ Are your data analysis steps clearly identified? ✓ Is it evident how you have managed and organized your data for analysis? ✓ Is your coding process adequately described?
Presentation of Findings	✓ Are your findings statements clearly and precisely stated? ✓ Do the study's findings clearly and directly address the research problem? ✓ Are the findings presented in relation to and as a response to the research questions? ✓ Are the findings presented in a logical sequence? ✓ Are the findings clearly organized and easy to follow? ✓ Are the findings directly responsive to the problem raised by the study? That is, do the findings provide an answer to the research questions? ✓ Do the data presented in support of the findings (interview and/or focus group quotations, incidents from field notes, material from documents, etc.) provide adequate and convincing evidence for the findings? ✓ Is this chapter free from interpretation? That is, are your findings reported accurately and objectively? ✓ Are there appropriate lead-in sentences and clues? ✓ Have you selected the strongest and most appropriate quotations to support your point(s)? ✓ Have you trimmed your quotations, eliminating all unnecessary wording? ✓ If you have made use of a road map, is this clear and precise? ✓ Do the headings of your road map correspond with the headings in your narrative?
Summary	✓ Do you include a culminating summary of key findings? ✓ Does your summary paragraph offer some logical link to the next chapter?
Addressing Alignment	✓ Are your research analysis methods aligned with your research methodology (qualitative tradition or genre)? ✓ Are your research analysis methods aligned with your research design? ✓ Is your research design aligned with your research methodology?
And . . .	✓ Did you fill in frequency charts as you were coding so that no information was missed? ✓ If tables and figures are used, are these well organized, self-explanatory, and easy to understand? ✓ Are the data presented in each table described in the text that either follows or precedes it? ✓ Have you tightened up your writing, looking for how to make short, crisp sentences? ✓ Have you refined and revised your initial drafts of this chapter to produce a polished final version? ✓ Have you checked for institutional and/or program-related differences regarding the content and structure of this chapter? ✓ Have you checked for institutional and/or program-related differences regarding the appropriate use of qualitative language and terminology? ✓ Is the writing throughout clear and readable? Refer to "Guidelines for Academic Writing" in Chapter 4.

Section II: Application

The application section that follows is a skeleton view of a findings chapter. Essentially, our intention is to provide you with only a "snapshot" of a findings chapter. Were it to be more completely and fully developed, as would be required in an actual dissertation, such a chapter would usually be 40 to 60 pages. As emphasized throughout this book, there are many options with regard to qualitative research presentation. Moreover, requirements vary among institutions and programs, and so, as with other components of the dissertation, you will need to check with your advisor and/or department about presentation of your study's findings. Most important is that you make clear that the findings clearly address the research problem and provide a response to each of the study's research questions.

Chapter 4 of the Dissertation

Presenting Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to explore with a sample of doctoral candidates their perceptions of why they have not managed to complete their dissertations. The researchers believed that a better understanding of this phenomenon would allow educators to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of design and facilitation of doctoral programs. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from 20 in-depth interviews and seven critical incidents, as well as from a focus group conducted with six additional participants who were not part of the study sample. Five major findings emerged from this study:

1. The overwhelming majority of the participants indicated that the course work did not prepare them to conduct research and write their dissertations.
2. All 20 participants expressed the need to know the content and understand the process involved in conducting research and writing their dissertations.
3. The majority of participants attempted to learn what they needed to know by reaching out in dialogue with colleagues and others, rather than through more formal means.
4. The majority of participants indicated that they relied on their own personal characteristics to facilitate their progress. More than half of these same participants also said colleagues were instrumental in helping.
5. The majority of participants cited lack of good, timely, and consistent advisement as a major barrier standing in the way of their progress.

The findings of this qualitative case study address the research problem, which was the phenomenon of why a great many doctoral candidates complete the doctoral course work but do not manage to complete their dissertations, thereby remaining "all but dissertation."

Finding #1 addressed the first research question, which asked: On completion of their course work, to what extent do participants perceive that they were prepared to conduct research and write their dissertations? Finding #2 and finding #3 addressed the second research question, which asked: What do participants perceive they need to learn to complete their dissertations? Finding #4 addressed the third research question, which asked: How do participants attempt to develop the knowledge and acquire the skills and attitudes that they perceive are necessary to complete their dissertations? Finding #5 addressed the final two research questions, which asked: What factors do participants perceive might help them to complete their dissertations? What factors do participants perceive have impeded and/or continue to impede their progress in working toward completing their dissertations?

Following is a discussion of the findings with details that support and explain each finding, illustrating the ways in which each of the findings provide a response to the study's research questions. By way of "thick description" (Denzin, 2001; Geertz, 1973), the researchers set out to document a broad range of experiences, and thereby provide an opportunity for the reader to enter into this study and better understand the reality of the research participants. The emphasis throughout is on letting participants speak for themselves. Illustrative quotations taken from interview transcripts attempt to portray multiple participant perspectives and capture some of the richness and complexity of the subject matter. Where appropriate, critical incident data are woven in with interview data to augment and solidify the discussion. Following is a further discussion that includes the focus group data.

Finding 1: An overwhelming majority (19 of 20 [95%]) of the participants indicated that the course work did not prepare them to conduct research or write their dissertations.

The primary and overriding finding of this study is that the course work did not prepare participants to conduct research or write their dissertations. This finding is highly significant in terms of the overwhelming number of participants (19 of 20 [95%]) who found the course work ineffective in preparing them for the dissertation process. Based on participant descriptions, there appeared to be a lack of connection between the first part of the doctoral program—the course work—and the second part—actually conducting research and writing, and presenting it in a completed dissertation. Participants expressed this disconnect in the following ways:

> The dissertation and the course work are two totally different ball games. And so success in one does not make for success in another. The course work gives you knowledge of the field; it gives you the theory, but it doesn't prepare you to write the dissertation. And it doesn't really prepare you to analyze the research you conduct. And I think anyone going into it needs to understand what a dissertation looks like. How big (emphasis) it is! And consider the other parts of it—not just writing it, but defending it, revising it, editing it—the whole process—you don't really know—no one tells you. (Debbie)
>
> The course work was confined. The dissertation process didn't have a structure built into it—it wasn't explained, and you find out it is much bigger, and more unwieldy. The process of actually doing it is much more time consuming—and that's if you know what you're doing—which in my case was less than half the time. It is a shame that the course work is not more directed. Ultimately, everything is indirectly associated with the dissertation, and so I think there could have been a better job done explaining what to expect, what you would have to know and be able to do by the end of the course work, and you don't get that, so it is like you've fallen off a cliff. (Fay)
>
> During the course work, I got only an inkling of what a dissertation represents. But the sheer magnitude of it—it's mind-boggling, really, in terms of research. And nothing prepared you for that. Knowing what I know now, I probably would not have gone into it at all in the first place! [Laughs] (Angela)

All 19 participants described their perception of the ineffectiveness of the course work. Among the comments cited were those by Hank, who said: "The course work did not prepare me for what I had to do in this dissertation; it didn't prepare me for the process that lay ahead," and those by Morris, who commented, "I didn't get the practical information during the course work, and when it was given, it was so poorly explained and so unnecessarily complex as to what we were to do, I just got lost—I never got it."

Most of the participants also spoke unfavorably about the research courses. Anthony recalled, "The course work was not in any way related to the dissertation. I took some research courses, but they were not helpful; they were not related to my dissertation." Another participant said specifically of the research courses: "They never gave us the formula in those classes; you couldn't see it or understand it as a step-by-step process—something I found out the hard way" (Anne). Another participant commented: "Even in those (research) classes intended to explain the process, it was conveyed in a way by complex language, you know, and that kept it shrouded in some kind of mystery" (Frank). Only 1 participant of the 20, while acknowledging that it did not fully prepare her, described the research courses as being somewhat helpful. She said,

> I took the research courses, and I learned a lot. It was difficult. And while I got something out of those courses, I didn't really know how I was going to go about actually doing the research, and I was very apprehensive. You know, the steps in the process were still unclear to me. So when I started out it was scary, almost debilitating. (Lin)

Although most participants appreciated the theoretical foundation the course work provided, they also expressed the need for more focus on the practical aspects of conducting research. Two participants conveyed this view when they said:

> The academic work was certainly expected, and I had to grapple with some difficult theoretical concepts, and it was hard, but it was also stimulating. But what was missing is seeing the whole picture—I didn't understand how I was going to be able to apply those concepts to my research—they didn't really focus on that; they didn't make that clear. (Mollie)

> You can't do this work if you don't have a solid basis, a theoretical foundation, but you also need to know how to use theory to frame your research, and they don't really focus on that. They didn't really teach the "how-to." They said, like, "You have to have a conceptual framework"; well, what is that? How will I know it when I see it? You know, what do I have to do to make one? So while there is certainly a lot to be said for knowing the theories, I think more of the "how-tos" would have been helpful. (Julia)

Finding 2: All 20 participants (100%) expressed a need to know the content and understand the process involved in conducting research and writing their dissertations.

The order of magnitude in terms of the number of participants who raised the issue of the course work not having prepared them not only is surprising but also may account for subsequent participant perceptions regarding what they needed to successfully carry out their work. This notion can be seen specifically in the finding that all 20 of the participants (100%) described that they needed knowledge and understanding of the content and/or the process required to conduct research and write the dissertation.

A few participants (3 of 20 [15%]) described the difficulty they had, and are having, in selecting a good, researchable problem. On this point, Anthony commented, "What I'm finding most difficult is to pinpoint exactly what I want to research—the research problem." As another student put it:

> I have never given up when it comes to education, and I really do not understand why I am having such a tough time finding the right topic and thinking clearly about it. You see they don't help you develop the topic, but when you bring one forward, they're ready to tell you all the reasons why it won't work. I know if I could develop a narrowly defined topic, I could collect the data, analyze it, and write it up, but I just can't seem to get off the ground, and this has been very distressing and depressing for me. (Shana)

Other participants (4 of 20 [20%]) spoke more poignantly about needing help in developing their proposals:

> The problem really was and still is how to develop a problem and purpose and research questions that are concrete. I'm also not sure what will get me over this impasse and what is at the source of it. I know I need help. (Mollie)

> I just cannot seem to get my proposal done. Every time I hand in a section, there seem to be so many revisions especially with the methodology. I never realized the proposal was such a hurdle . . . . This has been going on too long, and part of it is my own fault because I just don't seem to be able to stay with it. If I could just get past the proposal, I could probably move on. (Brent)

There were some students (2 of 20 [10%]) who had completed their proposals and found themselves stuck in the beginning stages of the research process:

> Looking back to the long process of the dissertation research, one critical stage for me started after my proposal defense when I had the pilot data and wanted more guidance for how to code it so as to pave the way for later data analysis. I tried myself and coded every line of the pilot interviews based on my initial conceptual framework, which was not very effective. I felt totally lost until another colleague was able to explain in language I understood what a conceptual framework really was and how to use it. If it weren't for him, I would still be stuck. (Sally)

> I was doing life history interviews, and they had no structure—none! And so when I went to analyze the data I was having a very, very difficult time identifying emerging categories because I had over twelve hundred pages of script that had to be analyzed and I

didn't know where to begin, how to get started. And I was so stuck that I thought about giving up, but somehow I just kept at it. But I can tell you it was nerve-wracking. (Doris)

Other participants (3 of 20 [15%]) said they knew what they were supposed to do with regard to the research but were not sure about how to carry it out. Following are some of the ways these participants expressed their frustrations in not knowing the process they needed to follow:

> I feel like I'm in limbo. The process and what is required is not clear. Basically, once you pass the certification exam, you get a letter of congratulations, and then—boom—that's it! You are alone. I was alone. I feel very alone. (Lin)
>
> The method of doing a dissertation really stood in my way—the method—how to do it. I mean, you know something from the theory, and you've got all those books, but you still don't know *how.* You know a lot of *what,* but you still don't know how. And who is going to show you how? (Jane)
>
> I wish I knew what I needed to do sooner. Then I would have been much further along than I am. But I guess everybody has to have the experience of the process of searching, of exploring *how.* And while you are trying very hard, it is important to have somebody direct you. Especially because you will have a lot—and I mean a lot—of data. I was lucky to have found someone who helped me. (Carin)

In addition to needing to understand the process, two students also spoke about the need to be assertive. In this regard, Lin said: "I learned there is help out there. Nobody tells you where the help is—you have to go and look for it." In this same vein, Angela said, "I have learned not to wait for professors but to seek them out, make appointments with them, and ask questions, and go after what you need to know."

A few of the participants (3 of 20 [15%]) talked about learning to carry out the research process on their own or, as several said, "the hard way." This idea is best illustrated by the comment of one participant who said:

> When I started out, I went to the doctoral office, and I picked up some brochures, and the manual helped me understand the process as far as what was required. Then I started reading other dissertations and sort of took them apart to figure out what others had done, and I pieced it together, piece by piece. Nobody told me—I had to find that all out by myself. I learned about the research process in a really hard way. (Brad)

A few of the inactive students (3 of 20 [15%]) reflected on their past experience in trying to understand the process and offered some insights into the complexities involved:

> The truth is that I feel that people get engaged in dissertation work without being really absolutely clear as to what it would take in terms of research, in terms of the support we were going to get, in terms of the type of writing we were going to have to do, the time frame as to how long it was going to take. There were so many unknowns. (Angela)
>
> A master's degree is very structured. You know exactly what you are supposed to do and how you are supposed to do it. But when you are in a doctoral program, all of a sudden you are expected to be very independent. And while people may like to be independent there still needs to be some kind of structure. Doctoral students need clear instructions in terms of the presentation of their subject matter but also in terms of how to do the actual data collection, analysis, and the rest. Advisors should plan with students more and guide the students more. They should start exploring topics and the literature review early on—it would make it all so much better, so much less confusing, so much less agonizing. (Julia)

Finding 3: The majority of participants (15 of 20 [75%]) attempted to learn what they needed to know by reaching out in dialogue with colleagues, rather than through more formal means.

The overriding finding that the course work did not prepare participants to carry out the practical aspects of conducting research and writing their dissertations was further reflected by the informal, rather than formal, ways by which the majority of students went about trying to get the help and guidance they needed. Half of all participants (50%) spoke of their experiences reaching out to other students. Connie described the value of interacting with colleagues: "The colleagues I met along the way were so helpful; we were supportive of one another. I was so lucky to be part of a cohesive and collaborative group, and we continue to help each other figure things out." Other participants were even more explicit in describing their positive interaction with colleagues:

> After the course work, I looked to some of my classmates for help, especially those who were further along than I was, and that helped me a lot. It wasn't that they were experts, but they knew more about the process than I did. They already had approved proposals, and they were collecting data, and I wasn't nearly there yet, and they filled in some gaps for me. And I continue to keep in touch with them, and sometimes I am able to help them, and you know, they understand, because it's like we're all in this together. (Anne)
>
> Everybody is very busy. In every program they enroll too many students, and the professors don't have the time to give the students enough attention. So, in our department the doctoral students get together, and we help each other. We shouldn't really have to do that! But we're all frustrated. (Lin)

In addition to reaching out to others, a number of participants (6 of 20 [33%]) also described how they went about learning informally in self-directed ways. Brad described his strategy in this way: "I spent a lot of my time doing research; I was either in the library or on the Internet, and I just kept digging until I found what I needed." Similarly, another participant said:

> I did an awful lot of reading on my own. I read so many dissertations, I can't even tell you how many, particularly those related to my topic, and that was helpful to me to understand what others had done, how they went about their research. So by reading I had some mental models I could follow. (Anthony)

Fewer participants (5 of 20 [25%]) said they found the post–course work dissertation seminars offered at their universities of help in understanding the practical aspects of doing research. One of these participants described the benefits of these seminars in this way:

> I found the dissertation seminar very helpful. I went regularly, and I learned a lot, and it gave me a very clear outline of how to proceed. Finally, I understood how everything fits together, how the research questions are related to the purpose and how they must fit with your conceptual framework. I finally understood it because we had a faculty person who had a very pragmatic approach—she was so clear in her explanations. I think just about everyone in the seminar felt that way. (Sally)

Only 4 of the 20 participants (25%) mentioned that they got the direction they needed from their advisors. At the same time, these participants also said it was not always easy to get an appointment with their advisors. One of these participants described it in this way:

> It seemed I was always tracking my advisor down when she was on campus. Almost every other week, I tried to contact her. And when I did reach her, and when she had time, she would sit down with me and talk, and every time after talking with her, I clarified a lot of stuff. I would tell someone to start as early as possible to build up a collegiate relationship with their advisor—it's so important. (Jane)
>
> Only 1 of the 20 participants (5%) indicated that the course work was somewhat helpful to her. She said: "The course work helped me to some extent but not enough—it points you in the right direction, but it doesn't fill in the missing pieces" (Lin).

To deal with her frustration, one participant (5%) reached out to other experts in her field. In this regard, she described how she reached out to a faculty person outside her university:

> I was fortunate. I met a professor (in another city) at a conference, and I took it upon myself to e-mail her, and she was kind enough to write back—as a matter of fact we had countless e-mails going back and forth, and she helped me form some initial ideas about how to develop the problem and how to carry out the research. And she didn't have to do that—she didn't know me all that well. I'm just grateful because I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't found her. (Jane)

Finding 4: The majority of participants (15 of 20 [75%]) indicated that they relied on themselves to facilitate their progress. More than half of these same participants (8 of 15 [53%]) also said that colleagues were instrumental in helping them.

It was not surprising that, in the absence of formal guidance during course work and because of inconsistent advisement, a majority of participants relied on themselves and their colleagues to help facilitate their progress. Participants framed the need to be self-reliant as follows:

> You need to have perseverance, patience, and basically a very independent spirit, someone who really pretty much knows how to go about finding out what they need to know and doesn't feel disheartened by lack of support and caring. (Angela)
>
> What helped me was my single-mindedness. I was and am determined—you know, relentless. I think that's how one has to be. You can't sit back and wait for someone to come along to help you—it doesn't work that way—you have to rely on yourself mostly. (Connie)

Many students expressed the need to reach out to colleagues. On this point, Brent commented: "When I'm really stuck I call on some of my classmates . . . . And even if they don't have the answers, they provide moral support." Similarly, another participant said:

> You have to have faith in yourself, you have to believe in yourself, you have to have confidence, and it's about having a positive attitude—you know, one that says I can do this. Sometimes, when I hit a roadblock and my confidence dips, that's when I call on my colleagues, and they give me support and encouragement, and I hope I do that for them when they need it. (Brad)

A few participants (3 of 20 [15%]) said they received help from faculty other than their advisors. This notion was illustrated by one participant who went outside her department for help:

> I went to Professor X when I had questions. And she was great because she's very structured and she had examples of the way to do things. And you could sit with her. She would go over things. She took the time. I believe that to really make this work you have to have advisors who like to advise, who have the skills to advise, and they have to have patience with people. And they need to be

> trained. It's almost as if they need to be counselors. I didn't have that in my department, with my advisor, so I had to go outside. (Debbie)

Only two participants (10%) described the guidance and direction they received from their advisors in positive ways. In his description of his relationship with his advisor, Dexter said: "I have a very good rapport with my advisor—he's always willing to go over things with me, and he tries to find the time for me, and I know that is not the case with all advisors, so I really appreciate him." Jane corroborated these sentiments when she said: "I developed a very positive relationship and rapport with my advisor, and this was a big plus for me."

Finding 5: The majority of participants (14 of 20 [70%]) cited lack of good, timely, and consistent advisement as a major barrier standing in the way of their progress.

Given that only two participants described the guidance and direction they received from their advisors in positive terms, it is not surprising that the majority of participants described the quality, access, and availability of advisors as a major impediment to their progress. (It should be noted that four participants did not share their perceptions of the advisement that they received.) The negative view of advisement is illustrated by the following participant comments:

> Most of them (advisors) don't put much into it because they're not really interested in what their students are doing. If they can't share in getting the credit for it to bolster their tenure . . . I have a kind of jaded view of advisors at this point! I think it's the university structure and the bureaucracy. You know they have to publish or perish. And also I don't know if advisors come into it with the skills, the people skills. I think you really have to be able to work with the student, to understand their frustrations, their issues, the things that block them, and to help them to be able to overcome those things. In a lot of ways it's a mentoring relationship. And so you have to be authentic. (Debbie)
>
> He (my advisor) really didn't help me at all. Every time I went in to see him, he would say to me, "I'm here to help you." I was yelling silently, "Help me, help me, tell me what to do!" In the end I was so frustrated. I wanted him to give me some specific work. I didn't know what I was supposed to do, instead of just reading the literature. That went on for a long, long time, about 3 to 4 years. (Lin)
>
> I couldn't get anywhere with my first advisor. And I did three proposals with an advisor who kept saying, "Well, that's not it yet. I'll know it when I see it." So it was that kind of response. I think when he said he'd know it when he saw it, he really didn't have a clue himself. He did well with advisees who could find a different way of dealing with that. I really needed some help and more structure or framework in which to get it done, and that wasn't forthcoming. (Anne)

Related to the disappointment that participants expressed concerning advisement, eight of the participants (40%) also cited other faculty and administration and the rigidity of the process. Some of the ways participants summed up their experiences were as follows:

> Nobody was really clear, not the faculty, not the administration. The really annoying thing from my perspective is that nobody is really there to give you guidelines. This is a very difficult process, a very lengthy one, and while it is so rigid, so many things are so vague. Most of the time, the feeling is one of loneliness. Hanging out in the wind—it was so overwhelming. (Angela)
>
> It was the constantly changing expectation among the committee members about what I was expected to do and how I was expected to do it. I was writing various chapters, and I had constant and conflicting messages about what I was supposed to write and how I was supposed to write it. That was very frustrating . . . . It seemed like a useless exercise in control. (Hank)
>
> I understand now, which I did not at the beginning, that writing a dissertation is an exercise whose value does not lie in its creative expression or revelation of new knowledge, but [lies] merely in its approved execution in accordance with a particular set of rules. (Morris)

In addition to describing structural impediments, such as ineffective advisement, lack of faculty and administration support, and the rigidity of the process, participants described personal factors that impeded their progress. Among these were professional work demands, personal and family issues, financial constraints, and lack of confidence in ability.

Ten of the 20 participants (50%) talked about the stress and challenges involved in managing their jobs and the time required to work on their dissertations. Following are illustrations of participants' comments regarding professional and work demands:

> I found that having a demanding full-time position and a commute on top of it, I just couldn't fit it in. So I don't know if I lost the drive along the way, or if it was just that some other things became more of a priority. I mean, I had to work—that was the priority. So, I would say that people need to really think it through and dedicate the time to do it. (Doris)
>
> Losing my job—that was a huge distracter. And the job that I took was a job that didn't pay me enough. I took it out of necessity, so there was a lot of financial strain imposed. Another thing about losing my job was that I lost the context of where I was thinking of doing my research. So I lost focus on what I actually was going to be doing, and I felt overwhelmed with trying to find something else. (Frank)

Six of the 20 participants (30%) focused on family issues and described these as impeding their progress. As Julia said, "Just when I felt I was beginning to make progress my mother died, and that really set me back." Various other comments illustrate the difficulties involved in managing family commitments:

> My wife and I both work, and we have three kids. There's always something going on, you know. Juggling all our schedules, managing everybody's plans and all the family issues, is difficult. There's a lot of pressure. (Carin)

> My job changed, and I adopted children. And the combination of these two things meant that I just couldn't do it (the dissertation), and there wasn't anything anybody could do to help me with it at that point in time. (Debbie)

A few other participants (5 of 20 [25%]) expressed concern around funding their doctoral work:

> I'm always running around and worrying about how I'm going to pay next semester's tuition. There's little scholarship money available, and I'm digging myself deeper in a hole every year. This has gone on for 9 years. If I didn't have this worry maybe I would have finished. (Doris)

Some participants (5 of 20 [25%]) indicated that they struggled with the lack of confidence they had in their ability to do the work. Shana expressed her self-doubt by saying, "I would tell someone not to be afraid of it (the dissertation) like I was; I spent too much time being afraid." Another participant was even more explicit in explaining her doubts about being able to do the work:

> I think it's [the dissertation] a terrifying process—I really do. And I worried so much about whether I could actually do this kind of work; I had a hard time shaking off those self-doubting negative thoughts when they took hold of me. And I don't know that faculty really wants to disarm anybody of what it's all about because it may take away the mystique. (Anne)

Findings From the Focus Group Interview

A focus group interview was held for approximately 1½ hours with six doctoral candidates who were not part of the study sample but who met all of the criteria for participation. The focus group participants were assured that all of their comments would be held in strict confidence and that each would be identified by a pseudonym. Prior to the session, the researchers contacted the six participants individually by phone to schedule a convenient time to hold the session. Following that conversation, the six participants were sent the same consent form given to all interviewees and were asked to sign and return it in an enclosed stamped and self-addressed envelope to the researchers. Before the session began, the participants were told that the session would be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed by the researchers.

The researchers described their role as facilitators, monitoring the process and advising that the discussion would largely be in control of the participants. Participants were told that there would be two parts to the discussion. In the first part, they were asked to think about their experience in the research process and share with one another their perceptions of factors that helped them during that process. The facilitators indicted they would let the participants know when to turn their attention to the second part of the discussion. In the last part of the discussion, participants were asked to share with one another those factors they perceived might have stood in the way of their progress. Specifically, what, if any, obstacles and challenges did participants face that they believe may have impeded their ability to move forward in their research, and what, if any, action did they take to overcome those challenges and/or obstacles?

It was interesting to see how the discussion by the six focus group participants parallels the findings that emanated from the interviews. All six participants indicated that they relied largely on themselves and a few classmates to help them when they got stuck. Michele said, "I really wanted to get through this process, and I was determined to find out what I needed, no matter what. As an extravert, I wasn't shy about asking my classmates for help or advice; heck, they were in the same boat, so I didn't have to impress them." Jacob followed up quickly by adding, "I was the opposite, Michele—I was and still am a real introvert—you know, I like to figure things out on my own—but this process is so beyond that—so beyond my experience. I had no choice. I had to learn to become more like you, an extravert, not afraid to ask for help, and I mostly went to my peers because my advisor was, let us say, not often available!"

Jacob's comments precipitated a discussion of the access and availability of advisors. Two other members, Kent and Lauren, were almost talking over each other in recounting their experiences with advisement. The following captures a part of what Kent said, "I mustn't have been one of her favorites. I had to wait so long for feedback—it was frustrating as hell—it made me feel disregarded." Lauren added, "I know what you mean about waiting and waiting for feedback, and then when you finally get something, it was, let's say, vague—to be kind. I really needed more direction." Another member, Julia, chimed in: "Yeah, at a time like this who wants to be self-directed?" The group laughed. Much like the descriptions from the interviews, the discussion continued, mostly centering on the frustration the six members had with the accessibility and timeliness of the advisement they received. Only one participant tied lack of advisement to financial difficulties. Beth said, "The tuition we pay—at least at my university—is outrageous and goes up every semester, it seems, and to think you are paying these exorbitant sums in tuition, and you're not getting your money's worth—something is wrong." Nods of acknowledgment led to the close of the discussion.

Both parts of the focus group discussion confirm perceptions of lack of advisement as an impediment to their moving more quickly through the process. The six members' discussions of what they perceived helped them also were consistent with data from the interviews. The focus group members indicated that they largely relied on themselves and their own resourcefulness while seeking the help of their colleagues and peers.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the five findings uncovered by this study. Findings were organized according to the research questions. Data from individual interviews, critical incidents, and a focus group revealed research participants' perceptions vis-à-vis their experiences of the dissertation process. As is typical of qualitative research, extensive samples of quotations from participants are included in the report. By using participants' own words, the researchers aim to build the confidence of readers by accurately representing the reality of the persons and situations studied.

The primary finding of this study (which addressed the first research question) is that the course work did not prepare participants to conduct research or write the dissertations. This finding emanated from the expressed descriptions of 95% of the participants as they discussed their perceptions of what they needed to successfully conduct research and write their dissertations. In discussing why they felt unprepared after they completed the course work, several participants talked about the lack of connection between the course work and conducting and writing up the research. Although most participants appreciated the theoretical foundation the course work provided, they expressed the need for more focus on the practical aspects of conducting research. A few said they knew what they were supposed to do with regard to the research but were not sure about how to carry it out.

The study's second finding (which addressed the second research question) was that all 20 participants expressed the need to know the content and understand the process involved in conducting research and writing their dissertations. Some participants described the difficulty they had, and are having, in selecting a good, researchable problem. Others spoke about needing help in developing their proposals. Some had completed their proposals but found themselves stuck in the beginning stages of the research process. In addition to needing to understand the process, two students spoke about the need to be assertive, and a few others talked about learning to carry out the research process on their own or, as several put it, "the hard way."

The third finding (which also addressed the second research question) was that the majority of participants attempted to learn what they needed to know by reaching out in dialogue with colleagues and others rather than through more formal means. Half of all participants spoke of their experiences reaching out to other students. In addition to reaching out to others, a number of participants described how they went about learning informally, in self-directed ways, through reading and research. A quarter of all the participants said they found the post–course work dissertation seminars offered at their universities of help in understanding the practical aspects of doing research, and a quarter also mentioned that they got the direction they needed from their advisors.

The fourth finding (which addressed the third research question) was that the majority of participants relied on their own personal characteristics to facilitate their progress. More than half of these same participants also said colleagues were instrumental in helping them. A few participants said they received help from faculty other than their advisors.

The fifth finding (which addressed both the fourth and fifth research questions) was that the majority of participants cited lack of good, timely, and consistent advisement as a major barrier standing in the way of their progress. Some also mentioned lack of faculty and administration support and the rigidity of the process. In addition to these structural impediments, participants also described personal factors that impeded their progress, including professional work demands, personal and family issues, financial constraints, and lack of confidence in ability.

Findings from the focus group corroborated the findings from the interviews. All six participants indicated that they relied largely on themselves, and that they called on classmates to help them when they got stuck. Focus group participants discussed their frustration regarding accessibility and timeliness of the advisement they received, confirming interview perceptions of lack of advisement as a major impediment to moving more quickly through the dissertation process.

Following are some recommended resources that you might consider perusing regarding the qualitative data analysis process and the reporting of your study's findings.

Annotated Bibliography

Bernard, H. R., Wutich, A., & Ryan, G. W. (2017). *Analyzing qualitative data: Systematic approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book explains a range of analytic approaches and the necessary analytic reasoning, instructions, and clear and easy-to-follow steps to begin this work. As the authors point out, most qualitative data are written texts, but increasingly, qualitative data include still and moving images, and sound recordings of dialogues or narratives. A key focus throughout is that analytic methods must be aligned with disciplines and subdisciplines, but these methods can also cut across disciplines. There are two parts to this book. The first set of chapters provides an overview of the basics—from choosing a topic to collecting data, establishing a conceptual model, and coding to establish themes and subthemes. Part two of the book comprises 11 chapters, each covering different methods of analysis, including grounded theory, content analysis, narrative analysis, analytic induction, semantic network analysis, ethnographic decision modeling, and cultural domain analysis. Acknowledging that research is not a linear process, the authors provide ideas and suggestions throughout for addressing the messiness of analysis. Real examples from the literature across the health and social sciences provide invaluable applied understanding. At the end of each chapter is a set of key concepts, hands-on exercises, and suggestions for further reading.

Boeije, H. (2010). *Analysis in qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book is written for students embarking on a qualitative research project, taking the reader through the process of analyzing data from start to finish. The author sets out a model for coding data in order to break it down into manageable parts and then offers suggestions regarding reassembling data to create a meaningful picture of the phenomenon under study. The book does a good job of guiding the researcher through the final phase of data analysis—that is, integration of data into a coherent analytical format. The author offers useful ideas pertaining to diagramming, matrices and other visual displays, memoing and thinking-aloud analytic strategies, ways of integrating analysis and interpretation, how to incorporate the use of software when appropriate, and writing up of research. This book includes examples covering a wide range of subjects, making it useful for students across a variety of social science disciplines.

Boreus, K., & Bergstrom, G. (Eds.). (2017). *Analyzing text and discourse: Eight approaches for the social sciences.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book provides a thorough overview of the key analytical approaches and tools for analyzing text and discourse and makes use of real-world examples and case studies to illustrate methods in action. These methods and tools include content analysis, argument analysis, qualitative analysis of ideas and ideological content, narrative analysis, metaphor analysis, critical linguistics, and discourse analysis. Terms and concepts that inform this type of qualitative research are interwoven throughout the book, thereby meeting the needs of an international and interdisciplinary readership. Each chapter explains the theory behind each method, its relationship to studying social phenomena, and its key uses, as well as the advantages and limitations associated with the method. An analysis section in each chapter is followed by a section titled "Critical Reflections," which is meant to deepen the understanding of each approach. The contemporary and real-world examples illustrate application of methods in different contexts. The view of these authors is that texts, in one way or another, relate to groups of people and mirror conscious and unconscious ideas. As such, texts reproduce, strengthen, or challenge power relationships in groups, organizations, communities, and societies. This critical approach is the key focus of analysis throughout.

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

As this author illustrates, thematic analysis—a process for encoding qualitative information—can be thought of as a bridge between qualitative and quantitative research. As such, the discussion in the book confronts the debate between positivist and postmodernist views, taking on the research act in an innovative and fresh way. More than that, and in a practical sense, however, this book helps the reader understand the concept of thematic analysis and

provides clear guidelines about learning to develop techniques to apply to one's own research. This book shows how to sense themes—the first step in analyzing information—as well as how to develop the various types of codes. This book is useful for researchers across a broad spectrum of disciplines.

Flick, U. (Ed.). (2014). *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This handbook provides a state-of-the-art overview of the whole field of qualitative data analysis, from general analytic strategies used in qualitative research to approaches specific to particular types of qualitative data. The volume includes chapters on traditional analytic strategies such as grounded theory, content analysis, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and narrative analysis, as well as coverage of newer trends like mixed methods, reanalysis, and meta-analysis. Practical aspects such as sampling, transcription, working collaboratively, writing, and implementation are given close attention, as are theory and theorization, reflexivity, and ethics. Written by an international team of experts in qualitative research, the handbook is an essential compendium for all qualitative researchers and students across the social sciences. Part II includes details pertaining to issues such as transcription, collaborative analysis, comparative practices, and induction and deduction. Part III covers analytic strategies pertaining to the different qualitative traditions and issues regarding the use of software in qualitative analysis. Part IV is the meat of the book, dealing with different types of data and ways of analyzing them. Included are interviews, focus groups, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, observation, documents, news media, images, film, videography, and virtual data. Part V focuses on using and assessing qualitative data analysis. Included in these chapters are discussions around ethical issues, meta-analysis, theorization, generalization, and implementation—that is, putting analyses into practice. This handbook is an illuminating new resource for qualitative and mixed methods scholars. These essays are certain to provoke further investigation, discussion, and theorizing around what once was a neglected area of qualitative research practice.

Guest, G., MacQueen, K., & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book provides step-by-step guidance on how to systematically and rigorously analyze text generated from in-depth interviews and focus groups, relating predominantly to applied qualitative studies. The authors introduce and outline an inductive approach that draws on established and innovative theme-based techniques suited to the applied research context. Chapters follow the sequence of activities in the analysis process and include many useful tools and templates. Real-world examples illustrate and reinforce ideas and procedures described, and detailed working exercises offer hands-on practice vis-à-vis techniques presented. The book covers useful discussion pertaining to coding strategies, planning and preparing for data analysis, trustworthiness considerations (credibility and dependability), data reduction techniques, comparison of thematic data, choice of data analysis software, and writing up and presenting thematic analyses.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The third edition of Miles and Huberman's classic research methods text has been updated by Johnny Saldana, author of *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2013). This is an excellent update to the original text, which has long been central to understanding and teaching qualitative research design. Several of the data display strategies from previous editions are presented in reenvisioned and reorganized formats to enhance reader accessibility and comprehension. The third edition's presentation of the fundamentals of research design and data management is followed by five distinct methods of analysis: exploring, describing, ordering, explaining, and predicting. Each method's profile follows a standard format: Description, Applications, Example, Analysis, and Notes. Each method of data display and analysis is described in detail, with practical suggestions for adaptation and use. Vivid examples from a host of education and social science disciplines show the application of qualitative research methods in real-world settings. The book's most celebrated chapter, "Drawing and Verifying Conclusions," is retained and revised, and the chapter on report writing has been greatly expanded and is now called "Writing About Qualitative Research." Overall, this book is well organized and clear, and replete with practical applications, resources, and examples. Comprehensive and authoritative, *Qualitative Data Analysis* has been revised for a new generation of critical qualitative researchers confronted with ever-changing demands in the field. The companion website includes links to related SAGE journals articles. In addition, several display forms, matrices, and templates from the book will be available for downloading.

Richards, L. (2015). *Handling qualitative data: A practical guide* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The author provides practical guidance on how to handle, reflect on, and make sense of rich data, while at the same time showing how a consideration of methods and their philosophical underpinnings informs how to most appropriately address and handle data. The book includes detailed sections that cover processes of making, meeting, sorting, coding, documenting, and exploring qualitative data. The book illustrates how to view a study holistically and write up findings, making and justifying claims from the data. Each chapter integrates software use and addresses the challenges that the software could likely present. The text also includes coverage of key topics concerned with qualitative data analysis, including ethics, reflexivity, and the relationship between research questions and methodological choices. There is also a fully updated companion website that includes examples of "methods in practice," including real-world examples and issues whereby researchers are presented with an opportunity to reflect on their studies and consider what they may have done differently. This book is an ideal resource for beginning qualitative researchers and has applicability to a wide range of social science disciplines, including education, media studies, sociology, psychology, and health sciences.

Richards, L., & Morse, J. M. (2013). *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

These authors provide a framework for understanding the decision-making processes that underlie current thinking about the making of data. A key strength of the book is the discussion and presentation of how to think about qualitative research and analysis. Part II, "Inside Analysis," helps a researcher to think more clearly about what qualitative data actually are (and what they are not), how to record and manage appropriate data, and how to prepare data for analysis. Chapter 5 talks about "making data"—the ongoing complex process in which the researchers and participants collaboratively negotiate data through the diversity of qualitative research methods. The authors illustrate what can be considered "good data" and "bad data" and provide details regarding the process of transforming data—the management and preparation of data for analysis. Chapter 6 deals with the coding process and includes discussion around what coding is; the different ways of storing, managing, and monitoring codes; and tips and common traps. What is useful is the notion of using codes to develop themes, or "themeing." Chapter 7, called "Abstracting," deals with the ability to think abstractly in order to transform data, and "methodological toolboxes" are provided that shed light on the interpretive process. Chapter 8 deals with methodological congruence between method and analysis and offers useful analytic distinctions among phenomenological, ethnographic, case study, discourse analysis and grounded theory approaches. As the authors rightfully point out, each tradition is sensitive to particular analytic methods and strategies—as such, demanding that the researcher think about analysis in a particular way. Researcher reflexivity is stressed throughout.

Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This is an excellent resource for those working with visual materials, providing a clear theoretical and methodological framework. Theoretical clarity regarding visual culture and power relations is seamlessly woven into the discussion and evaluation of a wide range of research methods. The book offers practical guidance on how to approach, think about, and interpret "visual culture," ranging from archival photography and documentary film to fine art, advertising, video, television, websites, and social media, including Twitter and Instagram. An important aspect of this book is the attention paid to audiences and viewing publics, as well as to the significance of ethical demands related to visual research, including the practical aspects of using critical visual methods and the dissemination, circulation, and accessibility of research through visual techniques. Culture and representational issues as well as debates in the field are addressed up front. This edition stresses the evolving nature of visual research and is up to date with contemporary developments in media arts and digital culture, exploring new and emerging opportunities for visual research made possible by developments in software and data analytics. This book is a rigorous guide for conducting visual research and encompasses an interdisciplinary approach, making it a meaningful text for both researchers and practitioners.

Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book demystifies the qualitative coding process with a comprehensive assessment of different coding types, examples, and exercises. This book focuses exclusively on the function of codes, coding, and analytic memo writing during the qualitative data collection and analytic processes and is an ideal reference for students and researchers across the social sciences. The author offers a repertoire of multiple coding approaches ranging in complexity from fundamental to advanced levels, covering the full range of qualitative data collection methods. The text demonstrates practical application within a variety of qualitative traditions or approaches. For each approach, the author discusses the method's origins in the professional literature and offers a thorough description of the method itself, recommendations for practical applications, and clearly illustrated examples, exercises, and activities. Throughout the book, you will read a breadth of perspectives on codes and coding, often purposefully juxtaposed to illustrate and highlight the diverse opinions among scholars in the field. Included is a discussion regarding how the coding process initiates qualitative data analysis, application of qualitative data analysis software, writing of analytic memos, and advice regarding how best to use coding manuals for particular studies. This coding manual is an invaluable reference for beginning and advanced qualitative researchers in multiple disciplines, including education, sociology, communication, anthropology, psychology, and health care.

Chapter 10 Objectives

Section I: Instruction

- Explain the concept of qualitative analysis.
- Explain how to analyze and interpret the findings of your research.
- Explain the concept of synthesis as an ongoing process.
- Describe how to go about presenting a final synthesis by integrating your study’s findings with literature, research, and practice.
- Emphasize and reiterate the significance of alignment among research methodology (tradition or genre), research design, analysis, and presentation of findings.

Section II: Application

- Present a completed example for the analysis and interpretation chapter of a dissertation.

Overview

Qualitative research begins with questions, and its ultimate purpose is learning. To inform the questions, the researcher collects *data.* Data are like building blocks that, when grouped into patterns, become *information*, which in turn, when applied or used, becomes *knowledge* (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of large amounts of data—reducing raw data, identifying what is significant, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal. This was the task of Chapter 9, "Analyzing Data and Reporting Findings." The challenge now becomes one of digging into the findings to develop some understanding of what lies beneath them—that is, what information we now have and what this really means. Analysis, in this sense, is about *deconstructing* the findings.

Your goal in conducting analysis is to figure out the deeper meaning of what you have found, and that analysis began when you assigned codes to chunks of raw data. Now that you have a well-laid-out set of findings, you go to a second level. You scrutinize what you have found in the hope of discovering what it means, or, more precisely, what meaning you can make of it. You are seeking ways to understand what you have found by comparing your findings both within and across groups and by comparing your study's findings with those of other studies. This final step of analyzing qualitative data involves *your interpretation* of the findings. (Note, some doctoral programs refer to this step as "evaluation of findings.") Interpretation includes how you, as the researcher, understand, explain, and represent research participants and their experiences and how you then describe this in ways that reflect both process and insight. Subjectivity is inherent in all aspects of qualitative research, and qualitative research does not strive for objectivity. What qualitative researchers do is strive for conscious and intentional tracking of their subjectivities (assumptions, biases, stereotypes, prejudices) that are at play in the research process and account for these to the extent possible. As such, the goal is to make subjectivities as transparent and open as possible. As such, there is a strong need for an ethical and critical approach to data analysis and interpretation that fully respects the site or setting and seeks to do justice to participants' lived experiences. As Ravitch and Carl (2016) explain,

> Your subjectivity can be harnessed as a vibrant part of the analytic process since it is embedded in all layers and phases of the interpretive processes that constitute the various aspects of qualitative research, from the development of a topic and research questions through data collection, to the final writing up of your study, and surely throughout the iterative cycle of data analysis. Understanding the relationship of broad interpretive processes to specific analytic procedures, and the role of subjectivity across these domains is an important part of an approach to qualitative data analysis that is based on intentionality and criticality of thought and process. (p. 219)

In qualitative research, we are open to different ways of seeing the world. We make assumptions about how things work. We strive to be open to the reality of others and understand different realities. We must listen before we can understand. Analysis of the findings begins with careful listening to what others have to say. Begin by asking yourself: "Given what I have found, what does this mean? What does this tell me about the phenomenon under study? What is really going on here?" In asking these questions, you are working back and forth between the findings of your research and your own perspectives and understandings to make sense and meaning. Meaning can come from looking at differences and similarities and from inquiring into and interpreting causes, consequences, and relationships.

Data analysis in qualitative research remains somewhat mysterious (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The problem lies in the fact that there are few agreed-on canons for qualitative analysis in the sense of shared ground rules. There are no formulas for determining the significance of findings or for interpreting them, and there are no ways of perfectly replicating a researcher's analytical thinking. In this chapter, we purport to offer not a recipe but rather a guideline for navigating the analytical process. Applying guidelines requires judgment, sensibility, and creativity. Because each study is unique, each analytical approach used is unique as well. As Patton (2015) puts it,

> Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance, yes, but no recipe. . . . In this complex and multifaceted analytical integration of disciplined science, creative artistry, skilled crafting, rigorous sense-making, and personal reflexivity, we mold interviews, observations, documents, and fieldnotes into *findings*. . . . In short, no absolute rules exist except perhaps this: Do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study. (pp. 521–522)

Remember, the human factor is the great strength of qualitative inquiry. But this can also be a fundamental weakness. There may be clear delineated frameworks for analyzing qualitative data, as discussed in Chapter 9 (e.g., Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Saldana, 2016). But as Patton (2015) emphasizes, guidelines, exemplars, and procedural suggestions are not rules. Each qualitative study is unique, so the analytical approach taken by the researcher will be unique. As such, because qualitative research depends on the skills, training, capabilities, and insights of the researcher, analysis and interpretation ultimately depend on the analytical intellect and style of each individual analyst.

As with all previous chapters, this chapter is presented in two sections: Section I, "Instruction," talks about (a) thinking about, (b) planning, and (c) presenting your analysis. Section II, "Application," presents what an analysis chapter might look like. By using the example carried throughout this book, we analyze and interpret the findings of the research that we have conducted.

It must be stressed that analyzing and interpreting is a highly intuitive process; it is certainly not mechanical or technical. The process of qualitative data analysis and synthesis is an ongoing one, involving continual reflection about the findings and asking analytical questions. Qualitative researchers often, of necessity, learn by doing. As such, there is no clear and accepted single set of conventions for the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data. Indeed, many qualitative researchers would resist this were it to come about, viewing the enterprise as more an art than a science. Therefore, the term *instructions* for this chapter might be somewhat misleading. Reducing the data and presenting findings can be explained in a stepwise and somewhat mechanical fashion. Analysis, synthesis, and interpretation of qualitative data, in contrast, is a far more nebulous endeavor—hence, the paucity of published literature on how to actually do it. Rather than instructions, what we provide in this chapter are essentially guidelines for how to think about analysis and principles to use in selecting appropriate procedures that will organically unfold and become revealed as you become immersed in your own study.

Please be aware, too, that the guidelines and principles that we provide are generic and can be applicable across a broad range of qualitative genres or traditions. However, analytical approaches are linked to particular forms of data collection and are underpinned by specific conceptual and philosophical traditions and their inherent grounding assumptions. Methodological congruence implies that there are analytic distinctions among traditions or genres. Each tradition is sensitive to particular analytic methods and strategies; as such, each tradition demands that the researcher think about data analysis and representation in a particular way. In essence, the product of each tradition provides a perspective on reality that is specific to that tradition. For more details and nuances regarding analysis for pure qualitative traditions such as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative inquiry, action research, and others, we suggest that you seek the relevant available literature related to your specific tradition, and also consult with your advisor.

The previous chapter discussed how to present the findings of your research by organizing data from various sources into categories to produce a readable narrative. The purpose of this chapter is to provide interpretative insights into these findings. This point in the process is where you shift from being an "objective" reporter to becoming an informed and insightful commentator or storyteller. No one has been closer to the focus of the study, its data, and its progress than you have. You have done the interviewing, studied the transcripts, and read the related literature. You have lived with and wrestled with the data. You now have an opportunity to communicate to others *what you think your findings mean* and integrate your findings with literature, research, and practice. This process requires a good deal of careful thinking and critical reflection.

Section I: Instruction

Thinking About Your Analysis

Taking time to reflect on your findings and what these might possibly mean requires some serious mind work—so do not try and rush this phase. Spend a few days away from your research, giving careful thought to the findings, trying to put them in perspective in order to gain some deeper insights. To begin facilitating the kind of thinking process required, we have developed what we call an interpretation outline tool—a mechanism that enables you to consider the findings in a deeper way than you have had to do up until now, to "peel back" all the possible reasons regarding how else a finding can be explained, thereby fleshing out the meanings that underlie each finding. Findings should not be taken at face value.

Essentially, this simple but effective tool prompts and prods you to question each of your findings (and all the various aspects of each finding) by asking "Why?" and "Why not?" over and again, allowing you to brainstorm and exhaust all the possibilities that might explain that finding. In effect, those explanations become the basis of your interpretations. This tool propels you to develop and strengthen your critical thinking and reflection on all the issues surrounding your findings. This is essentially "problem posing"—an inductive questioning process rooted in the works of Lindeman, Dewey, and Piaget, who were advocates of an experiential and dialogical education. Freire (1968/1970) and Mezirow (1981) used problem-posing dialogue as a means to develop critical inquiry and understanding of experience.

Figure 10.1 gives some idea of how such a tool can be developed. A sample completed interpretation outline tool is included as Appendix CC. We suggest that a completed version of an interpretation outline be included in your dissertation's appendix to illustrate the logical development and overview of your interpretive thought processes.

Figure 10.1 Interpretation Outline Tool

STEP 1:

State Analytic Category 1: This category directly relates to your research questions.
Describe the corresponding findings.
Ask "Why?" and "Why not?"
Think critically. Brainstorm all possible reasons. Continue to probe "Why?" and "Why not?"
Ask: What is happening, and why it is happening? How else can this be explained? What assumptions am I making? What blind spots might I have overlooked? What alternative interpretations or explanations might exist for what I see in the data?
Look (a) within findings, (b) across findings, and (c) across cases/individuals. State all linkages that can be made to the relevant literature.
Ask also: How does my positionality and my identity (social, cultural, political, psychological, institutional) influence the research process? How can I address this? What trustworthiness issues are emerging? How can I address challenges to credibility and validity?

STEP 2:

State Analytic Category 2: This category directly relates to your research questions.
Describe the corresponding findings.
Ask "Why?" and "Why not?"
Think critically. Brainstorm all possible reasons. Continue to probe "Why?" and "Why not?"
Ask: What is happening, and why it is happening? *How else* can this be explained?
What assumptions am I making? What blind spots might I have overlooked? What alternative interpretations or explanations might exist for what I see in the data?
Look (a) within findings, (b) across findings, and (c) across cases/individuals.
State all linkages that can be made to the relevant literature.
Ask also: How does my positionality and my identity (social, cultural, political, psychological, institutional) influence the research process? How can I address this? What trustworthiness issues are emerging? How can I address challenges to credibility and validity?

Instruction: Continue in the same manner for each analytic category, exhausting all possible interpretations. In fact, the structured questions in this tool can be asked throughout the research process. In essence, they are a means of checking in with your conceptual framework throughout the process of data collection and analysis of findings.

Source: An initial version of this figure first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2007b). *Understanding qualitative inquiry: Content and process* (Part I). Unpublished manuscript. This revised version appears in Bloomberg, L. D. (2011). *Understanding qualitative research: Content and process* (Part III). Unpublished manuscript.

Planning Analysis of Your Findings

In thinking about the analysis, you might ask yourself what this chapter is really all about and what it should constitute. How does one go about seeking the deeper meanings behind the findings? How does one get started? What is really involved? We asked ourselves these questions as we set about writing this chapter. We sought the answers by way of structuring our discussion according to three interrelated activities: (a) seeking significant patterns among the findings, (b) making use of description and interpretation, and (c) providing some sort of synthesis or integration.

Think intently about the analytic logic that informs the story you wish to tell. Questions you need to ask yourself include: "What are the key concepts I have used in this study? How do my findings shed light on these concepts and on my broader topic of inquiry? How do the study's findings shed light on the original research problem as set out in the introduction to the dissertation and on related literature and/or theory?" You need to decide the type of story you wish to tell as well as the structure of the chapter. Remember that keeping your findings in context and thinking holistically are among the cardinal principles of qualitative analysis.

Examining Patterns and Themes

Analysis is essentially about searching for and closely examining patterns and themes (and subthemes)—that is, the trends that you see emerging from among your findings. Note that qualitative analysis allows for discussion of major themes and also subthemes, and the latter are often extremely significant, so these should not be overlooked. After having spent many hours interviewing (and/or observing) people and contexts, you are likely to come away with some possible explanations of how and why people are saying what they are saying. Having immersed yourself in your data and lived with them for an extended period of time, you have most likely reflected on emergent patterns and themes that run through your findings. You also have probably made some assumptions about the significance of certain outcomes, consequences, interconnections, and interrelationships that you see appearing.

Bear in mind that analytical approaches are linked to particular forms of data collection and are underpinned by specific conceptual and philosophical traditions. Each tradition provides a perspective on reality that is specific to that tradition. In this regard, data analysis strategies for case study research include analyzing data through description of the case or cases, including themes and cross-case themes, and making use of analytic categories to establish themes or patterns. Ethnography involves analyzing data through description of the culture-sharing group and the themes that emerge about that group. The goal is essentially the analysis and interpretation of cultural themes and patterned regularities. Grounded theory data analysis strategies involve open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, thereby generating theory. In a phenomenological study, the researcher analyzes data for significant statements grouped into "meaning units," with the goal of producing an exhaustive description of the phenomenon by developing themes of meanings. Narrative research strategies analyze data for stories, "re-storying" stories, and developing themes, often employing a chronological dimension.

A few words on significance are necessary at this point. Quantitative researchers utilize statistical tests of significance to research the frequency of responses. Typically, these tests of significance are reported with preestablished levels of confidence. Data are numerically analyzed by determining means, modes, medians, rank orderings, and percentages. In qualitative research, we do not seek statistical significance that characterizes quantitative research. In qualitative research, what we mean by significance is that something is important, meaningful, or potentially useful given what we are trying to find out. Qualitative findings are judged by their substantive significance (Patton, 2015). As Patton explains, in determining substantive significance, the qualitative analyst must address certain issues, including the following:

- How solid and consistent are your findings?
- To what extent and in what ways do your findings increase understanding of the phenomenon under study?
- To what extent are your findings consistent with the existing body of knowledge? That is, do they support

or confirm what is already known about the phenomenon? Do they refute what is already known? If so, how, and in what ways? Do they break new ground in discovering or illuminating something?

- To what extent are the findings useful in terms of contributing to building theory, informing policy, or informing practice?

You need to establish some system for representing participants' perspectives on the most significant events or activities by describing the procedures that you have adopted in analyzing your findings. Patterns, as we have come to see them, include both quantitative and qualitative elements. At this point in the process, your data summary tables (see Appendices T through Y for completed examples) and participant demographic charts (discussed in Chapter 8, "Presenting Methodology and Research Approach") become useful for analysis. In the findings chapter, the purpose of the data summary tables was merely to report numbers and percentages of responses. In the analysis chapter, the data summary tables become useful vis-à-vis the significance of your findings. In the analysis of qualitative data, we are interested in the concentration of responses across individuals. Although not really a finding in itself, having a large number of data in a particular area or under a particular descriptor or criterion does suggest where to look for patterns.

Readers need to understand different degrees of significance of your various findings. In this regard, you need to be specific when patterns are clear and strongly supported by the data or when patterns are merely suggestive. Ultimately, readers arrive at their own decisions based on the evidence that you have provided, but your opinions and speculations hold weight and are of interest to the reader because you have obviously struggled with the data and know them more intimately than anybody else.

Looking for emergent patterns among your findings can be considered a first round of analysis. It is important to also look across findings and across dimensions of each finding—the subsets within each finding. This second round of searching for patterns can often generate new insights and usually uncovers patterns that may not immediately have been obvious or apparent in the initial round of analysis. Creating cross-case classification matrices is an exercise in logic. This involves moving back and forth between your findings and crossing one dimension (subset) with another in search of what might be meaningful or significant. Beyond identifying themes and patterns, you now build additional layers of complexity by interconnecting your themes or patterns into a story line. Matrices can certainly push linkages. In creating matrices, however, be careful not to manipulate the data in any way or force the data to make cross-classification fit.

Finding patterns, themes, and subthemes is one result of analysis, whereas finding and closely examining ambiguities and inconsistencies is another. You certainly want to determine how useful the findings are in illuminating the research questions being explored and how central they are to the story that is unfolding about the phenomenon under study. However, you must also be sure to challenge your own understanding by searching for discrepancies and negative instances in the patterns. Seek all possible and plausible explanations other than those that are most apparent. Alternative explanations always exist. As is characteristic of qualitative research, you must be willing to tolerate some ambiguity. As such, look at issues from all angles to demonstrate the most plausible explanations. This step enables readers to assess the persuasiveness of your argument.

Once you have established patterns, they need to be explained. In this regard, you need to draw on your own experience and intuition. In addition, you have to once again consult the literature and consider your pattern findings in light of previous research and existing theory. Do your findings confirm similar research? Do your findings contradict previous studies? How can you explain these differences and/or similarities? As you begin to consider answers to these sorts of questions, you begin to *describe and interpret* your material.

Description and Interpretation

As Patton (2015) explains:

> Thick, rich description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting. Good description takes the reader into the setting being described … Description forms the bedrock of all qualitative reporting …

> Interpretation involves explaining the findings … Interpretation, by definition, goes beyond the descriptive data. (pp. 533–534)

The details in the description are your evidence, your logic; they build your argument. Therefore, description must necessarily precede interpretation. At the same time, the explanation and linkages revealed in the explanation serve to clarify the description and illuminate the details. Description is intended to convey the rich complexity of the research. Interpretation involves attaching significance to what was found—making sense of findings, considering different meanings, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, and offering potential explanations and conclusions. A qualitative report should provide not only sufficient description to allow the reader to understand the basis for an interpretation but also meaningful interpretation to allow the reader to appreciate the description. Remember, because the data are made meaningful through interpretation (a necessary and vital component of qualitative research!), the very process of meaning-making through interpretive practice and associated researcher reflexivity becomes key. As stressed throughout this book, it is critical that qualitative researchers be explicit about their frame of reference, philosophical standpoint, and their investment in the research (personal, emotional, conceptual, and/or theoretical) because these factors will in one way or another be used to interpret the study's findings.

Just as methodological congruence implies that there are clear analytic distinctions among traditions or genres, demanding that the researcher think about data analysis in a particular way, so are interpretation and representation strategies specific to each tradition. Case study research makes use of deep and complex interpretation and presents an in-depth picture of the case (or cases) using narrative and visual representation (tables, charts, figures, etc.). Ethnographic research conducts interpretation by attempting to make sense of the findings—how and in what ways the culture functions or "works"—and like case study presents narrative and visual description and representation. A grounded theory study engages a series of coding procedures in order to develop a story of propositions, with the goal of presenting a visual model or theory. A phenomenological study develops textural description ("What happened?") and structural description ("How was the phenomenon experienced?"), as well as description of the "essence" of the experience, with narration of the essence being presented by way of discussion and visual representation. Narrative inquiry strives to interpret the larger meaning of the story by focusing on processes, theories, and unique and general features of the story or text. Richards and Morse (2013) provide in-depth discussion regarding analysis and interpretation with regard to the major qualitative genres. Willig (2014) offers an excellent overview of interpretation in qualitative research, including the origins of interpretation and approaches to interpretation of the major current qualitative traditions or genres.

An interpretive reading of your data involves constructing a version of what you think the data mean or represent, or what you think you can infer from the data. You may be wondering why you should even bother with interpretation, especially because interpretation involves taking risks and making educated guesses that might be off base. Wolcott (1994) argues for the importance of interpretation in qualitative research not only because interpretation adds a new dimension of understanding but because the process of interpretation challenges qualitative researchers' taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs about the processes and phenomena they have investigated—an important aspect of a researcher's personal and professional development.

Interpretation essentially involves reading through or beyond the findings—that is, making sense of the findings. It is about answering the "Why?" and "Why not?" questions around the findings. Interpretation requires more conceptual and integrative thinking than data analysis alone because it involves identifying and abstracting important understandings from the detail and complexity of the findings. Interpretation in effect moves the whole analytic process to a higher level. You (the researcher) arrive at new understandings, finding meaning beyond the specifics of your data. What you have seen in the field and what you have heard participants say all come together into an account that has meaning for the participants, for you, and for the reader. As with qualitative analysis in general, there are no hard-and-fast rules for how to go about the task of interpreting the meaning of the findings. One way to facilitate the process of interpretation is to begin by asking the following questions: What is really going on here? What story is told by these findings? Why is this story important or significant? What can be learned from these findings?

Lincoln and Guba (1985) capture well the essence of interpretation when they ask: What were the lessons learned? Lessons learned are in the form of the researcher's understanding and insight that she or he brings to the study based on her or his personal and/or professional experience, history, and culture. But it is more than this: It is about the meaning derived from a comparison of the findings of your study with information gleaned from the related literature and previous research. Making connections between your study's findings and the relevant literature provides you with a way to share with colleagues the existing knowledge base on a research problem and acknowledge the unique contribution your study has made to understanding the phenomenon studied.

Searching the literature to see whether it corresponds, contradicts, and/or deepens your interpretations thus constitutes a second layer of interpretation. Interpretation, therefore, is not just a conglomeration of personal ideas. It is the subtle combination of your ideas in tandem with what has already been reported in the literature. The findings of your study will either confirm what is already known about the subject area surrounding your research problem or diverge from it. Therefore, it is imperative that you relate your analysis to the available literature on the subject. This transparency, essentially, is what enables a reader to determine whether and to what extent your interpretation is persuasive, plausible, reasonable, and convincing.

Your integrity and credibility as a researcher are given credence by your inclusion of all information, even that which challenges your inferences and assumptions. You are building an argument about what you have learned in the field—an argument that is more compelling than other alternatives. As you put forward your interpretations, you should not forget to challenge the patterns that seem so apparent. Qualitative research is not about uncovering any single interpretive truth. Alternative understandings always exist; to demonstrate the soundness of your interpretation and your commitment to reflexivity, you should be sure to search for, identify, and describe a variety of plausible or rival explanations, thereby challenging your own assumptions, preconceived ideas, and potential biases.

Remembering that the human factor is both the greatest strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis, the researcher must recognize the subjective nature of the claims made regarding the meaning of the data. One barrier to credible interpretation stems from the suspicion that the analysis has been shaped according to the predispositions, assumptions, and biases of the researcher. Whether this happens unconsciously or inadvertently is not the issue. Rather, the issue is that you counter such a suspicion in the mind of the reader by reporting that you have engaged in a systematic search for alternative patterns and themes, and rival or competing explanations and interpretations. This means thinking carefully, and with an open mind, about other logical possibilities and then seeing whether those possibilities can be supported by the findings and the literature. Failure to find strong supporting evidence for contrary explanations helps increase readers' confidence in the interpretations that you have generated.

As you guide the reader through your discussion, you attempt to create a compelling argument for interpreting your data in a specific way. Your reader should have some sense that your interpretations represent an exhaustive search for meaning from all your findings. Your explanations of the meaning drawn from the data should be multidimensional. The reader should get the sense that you have looked at your findings from different angles, that you have taken into account all the information relevant to the analysis, that you have identified and discussed the most important themes, and that your argument is systematically constructed. In the dissertation defense, you must be prepared to clarify your interpretations and support your thinking while remaining open to and being willing to consider alternative perspectives.

Your effort to uncover patterns and themes among your findings, as well as provide a variety of interpretations, involves both creativity and critical thinking. You need to make creative but also careful and thoughtful judgments about what you see as significant and meaningful. In this regard, you rely on your own experience, knowledge, and skills. However, analysis need not be a solitary endeavor—indeed it should not be. Although you are certainly the closest person to your study, discussion, dialogue, and debate with critical colleagues and advisors will certainly be helpful as you look at the findings from a variety of angles and vantage points. Analysis is all about learning what emerges from the findings of your research, and sharing perspectives through dialogue lies at the heart of all meaningful learning.

Synthesis

Qualitative research involves the move from a holistic perspective to individual parts (analysis) and then back to a holistic look at the data (synthesis). Whereas the findings chapter splits apart and separates out pieces and chunks of data to tell the "story of the research," the analysis chapter is an attempt to reconstruct a holistic understanding of your study. Analysis is intended to ultimately depict an integrated picture. What should emerge from your discussion is a layered synthesis. Synthesis is the process of pulling everything together—that is, (a) how the research questions are answered by the findings, (b) to what extent the findings emanating from your data collection methods can be interpreted in the same way, (c) how your findings relate to the literature, and (d) how the findings relate to the researcher's prior assumptions about the study. Synthesis is not, however, a linear process.

As you move toward interpretations about causes, consequences, connections, and relationships, you must be careful to avoid the simplistic linear thinking that characterizes quantitative analysis, which deals with variables that are mechanically linked out of context. Qualitative analysis is about portraying a holistic picture of the phenomenon under study to understand the nature of the phenomenon—which is usually extremely complex—within a given specific context. As such, synthesis becomes key.

Synthesis is ongoing throughout the analytical process and is about combining the individual units of analysis into a more *integrated whole*. You need to account for all the major dimensions that you have studied. From your intimate familiarity with your data, you create a cohesive whole from the isolated bits and pieces. You also need to lead your reader to focus on the larger issues—the broader context. Analysis is ultimately about capturing the meaning or essence of the phenomenon and expressing it so that it fits into a larger picture. One problem that tends to occur is that we become so immersed in a highly specific research topic that we are unable to step back and think about more general and fundamental disciplinary frameworks. Give your research a broader perspective by thinking about how what you have discovered may relate to issues that are broader than your original research topic. Narrowly defined research problems are related to broader social issues. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) propose:

> Qualitative data, analyzed with close attention to detail, understood in terms of their internal patterns and forms, should be used to develop theoretical ideas about social processes and cultural forms that have relevance beyond these data themselves. (p. 63)

As we have stressed throughout, there is no one "right" way to analyze your findings. You will be judged not on your analysis per se but rather on your synthesis—that is, the way in which you have organized your discussion around major themes, issues, or topics and the ways in which you have woven these together. What is of importance is the logic and coherence of your argument, how effectively you have tied your argument to the literature and prior research, and your ability to sweep your discussion into some broad and relevant discourse.

A final word on analysis: Qualitative analysis and interpretation are both an art and a science, and herein lies the tension. Qualitative inquiry draws on a critical as well as a creative attitude. The scientific part demands a systematic, rigorous, and disciplined approach and an intellectually critical perspective. The artistic dimension invites exploration, discovery, insight, innovation, and creativity to generate new possibilities and new ideas. The technical, procedural, and scientific side of analysis is easier to present and teach. Creativity is more difficult to distill and describe. Remember that each analysis is a unique expression of the researcher's skill and creativity. Each analysis is also a reflection of your reflexivity as a researcher and a statement of your openness to having your assumptions and propositions challenged. As you approach the analysis of your findings, remain aware of and open to new and unexpected possibilities. Be prepared to tolerate ambiguity and critique. Have faith and trust in yourself as a thinker. Spend much time brainstorming, revisiting earlier assumptions, and engaging in critical reflection. Also take the time to dialogue with others—in depth and critically.

Presenting Your Analysis and Synthesis

Overview

In qualitative research, the emphasis is on understanding. You are not seeking to determine any single causal explanation, to predict, or to generalize. Your aim is to tell a richly detailed story that takes into account and respects a context, and that connects participants, events, processes, activities, and experiences to larger issues or phenomena. As the researcher, it is your responsibility to explain in great detail what you have found—what you have discovered from your data, the sense you make of it, and what new insights you now have about the phenomenon under discussion. In this chapter, you serve as a guide to your readers, helping them to understand the findings of your study based on your intensive and careful analysis. The chapter is essentially a well-thought-out conversation that integrates your findings with literature, research, and practice.

Just as there is no one correct way to analyze findings, there is no one correct way to organize this chapter. The structure varies depending on your methodology, the findings, and your advisor's preferences. Structure also depends on your research tradition or genre as mentioned previously, with the product of each tradition remaining specific and relevant to that tradition. With the process being a highly intuitive one, and with the real learning taking place in the doing, what we offer is a set of guidelines regarding microstructure of your chapter—that is, a chapter that is well organized, well written, and well argued. These guidelines regarding a way to proceed are based on some strategies that have worked for us in our own research. Our hope is that these guidelines are useful to you in stimulating further thinking and ideas of how you might go about presenting this chapter of your dissertation.

A Set of Guidelines

Begin with a brief introductory paragraph that includes your research purpose statement as you have identified it in Chapter 1, as well as a preview of how the chapter is organized so that the reader knows what to expect. Include a summary of the major findings and some explanation of how you have gone about analyzing and synthesizing your data. Exemplary dissertations typically provide sufficient information that enables the reader to envision all the steps that the researcher undertook in preparing and organizing the data. By providing a window into your procedures for analyzing the data, you assure the reader of your attempt to provide an impartial analysis. Moreover, you allow others who might want to follow the same procedures to do so, thereby establishing an audit trail, which contributes to the trustworthiness of your study. When professional colleagues are able to follow your line of reasoning, they have a more solid basis for determining the credibility of your study.

To offer this explicit documentation of your analytical procedures, both in the dissertation and at the dissertation defense, you have to make careful and detailed notes of all the steps you have gone through in the process of analysis, including even the ones that subsequently turned out to be dead ends or unsuccessful. Your explanation of all the decisions and choices that you made along the way conveys a sense of care about how you conducted your research and will promote the credibility of your interpretations.

Once you have introduced your reader to the chapter and given some indication of how the chapter is organized, you need to pull apart all the areas and discuss each one separately. Always remember to make one point at a time and fully flesh it out before moving on to the next point. This rule applies to all writing, especially to writing your analysis. Discuss each point that you make from different perspectives, but stay on target. Avoid redundancy or repetition. Some material might need to be cut, placed in other sections, or saved until later. It is crucial that the reader be able to follow the logic of your argument and grasp what it is that you are trying to communicate. Do not distract the reader by too many arguments and/or ideas at once. Applying too many concepts at once can make your analysis confusing. Achieving a high-level product requires careful thinking on your part; therefore, revisions and redrafting are to be expected.

Analysis is a multilayered approach. When writing this chapter, keep in mind various key aspects:

- Establish the story line based on your findings. Based on that story, what do you think may really be going on? Think deeper as you go through all of the following levels:
  - Level 1 means looking at each individual finding (i.e., going finding by finding). Ask yourself what each finding means. What are all the possible explanations for what is being said by your participants?
  - Level 2 means looking across your findings. Ask yourself how the findings are related and/or interconnected. To what extent do the findings impact each other?
  - Level 3 means looking across cases (i.e., cross-case analysis). Remember, each person is a "case." Here we look for similarities and differences among participants. You can address these issues by way of your interpretation outline tool (see Figure 10.1).
- Structure your discussion by using headings. For example, you may choose to use your research questions or the analytic categories of your theoretical or conceptual framework. Think carefully of how you can most logically set up your discussion.
- When discussing your findings, carefully choose your words. Use qualifiers such as *seems, appears, possible, probable, likely, unlikely,* and so on. In your discussion, you offer ideas, suggest explanations, and/or identify reasons; you do not state facts. You speculate, and therefore you cannot come across as definitive, rigid, or dogmatic.
- In the course of the discussion, identify any qualifications and/or limitations of factors, such as age, gender, and context, with respect to your findings. Make sure to mention that you have done extensive cross-case analysis, which enables readers to follow your interpretation and judge whether it is plausible. It also enables you to review your own thinking and perhaps find weaknesses or limitations within your discussion, which will then have to be addressed and revised.
- Remember that analysis is not just a list of findings. In your discussion, you need to weave together the findings from the various data collection methods that you have used. You do this to demonstrate that each method you have used contributes similarly to the same analysis.
- Take responsibility for convincing your readers of the accuracy of your analysis by providing sufficient descriptive information for them to make independent judgments. Be sure to discuss the findings of your study with respect to the literature and prior research. The intent is that the inferences you are making from your findings, in combination with what the literature says, will make a compelling argument. Overall, it is important for the reader to know the ways in which your study contributes to the current knowledge base. What are the differences between your study and the findings of previous studies? How do your findings compare with what the literature says? Do your findings help clarify contradictions in the literature? Do your findings go beyond the literature, breaking new ground? Are there any surprises? Surprises are the unanticipated outcomes of your study that may in some way contradict current thinking in meaningful and significant ways.
- Aside from including the relevant literature citations, also be sure to weave into your discussion direct participant quotations. The more support you can provide for your discussion, the more likely your readers will be to concur with your analysis.

Your interpretations—that is, your conjectures as to what the findings really mean—should be clear, logical, relevant, and credible:

- *Clear* interpretations are easy to follow. If the reader has difficulty following your train of thought, you run the risk of losing the reader. Information must be presented systematically, and sufficient details must be provided to enable the reader to understand the issues as presented. Information that is presented in tables should always be preceded by the narrative that describes the table.
- Readers will consider your interpretation *logical* if you have presented your discussion in a systematic and thoughtful way. Based on your own understanding of your findings, you should decide which issues need to be addressed first and how the remainder of the discussion will flow naturally from those issues (your interpretation outline tool is your sketch of the order in which you will discuss your findings). Your presentation should lead your readers to understand your findings as clearly as you do.
- Your interpretation must be *relevant;* that is, it must be directly related to the research problem, purpose, and research questions that have guided your research. It also must relate to the literature and/or theoretical base within which your study is situated. Make sure to keep your interpretation tight and focused. Whereas

your findings chapter includes a multitude of elements, you now need to focus only on the most important and relevant issues, and highlight and address the most prominent findings of your research. Determining the major issues may be viewed as a judgment call on your part. However, you are the person most familiar with your data, and thus you are in a position to help the reader recognize and accept your focus. A good idea is to run your ideas by others, thereby remaining open to different understandings and acknowledging different perspectives.

- Establishing *credibility* in qualitative research means that you have engaged in the systematic search for rival or competing explanations and interpretations. Think carefully about other logical possibilities and see whether those can be supported by the findings and the literature. In doing this, you should not be focused on attempting to disprove alternatives. You are not looking for clear-cut "yes" or "no" answers. Rather, you are searching for the best fit. As such, seek support for alternative ways of seeing things. Also keep track of and report alternative classification systems, patterns/themes, and explanations that you have considered during your analysis, which demonstrates intellectual integrity and lends credibility to your study.

Give yourself the critical distance necessary to see whether all the parts of your argument are in place. This may require periodic "stepping back" from your research for a time and/or engaging in critical discussion with colleagues or advisors and/or journaling. In thinking carefully about what meaning may lie behind the findings—that is, what is really driving your findings—researchers frequently create visual displays—figures and tables. These displays organize the findings diagrammatically and illustrate the relationships among identified topics, categories, and patterns. Visuals are useful for demonstrating linkages and connections as well as differences within each case, across cases, and across categories, as well as by demographics or other dimensions. The information enables the reader to clearly see and understand issues and concepts discussed in the narrative. In addition to augmenting your discussion, constructing diagrams or charts can help you with your analytical thinking. Displays often help you "see" some aspect of your findings in new ways. Through displays, you might notice emergent trends, discover new connections or relationships, or even recognize the significance, or lack thereof, of certain pieces of information.

The "Analytic Category Development Tool," presented as Figure 10.2, is one example of a visual that gives some idea of how analytic categories can be explained and presented. The tool, a type of flow diagram, traces the logical flow and development of a study's analytic categories from research questions through findings and outcomes/consequences (the source of the research problem). You need to be mindful in determining the correlation between research questions, findings, and analytic categories, remembering that these are not always simple and linear. A sample completed analytic category development tool is included as Appendix DD. We suggest that a completed version of the tool be included in your dissertation's appendix to illustrate to your readers an overview of the development and emergence of the analytic categories pertaining to your study.

Figure 10.2 Analytic Category Development Tool

Research Question	Finding Statement	Outcome/Consequence (Source of Research Problem)	Analytic Category
1.	Finding 1:	⇨	Category 1
2.	Finding 2:		Category 2
3.	Finding 3:	⇨	Category 3
4.	Finding 4:		Category 4

Source: This tool appears in Bloomberg, L. D. (2010). *Understanding qualitative research: Content and process* (Part II). Unpublished manuscript.

If you choose to include visuals, give careful thought to the most logical place to insert them so as not to interrupt the flow of the discussion. If the diagrams are working tools, they are typically included as appendices. There are different ways of constructing diagrams, charts, and graphs in the analysis of qualitative data. In this regard, Miles et al. (2014) offer excellent suggestions. Make sure that all information presented in tables is consistent with information presented in the narrative.

Finally, you will need to tie together the various threads of the discussion. As such, there should be a strong culminating paragraph that provides a concluding summary of the whole chapter. This summary should include the key points made, as well as some form of reflection on the analytic process. You also might choose now to revisit your initial assumptions (stated in your first chapter) and comment on these in light of your findings. The researcher-as-instrument is an inquirer, a writer, an analyst, and an interpreter. We have to leave open the possibility that other researchers might have told a different story given the same set of data. What we learn from our research, how we understand what we find, and how we report it is but one view. Some acknowledgment that there are multiple ways of interpreting data will serve to show that you fully understand the subjective nature of qualitative research. Such an acknowledgment further enhances your study's credibility in the eye of the reader.

There are many subtleties involved in the kind of detailed analysis that is required for a qualitative dissertation. As such, it is unlikely that you will achieve a well-argued, reader-friendly analysis chapter in one go. Writing this chapter takes many hours of thinking and rethinking, and much tightening up is involved to ensure the logic, depth, and breadth of your argument. Based on your advisor's feedback, you usually have to write and rewrite drafts of this chapter, revising and/or expanding sections of it accordingly. In most cases, this step may occur more frequently than you anticipated as you work toward organizing the sections into a cohesive and powerful chapter that explains your findings. If your interpretation is thoughtful, logical, articulate, insightful, and reasonable, it is more likely to be compelling to your readers. In addition, it will provide the opportunity for an informed discussion, making a worthwhile contribution to your academic discipline.

The reflexive questions that follow can serve as prompts for journaling throughout the dissertation process, and in this case, for Chapter 5 of your dissertation, in which you are analyzing and interpreting your study's findings, thereby shedding light and insight on the underlying meaning of the findings with regard to your own experiences and assumptions, and also making connections with the literature and prior research.

It is an act of power to analyze and interpret someone else's reality and experience and tell their story. Critically approaching data analysis involves acknowledging the power to represent others' experiences and recognizing and addressing power differentials within data analysis as an ethical and methodological concern. As qualitative researchers, we can never fully mitigate *impositional interpretation* and *interpretive authority* (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), but we should understand this is a concern and a complex issue to be addressed with transparency and integrity. Critically confronting and engaging with our interpretations and the biases that shape them is a key consideration. Addressing this ethical responsibility requires a reflexive approach to research that includes developing and maintaining a commitment to openness to critical feedback and change.

Reflexive Questions for Chapter 5: Analyzing and Interpreting Findings

1. What assumptions do I bring to this study? What assumptions of mine continue to impact analysis of the study's findings?
2. How, if at all, have I described the ways in which my biases or assumptions may have affected my analysis and interpretation of the findings?
3. Did any conflicts of interest impair or impact the way I approached the participants and/or the data?
4. Have participants provided sufficient information for me to make plausible interpretations?
5. Do I have sufficient knowledge of participants' worlds to read their words and really understand these?
6. Do I provide sufficient social context on which to base my analysis and interpretation?
7. How and in what ways might I be misinterpreting the findings?
8. Have I challenged my interpretations? How might I do so more vigorously?
9. Have I understood and addressed all patterns and themes I see in the data? Might I have omitted anything?
10. How do I understand my role in the creation of data so that the arguments I make are credible and authentic?
11. Have I addressed issues of *interpretive authority*—that is, the power of the researcher to be the translator and interpreter of the lived experiences and perspectives of others? Have I made an effort to acknowledge the possibility thereof and, to the extent possible, challenge and resist its imposition?
12. In my analysis and interpretation, have I fully respected participants and attempted to the best of my ability to do justice to their lived experiences?
13. If my research participants were reading my study, how would they feel? Would my analysis and interpretation resonate with them?
14. How did early data analysis inform subsequent data analysis? In what ways, if at all, did that shape or inform the findings?
15. To what extent do I allow theory to inform (frame and/or challenge) analysis and interpretation?
16. Have I sought out and engaged with disconfirming evidence to provide alternative perspectives, even though these may be surprising, unexpected, or even uncomfortable?
17. In what way(s) did I seek disconfirming evidence? How can I do more of this?
18. Have I made any assumptions or generalizations beyond the scope of the data?
19. Am I making interpretive arguments that are grounded in my data, or are these arguments an inferential leap, or both?
20. What is the role of each of the research participants themselves in shaping the research and challenging my interpretations? Am I providing this opportunity to them? If so, how, and in what ways? If not, why?
21. Have I engaged in dialogue and collaboration with colleagues or "thought partners" regarding my data and the potential impact on data interpretation including researcher identity, power differentials, and positionality? Am I receptive to critical feedback regarding my interpretations?
22. Have I taken all necessary precautions to respect research participants and the research site and to preserve anonymity?
23. Can any harm befall the site/setting and/or research participants at any point, now or in the future, as a result of my analysis or interpretation?
24. What immediate or future risk might occur by disseminating research material in published reports?

Chapter Summary Discussion

As pointed out previously, analysis of data begins to occur before you can present your findings; by coding and sorting, you are in effect analyzing your raw data. Having organized and prepared mounds of raw data so you could present an accurate and objective account of the findings of your research (as addressed in Chapter 9), you are now ready to move on to the final step of the analytic process: to provide an interpretation and synthesis of those findings. Both in the previous chapter and in this one, we emphasized the distinction between reporting and presenting findings and interpreting them. These are two distinct processes.

We have covered some difficult ground in this chapter. Qualitative analysis is a complex task and is therefore not simple to explain. Because the concepts of analysis, interpretation, and synthesis are difficult to explicitly articulate, thinking about how to compose a chapter describing these processes is somewhat challenging. Therefore, the suggestions we have made in this chapter should be viewed more in the nature of guides to possible approaches and combinations of approaches rather than as tight prescriptions. You should also be sure to check with your advisor regarding specific school or programmatic requirements in this regard.

In the previous chapter, you presented the analysis of your raw data, which were your findings. In this chapter, you presented the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of your findings. You moved beyond *data* to *information.* In the findings chapter, you stood back and remained objective, to the extent possible. Your task was to offer an accurate account of the findings. In the analysis chapter, you moved from the objective to the subjective. Your voice and opinion, in conjunction with the literature, now take center stage. Findings cannot be taken at face value. Your aim in writing the analysis chapter is to tell a richly detailed story that takes into account a specific context that connects participants, processes, activities, and experiences to larger issues or phenomena. This chapter is essentially a well-thought-out conversation that integrates your findings with the literature, previous research, and practice.

First, you seek to identify significant patterns or themes. Then you move on to provide some sense of understanding; that is, you attempt to explain these patterns and themes—possibly the most creative part of the dissertation. Findings need careful teasing out. As a researcher, you must ask yourself what you have learned from conducting the research and studying the findings. What connective threads are there among the experiences of your study's participants? How do you understand and explain these connections? What new insights and understanding do you have as a result of conducting your study? What surprises have there been? What confirmation of previous instincts and hunches has there been? Are your findings consistent with the literature? Have they perhaps gone beyond the literature? If so, how and in what ways? The answers to these questions add another dimension of understanding to your findings.

Bear in mind that analytical approaches are linked to particular forms of data collection and are underpinned by specific conceptual and philosophical traditions. And just as methodological congruence implies that there are clear analytic distinctions among qualitative traditions or genres, demanding that the researcher think about data analysis in a particular way, so are interpretation and representation strategies specific to each tradition. As such, each tradition provides a perspective on reality that is specific to that tradition, and so the way you go about developing themes and presenting interpretations is aligned with your chosen qualitative genre or tradition.

Providing careful step-by-step documentation of your analysis offers other researchers access to your procedures, thereby addressing the trustworthiness of your study. In this way, your study can become a model for other studies—a contribution to the research community and an implicit affirmation of the value of your work. Readers of dissertations also are drawn to visual representations of information, which typically compare and contrast key findings of the study. Displaying data visually makes things clear and also can facilitate your seeing findings in new and striking ways.

The central requirement in qualitative analysis and interpretation is *clear and logical thinking*. You need to examine your findings critically so as to produce credible and meaningful interpretations. Interpretation of qualitative data precludes reducing the task to any single defined formula or fixed blueprint. Moreover, we must appreciate that, in dealing with interpretation, we are unavoidably dealing with human subjectivity, and, as such, there are differences in the ways we make meaning. Be sure to acknowledge that there are multiple ways of interpreting findings, that you have sought rival explanations, and that your interpretations are but one perspective. The human as instrument in qualitative inquiry is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. Nowhere does this ring more true than in analysis and interpretation.

TABLE **Quality Assessment Chapter Checklist**

Introduction	✓ Do you have an introductory paragraph that includes a purpose statement (if required) as well as a brief explanation of how you went about analyzing and synthesizing the findings?
Presentation of Analysis and Synthesis	✓ Does your argument flow logically and coherently? ✓ Do you make one point at a time? ✓ Are your interpretations clear, thoughtful, and reasonable? ✓ Are your interpretations relevant to the research problem, purpose, and research questions? ✓ Are the major themes and patterns interrelated to show a higher level of analysis and abstraction? ✓ Is your analysis positioned and discussed in terms of the related bodies of literature and previous research? ✓ Have you included relevant participant quotations to support your argument, making sure that these same quotations did not appear in Chapter 4? ✓ Have you made appropriate use of tables and other displays to augment and support the discussion? ✓ Have you made sure that all information presented in tables is consistent with information that is presented in the narrative? ✓ Have you acknowledged that there are multiple ways of interpreting findings and that you remain open to other interpretive possibilities? ✓ If you have chosen to revisit and reflect upon your initial assumptions as stated in your opening chapter, do you flesh these out sufficiently in terms of your study's findings?
Summary	✓ Do you offer a comprehensive and overview summary that integrates all key points?
Addressing Alignment	✓ Is the presentation of your findings aligned with your study's research methodology (qualitative tradition or genre)? ✓ Is the presentation of your findings aligned with your research design?
And …	✓ Have you eliminated any needless repetition? ✓ Have you checked for insufficient detail and areas that are "unfinished"? ✓ Have you checked throughout your discussion for unclear/ambiguous language? ✓ Have you kept track of and reported on alternative classification systems, patterns/themes, and explanations that you have considered during your analysis? ✓ Have you engaged in discussion with critical colleagues throughout the analysis process to hear and acknowledge different perspectives and points of view and to be open to a variety of possible interpretations? ✓ Is the writing throughout clear and readable? Refer to "Guidelines for Academic Writing" in Chapter 4.

Section II: Application

Following is the application section, which demonstrates the salient features of an analysis chapter in terms of how it should be structured and the interpretive style it should take on. However, please be aware that what we present in Section II is a sketch of an analysis chapter rather than a full-blown analysis of the findings. In a real dissertation, the discussion would be elaborated more extensively to achieve deeper and richer levels of analysis and synthesis. As emphasized throughout, there are many options with regard to qualitative analysis and presentation, and requirements vary among institutions and programs. Therefore, as with other components of the dissertation, you will need to check with your advisor and/or department about the content and presentation of your study's analysis chapter.

Chapter 5 of the Dissertation

Analysis, Interpretation, and Synthesis of Findings

The purpose of this case study was to explore with a sample group of all-but-dissertation (ABD) students their perceptions of why they had not managed to complete their dissertations. It was hoped that a better understanding of the perceptions of students struggling at various stages of the dissertation process, as well as those students who have become inactive, would provide insight about how to encourage and support other current and future students to successfully conduct their research, write the dissertation, and obtain the desired doctoral degree.

This research used qualitative inquiry to collect data by conducting in-depth interviews and collecting supportive data by use of critical incidents and a focus group discussion. Participants in the study included 20 current and former doctoral candidates. The data were coded, analyzed, and organized first by research question and then by categories and subcategories guided by the theoretical or conceptual framework as depicted in Chapter 2. The study was based on the following five research questions:

1. Upon completion of the course work, to what extent did participants perceive they were prepared to conduct research and write the dissertations?
2. What did participants perceive they need to learn to complete their dissertations?
3. How do participants attempt to develop the knowledge and acquire the skills and attitudes that they perceive are necessary to complete their dissertations?
4. What factors did participants perceive might help them to complete their dissertations?
5. What factors did participants perceive have impeded and/or continue to impede their progress in working toward completing their dissertations?

Analytic categories are directly aligned with each of this study's research questions. These same analytic categories were used to code the data and present the findings in the previous chapter. In the analysis, the researchers search primarily for connecting patterns within the analytic categories, as well as the connections or themes that may emerge among the various categories. As a secondary level of analysis, the relevant theory and research are tied in, as these themes are compared and contrasted to issues raised by the literature.

The previous chapter presented the findings of this study by organizing data from various sources into categories to produce a readable narrative. The purpose of this chapter is to provide interpretative insights into these findings. Whereas the findings chapter split apart and separated out pieces and chunks of data to tell the "story of the research," this chapter is an attempt to reconstruct a more holistic understanding. Analysis is intended to depict a more integrated picture, and what emerges is a layered synthesis.

The discussion takes into consideration the literature on higher education and doctoral programs and adult learning. The implications of these findings are intended to augment the understanding of the perceptions of why some students are unable to manage completion of their research and the resultant dissertation. The chapter concludes with a reexamination of the researchers' assumptions, which were identified in the first chapter, and a summary that incorporates reflection regarding the effect of possible researcher bias in interpreting the findings.

Analytic Category Development

To illustrate the process of developing analytic categories, we revisit the findings from the study conducted in this book. Upon careful analysis of the concentrated responses in our data summary tables, both within individuals and across individuals, themes and patterns emerged, which we refer to as analytic categories. The overriding finding in this study revealed that students perceived the course work did not prepare them for the dissertation process. We named Analytic Category 1 that describes this disconnect "Recognizing the gap between course work and dissertation work." Analytic Category 1 speaks to Findings 1 and 2.

The perceived disconnect between the course work and understanding and knowing how to carry out the research led students to dialogue with colleagues and friends, tapping into their informal networks for a sounding board and assistance. Students relied on their own personal characteristics and self-directed activities to facilitate their progress. We called Analytic Category 2 "Closing the content-process gap." Analytic Category 2 speaks to Findings 3 and 4.

This perceived disconnect between the course work and understanding and knowing how to carry out the research was compounded by the fact that students perceived a lack of timely, consistent, and helpful advisement as a further impediment to their progress. Students encountered various obstacles. Some supports were utilized to overcome barriers to success. We called Analytic Category 3 "Leveraging dissertation support." Analytic Category 3 speaks to Finding 5.

Analytic Category 1: Recognizing the gap between course work and dissertation work.

The first research question sought to determine how well participants understood what they needed to know and what they needed to be able to do to successfully conduct research and write the dissertations once they completed the course work. Participants indicated that there was a disassociation between the first part of the doctoral program, the course work, and what follows as doctoral candidates engaged in the research and dissertation-writing process. One of the participants, Morris, reflected this view when he said, “I didn’t get the information during the course work. I didn’t pick up what I needed to know about actually doing research, and what’s worse, I didn’t know how to find it out.” David Sternberg, author and professor emeritus at John Jay College, gives credence to this perspective:

> The real issues are sociological and structural in the formation, the way the whole doctoral process is shaped. And then linked to that, of course, is that after you have finished your comprehensives, you just fall off the cliff—there is no linkage at all in that sense. You know the dissertation is seen as a trial by fire—you have got to do it yourself. (personal communication, September 14, 2006)

At the same time, casting the onus for not being able to complete the dissertation solely on the design and structure of particular doctoral programs may be misplaced. Such an assertion might be warranted because a number of studies dealing with possible causes of high attrition rates among doctoral students identify not only issues of program design but factors directly related to students’ idiosyncrasies (Bourner, Bowden, & Laing, 2001; Hawlery, 2003; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004).

Let us consider the implications of both perspectives—that of doctoral programs and that of the students enrolled in those programs. It can be argued that the primary purpose of institutions of higher education is to foster critical thinking by exposing students to philosophical and theoretical concepts and to the various bodies of literature that inform theory. Therefore, the focus of doctoral programs is not so much to demonstrate the practical application of theory but rather to expand and build on existing theory and/or to fill gaps that may exist in the literature.

Hawlery (2003) expands on the purpose of doctoral programs as the development of academic scholarship, rather than the training and development of practitioners. The author points out that new psychological and intellectual demands are placed on doctoral students and describes the implications of both demands in this way:

> In most disciplines, the Ph.D. is considered a research degree and means that its primary purpose is not to prepare practitioners, clinicians and teachers but to produce scholars. If you want to be considered a scholar, you must do research. This calls for a major transition in how you think and what you do. (p. 21)

Although attrition in doctoral programs is high, estimated at 50% nationwide (Berg, 2007; Dunn, 2014; Lazerson, 2003; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Smallwood, 2004), it also can be said that another 50% of students, exposed to the same course work, are successful in completing their dissertations and subsequently earn their doctoral degrees. This finding suggests that there may be innate or idiosyncratic student characteristics that cause some to succeed in attaining their degrees—despite the fact that course work does not prepare them in the practical application of research—while others remain unable to complete their dissertations. In addition to possible personal characteristics, there may be environmental factors that contribute to students’ success.

Taking on doctoral work can be overwhelming and can place a psychological burden on some students, for which they are unprepared. Karen, one of the participants who commented on this, said, “It (the dissertation) is an overwhelming task, and one doesn’t have experience with it, and so it can be very anxiety provoking.”

Lovitts (2001) explains the dissertation process as complex, long, and daunting, and one in which students have little or no experience. The author notes

> These are complex processes with which most students have little familiarity or prior experience. Students who reach this stage know (or discover) that they must conduct research that distinguishes them from their peers. Most feel inadequately prepared to do this type of research and find themselves unprepared for the writing in the style required for a dissertation. (p. 72)

Although lack of experience can lead to confusion and even debilitation, and although the course work has not adequately prepared students, this impasse may be only temporary as students begin learning by doing. Meloy (1994) found that, for novice qualitative researchers, developing a sense of the project’s coherence was dictated by the project, rather than any suggested a priori plan or program structure. As she explains,

> One of the most common ways we have of learning to do something is *by doing it.* But “doing research” is becoming more complex and controversial. Although qualitative researchers are making substantial contributions to scholarship by describing not only how research is conceptualized but also how its products are finally presented and understood, there is for novice researchers, and traditionally trained faculty members across the wide array of disciplines, a down side. As the number of methodological options and alternative presentations increases, so does the ambiguity. (p. xi)

In terms of her own research, Meloy (1994) acknowledges that her course work did not fully prepare her to do qualitative research, and she recounts her experience:

> In spite of my coursework, I had no idea of what it felt like to do research. Writing the dissertation was an experience in itself. Adding qualitative research on top of that made for an especially interesting time of learning, reflection, and practice. (p. 2)

Indeed, unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is not structured, systematic, and procedural. As such, course work cannot fully prepare the student for the experience of actually doing it—that is, conducting the research and writing the dissertation. Moreover, aside from the necessary research skills, the level of writing skill required in a dissertation is something that is not easily taught. Thus, it can be reasonably argued that course work cannot be expected to prepare the student for academic writing of a project as intense and complex as a dissertation.

Although some faculty and administrators view lack of progress or even attrition as a function of students' academic ability, motivation, or commitment, Lovitts (2001) and other researchers suggest it is a constellation of psychological and/or personal and structural factors that explain why some students are not able to complete their dissertations while others succeed. Thus, it appears to the researcher that ABD status and attrition rates cannot be placed solely at the doorstep of the institution or squarely on the shoulders of students. Rather, students' progress in doctoral programs might be better understood as the dynamic interaction of students and the institutional context.

Being unprepared may mean, in a sense, that students are unsocialized as to the scope and meaning of a doctoral dissertation (Bauer & Green, 1994; Sternberg, 1981). This notion brings into play the idea of a doctoral dissertation as an institution in itself—that is, the traditional model of a dissertation and all the expectations that go along with it. This theory includes the political aspects involved with faculty, the university system, institutional protocol (ambiguities, nuances, rules, regulations), and working with committee members who often have differing and sometimes even competing requirements. Students often do not have a clear grasp of the policies and procedures involved. The system of dissertation work and the expectations surrounding that system are unfamiliar to them—hence, the general feeling of unpreparedness.

The above notwithstanding, there are still some doctoral faculty who feel the main reason that students do not progress and in some cases even drop out of doctoral programs is because of some aspect of the student's background. Hawlery (2003) raises this perspective in her book about the doctoral experiences and feelings of graduating students:

> Standing behind each smiling graduate is the shadow of another person who also expected to be there on the auspicious occasion, but dropped out somewhere along the way. Are these "shadow people" intellectually inferior to those who stayed the course and received their PhD? Is the graduation ceremony portrayed here simply an example of Social Darwinism in which only the fittest (brightest) survive? (p. 3)

To address their perspective, doctoral faculty in some programs have tried to tighten up the admission requirements for enrollment into their programs so as to admit only those students who are able to withstand the pressures of doctoral work (Lovitts, 2001). However, it is interesting to note that more stringent admission requirements in a number of doctoral programs have not affected the dropout rates, which continue to be high (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). According to Lovitts (2001), those who enter doctoral programs are high achievers in the base case; they are people who have prior academic experience that often includes numerous honors and academic awards, and yet they are among the best and brightest who drop out of doctoral programs. Having taken the onus solely off the students, Lovitts (2001) identifies three reasons for the stagnation and/or dropout rates within doctoral programs, which the author sees more as a function of the interaction of students and the institution. She describes these as follows:

1. It is not the background characteristics that students bring with them to the university that affects their persistence outcomes; it is what happens to them after they arrive.
2. Graduate student attrition is a function of the distribution of structures and opportunities for integration and cognitive map development.
3. The causes of attrition are deeply embedded in the organizational culture of graduate school and the structure and process of graduate education. (p. 2)

Azad and Kohun (2006) attribute feelings of isolation among doctoral students as a major factor affecting their progress. The authors point out that "despite this recognition, the feeling of isolation has yet to be addressed fully in the design of some doctoral programs" (p. 21). The authors find support from others in the academic community that most doctoral programs are not designed to specifically address the emotional needs, social feelings of estrangement, and/or inadequacy experienced by matriculating doctoral students. In other words, the design of most doctoral programs does not provide a supportive environment for students to successfully complete their dissertations and obtain their degrees (Azad & Kohun, 2006; Berg, 2007; Hawlery, 2003; Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000).

Lack of progress in a doctoral program also may be a function of mutually exclusive expectations on the part of program faculty and the students they enroll. One of the participants in this study wrote the following in his critical incident:

> It was the constantly changing expectations among the committee members themselves about what I was expected to do and how I was expected to do it. (Hank)

As one of the participants who said that her expectations were not met described,

> While I found the course work intellectually stimulating, I was learning a lot—the language, the terminology, the theory. But once I was on my own I had this expectation that I would be given some guidance around actually doing the research, writing the dissertation—and it just wasn't there. Then I started to think it's a matter of learning along the way, and it is up to me to figure it out—but somehow I keep thinking it shouldn't be that way. (Jane)

Brause's (2004) study lends support to the expectations of some doctoral students with regard to the dissertation process and what they believed were the obstacles that stood in their way. One participant in Brause's study described it this way: "I sought assistance in understanding a process which has seemingly been cloaked in 'darkness and secrecy'" (p. 143). Lovitts (1996) also reports that doctoral students understand formal program requirements, but often do not have a good understanding of the informal expectations vis-à-vis carrying out the work. From the perspective of the doctoral program faculty, there may well be an unspoken expectation that the rigors of producing a dissertation require students to be highly self-directed given their view that the doctorate is a terminal degree of intellectual import and of the highest prestige. Hawlery (2003) explains this perception of doctoral faculty in this way:

> It is understandable that academics view the cognitive realm as their primary domain and intellectual accomplishment as their primary mission. Few would argue with this focus. Nevertheless, there are vast differences among faculty in the degree to which they recognize the psychological components implicit in an understanding of this kind. It is subjectively painful experiences that underlie most students' decision to quit, yet many doctoral faculties refuse to concern themselves with that they see as non-cognitive matters. (p. 24)

With regard to the differing expectations, research studies have shown that when students are given timely, relevant information about the program and, as important, the doctoral process, they are better able to develop good working relationships and are able to maintain their commitment to the program (Bauer & Green, 1994). This sentiment was expressed by many participants in this study and was best reflected by one, who said,

> I think at the beginning of the course work there needs to be some additional assistance as to how to get people to begin thinking about their dissertation, because indirectly everything is associated, in my opinion, with the dissertation. So I think there could have been a better job done with an overview that keeps getting referred to as one goes through the course work, so as one moves forward in the classes one can see the relevancy. And there should be more about what's expected—you know, what lies ahead. More direction would have been very helpful to me. (Debbie)

In summary, it has been argued in the foregoing that the lack of student progress and even student departure cannot be attributed solely to the fact that course work does not typically prepare students to conduct research and write their dissertations. This view is posited because the intent of course work is primarily to provide a sound theoretical foundation for subsequent research and not to address the practical application of theory. At the same time, there are significant psychological and social aspects that affect students' ability to carry out this work, most notably issues of self-efficacy and feelings of isolation.

In many cases, psychological symptoms and social feelings of estrangement and/or isolation that students experience may be a function of the ambiguity within which the academy portrays the research process during the course work. Participants characterized this phenomenon as "shrouded in mystery." Therefore, it appears there should be opportunities in the design of doctoral programs to demystify the research process without sacrificing the intellectual rigor intended to escalate higher-order thinking among students. The following comments reflect participants' strong reactions when what is expected is not made explicit by the faculty:

> I don't know that faculty really want to disarm anybody of what it's all about because it may take away the mystique. . . . So you are left with this feeling of loneliness—like you are hanging out in the wind—and it's overwhelming. (Anne)
>
> What I have come to realize as I get further involved in this work is that there is something of a mechanical process to putting this dissertation together. And, you know, if they had explained how these pieces all fit when I was taking classes—it didn't have to be such a mystery, and it doesn't have to be so difficult. And I wonder sometimes if the field—doctoral programs in general—if they just try to make it difficult for students . . . you know, a rite of passage or whatever! (Doris)

The prior comments illustrate the sense of isolation that students experience in the absence of not knowing what is expected and what lies ahead. Research suggests that the more students are informed about the process, the more they are integrated into the academic community, and the more they feel part of its social life, the less likely it is that students will feel isolated and the more likely it is that they will persist in the program (Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 1993). In light of this notion, it appears that mechanisms need to be put in place to clarify expectations that faculty have of students and what students can reasonably expect of faculty; it is really a question of shared responsibility.

Analytic Category 2: Closing the content-process gap.

The perception of the overwhelming majority of participants in this study that the course work did not prepare them to do research may explain why they also reported they were left to rely on their own resources and the help of colleagues to identify what they needed to learn. The findings revealed that all participants in this study indicated they needed to (a) acquire knowledge about the *content* involved in doing research and/or (b) understand what they actually had to do to carry out the *process* of conducting research.

On the surface, it appears obvious that if students felt the course work did not prepare them to carry out research and write their dissertations, they would seek that information and knowledge elsewhere. However, this may not necessarily be attributed to a failure of the course work. It may likely be that students were more focused on meeting the demands of the course work and not looking beyond to the potential relevancy of the theories to which they were being exposed and how those theories might subsequently inform their future research. Knowles (1980) provides support for this likelihood:

> Adults … tend to have a perspective of immediacy of application toward most of their learning. They engage in learning largely in response to pressures they feel from their current life situation. To adults, education is a process of improving their ability to cope with life problems they face now. They tend, therefore, to enter an educational activity in a problem-centered or performance-centered frame of mind. (p. 53)

This may well be the "frame of mind" of many participants in this study, who were focused on the demands of the course work and not the application of what they were learning to subsequent practice. One of the participants expressed it this way:

> As I was going through the course work I was paying a lot of attention to other papers and things. And the research stuff got very much pushed aside for me in my own mind. And it was, well, you know what, I don't have to deal with that right now. I'm going to have to do that at the end of it. But I've really got to get this paper done, and I really have to do well in this class. And I know that when the research stuff was presented, there was something in my unconscious that was saying, "You know what, you can learn this later." (Mollie)

This idea may be further understood in light of what Knowles (1980) describes as having a "readiness to learn" and the associated "timing of the learning." Knowles reminds us that adults must be ready to receive the learning, and this readiness constitutes what he calls a "teachable moment." In other words, presentation of the learning must be timed or in step with a particular stage of development. In this case, development can be understood as students' maturation within the doctoral program.

The majority of participants in this study completed the course work with content knowledge relative to theory, but not content knowledge relative to the practical aspects of what to research and how to conduct the research. The work of Beeler (1991) may provide some further insights. Beeler describes four stages he says students experience as they move through the doctoral journey: (a) unconscious incompetence, (b) conscious incompetence, (c) unconscious competence, and (d) conscious competence. These stages may explain why students in this study were not ready to relate the theories to which they were being exposed to the practical application of research.

The essence of good research is its content; it must be sound, authentic, and researchable. In other words, the subject of inquiry, the problem or phenomenon, must be one that warrants investigation. Several participants in this study described their struggles after the course work to identify a problem about which meaningful research could be conducted. One participant framed the dilemma in this way:

> It's a year later [after the course work] and I am still at this impasse, as the problem really is how to develop a problem and purpose that I can stick with, and I still seem to be having this problem. (Shana)

Participants reported struggling throughout the process to understand *how* they should go about carrying out the research. In reflecting on the process as a whole, Brad, one of the participants, summed up a prevailing view when he said, "If I had more of the *how,* I could have been further along sooner, but I try not to focus on what wasn't but what I have to do now." Another participant described her struggle and frustration with trying to understand what to do in a critical incident form:

> Looking back to the long process of the dissertation research, one critical stage for me started after my proposal defense when I had the pilot data when I needed guidance on how to code the data so as to pave the way for my later data analysis. When I asked for help, I didn't get the guidance or the direction I was looking for. I was just told—go read the works of so and so, and I struggled a long time with this trying to code every line before I had a breakthrough with the help of a colleague. (Jane)

The struggle of students who lacked the knowledge of what to do and how to do it also is reflected in Brause's (2004) study of the experiences of doctoral students as they engage in the dissertation process:

> The one constant theme was lack of knowledge. There was a clear desire to know as much as possible about the process so that they [students] could predict what was going to happen, allocate time and money wisely, and understand their roles in that process. . . .

> Explicit information, respondents believed, would make it easier to manage their responsibilities within and beyond their doctoral program, as well as enabling them to feel more knowledgeable about their progress. (p. 149)

In addition to the perception of the majority of participants that the course work did not prepare them to conduct research and write their dissertations, they had little confidence that they would learn what they needed from faculty and/or their advisors post–course work. This perspective is best illustrated by a participant who explained it this way:

> For me, it comes down to how the dissertation process is handled, and how much support you get from faculty once you get to that point because that's where they lost me. I just couldn't get off square one for doing a dissertation. I couldn't get anywhere with my first advisor. And I did three proposals with an advisor who kept saying: "Well, that's not it yet. I'll know it when I see it." (Anne)

Further, it might be that some students were simply unmotivated to move forward with the dissertation work. Having spent many years at this point in the doctoral program, it might simply be that they lacked the necessary energy to continue—that they were, in effect, running out of steam. As one participant stated,

> At this point [following completion of course work] I was simply exhausted. I had just about come to the end of my tether. . . . Yes, I badly wanted the doctorate—otherwise why would I have enrolled in the first place? But let's face it, I had a life too, and many commitments, including a family who needed me. I weighed the pros and cons and the toll the doctoral work had taken on my life so far, and I started to question whether I really wanted this thing [the doctorate] so badly after all. (Frank)

It cannot be assumed that students who enroll in a doctoral program will necessarily be motivated. Motivation is indeed a factor that cannot be taken for granted in terms of adults' participation in learning experiences and in their subsequent learning success (Knowles, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Knowing why some doctoral students do not progress and what deters their progress is a function of the extent to which intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivating factors are compelling. In the present study, when participants were asked what prompted them to enroll in a doctoral program, almost equal numbers cited extrinsic and intrinsic motivating factors. Therefore, one can surmise that, in this case, motivation was determined not by any one particular motivating factor —either extrinsic or intrinsic—but rather by the *intensity* of the factors at play.

In light of the lack of formal preparation during course work and formal guidance post–course work, as cited earlier, participants went about learning informally by relying primarily on themselves and their colleagues—those others who were, in their view, "in the same boat." This mode of learning is not so much an anomaly but rather is consistent with the concept in the literature that says adults learn largely through informal means. In fact, it is in the informal domain that most learning occurs. Watkins and Marsick (2009) define informal learning as learning that is predominantly unstructured, experiential, and noninstitutional. As such, the authors view informal learning as integral to daily life, asserting that its value comes from the fact that it occurs as people face a challenge, a problem, or an unanticipated need. By its nature, then, informal learning arises spontaneously within the context of real work.

Learning informally requires individuals to engage in self-directed activities, either through interactions with others or independent of others. Candy (1991) characterizes self-directed learners as individuals who take responsibility for their own learning and do not rely on others to tell them what they need to learn. Nor do they rely on structured programs for their learning. Therefore, it was not surprising to see that the participants in this study sought to learn what they needed primarily by engaging in dialogue with colleagues and to a lesser extent, by other solitary activities, such as reading relevant texts and completed dissertations, and conducting literature searches for the kinds of information they needed.

Some participants expressed a clear preference for finding things out on their own. For example, in reflecting on the advice she might give to new doctoral students, Debbie commented, "I would tell someone they really need to read, read, read—get a hold of as many dissertations as you can, and examine how they are structured. It helped me a lot, and this was the main way that I figured things out." Other participants, like Lin, talked about "losing themselves for hours in the online library." Angela talked about how invaluable the Internet was in helping her find the information she needed.

The following comment describes the value that most participants in this study placed on having colleagues to talk to and with whom they could brainstorm:

> I started reaching out to some of my peers, and I found they would listen, they understood, and a lot of the time, I would walk away a little bit clearer. You know, you get another perspective, another way of looking at things when you talk it over with someone or with other people. I tried to be there for others when they needed to talk, to discuss ideas or even just listen when they needed to vent; after all they had done that for me. And I don't think I would still be in the program if it weren't for some of my classmates. (Karen)

Many participants maintained consistent communication with colleagues, as one participant, Fay, noted, "After the course work, we formed a small group, and we kept in touch and still do—there's a lot of caring, and we continue to help one another, and we share information." The value that participants in this study placed on their interactions with colleagues finds support generally in the adult learning literature, which places an emphasis on how collaboration, dialogue, and reflection are vehicles for learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000). Learning from and with colleagues specifically within the context of doctoral work also finds support in the work of Meloy (1994) and Piantanida and Garman (1999). These researchers found that study groups with colleagues were a strong support factor for students in doctoral programs. Study groups, according to these researchers, were found to encourage scholarly development, generate thought-provoking issues with respect to qualitative research, provide opportunities for dialogue and reflection, and engender emotional support.

Although most participants were involved in self-directed activities to help them learn what they needed to progress in their work, some also mentioned that they received some help in the post–course work seminars they attended. These seminars were described by participants as "less structured than typical course work classes." Although students were provided with contextual material vis-à-vis research, the "discussions were largely informal." Interestingly, participants reported that students who attended these seminars were, in the words of Dexter, "not held accountable for producing work."

Lack of accountability may indeed promote a sense of complacency and allow students unspoken permission to avoid the real work of doing research and writing a dissertation. In contrast, having students set objectives and commit to producing a particular piece of work within a certain given time frame would create momentum for the students' progress. In this regard, lack of accountability may well have contributed to the high "time-to-completion" rate of participants in this study.

A further explanation as to why students did not find these seminars helpful may be due to the fact that they were not involved in setting objectives and planning. Indeed, one of the distinguishing characteristics of many adult learning programs is the shared control of program planning and facilitation (Knowles, 1998). Even when the learning content is, to a large extent, prescribed, sharing control over the learning strategies is believed to make learning more effective. Engaging adult students as collaborative partners satisfies their "need to know," as well as appeals to their self-concept as independent learners.

In summary, although working and learning through others is the primary way that adults learn, in the context of knowing what to do and how to complete research and write a dissertation, it may require the "others" to be informed experts. In other words, although it is important to have empathetic and supportive colleagues, in the absence of some form of formal, structured guidance and/or the accessibility of informed experts, collegial support may well be insufficient and actually slow down the process of completing arduous dissertation work. Further, although a fair amount of self-directed activities is necessary, such as reading other dissertations and searching the literature, time expended on these activities should be content specific—that is, searching out information related specifically to the subject of inquiry at hand.

Analytic Category 3: Leveraging dissertation support.

The perception of participants was that—in the absence of formal help through either course work, faculty, or advisement—they had to rely on themselves and their colleagues to understand and carry out their research. In light of this perception, it is not surprising that participants would cite their own personal attributes or qualities as well as the help of colleagues as primary supports to them in their doctoral work. At the same time, participants cited access and availability of advisors, and in some cases the quality of advisement, as the single most significant impediment to their post–course work progress. This perception raises a serious point of contention that warrants closer examination, especially given the pivotal role advisors play in doctoral programs. Lovitts (2001) sheds light on the importance of the advisor in this way:

> The advisor influences how the student comes to understand the discipline and roles and responsibilities of academic professionals, their socialization as a teacher and researcher, the selection of a dissertation topic, the quality of the dissertation and subsequent job placement. (p. 131)

Given the importance of advisement in the dissertation process, painting all advisors with the same brush may well be an unfair and unwarranted assumption. As previously mentioned, approximately half of the students who enroll in doctoral programs succeed in obtaining the degree. Thus, in light of the success of roughly half the population of doctoral students, it is likely that those students who completed their dissertations and obtained their doctoral degrees did receive the kind of guidance and support from advisors that is required. However, the fact that more than half of the participants in this study viewed the advisor relationship as an impediment does suggest the advisement that students received may not have been adequate. There may be several reasons that so many students in this study held this perspective. In many cases, the workload and professional demands placed on faculty can be daunting; hence, they may not always be able to meet students' expectations by providing timely and consistent guidance. Sternberg (1981) sheds light on why faculty members are not always consistently helpful to students:

> From a sociological perspective, dissertation advising rates low as a career promoting activity. People are promoted, given tenure, receive more attractive offers from other universities principally in terms of what they publish themselves, certainly not for editing and advising the writing and publications of graduate students. (p. 17)

Consider as well that not all faculty members who provide advisement have the same level of commitment or the same degree of interest in the various research topics of all their advisees. Further, it also is conceivable that advisors can and do become frustrated by the lack of initiative and lack of progress of the part of some students despite the prodding, encouragement, and direction the advisor provides. Given these considerations, one explanation may be that it is easier and even more comfortable for students to blame their lack of progress on their advisors rather than on their own competencies, level of motivation, or even habits of laziness. Another explanation to consider is that conducting research and writing a dissertation is new terrain for most students, one for which most have little or no prior experience on which to draw. As such, it is difficult for students to have the confidence in their ability to carry out such a large-scale scholarly project without the support, encouragement, and direction of advisors who have traversed this terrain and, therefore, are content experts.

At the same time, it should be noted that two participants in this study did comment favorably on their relationship with their advisors. Sally, one of the two, said, "I am a very lucky person; my advisor gives me a lot of feedback, a lot of personal care, and a lot of dedication. I know that is not the case for everyone." Further, that one fourth of the participants did not mention advisement at all—either positively or negatively—may suggest that other personal and overriding issues impeded progress in addition to or beyond the student–advisor relationship.

Doctoral students face all the life issues and demands typical of adulthood. Therefore, it was not surprising that, in addition to lack of support from their advisors, participants cited professional/work demands and personal family issues as significant challenges that stood in the way of their progress. As is the case in most doctoral programs, the participants in this study are working adults who have to manage the demands of both work and school.

In all cases, the participants in this study have to maintain employment to support themselves and their families as well as pay the "not insignificant" tuition. Maintaining balance between work and academic life is not easy; when the demands in one domain increase, productivity in the other may be affected. Maintaining this balance can be stressful, thus producing anxiety and even debilitation that threatens effectiveness in one domain or the other. The level of individual stress placed on students, as with many other adults, is often compounded by concern and worry about other personal, family, and/or health issues.

Because participants in this study perceived that they were not getting the formal help they needed from the course work, the faculty, or their own advisors, they said they had to rely on themselves and their colleagues to get through the research process. Therefore, it is understandable that those participants who persist in the program would describe themselves as being resourceful and use terms such as *dedicated*, *committed*, *motivated*, and *self-directed* as personal characteristics that keep them going. It is likely that the kind of perseverance, and even tenacity, that these characteristics encapsulate are important elements contributing ultimately to a student's ability to successfully complete her or his dissertation.

In summary, why some students do not progress more quickly and others abandon the process altogether is more likely the result of a complex set of factors. In other words, it does not appear to be a function of course work not preparing students, advisors not providing guidance, students not being able to handle the pressures of daily life, or students not being sufficiently motivated or self-directed. Some or all of these factors impinge, to a lesser or greater extent, on the lives of all students. Despite these challenges, some students in doctoral programs persist and prevail, whereas others do not.

Revisiting Assumptions From Chapter 1

It is useful to revisit the five assumptions underlying this study that were stated in Chapter 1. These assumptions were presented at the inception of this study and were based on the researchers' backgrounds and professional experiences. The five basic assumptions identified at the outset are discussed next in light of the analysis of this study's findings.

The first assumption underlying the research was that course work does not prepare doctoral candidates to conduct research and write their dissertations. This assumption held true according to the first finding. The sample of students in this study expressly stated that the course work did not prepare them to carry out the practical aspects of conducting research and writing their dissertations.

A second assumption posited by the researchers was that because doctoral students are mature adults, they will be sufficiently self-reliant and self-directed, and that will enable them to carry out research and write their dissertations. This assumption turned out to be partially true. Initially, students appeared to be dependent on the course work and were not prepared to be self-directed. It was only when they had completed the course work and realized they did not know the steps involved or how to proceed that they became self-reliant and were self-directed as they reached out to colleagues for help. This notion was illustrated in the third finding uncovered in this study.

The third assumption was that because students were successful in completing all the course requirements, they would be able to achieve success in doing research. This assumption did not hold to be true. Judging by the slow progress and in some cases, lack of progress of the sample students in this study, past academic success is not always or necessarily a predictor of future academic success.

The fourth assumption is that doctoral candidates do not always receive the direction and guidance they need from their advisors. This assumption held true given that the majority of participants cited the lack of good, timely, and consistent advisement as a major barrier standing in the way of their progress.

The fifth and final assumption is that people who enroll in doctoral programs are strongly motivated to obtain the doctoral degree and are thus likely to complete the dissertation. This assumption did not hold true given that motivation alone is insufficient to carry out doctoral work. This idea was illustrated in Finding 2, which revealed that students needed to understand the content and process involved in research and have the knowledge and skills required to complete their dissertations.

Summary of Interpretation of Findings

This chapter portrayed the dissertation experiences of a sample of doctoral candidates. In summary, the prior discussion illustrates the multifaceted and complex nature of the dissertation experience. The discussion reveals various reasons that students might feel unprepared following course work. It offers an explanation as to what students feel they really need to know to conduct research and write a dissertation, why they then go about learning the way they do, and why certain factors are seen as either supports or barriers to their progress.

The endeavor of analyzing the findings was to produce a nuanced and multitiered, but holistic and integrated, synthesis. The challenge throughout data collection and data analysis, which were not separate but rather interlocking phases of this research, was to make sense of large amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal given the purpose of the study. In addition, the researchers performed extensive within- and across-case analyses and did not find any significant relationships between any of the demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity, discipline/field of practice) in explaining the findings one way or another.

Presenting an analysis of the findings uncovered in this study warrants a degree of caution. First, the research sample was small, comprising interview data from only 20 interviews with doctoral students involved in qualitative research. Second, the focus of the study was on those who either are struggling at some stage of the dissertation process or have withdrawn from their doctoral studies entirely. Thus, the perceptions of those students who persist in the process and those who complete the process and obtain the doctorate are not represented. For these reasons, it must be stressed that the implications that can be drawn are specific to the experiences of the sample group under study.

Aside from the potential biases involved in researcher-as-instrument, as is typical of qualitative research, the researchers acknowledge possible additional bias in analyzing the findings because they are faculty members teaching in doctoral programs. Toward this end, and to help minimize this limitation, throughout the process of data collection and data analysis, the researchers engaged in ongoing critical reflection through journaling and discussions with critical colleagues. Remaining open to the possibility that others might have told a different story, this chapter is essentially, and ultimately, a presentation of how *these* researchers understand and make meaning of the material and the connections they see in it.

Following are some recommended resources that you might consider perusing regarding analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

Annotated Bibliography

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Following a detailed discussion of data analysis and representation (Chapter 8), the authors, in Chapter 9, turn the focus to the art of writing and composing the narrative report, which "brings the entire study together." Using the metaphor of architecture, the authors center the discussion on four rhetorical issues inherent in the rendering of a rigorous qualitative study, regardless of research approach: reflexivity and representation (the importance of being ethically and politically self-aware and self-disclosing), audience (whom are we writing for, and are there potentially multiple audiences?), encoding our writing (the importance of the use of language in encoding the narrative), and using quotations (whereby we bring in, or perhaps distort or even exclude, the voices of participants). This chapter addresses each of the five research traditions—narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study—and assesses and compares two rhetorical structures within each tradition: overall structure (i.e., overall organization of the report or study) and embedded structure (i.e., specific narrative devices and techniques that the writer uses in the report or study). In so doing, this chapter highlights the diverse narrative structures for writing a qualitative report and the major differences that exist among the different research traditions. Of particular use is a table (pp. 234–235) that illustrates the diversity of perspectives and compares structural and embedded writing in each of the qualitative traditions. The focus throughout is on ethical considerations and reflexivity, and the significance of incorporating these guiding principles in the write-up of the study. This key chapter includes additional useful readings and exercises.

Grbich, C. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This is a practical guide to qualitative data analysis and its application with regard to the wide range of different qualitative traditions, including ethnography (autoethnography, ethnodrama, and cyberethnography); grounded theory; phenomenology (existential and hermeneutic); content, narrative, conversation, and discourse analysis; visual interpretation; and semiotic structural and poststructural analyses. Parts I and II cover some of the theoretical and practical issues in qualitative research, which inform decisions regarding research design and analysis. Part III provides an in-depth account of analysis of written and visual documentation, drawing on relevant tools including narrative analysis, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, visual interpretation, and semiotic structural and poststructural analyses. The author provides a response to various epistemological, theoretical, and practical challenges involved in each tradition and ways in which analysis of findings can be appropriately conceptualized, tools developed, and data presented. Part IV is devoted to assembling data into groupings to begin writing up an analysis. This section covers how to theorize from data, how to incorporate data from multiple sources (both qualitative and quantitative), and how to develop a more abstract explanation regarding findings, as well as an exploration of techniques for innovative data presentation, including visual displays, vignettes, and anecdotes. Part VI focuses on interpreting and presenting qualitative data. The book is packed with detailed examples, a glossary, and further reading lists.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Part III of Patton's book is possibly one of the best texts that we have come across with regard to explaining qualitative analysis, and it is a must-read for those interested in getting a better handle on what is essentially an extremely elusive and ambiguous endeavor. Chapter 8 deals with analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the findings, explaining in great detail the challenges and complexities involved. Especially useful are the sections dealing with thick description, case study analyses, pattern, theme, content analysis, and interpretation of findings. Aside from looking at generic approaches to qualitative analysis, Patton also provides suggestions for what he calls "theory-based analysis approaches." Here he examines the theoretical and philosophical perspectives of phenomenology and grounded theory and offers detailed guidelines for how a qualitative researcher would approach data analysis within each of these traditions. Chapter 9 deals with enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. The author details how to determine the criteria for truth and provides insight into some of the current debates about establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative analysis. Writing in an engaging style, the author draws the reader into the conversation around core issues of persistent debate and controversy.

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological.* Thousand Oak, CA: Sage.

This text is focused on developing knowledge with regard to the methodological (how to design and conduct qualitative research), theoretical (philosophical underpinnings), and conceptual (ways the researcher conceives and shapes the study and its multiple components) aspects that are needed to engage in rigorous research. In Chapter 9 the focus turns to writing and representation. The focus is on the many aspects to consider when formally writing up qualitative research, including how to make informed decisions about the goals, audience(s), purposes, and focus of the study; the format and structure of final reports, incorporating and representing data; voice, language, and participant portrayal; and the processes of outlining, drafting, and revising written reports. Throughout the book, these authors underscore the power inherent in qualitative research and the representation of study participants, including their contexts and aspects of their experiences, and argue for the respectful, authentic, and ethical representations of research sites, individuals, and groups. The authors address important issues including use of quotations, ways to find a balance among description and analysis, voice, language, and participant portrayal, as well as critical writing considerations. Included are useful exercises, reflection activities, working examples, and additional references and resources.

Wertz, F. J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L. M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

This book facilitates a deeper understanding of a variety of qualitative analysis approaches, including phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry. Set as an "adventure" within the field of qualitative research methodology, leading scholars apply their respective analytic lenses and points of view to a narrative account and interview featuring "Teresa," a young opera singer who experienced a career-changing illness. The resulting analyses vividly exemplify what each approach looks like in action. The researchers probe the similarities and differences among their approaches; their distinctive purposes and strengths; the role, style, and subjectivity of the individual researcher; and the scientific and ethical complexities of conducting qualitative research. As an added bonus, the authors present the participant's reaction to the outcomes of the five different analyses and discuss the ethical implications in terms of letting the participant speak for herself, issues of confidentiality, and tensions around interpretation of data. As the authors point out, the goal is to assist seasoned and novice researchers in achieving more rigorous qualitative *praxis*—that is, the reflective application of qualitative analyses. This book clearly illustrates that qualitative analysis is not the mere application of technical procedures but when properly practiced requires a unique qualitative stance and worldview.

11 Drawing Trustworthy Conclusions and Presenting Actionable Recommendations

Chapter 11 Objectives

Section I: Instruction

- Demonstrate how to think about and write sound conclusions.
- Demonstrate how to think about and write actionable recommendations.
- Emphasize and reiterate the significance of alignment among the study's findings, interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations.
- Offer ideas for a final reflection statement.

Section II: Application

- Present a completed example for the concluding chapter of a dissertation.

Overview

We know how exhausted you are at this point. But you are almost at the end of the process, so keep up the energy for just a short while longer! This final chapter of your dissertation is much more than just a cursory summary of findings. It is your chance to have the last word about your study, and it should help the reader decide what to make of your work. It also should stimulate your readers to think more deeply about the findings of your study and the implications thereof. Please note that some institutions require that the chapter presenting conclusions and recommendations stand alone. In other institutions, conclusions and recommendations are incorporated into the analysis chapter. As we have emphasized throughout this book, in the interests of conforming to structural requirements, we advise that you check with your own program and/or institution. As with all previous chapters, we present this chapter in two sections: Section I, "Instruction," and Section II, "Application."

As you were writing your findings, you may have begun to think about various interpretations and draw tentative conclusions. Remember that interpretation and conclusions in qualitative data analysis are always open to revision. In essence, you are building an argument based on your data and attempting to develop explanations that fit the data—a process of inductive reasoning. This process is unlike quantitative analysis, where you collect data to test a hypothesis, or deductive reasoning.

Section I: Instruction

Let us hearken back for a moment to the Part II table, "Overview of Dissertation Content." The simple but useful matrix in the bottom right corner of the table (reproduced as Table 11.1) explains the essence of how to think about the conclusions that you will draw from your findings and the actionable recommendations you will be able to make based on those conclusions.

TABLE 11.1 If/Then/Therefore/Thus Matrix

Findings Through Recommendations:			
Findings	**Interpretations**	**Conclusions**	**Recommendations**
"If I find this …"	"Then I think this means …"	"Therefore I conclude that …"	"Thus I recommend that …"

Table 11.1

Presenting Trustworthy Conclusions

Thinking About Your Conclusions

The interpretation outline tool in the previous chapter (Figure 10.1) was helpful in stimulating critical thinking and reflection about all the potential deeper meanings behind your findings. Findings should not be taken at face value, so you probed and dug deeper beneath the surface of your findings by asking over and again, "Why?" and "Why not?" As such, you were able to brainstorm a number of possible interpretations that explained your findings; that is, you developed some ideas of what you thought the findings really meant.

In thinking about how you were going to interpret your findings, you were in effect saying to yourself, "If I find this … then I think this means …" In generating conclusions, you need to go back to your findings and interpretations once again and say to yourself, "I found … and I think this means …"

Conclusions flow directly from your findings. In effect, the conclusions are assertions based on your findings and must therefore be warranted by the findings. With respect to each finding, you are asking yourself, "Knowing what I now know, what conclusion can I draw?" Although your conclusions will be backed up by your findings, do not confuse conclusions with findings. Conclusions are not a restatement of your research findings; they represent a higher level of abstraction. Drawing sound and trustworthy conclusions from your findings pushes you to consider broader issues and make new connections among ideas. In effect, by doing this, you are expanding or elaborating on the significance of your findings.

Just as your conclusions are not the same as findings, neither are conclusions the same as interpretations. Rather, conclusions are essentially conclusive statements of what you now know, having done this research, that you did not know before. As in the case of providing interpretations, writing conclusions draws on your ability to be a critical and, at the same time, creative thinker. In writing up the conclusions, you are in effect evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing information.

Remember that your study's research questions, right from the beginning, form the backbone of your research. Remember, too, that the findings of your research must provide answers to these questions. To check your thinking and ensure consistency among the research questions and all that follows from them, it is recommended that you develop a matrix—what we refer to as a "consistency chart," presented as Table 11.2. This chart tracks the findings through the interpretations to conclusions, making certain that these components are all aligned. A sample consistency chart is presented as Appendix EE. Note that each finding relates to its same numbered research question so the research question is not repeated in the table.

TABLE 11.2 Consistency of Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions

Findings	Interpretations	Conclusions
Finding Statement 1:	List all possible interpretations in summary form	Identify conclusions you draw from your first finding
Finding Statement 2:	List all possible interpretations in summary form	Identify conclusions you draw from your second finding
Finding Statement 3:	List all possible interpretations in summary form	Identify conclusions you draw from your third finding
Finding Statement 4:	List all possible interpretations in summary form	Identify conclusions you draw from your fourth finding
Finding Statement 5:	List all possible interpretations in summary form	Identify conclusions you draw from your fifth finding

Table 11.2 (Continue in the same manner with your other findings.)

(Continue in the same manner with your other findings.)

It is important to bear in mind when thinking about and formulating each of your conclusions that they must be logically tied to one another. That is, there should be some sort of consistency among your conclusions; none of them should be at odds with any of the others. This type of consistency among your conclusions goes without saying. If your study's research questions are tied together or interconnected, as they necessarily should be, and because your findings are the answers to the research questions, then your findings statements also will be interconnected. Hence, your conclusions should logically and meaningfully "fit" with each other and not contradict each other. Your findings, in effect, tell the initial "story of the research." Your interpretations then add another dimension, bringing the story to a deeper level of understanding. Your conclusions become the beginning of a new story. By way of the conclusions, the story of your research is wrapped up, bringing it to its logical finale.

Writing Your Conclusions

As a general rule of thumb, you should provide at least one conclusion for each finding. However, the process is not altogether linear. As such, one conclusion can (but does not always) cut across more than one finding. Each conclusion should be clearly and crisply stated in a few sentences. Following this notion, you need to expand on and amplify your main idea in a paragraph or two. The logic of the argument provides support for your conclusion and enhances its trustworthiness. Because your conclusions must be concise, the discussion should be relevant, organized, and tight. Avoid repetition and ambiguity. Be sure that what you want to say comes across just as you intend.

Presenting Actionable Recommendations

Thinking About Your Recommendations

Recommendations follow your findings and conclusions. In thinking about conclusions, you said to yourself, "I found … therefore I know the following to be true …" Recommendations are the application of those conclusions. In other words, you are now saying to yourself, "Knowing what I now know to be true, I recommend that …" Therefore, recommendations are the final stage of a logical thought process. In your recommendations, your research findings now have a springboard for action.

In Chapter 1 of your dissertation, you discussed the significance of your study. In that discussion, you mentioned who would be likely to benefit from your study, what they would learn from it, and what they would gain from this knowledge. That section in Chapter 1 now becomes the basis for thinking about your recommendations. Be aware that recommendations must move away from the theoretical to the actionable and doable. In other words, what are the *actions* that you would recommend and for whom?

The reasonableness of a recommendation depends on it (a) being logically and clearly derived from the findings, (b) being both content and context specific, and most important, (c) being practical; that is, it is capable of implementation. Whereas your interpretations and conclusions are speculative, and may be the subject of dispute, your recommendations, although a set of opinions, should be firmly grounded in the findings and must be doable.

Recommendations have implications for policy and practice, as well as for further research. Based solidly on your findings, think of all the possible ways that people could and should now do things differently. As a result of your findings, how might practice change? As a result of your findings, what new ideas can now be explored and researched further? How might your study be improved on, and how might future studies in other contexts expand on your study and contribute to the field? In offering practical recommendations, you can and should make recommendations for your own program or organization, as well as for others that are similar. With regard to research recommendations, you might think about implications of your study's limitations and include the appropriate suggestions for further research. In this regard, ask yourself, "In light of what I have learned, what more can be done? What can be done differently now?" Here you might suggest studies designed to replicate your study in other contexts or settings. You might also suggest next-step studies designed to investigate another dimension of your study's research problem.

Writing Your Recommendations

Your findings will have implications for both professional practice and further research. You make recommendations based on your own experiences in conducting the research, as well as in any other professional capacity. In writing up your recommendations, it is important that you describe exactly how you envisage each recommendation being implemented. Be specific about identifying who will be responsible for implementation and who will monitor the ongoing implementation.

In offering recommendations, you are free to make a range of suggestions for the usefulness of the findings. Although the liberty to make suggestions is appealing, you should restrict your suggestions to only those that you think will make an important impact and that, to the best of your knowledge, are doable and actionable. Remember that fewer, stronger, and more-focused recommendations will make more of an impact than a long list.

Researcher's Final Reflections

Stake (1995) writes,

> Qualitative case study is highly personal research. Persons studied are studied in depth. Researchers are encouraged to include their own personal perspectives in the interpretation… . The quality and utility of the research is not based on its reproducibility, but on whether or not the meanings generated, by the researcher or the reader, are valued. Thus a personal valuing of the work is expected. (p. 135)

Having come to the close of your study, you might be asking yourself, "How do I personally value my work? How do I personally value the research experience?" In this final section of the final chapter of your dissertation, you have an opportunity (but are not always required) to offer your own thoughts on the experience of conducting the research and writing the dissertation, including lessons learned in the field. Here you can describe how you came to your research. You also can reflect on the research experience and what it means to you. What are the lessons learned from conducting the study? What were some of the challenges that you experienced? What did you learn about qualitative research that you did know when embarking on the study? What insights and inspirations have you derived from conducting your study? Think about your role as a researcher and what new learning—both personal and professional—you have had as a result of the qualitative research experience. There is cause for celebration! You are now writing your closing paragraphs!

The reflexive questions that follow can serve as prompts for journaling throughout the dissertation process, and in this case, for Chapter 6 of your dissertation, in which you present conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions flow directly from your study's findings and must therefore be warranted by the findings themselves. The conclusions are not just a restatement of the findings but represent a higher level of abstraction. Drawing sound and trustworthy conclusions from your findings pushes you to consider broader issues and make new connections among ideas. By doing this you are, in effect, expanding on the significance of your findings. Recommendations follow the findings and conclusions, and are essentially the application of your proposed conclusions. The recommendations are the final stage of a logical thought process, providing your research findings a springboard for action. In effect, your recommendations could create real change in the lives of others! Developing conclusions and recommendations should be a thoughtful and critically reflective process, and as with other decisions made along the research journey, requires reflexivity and insight with regard to your position and positionality as the researcher.

Reflexive Questions for Chapter 6: Drawing Trustworthy Conclusions and Presenting Actionable Recommendations

Conclusions

1. In what ways and to what extent are my conclusions grounded in my study's findings?
2. In what ways and to what extent are my conclusions grounded in my interpretation of the data?
3. Is my hope that the research will address or solve a social or cultural issue? Is this issue of local, national, or international interest? How, and in what ways?
4. Is my goal to contribute to theory? If so, which one(s), and in what way(s)?

Recommendations

1. Is the goal of my recommendations to contribute to the improvement of professional practice, and/or impact policy, and/or enhance community awareness? Is it some combination of these?
2. Are my recommendations for further research of practical and/or theoretical significance?
3. What insights, knowledge, or information informs my recommendations?
4. What personal and/or professional agenda am I trying to address or resolve with each of my recommendations?
5. Is this agenda warranted? Why?

Chapter Summary Discussion

The process of generating solid conclusions and actionable recommendations takes time and should be carefully thought out. In planning how to articulate and present your conclusions and recommendations, you should be sure to discuss provisional ideas with advisors and critical colleagues. Also be sure to complete your own consistency chart because this will help you focus and maintain the necessary alignment between your research questions—the core of your research—and the key elements that follow: findings, interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations. As with other components of the dissertation, you will need to check with your advisor and/or department about the content and presentation of your study's final chapter.

TABLE	Quality Assessment Chapter Checklist
Conclusions	✓ Are your conclusions clearly derived from your study's findings? In other words, is it clear to the reader that your conclusions are warranted by the findings? ✓ Do you offer at least one conclusion per finding? In other words, even though conclusions can cut across findings, is each finding tied to at least one conclusion? ✓ Are your conclusions logical and clearly explained? ✓ Are you sure that your conclusions are not mere restatements of the findings? ✓ Are you sure that your conclusions are not "interpretations" but rather strong conclusive statements? ✓ Are your conclusions consistent? Do they flow logically and meaningfully from each other and not contradict each other? ✓ Can your conclusions be challenged? If so, play devil's advocate. Can you think of any flaws or limitations in the way in which you have stated and explained each conclusion?
Recommendations	✓ Are all of your recommendations justified by the findings? ✓ Are all of your recommendations doable and actionable, or are they theoretical and esoteric? ✓ Have you discussed applications for practice? ✓ Have you discussed applications for policy? ✓ Have you offered suggestions for further research? ✓ Have you selected strong recommendations for each of the above sections?
Addressing Alignment	✓ Are your study's findings aligned with your interpretations and conclusions? ✓ Are your conclusions aligned with your recommendations?
And ...	✓ Have you made sure whether conclusions and recommendations are required to stand alone as a final chapter or whether these should be incorporated into the analysis chapter? ✓ If this is your dissertation's final chapter, have you included a brief but informative introduction? ✓ If you have included a final reflective piece, does this make a statement regarding your role as a qualitative researcher and/or your experience in writing the dissertation? ✓ If you step back and review your chapter, do you think that it offers the reader a completed picture of your research? ✓ Will your readers be likely to walk away with a good understanding of the study and with a general feeling of finality and closure? ✓ Is the writing throughout clear and readable? Refer to "Guidelines for Academic Writing" in Chapter 4.

Section II: Application

Chapter 6 of the Dissertation

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this case study was to explore with a sample of doctoral candidates their perceptions of why they have not managed to complete their dissertations. The conclusions from this study follow the research questions and the findings, and therefore address four areas: (a) perceptions that the course work would prepare students to conduct research and write a dissertation; (b) students' uncertainty about what they need to do and how to go about doing what is needed to complete the dissertation; (c) acquiring information, learning the skills, and developing the attitudes needed to complete the dissertation; and (d) what helps or hinders students' learning. Following is a discussion of the major findings and conclusions drawn from this research. This discussion is followed by the researchers' recommendations and a final reflection on this study.

Perceptions That Course Work Would Prepare Students

The first major finding of this research is that the majority of students in this study indicated that the course work did not prepare them to conduct research and write their dissertations. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that students who enroll in doctoral programs should not expect that course work alone will or can fully prepare them to conduct research and write their dissertations. Completion of a good dissertation is a content-specific journey taken by the student and, as such, becomes a process of discovery. Although research classes during the course work can provide a general understanding of research methods and strategies for conducting research, it may be difficult for students to relate those methods or strategies to some future and often not-yet-identified research problem. In this regard, it also can be concluded that the primary purpose of course work is to provide students with a sound theoretical foundation required for intellectually rigorous research and not to provide the nuts and bolts of application. A further and related conclusion that can be drawn is that, although doctoral programs do include courses on research, in some cases such courses may be inadequate in providing a basic and rudimentary understanding of qualitative research methods and the approaches and strategies to carry out those methods.

Uncertainty About What to Do and How to Do It

The second major finding was that all participants expressed the need to gain knowledge about the content and to understand the process involved in conducting research and writing their dissertations. During the first 2 years, students are often more preoccupied with understanding theoretical concepts and meeting the demands of the course work than relating theoretical concepts to knowing what is involved in carrying out future research. A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that being grounded in theory alone is insufficient. Inexperienced student researchers also need the know-how (i.e., practical information about what to do and how to do it) to conduct research and write their dissertations, and they need to acquire this competency through more informal means. A related conclusion is that, in the absence of formal preparation, students need to be open to learning, be able to tolerate ambiguity, and have a compelling and fierce desire to succeed regardless of their circumstances.

Acquiring Information, Learning the Skills, and Developing the Attitudes Needed

The study's third major finding was that the majority of participants attempted to learn what they perceived they needed to learn by reaching out in dialogue with colleagues rather than through more formal channels (i.e., advisement, other faculty, or post–course work seminars). A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that (in the absence of formal preparation) dialogue with colleagues in a similar situation can serve as a catalyst for reflection and action and at the very least can provide a source of support to ameliorate feelings of isolation. Students may desire autonomy but may not have the skills or even the motivation to learn the same material in isolation. Through dialogue, students have the opportunity to share information, exchange perspectives, challenge assumptions, test ideas, and play devil's advocate for one another, and all of these collaborative opportunities hold the potential for the development of new understanding, new learning, and the ability to take constructive action.

What Helps or Hinders Learning

The sample of students identified different factors that they perceived helped or hindered their learning. This study's fourth finding was that the majority of students indicated that, in the process of attempting to do their dissertations, they relied on themselves. More than half of these same participants also said that colleagues were instrumental in facilitating their progress. There are two primary conclusions that can be drawn from this finding. First, adults have a need to be self-sufficient and self-reliant, and most adult students have a preference for directing their own learning. Second, whether students progress well in the dissertation process is largely a function of their own personal characteristics and their motivation and drive to succeed.

The fifth finding was that the majority of students cited the lack of good, timely, and consistent advisement as a major barrier standing in the way of their progress. The primary conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that, although students want to be self-reliant, good and consistent advisement must be an integral part of the doctoral experience. Dissertation work cannot and should not be a solitary endeavor. To move forward in the dissertation process, students need support, feedback, and guidance from advisors; without it, the ability to progress, in most cases, is limited.

Recommendations

The researchers offer recommendations based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study. The recommendations that follow are for (a) doctoral program administrators and faculty, (b) current and prospective doctoral students, and (c) further research.

Recommendations for Doctoral Programs and Faculty

Given that there are multiple factors that affect attrition rates and acknowledging that these vary across universities, the recommendations put forth here for doctoral program administrators and faculty should be considered for their appropriateness on an individual basis. At the same time, it should be noted that there are many excellent university programs where the completion rate has steadily been improving. Therefore, some of the following recommendations may already be in place.

Recommendations for Doctoral Program Administration and Faculty

Administrators of doctoral programs should:

1. Revisit the reward and recognition system for faculty involved in advising and mentoring doctoral students by bringing forward to university leaders and decision makers any enhancements to the system that would create further incentives for faculty who provide advisement.
2. Consider a policy change that addresses the development and implementation of formal training programs in mentoring for faculty.
3. Review on an ongoing basis the criteria for acceptance of students into the university's doctoral programs. In addition, once students are enrolled in the program, guidelines and benchmarks should be put into place to monitor students' progress.
4. Conduct ongoing assessments of students' status to uncover on a timely basis any problems, issues, and/or challenges that may be blocking student progress, and identify resources to help students with such issues.

Recommendations for Current and Prospective Doctoral Students

Individuals contemplating enrolling in a doctoral program should:

1. Take sufficient time to find out as much about not only criteria for acceptance and course requirements but also, equally important, the kind of support, direction, and guidance they can rightfully expect to receive during the entire time they are in the program.
2. Have realistic expectations about the investment in time and money involved in completing a dissertation.
3. Become knowledgeable about what recourse they have if they find they are not receiving the guidance and direction they require. For those students already involved at some stage of the dissertation process, they should be aware that, if they do not have a satisfactory relationship with their advisor, it is legitimate and appropriate to seek another advisor. Further, students should be aware that there should be neither a penalty nor any political implications for changing advisors.

Recommendations for Further Research

The researchers recommend further studies be conducted to develop a larger database of information to gain a more comprehensive understanding of why some students who complete the required course work do not go on to complete their dissertations.

In light of this, the following should be considered:

1. Based on the limitations of the current study and to correct for researchers' bias, a survey of a large sample of active and inactive doctoral students should be conducted to assess the extent to which the same or similar findings would be uncovered.
2. A further similar study using the same criteria should be undertaken among students who successfully completed their dissertations and obtained their doctoral degrees to compare and contrast the experiences of students who graduate with those in this study who remain at all-but-dissertation (ABD) status.
3. A comparison and analysis of research should be undertaken to assess the recent experiences of doctoral program administrators and faculty and students who have obtained doctoral degrees and those who remain ABD. This research should be undertaken to uncover similarities and/or differences in perspectives as well as the implications for success or failure in doctoral programs.

Researcher Reflections

There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.

—Edith Wharton

As we come to the close of this study, we want to pause for a moment and reflect on the journey that we have undertaken with you. We hope we have been like the candle guiding those students struggling at various stages of the process, rekindling the flame of possibility for those who have abandoned this work and shedding some light on what lies ahead for those who are contemplating taking up this work. This was our intention and sincere hope from the moment we began this project. But as with everything in life, the more we attempted to give, the more we received in return, and we came to understand how prophetic are the words of French moralist and essayist Joseph Joubert, who reminds us that "to teach is to learn twice." This study was a collaborative effort among ourselves, and it was greatly enhanced by the insight and feedback of the research participants who willingly gave of their time to share their experiences with us. Our fondest hope is that we lit the candle that may help demystify the process for you and that you have come to see this work, although difficult, as achievable. At the same time, by mirroring the process, we are grateful for all that we have learned and continue to learn as researchers, academics, and doctoral advisors.

Part II: Summary and Discussion

Content and Process: A Chapter-by-Chapter Road Map

Part II of this book mirrors each chapter of an actual dissertation. Chapters 6 through 8 set up the study and constitute the study's framework. As pointed out in Part I, these three chapters form your proposal. Chapters 9 through 11 discuss how you conduct research and write up your study. The problem identified in Part I, which addresses the issue of why people who have completed course work do not go on to complete the research and write their dissertations, is used throughout each of the chapters in Part II. In this way, you can follow the same idea as it weaves through the different sections that constitute a dissertation. Each chapter in Part II is presented in two sections. Section I provides instructions regarding the specific content of each chapter and how that content is developed. Section II is the application that demonstrates what a written-up dissertation chapter would look like based on the content developed.

- The first chapter of your dissertation is the most critical, and everything that follows hinges on how well this first chapter is constructed. Chapter 1 of your dissertation begins with the *context,* which introduces the research by providing the background that sets the stage for the *research problem* to be investigated. The next step is to describe the *purpose* of the research—that is, *how* you will go about addressing the problem. To carry out the purpose, *research questions* are developed that, when answered, will shed light on the problem you have identified. Ultimately, the study's findings will provide a direct response to the research questions.
- The second chapter of the dissertation constitutes a review of topic-specific literature. A dissertation demonstrates your ability to write a coherent volume of intellectually demanding work. A key part of the dissertation that illustrates your scholarship is the way in which you have analyzed, organized, and reported the relevant literature. In conducting a literature review, you are forced to think critically and consider the role of argument in research. Thus, reviewing the literature is research in and of itself. We also address the theoretical or conceptual framework as an integral element of the research process and provide detailed explanation regarding how to understand and develop this often misunderstood concept, where it would be introduced in the dissertation, and how it functions in analysis.
- Chapter 3 of the dissertation presents the research design and methodology used in conducting your study and includes multiple interrelated elements that reflect the sequential nature of qualitative research. This chapter is intended to show the reader that you have a clear understanding of qualitative research and its characteristic features, including the methodology (tradition or genre) that you have selected for your study. In addition, this chapter must display your understanding of the methodological implications of the choices you have made and, in particular, that you have thoughtfully addressed the linkages and alignment among all key components, including research problem, purpose, research questions, research approach, and selected research methods.
- Once you have collected your data by way of the various data collection methods, your next step is to manage, organize, and make sense of all the separate pieces of accumulated information. Your task is to transform *raw data* into something meaningful by analyzing them and making inferences from discrete pieces of information. This process is based on induction: The researcher starts with a large set of data and seeks to progressively narrow them into smaller important groups of key data. The analytic procedure falls essentially into the following sequential phases: organizing the data, generating categories, identifying patterns and themes, and coding the data.
- When you reach this point in the research process, it is essential to keep an open mind, remembering that qualitative research is all about discovery. You will need to look carefully at all of your data, seeking to uncover important insights regarding the phenomenon that you are researching. These are your "findings," which are presented in Chapter 4 of your dissertation. The procedures you use to accomplish analysis of data and reporting findings need to be well thought out, explicitly documented, and directly connected to your study's research questions.
- Subsequently, in the following chapter, Chapter 5, you will analyze and synthesize all your data sources and insights, creating an interpretation that is holistic and integrated. Your goal in conducting analysis of findings is to discover what your findings mean or, more precisely, what meaning you can make of your findings by integrating them with literature, research, and practice. Meaning comes from looking at differences and similarities, and from inquiring into and interpreting causes, consequences, and

relationships. This process requires a good deal of careful thinking and reflection; that is reflexivity.

- Because qualitative research depends on the skills, training, capabilities, and insights of the researcher, qualitative analysis and interpretation of findings ultimately depend on the analytical intellect and style of each individual analyst. Analyzing and interpreting is a highly intuitive process; it is certainly not mechanical or technical. As such, there is no clear and accepted single set of conventions for the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data.
- Analytical approaches are linked to particular forms of data collection and are underpinned by specific conceptual and philosophical traditions or genres and their inherent grounding assumptions. Methodological congruence implies that there are analytic distinctions among traditions or genres. Each qualitative tradition or genre is sensitive to particular analytic methods and strategies, as such demanding that the researcher think about data analysis and representation in a particular way, with the product of each tradition or genre providing a perspective on reality that is specific to that tradition.
- In dealing with interpretation, we are unavoidably dealing with human subjectivity, and therefore there are differences in the ways we make meaning. Be sure to acknowledge that there are multiple ways of interpreting findings, that you have sought rival explanations, and that your interpretations are but one perspective. The human-as-instrument in qualitative inquiry is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. Nowhere does this ring more true than in analysis and interpretation. This is indeed one of the greatest strengths of qualitative research, but also the source of one of the greatest critiques of the field.
- The final chapter of your dissertation, Chapter 6, is much more than just a cursory summary of findings. Presenting trustworthy conclusions and actionable recommendations is an opportunity to have the last word about your study and stimulate your readers to think more deeply about the findings of your study and the implications thereof in terms of practice, policy, and future research.

Part III Nearing Completion

Finally, you have reached the "almost completion" stage of the dissertation process. We know how much time and effort you have invested up until now, and for this, you certainly deserve to give yourself much credit. Indeed, take a moment to reflect on the many varied activities you have engaged in to reach this point. This work has been no small accomplishment. Part III of this book addresses preparation with regard to the final stages of the dissertation process. Chapter 12 offers guidelines and suggestions regarding alignment of all key elements that constitute your study, selecting an appropriate title, writing the abstract, assembling your manuscript and making sure that all the necessary components of the dissertation's layout are addressed, and proofreading and editing the manuscript. The chapter also includes a comprehensive (and extensive!) quality assessment checklist for the entire dissertation. Chapter 13 addresses preparation for a successful defense and thinking about potential avenues for dissemination of your research.

12 Some Final Technical Considerations

Chapter 12 Objectives

- Provide an overview of the concept of alignment with regard to an entire dissertation.
- Provide instruction and guidelines with regard to crafting an appropriate dissertation title.
- Provide instruction and guidelines with regard to devising a dissertation abstract.
- Provide guidelines for proofreading, editing, and comprehensive manuscript assembly.
- Assess or evaluate the quality of a complete dissertation.

Overview

As you near the end of a very long and intensive process, there are a few key elements that still need to be tackled and addressed. This chapter provides an overview of some practical and technical tasks to accomplish at this almost-final stage. First, it is imperative that you make certain that all the elements that constitute your entire document are aligned (a) with your research questions and (b) with one another. In this regard, you should refer back to Chapter 5 of this book, which outlines all the necessary components that require alignment. Next, you need to craft an appropriate and relevant title that captures the essence of your study and that conveys this in clear and concise terms. You will also need to formulate a tight abstract. In addition, you will need to proofread once again, and assemble your entire document. Finally!

Revisiting the Importance of Alignment

Part I of this book started out by indicating the elements that would need to be included in a completed dissertation. Table II.1, "Overview of Dissertation Content" (p. 121), provides a visual outline of an entire dissertation—a prelude to the steps that are described and demonstrated in Chapters 6 through 11. In addition, Figure 6.1, "Road Map for Developing the Dissertation's First Chapter: Necessary Elements" (p. 128), illustrates the importance of alignment among the first three core critical elements: problem, purpose, and research questions.

At this juncture, as you reach the final stages of writing your dissertation, it is crucial that you once again make certain that all the necessary elements that constitute a dissertation are aligned with one another. In this regard, it is important to revisit the chapters of your dissertation, as if in detective mode, carefully and meticulously checking that the elements are all meaningfully tied together. Check specifically that each element (a) flows sequentially from the elements prior to it and (b) leads logically to the elements that succeed it. In particular, make sure of the following:

- Problem statement defines the subject of inquiry
- Specific research problem is situated within a broader context
- Purpose addresses the research problem
- Research questions together shed light on purpose
- Theoretical or conceptual framework is based on the research questions and is situated within the literature
- Theoretical or conceptual framework is the repository for the findings
- Findings, which are objective, are the basis for interpretations, which are subjective
- Findings and interpretations together are the basis for drawing trustworthy conclusions
- Conclusions are the springboard for actionable/doable recommendations

Ensuring that you have achieved all of these steps means that your study is tight and you have taken an important step in ensuring methodological integrity. This process is extremely important for the defense when, among other things, the methodological integrity of your research is finely scrutinized. Table 12.1, "Alignment Flowchart," is, in effect, the final "dissertation picture," illustrating clearly the alignment that is required among all of the qualitative dissertation's key elements.

Crafting a Title

The title of your dissertation should catch the readers' attention while properly informing them of the main focus of your study. From the beginning of your research, and certainly from the initial proposal stage, you will have had some kind of guiding working title. You have most likely revised and re-revised the title as you proceeded, and as new ideas came to mind. Now, at the end of the study, you hone that title so that it is crystal clear, meaningful, and appropriately worded. Most important, it should accurately reflect your work.

A title serves various functions. The first function is to identify the content of your study. The title is the first contact that your readers have with your research. It generates some anticipation of what is to follow and, as such, must communicate a concise, thorough, and unambiguous picture of the content of your dissertation. The second function of a title is for retrieval purposes. By including the most applicable keywords, you enable another researcher doing a literature search to locate your study. Therefore, a title becomes an important factor in sharing research.

A well-crafted title conveys the essence of what is under study and the mode of inquiry. In composing a title, be sure to include the central phenomenon of your study, as well as the research approach you have used. The title should describe as accurately as possible the main elements of your study. Although such accuracy demands the use of specific language, the title should be clear (i.e., free of obscure technical terms, highly specialized language, and jargon). Mechanically, the title should be concise, to the point, and free of elaborate constructions, alliteration, and other literary devices that detract from the content of the title. Excessive length should be avoided, too, because that dilutes the impact of the key elements presented.

TABLE 12.1 Alignment Flowchart

Chapter 1: Introduction	Chapter 2: Literature Review	Chapter 3: Research Methodology	Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings (OBJECTIVE)	Chapter 5: Analysis and Interpretation of Findings (SUBJECTIVE)	Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations	
• Research problem must be situated within a broader context • Purpose statement must be formulated in such a way that it will shed light on the problem • Research questions must address the purpose	• Each body of literature that is reviewed must be tied to and address some aspect of the problem • Conceptual framework: Categories emanate from research questions; descriptors/ subcategories emanate from "hunches" as well as from the literature • Conceptual framework becomes the repository for findings • Based on the findings and interpretations, make sure that all areas of literature reviewed are relevant and appropriate. Eliminate unnecessary sections, and add in what might still be needed	• Check that all data collection and data analysis methods have actually been done in the way that you have described • Be sure to eliminate any unnecessary material	• Findings are answers to the research questions • Each finding must be tied to a research question • Findings are basis for interpretation	• Interpretation is about what you think the findings really mean • Final synthesis includes findings from all data collection methods, integrated with the literature	• Each conclusion that is drawn should be tied to respective findings and interpretations • There should be at least one conclusion per finding • Conclusions are the springboard for actionable recommendations • Typically, there are recommendations for (a) the organization or institution, (b) people in the particular discipline under study, and (c) for further research	
			• "If I find this ..."	• "Then I think this means ..."	• "Therefore I conclude that ..."	• "Thus I recommend that ..."

Table 12.1

Generally, a two-part title structure offers you the scope to specify the key elements of your report: a few words capturing the essence of your study, followed by a colon that introduces a more specific and descriptive subtitle. One way to begin constructing an effective title is to list all the elements that seem appropriate for inclusion and then weave them in various ways until you are satisfied with the title both aesthetically and technically. As you do this, make a list of all possible two-part titles. Reverse the order. See which works best. Try to obtain feedback from advisors and critical colleagues, and revise accordingly.

In qualitative research, the title provides the researcher with a conceptual frame of reference for continuous reflection. As you immerse yourself in the context of your study, you become increasingly attuned to the key issues of your research—issues you may have been unaware of before starting your research. This process may lead you to shift the focus of your study and, as a result, to change the title to more accurately reflect the new focus. It is a good idea to keep notes of how your title evolves, and we suggest that you keep all ideas of titles as memos. If systematically monitored, your changing title can become a means to track the evolution of your perspective as a researcher, as well as the ways in which the focus and direction of your study have shifted over time.

Writing the Abstract

You are required to write an abstract—a carefully worded comprehensive summary that precedes the main body of the report and that tells readers what to expect. An abstract condenses a longer piece of writing while highlighting its major points, concisely describing the content and scope of the writing, and reviewing the content in (very) abbreviated form. A research abstract concisely states the major elements of a research project. Writing a good abstract requires that you explain what you did and found in simple, direct language so readers can then decide whether to read the longer piece of writing for details. Although it is the first section of your paper, the abstract, by definition, should be written last since it will summarize the contents of your entire paper.

The abstract allows readers to survey the contents of a study and, like a title, is used by abstracting and information services to index and retrieve articles. The information included in your abstract influences whether readers proceed to look at your total study. In addition, your abstract is the means through which other researchers, searching for studies on your topic, will be able to evaluate whether your study is useful to them. Therefore, the abstract offers a valuable opportunity for your study to inform a wide audience. It is the means with which to capture potential readers' interests, thereby expanding your professional opportunities within the research community. As in the case of the title, focusing on the most significant elements and using precise wording are key. A sample abstract appears as Appendix FF.

Abstracts can differ in terms of style and word count. We suggest that you consult with your advisor, departmental regulations, and the relevant style manual regarding abstract requirements. In the social sciences, abstracts are usually published in the *Dissertation Abstracts International*, and for this there is a 350-word restriction. The content of an abstract typically includes the following elements:

- Title of your study
- Research problem or issue that was addressed
- Qualitative research tradition or genre
- Theoretical basis that guided the study
- Data sources that informed your study
- Methods and procedures of data collection and data analysis
- Key findings, conclusions, and recommendations

A well-prepared abstract is essential. Most people will have their first contact with a dissertation by accessing the abstract as they are doing a literature search through an electronic abstract-retrieval system. Readers frequently decide on the basis of the abstract whether to read the entire study. The abstract needs to be dense with information but also readable, well organized, concise, focused, and self-contained. Embedding keywords in your abstract will enhance the user's ability to find it. A good abstract is

- Accurate: Ensure that an abstract correctly reflects the purpose and content of the manuscript. Do not include information that does not appear in the body of the paper. If the study extends or replicates previous research, note this in the abstract, and cite the author (initials and surname) and year. Comparing an abstract with an outline of the paper's headings is a useful way to verify the accuracy of an abstract.
- Self-contained: Define all abbreviations (except units of measurement) and acronyms. Spell out names of tests and drugs (use generic names for drugs). Define unique terms. Paraphrase rather than quote. Include names of authors (initials and surnames) and dates of publication in citations of other publications (and give a full bibliographic citation in the article's reference list). Include important and relevant keywords within the abstract for indexing purposes.
- Concise and specific: Each sentence should be maximally informative, especially the lead sentence. Begin the abstract with the most important information (but do not waste space by repeating the title). This may be the purpose or thesis, or perhaps the results and conclusions. Include in the abstract only the four or five most important concepts, findings, or implications. An abstract should not contain any lengthy background information or references to other literature.

- Non-evaluative: Report rather than evaluate; do not add to or comment on what is in the body of the manuscript.
- Coherent and readable: Write in clear and vigorous prose, use concise but complete sentences, and get to the point quickly. Use verbs rather than the noun equivalents, and the active rather than the passive voice. Use the present tense to describe results with continuing applicability or conclusions drawn; use the past tense to describe specific variables manipulated or tests applied.

Writing Tips

1. Refer to academic journals for examples of abstracts.
2. Keep on hand a copy of your required style manual.
3. Write an initial draft that follows the guidelines.
4. To begin composing your abstract, take whole sentences or key phrases from each section and order them in a sequence that summarizes your paper. Then revise or add connecting phrases or words to make it cohesive and clear.
5. Obtain feedback on the draft from colleagues, preferably those who have not yet read the longer work. Note their comments and questions. This will be an indication of whether and to what extent your abstract is "doing its job."
6. Revise the abstract based on the feedback. Plan to revise repeatedly in order to craft it as well as possible and to keep it within the word limit.
7. Be sure your abstract is grammatically correct with correct spelling, punctuation, and format. The abstract is typically a single paragraph that is double spaced.
8. If necessary, take your abstract to your school's writing lab for assistance.

Additional Tips

- An abstract always begins on a new page. On the first line of the abstract page, center the word "Abstract" (no bold, formatting, italics, underlining, or quotation marks).
- Beginning with the next line, write a concise summary of the key points of your research (do not indent). Your abstract should contain your research topic, research questions, participants, methods, results, data analysis, and conclusions. You may also include possible implications of your research and future work you see connected with your findings.
- You may also want to list keywords from your paper in your abstract. To do this, center the text and type *Keywords* (italicized) and then list your keywords. Listing your keywords will help researchers find your work in databases.
- Ways to conserve characters include (a) using numerals for all numbers, except those that begin a sentence (consider recasting a sentence that begins with a number); (b) abbreviating liberally (e.g., use *vs.* for *versus*), although all abbreviations that need to be explained in the text must also be explained on first use in the abstract; and (c) using the active voice (but without the personal pronouns *I* or *we*).
- Remember that within the specified word limit, you will need to try to make your research summary as informative and comprehensive as possible. To achieve a final, solid version, go through various drafts. Usually, you will start off by writing an extended abstract, and this is followed by various iterations in which you pare down the words so that the key elements are expressed concisely within the imposed limits.

Assembling the Manuscript

Although format and style is a function of individual taste and institutional and/or departmental regulations, several general rules can be adopted in design and layout:

1. Pages must be numbered consecutively throughout. Page numbers are usually centered at the bottom of the page or placed at the top right. Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, iv) are used for the preliminary pages or front matter (abstract, dedication, acknowledgments, list of tables and figures, table of contents). Note that the title page is always the first page (i), but it is not numbered. Arabic numbers (1, 2, 3, 4) are used throughout the rest of the manuscript.
2. The entire document, including page numbers and table captions, must be typed in the same typeface/font and size. The most common usage is 12-point type Times New Roman.
3. The body of the dissertation should be double spaced. Single spacing is permitted in the following text: (a) footnotes, (b) block quotations, (c) tables and figures and their captions, and (d) bibliography entries (if single spaced, you must still have double space between entries).
4. Don't "justify" (square off) on the right margin. This style is for published articles only.
5. It is customary to use 1-inch margins all round. In some cases, the margin on the left side may be required to be 1.5 inches for binding purposes.
6. Regarding headings and subheadings, refer to the standards set by your department's choice of style manual. Regardless of style, all heading and subheading format must be consistent throughout.
7. Paragraphs are distinguished by indentation. Make sure there are no skipped lines or extra spaces between paragraphs.
8. The reference list must include all sources that were directly used in writing your dissertation. Every source that you have cited should be included in the reference list, and every entry listed in the reference list must appear in the manuscript. Because it is critical that the reference list is precise and accurate, we suggest that you carefully check all your citations.
9. Footnotes can be used for explanatory purposes where necessary.
10. Figures and tables must be consecutively numbered throughout. Alternatively, you may make use of combination chapter and figure and/or table number designations (e.g., Table 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2). The number and caption of the table is placed above the table and must appear in the same typeface and size as the dissertation text. The number and caption of a figure is placed below the figure and must appear in the same typeface and size as the dissertation text. To avoid your dissertation becoming too unwieldy, and to ensure that it is as reader-friendly as possible, all tables that are working tools should be included as appendices rather than in the main body of the text.
11. Appendices provide information that is pertinent to the study but is either too lengthy or not important enough to be included in the main body of the text. This information includes materials especially developed for the study, such as cover letters, data collection instruments, tables containing raw data, and tabulated data analysis. Appendices are lettered, not numbered (Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.).
12. The key point to remember when you include an appendix is that the information is nonessential; that is, if it were removed, the study would still be understandable to the reader. It is appropriate to include appendices (a) when the incorporation of material in the body of the work would make it poorly structured or (b) when the information is too long and detailed to be easily summarized in the body of the paper. Ensure inclusion of helpful, supporting, or essential material that would otherwise clutter or break up the narrative flow of the paper or would be distracting to the reader.
13. The final element to check is the table of contents, which must be clearly and logically organized. The function of the table of contents is to guide your readers, allowing them to follow a long and involved story. It should enable them to find their way easily around the different parts of your dissertation and quickly pinpoint those sections that they are most interested in reading. Therefore, it is essential that every heading and subheading that you use appear in the table of contents. Your style manual will indicate specified differences regarding the levels of subheadings and how these should be numbered. The list of tables and figures is presented on a separate page. This list must give the number and title of each table and figure and the page on which it can be found. A sample table of contents is presented as Appendix GG.

Proofreading and Editing

Getting the dissertation ready for submission refers to both the form and the content of the document. Although some revisions are required following the defense, what you present at the defense cannot be incomplete in any way, nor should it contain any grammatical and/or typographical errors. Although you anticipate some changes and alterations following the defense, you should consider your dissertation a polished final version, not a work in progress.

At this point, go back and, if necessary, adjust Chapters 1 through 3. Make sure all text elements are necessary and relevant. Check for items that need to be expanded. Also be aware that the literature review was an important early task. You now need to reread it and ensure that everything in your review is directly relevant to your study. If not, it needs to be eliminated. Equally important, if a section of literature review is missing, it needs to be added. Check throughout your document for correct tenses. In the proposal, you used the future tense because you were writing about what you were intending to do. In the dissertation, you are reporting on research that you have already completed, so you should change to past tense.

All manuscripts require editing and proofreading, and especially if English is not your native language, you might need editing assistance in this regard. If you feel that you need assistance with writing, be sure to contact your advisor or institution for additional resources and guidance. It should be obvious that the expectations for correctness and accuracy in academic writing are high. If you feel that you are unable to meet these demands at your current level of writing proficiency, you may need to seek outside assistance. It is quite acceptable to hire an editor or a proofreader to help meet academic writing expectations. In addition, most universities have writing centers with writing classes and/or workshops that offer an array of helpful writing resources.

A word of advice: After you complete your final draft, it is often helpful to set your manuscript aside for several days. Stepping back in this way creates the distance needed to change roles from “writer” to “reader,” which is a way to approach and review your work with fresh eyes.

In rereading, you should be critically evaluating the completeness, quality, and alignment of the contents of your work. In doing so, the following checklist (albeit extensive) might be useful:

TABLE	Quality Assessment Checklist for Your Complete Dissertation: All Together Now!
FRONT MATTER	**Title** ✓ Does it convey the essence and purpose of the study? ✓ Does it indicate the type of study and participants? ✓ Does it include keywords that will promote proper categorization into databases? ✓ Does it include author's full name, degree to be conferred, university, and year? ✓ Are letters all in all capitals? **Copyright Page (optional)** ✓ Are author's name and year centered between the margins on the lower half of page? ✓ Do you include the copyright symbol (©)? ✓ Do you include the statement "All Rights Reserved"? **Abstract** ✓ Is it written in third person (active voice)? ✓ Does the first sentence describe the entire study? ✓ Do subsequent sentences expand on that description? ✓ Do you include all necessary material (i.e., problem, purpose, scope, research tradition, data sources, methodology, key findings and implications)? ✓ Does it include all keywords in order to promote proper categorization into databases? ✓ Is the format correct as per guidelines in your preferred style manual? ✓ Is the word count accurate? **Dedication and Acknowledgments** ✓ Is the heading ACKNOWLEDGMENTS capitalized? ✓ Does the heading appear centered between the left and right margins 2.0 inches from the top? ✓ Does text begin two spaces after the word ACKNOWLEDGMENTS? ✓ If included, is the dedication page separate from the acknowledgments page? ✓ Is the dedication text centered between the left and right and between the top and bottom margins? ✓ Have you included the title for the dedication page? If so, it should be removed.

	Table of Contents ✓ Is the heading TABLE OF CONTENTS centered between the left and right margins, 2.0 inches from the top of the page? ✓ Are all chapters, major sections within chapters, and all back matter listed with page numbers? ✓ Are all headings and subheadings grammatically consistent (i.e., "Introduction," "Review of Literature" not "Introduction," "Reviewing the Literature")? ✓ Are the headings and subheadings worded exactly the same as those in the text? ✓ Is the entire table of contents correctly formatted as per guidelines in your preferred style manual? **List of Tables and Figures** ✓ Are all tables and figures that appear in the body of the dissertation included? ✓ Are all tables and figures worded exactly as they appear in the body of the dissertation?
CHAPTER 1	**Introduction** ✓ Do you provide an overview of purpose and focus of the study, why it is significant, how it was conducted, and how it will contribute to professional knowledge and practice? **Statement of Problem** ✓ Is the background to the problem clearly presented? ✓ Is adequate background information presented for a clear understanding of the problem? ✓ Is the problem clearly and logically articulated? ✓ Does the discussion move from the general to the specific? ✓ Is the problem situated within the literature? That is, does literature serve to place the problem in context? ✓ Do you make clear the relationship of the problem to previous research? ✓ Is there an appropriate amount of relevant literature cited? ✓ Is the researcher's perspective and relationship to the problem discussed? If so, are assumptions and biases made explicit? ✓ Do we know how this research might contribute to the knowledge base and practice? ✓ Is there a logical segue that leads directly to the purpose statement? ✓ Is your writing clear and readable?

	Purpose Statement ✓ Is the purpose clearly, succinctly, and unambiguously stated? ✓ Is it clear as to how the research purpose will address the problem? ✓ Is your purpose relevant to your chosen research tradition? **Research Questions** ✓ Are the research questions clearly focused? ✓ Are research questions open ended so that they will foster exploration and discovery? ✓ Would answers to research questions shed light on the problem? ✓ Are all your research questions interconnected; that is, is there a natural and meaningful relationship among them? ✓ Is there alignment among problem, purpose, and research questions? **Research Design and Methodology** ✓ Is the overall research design approach appropriate and feasible as a means of qualitative inquiry? **Role of Researcher** ✓ Does this section inform the reader what the researcher brings to the study? ✓ Do you discuss how researcher experience and/or perspective are related to the problem? **Researcher Assumptions** ✓ Are researcher assumptions and biases revealed and explained? **Rationale and Significance** ✓ Is there a well-thought-out rationale that provides justification for this study? ✓ Is a convincing argument explicitly or implicitly made for the importance or significance of this research? ✓ Is it clear how this research will contribute to the knowledge base and/or practice and/or policy?

	Definitions of Key Terms ✓ Does the chapter conclude with definitions and/or explanations of key terminology that might not have a commonly understood meaning? ✓ If you include definitions, have you properly cited all relevant authoritative sources?
CHAPTER 2	**Literature Review** ✓ Do you have a clear introduction to this chapter that includes your purpose statement (if required), as well as an explanation of how the chapter will be organized? ✓ Does your review show a clear understanding and critique of each topic? ✓ Is the review comprehensive? Does it cover the major issues and thinking around each topic? ✓ Have you included historical as well as current and most up-to-date coverage? ✓ Does the path of your argument flow logically? ✓ Make certain that you have written with authority: Is the review analytical and critical and not merely summative and descriptive? ✓ Is the review well organized and systematically presented? ✓ Do you include an introductory paragraph that outlines the way you organize the different bodies of literature? ✓ Are the methods for conducting the literature review sufficiently described? ✓ Does the order of headings and subheadings seem logical? ✓ Do you make use of transition phrases to link and integrate paragraphs? ✓ Do you include logical segues between sections? ✓ Do you include summary paragraphs at the end of each major section, as well as an overall summary at the end of the chapter? ✓ Do summary paragraphs highlight and clarify the main points of a section, especially if it is complex and long? ✓ Have you included too much paraphrasing and too many direct quotations that detract from the readability of the chapter? ✓ Are all authors who make the same point combined in a citation? ✓ Are all citations included in the reference list? ✓ Have all citations that you have not included been eliminated from the reference list? ✓ Have you checked your recommended style manual for format, punctuation, and grammar?

	Theoretical or Conceptual Framework ✓ Does your framework depict the overall "territory" of your research? ✓ Does your framework provide theoretical clarification of what you have investigated? ✓ Does your framework illuminate the relationships among theoretical variables, concepts, or constructs? ✓ Does your framework enable a reader to understand *what* your research seeks to achieve and *how* that will be achieved? ✓ Does your framework provide a strong methodological base for development of the study and for analysis of the findings? ✓ If you have developed a diagrammatic model, is this clearly, accurately, and meaningfully presented? ✓ If you have developed a diagrammatic model, is this accompanied by comprehensive descriptive narrative? ✓ If your framework underwent any developments, do you mention and describe its evolution? ✓ Does your framework add value to the way you and others understand your research? ✓ Does your framework enhance the conceptual quality of your dissertation?
CHAPTER 3	**Introduction** ✓ Do you restate your research purpose? ✓ Do you describe the general organization of the chapter? **Research Sample** ✓ Do you provide a comprehensive description of your research sample and the population from which it was drawn? ✓ Do you discuss and explain the research site (organization/program/institution)? ✓ Do you discuss in detail your sampling strategy/strategies, citing appropriate literature? ✓ Are the criteria for sampling selection stated and explained? ✓ Are the details and characteristics pertaining to the sample adequately discussed? ✓ Have you discussed issues of access and consent?

Information Needed

- ✓ Is the information that was needed to conduct the study clearly and specifically outlined? (This should include demographic, perceptual, and contextual information.)
- ✓ Are you clear how and from whom the necessary information was obtained?
- ✓ Do you provide a logical connection between the type of information needed and the methods you have selected to obtain that information?

Research Design Overview

- ✓ Do you describe qualitative research as your chosen research paradigm, citing appropriate literature?
- ✓ Do you offer a convincing argument for choosing qualitative research?
- ✓ Do you provide a convincing argument for the particular qualitative tradition or genre (or combination of traditions) that you have chosen?
- ✓ Do you describe your chosen qualitative research methods including rationale for suitability regarding addressing the research questions?
- ✓ Is the study's methodology/research design documented in sufficient detail so that the study could be replicated?
- ✓ Have you described in chronological order each step taken in conducting the study?
- ✓ Is there a sequential progression inherent in the methodological design? That is, is the reader able to see how each stage of the study's design builds on and flows logically from the stage preceding it?
- ✓ Have you discussed all decisions made during the course of the study, and if applicable, have you mentioned any changes or modifications in focus, direction, and design?
- ✓ Do you include explanation of any field tests or pilot studies, including administration and description of findings (if appropriate)?
- ✓ If you include a timeline, have you described in chronological order each step taken in conducting the study?
- ✓ Are all charts and/or figures that you have included comprehensive and relevant?

	Data Collection Methods ✓ Do you reference all tools, instruments, and procedures that you have used? ✓ Do you provide a rationale for the selection of instruments used? ✓ Do you discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each method of data collection, citing appropriate literature? ✓ If an instrument was developed specifically for this study, have you described procedures involved in its development, validation, and administration? ✓ Do you describe how, when, where, and by whom data were collected? ✓ Are the data collection methods congruent with the problem being investigated and the specific qualitative tradition employed? ✓ Has triangulation of data collection methods been achieved? **Data Analysis and Synthesis** ✓ Do you explain the procedures you use for recording, managing, and storing information? ✓ Are your methods of data analysis, synthesis, and interpretation sufficiently described and detailed? ✓ Are all charts and/or figures that you have included comprehensive and relevant? **Ethical Considerations** ✓ Are the ethical considerations that you have identified clear and acceptable, and have you discussed the procedures followed to address them? ✓ Do you include how you have satisfied institutional review board (IRB) requirements? **Issues of Trustworthiness** ✓ Does your discussion of the key issues pertaining to trustworthiness in qualitative research show that you have a clear understanding of these issues? ✓ Does your discussion illustrate how you have considered and accounted for credibility, dependability, and transferability vis-à-vis your own study? **Limitations and Delimitations** ✓ Do you acknowledge all limitations and delimitations pertaining to your study? ✓ Do you indicate how you have attempted to address limitations?

	Chapter Summary ✓ Does your culminating summary integrate all the elements presented in this chapter? ✓ Do you include all key points? ✓ Is your summary comprehensive and focused?
CHAPTER 4	**Presentation of Findings** ✓ Is your introduction clear? ✓ Does your introduction include your purpose statement (if required), as well as inform the reader as to how the chapter is organized? ✓ Are your data analysis steps clearly identified? ✓ Do you explain clearly how you have managed and organized your data for analysis? ✓ Is your coding process adequately described?Are your findings statements clearly and precisely stated? ✓ Are the findings presented in relation to the research questions? ✓ Are the findings presented in a logical sequence? ✓ Are the findings clearly organized and easy to follow? ✓ Are the findings directly responsive to the problem raised by the study? That is, do the findings provide an answer to the research questions? ✓ Do the data presented in support of the findings (interview and/or focus group quotations, incidents from field notes, material from documents, etc.) provide adequate and convincing evidence for the findings? ✓ Is this chapter free from interpretation? That is, are your findings reported accurately and objectively? ✓ Are there appropriate lead-in sentences and clues? ✓ Have you selected the strongest and most appropriate quotations to support your point(s)? ✓ Have you trimmed your quotations, eliminating all unnecessary wording? ✓ If you have made use of a road map, is this clear and precise? ✓ Do the headings of your road map correspond with the headings in your narrative? ✓ Do you include a summary paragraph that offers a logical link to the next chapter? ✓ Are all tables and figures well organized, self-explanatory, and easy to understand?

	✓ Are the data that are presented in each table described in the text that either follows or precedes it? ✓ Have you tightened up your writing, looking for how to make short, crisp sentences?
CHAPTER 5	**Analysis and Synthesis** ✓ Does your introductory paragraph include a purpose statement (if required) as well as explanation of how you went about analyzing and synthesizing the findings? ✓ Does your argument flow logically and coherently? ✓ Do you make one point at a time? ✓ Are your interpretations clear, thoughtful, and reasonable? ✓ Are your interpretations relevant to the research problem, purpose, and research questions? ✓ Are the major themes interrelated to show a higher level of analysis and abstraction? ✓ Is your analysis positioned and discussed in terms of the related bodies of literature and previous research? ✓ Have you included relevant participant quotations to support your argument, making sure that these same quotations did not appear in Chapter 4? ✓ Is all information presented in tables consistent with information that is presented in the narrative? ✓ Have you acknowledged that there are multiple ways of interpreting findings and that you remain open to other interpretive possibilities? ✓ If you have chosen to revisit and reflect upon your initial assumptions as stated in your opening chapter, do you flesh these out in terms of your study's findings? ✓ Do you offer a comprehensive overview that integrates all key points?
CHAPTER 6	**Closure** ✓ Do you include a brief but informative introduction? ✓ If you have included a final reflective piece, does this make a statement regarding your role as a qualitative researcher and/or your experience in writing the dissertation? ✓ If you step back and review this chapter, do you think that it offers the reader a completed picture of your research? ✓ Will readers be likely to walk away with a good understanding of the study and with a general feeling of finality and closure?

Conclusions

- ✓ Are your conclusions clearly derived from your study's findings? In other words, is it clear to the reader that your conclusions are warranted by the findings?
- ✓ Do you offer at least one conclusion per finding? In other words, even though conclusions can cut across findings, is each finding tied to at least one conclusion?
- ✓ Are your conclusions logical and clearly explained?
- ✓ Are you sure that your conclusions are not mere restatements of the findings?
- ✓ Are you sure that your conclusions are not "interpretations" but rather strong conclusive statements?
- ✓ Are your conclusions consistent? Do they flow logically from each other and not contradict each other?
- ✓ Can your conclusions be challenged? If so, can you think of any flaws or limitations in the way in which you have stated and explained each conclusion?

Recommendations

- ✓ Are all of your recommendations justified by the findings?
- ✓ Are all of your recommendations doable and actionable?
- ✓ Have you discussed applications for practice?
- ✓ Have you discussed applications for policy?
- ✓ Have you offered suggestions for further research?
- ✓ Have you selected strong recommendations for each of the above sections?

Appendices

- ✓ Are all research instruments used listed?
- ✓ Are all other relevant materials included (sample transcripts, sample coding schemes, summary charts, etc.)?
- ✓ Is each item that is included listed in the table of contents?

References

- ✓ Have you included all works cited in the dissertation?
- ✓ Are all works cited listed in alphabetical order by author?
- ✓ Do all references adhere to proper style format (American Psychological Association, Modern Language Association, Turabian, Chicago Manual of Style, etc.)?
- ✓ Have you checked spelling of all authors and titles?

AND FINALLY:	✓ Have you checked that all elements of your dissertation are aligned so that methodological congruence is clearly evident throughout? Refer and RE-REFER to Chapter 5, "Achieving Alignment Throughout Your Dissertation." ✓ Does the structure of your complete document comply with institutional and/or programmatic requirements? ✓ Is your writing throughout scholarly and academic? ✓ Have you checked throughout for unclear and/or ambiguous language? ✓ Have you checked for any incorrect grammar? ✓ Have you checked throughout for any incorrect spelling? ✓ Does the discussion throughout have a logical flow? ✓ Are headings and subheadings throughout used effectively in order to structure and present the discussion? ✓ Have you eliminated any needless repetition? ✓ Conversely, have you checked for insufficient detail and areas that are "unfinished"? ✓ Refer and RE-REFER to "Guidelines for Academic Writing" in Chapter 4

Source: This chart first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2009). *The qualitative dissertation: A content guideline*. Unpublished manuscript series.

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13 Defense Preparation and Beyond

Chapter 13 Objectives

- Offer guidelines and suggestions regarding pre-defense preparation and meeting institutional and programmatic requirements.
- Provide possible defense questions to serve as preparatory material for a dissertation defense.
- Offer guidelines and suggestions regarding post-defense preparation, including publication and research presentation opportunities.

Overview

Your manuscript is finally ready! As a doctoral candidate, you now stand on the cusp of presenting your study to the academic community at your institution and beyond. As you head toward this final milestone in the dissertation journey, we provide you with some ideas and clues that will hopefully prepare you and stand you in good stead in terms of both pre- and post-defense status. Much success to you!

Pre-Defense Preparation

Submitting Necessary Documentation

In order to remain within required time frames, you should plan ahead accordingly. When you approach your defense (sometimes referred to as the “dissertation hearing,” “orals,” or “vivas”), you should generally keep in regular contact with your institution’s registrar and office of doctoral studies for their calendar of deadline dates and requirements for submission of all the necessary documentation. Check dates carefully because your degree may be delayed if you have not complied with all the necessary submissions. Especially make sure whether you need to file the “intent to defend” form and do not exceed the required deadline. This form declares that you and your advisor believe that you can meet all the institutional demands for defense; this stage usually requires advisor approval.

As you near completion of your dissertation, you also should check that all your required courses have been completed in accordance with your approved program plan, that all necessary credits are entered on your transcript, that your proposal is on file, and that all your records are in proper order. If there are any discrepancies or concerns, you should bring these matters to the immediate attention of your program administrator and/or dissertation secretary in the office of doctoral studies. You certainly want no unwelcome surprises at this point.

Addressing and Finalizing Your Committee Structure

As mentioned in Part I, each university has a different system regarding dissertation committee structure and the process of preparing for that structure. You need to find out what system is adopted in your particular institution. A dissertation committee typically consists of three to six faculty members. In some instances, all committee members are from within the department of the student's major. Other times, the committee is multidisciplinary, with members representing various academic departments. In some cases, a dissertation committee consists of three core faculty members who guide the development and completion of the dissertation. In these cases, a final panel is convened, consisting of the dissertation committee and in some cases an outside reader selected by the graduate office. This selection of additional committee members usually takes place only when the manuscript is complete and the defense is imminent.

In some universities, the doctoral committee structure is based on an apprenticeship model and is used as a vehicle to guide the student from course work through the defense. In these instances, the dissertation committee is the group of faculty responsible for the student's progress right from the beginning, with all those involved contributing to the development of an acceptable dissertation. The committee functions as a hierarchical organization, with each member of the committee having a different responsibility vis-à-vis the student's research. Ideally, the doctoral committee is composed of faculty with different areas of expertise whose resources the student will be able to tap into during the dissertation process. Sometimes the same committee will stay with the student from the outset, guiding the apprenticeship. In other cases, this committee will evolve during the course of conducting research and writing the dissertation as the necessary expertise becomes evident based on the developing project.

At some universities, the student will be required to work with a chair or sponsor and second reader, who is usually considered a subject matter expert, from the proposal stage onward; it is only when the student has almost completed the dissertation that a dissertation committee needs to be formed. In this instance, you can usually select your committee from among those in your own and related departments, those whose courses you have taken, and/or those whose work bears some relation to the focus of your dissertation. Some of these faculty members may be involved in other programs or schools within your university. In some cases, experts beyond your university can be chosen. In most instances, faculty has the choice to accept or decline to serve on a doctoral committee. Bear in mind that because in most instances a faculty member has the choice to accept or decline to serve on a doctoral committee, you should be prepared for alternative choices should the need arise.

Remember, academic institutions, by their nature, are highly political arenas. Therefore, selection of the committee requires careful planning, with an emphasis on maintaining respectful professional relationships at all stages of the dissertation process.

Once you have filed your intent to defend your dissertation and your dissertation chair has approved your defense, you should secure the necessary additional committee members. This process usually includes selecting and assigning additional readers. Each institution has its own way of going about setting up the defense meeting, and you should always consult with your institution's office of doctoral studies with regard to the correct procedures and protocol.

Familiarizing Yourself With Expectations and Requirements

Generally, it is a safe rule of thumb to figure out that a complete draft of the dissertation should be in the advisor's hands within the first weeks of the semester in which you intend your defense to take place. This allows your dissertation chair or sponsor sufficient time to review your material and make recommendations, forward to the second reader for approval and recommendations, and secure any additional readers thereby complying with the institution's scheduling procedures regarding the defense committee. You need to make sure that you have the necessary information regarding all required deadlines by consulting with your advisors as well as contacting your institution's office of doctoral studies for guidelines and rules. It is highly recommended that as a precautionary measure you make backup copies of your presentation and notes and that you keep these copies handy at the time of the actual defense. This is especially important if you are presenting your defense online, because computer glitches can (and often do) occur, and you certainly don't want to be left unprepared.

The purpose of the dissertation defense is twofold: (a) to publicly discuss what you have researched and what you have discovered in the process and (b) to evaluate the acceptability of the study as a scholarly piece of research in your area of specialization and to make a collective decision that will determine the recommendations for revisions.

The defense, in effect, moves your dissertation from the private domain into the arena of public discourse, providing you with some sense of closure. Actual procedures for conducting the meeting and the formalities involved are likely to vary, not only among universities but also among departments. Your advisor will most likely outline the proceedings of the defense, as well as explain to you the roles of the various committee members. As such, although each experience will certainly be unique, you should be well prepared as to what to expect in the session.

Each institution is concerned with maintaining an implicit academic standard for acceptable scholarship. You have just completed a rigorous piece of research, so your research apprenticeship is ending. The defense marks this transition as you are invited to sit at the table and talk about your research as a peer with your professors. With your knowledge from your just-completed research study, you are expected to provide authoritative insight into previously uncharted or contested issues. Your ideas are as highly valued as your committee members', and you have an equal place at that table.

In our view, no student should be allowed to schedule the defense if the dissertation is not regarded as complete and worthy of examination. Your advisor will no doubt have had the opportunity to review the final document prior to its official distribution to committee members and will already have determined that the document meets the necessary academic standards, thereby qualifying for formal review. Consequently, part of the function of the defense is a formal induction of the doctoral candidate into a scholarly community—the celebration of a major scholarly achievement and a symbolic rite of passage to the awarding of the doctorate.

Because it is the culminating aspect of a rigorous, traditional, and long-standing ritual, we understand that you will likely approach the defense with some sense of anxiety. View the defense as an opportunity to think about your study more deeply and creatively and to articulate the implications of your work. Your months of concentrated reading and research have contributed to unique knowledge on your topic that few possess. Think of the meeting essentially as an academic conversation among colleagues that involves the exchange of ideas and the sharing of knowledge—an opportunity to extend your thinking in new directions.

You can certainly prepare to make the defense a positive experience. Therefore, being fully conversant about all aspects of your study is crucial. The more familiar you are with the details of your study, including the relevant literature and research, the more you will appear as the expert. You have lived with your study for an extended length of time and have been totally immersed in it. The role that the committee can rightfully play is to provide some new lenses with which to review your work and to offer you some new perspectives.

Usually, at the defense, you are given an opportunity to set the stage by presenting an overview of your study to the committee. Although you can use your discretion in making the choice as to what points you want to get across in the time available, you should think carefully about this task beforehand and be cognizant of the allotted time for your presentation. Rather than just summarize the salient points of your study, you should think of that part of your research that is most critical, interesting, unique, and/or controversial. Committee members have read your study (or at least certain parts of it). Therefore, they are expecting not to hear from you what they already know but rather to learn something new.

Think about whether there is anything that is deserving of further discussion. What is it about the content or process that might require additional emphasis, illustration, explanation, elaboration, and/or clarification? What might committee members not know that they might need or want to know more about? Also think about what predictable concerns or needs that committee members might have regarding your study. In what ways might the limitations of your study deserve special mention? What broader or more pressing social issues does your study connect with? Having completed the study and lived with your findings, are there any ways your work might be revised and/or extended so that it would make a useful contribution either theoretically and/or practically?

Try to remain as specific and focused as possible, rather than crowding too much detail into this opening discussion. An interesting, concise, topical, and meaningful researcher presentation usually lays the ground for the discussion to follow. Maintaining the close attention of committee members allows you to maintain some degree of control over what will be given attention in the conversation that ensues. Remember that you have only limited time available to make your presentation. Note your beginning and ending times. Inform the committee of what is to come and for how long you intend to speak. This, for them, is a sign of careful planning and will be appreciated.

In planning your presentation, prepare an outline of what you want to talk about, laid out in sequence. You also might want to prepare some graphic aids to organize, illustrate, and support your oral presentation, including flowcharts, diagrams, audiotape segments, or even photographs or video clips. Visual materials such as PowerPoint can provide focus and heighten impact. However, in light of the limited time that you have available, if you do decide to use visuals, be selective and use only what is highly pertinent to your discussion. Be sure that these are *used* and not simply displayed. Present your materials, explain their significance, and allow readers the time to digest these materials and ask questions. Visuals should feel like an integral and relevant aspect of the conversation rather than an interruption. Although visual materials can certainly be used effectively, an overreliance on handouts and visuals can be off-putting to faculty who come to the defense expecting to engage in substantive conversation with the candidate and each other.

Typically, the presentation of your study is followed by questions and comments from the various committee members, which usually generate a discussion of your study that can further establish your professional credibility. Part of the expertise of being an acknowledged specialist is the ability to explain your work logically and intelligently. In the days prior to your defense, read over your dissertation carefully so you can respond authoritatively to the questions asked. Be able to succinctly summarize your research problem as well as your key findings. Be prepared to defend your choice of qualitative research tradition or genre, choice of data collection methods, and sample selection procedures, as well as your methods of data analysis. If there are any concerns over the quality of the inquiry or the document, these obviously will be a major focus of deliberation. Be confident that you can provide clear explanations regarding all aspects of your work and offer a rationale for all your decision making.

Considering Possible Defense Questions

In the days leading up to your defense, reflect on the value of your dissertation. Recall the relevant literature in your field and bring yourself up to date with the most recent work. Think carefully about how your study contributes to the current knowledge base. Probe yourself about how your work relates to the literature, both theoretically and practically. Try to anticipate all possible questions that the committee members might ask. In this regard, play "devil's advocate" with yourself and try to identify as many of your study's strengths and weaknesses as possible. Following are some of the specific questions that examiners might predictably raise related to different aspects of your study. There will be some questions about the research process in general—that is, how you came to do this study, how you conducted the study, and your experience as a qualitative researcher:

- What motivated you to conduct this study? In other words, what brought you to explore this particular topic?
- How do you situate yourself within this research? What experiences brought you to conduct this research?
- In what ways did your course work at the university prepare you for your dissertation work?
- In planning and conducting this study, which major theorists and/or philosophers influenced your thinking?
- What are the major strengths and/or limitations of your research design and research methodology?
- What might further strengthen this study?
- What, if any, are the unanticipated outcomes of your study? What surprises have you come away with?
- What new learning about qualitative research have you come away with as a result of conducting this study?
- What new learning about yourself have you come away with having conducted this study? What additional insights has the dissertation experience afforded you?
- What were the high and/or low points for you in the dissertation experience?
- What was the most challenging aspect of your research?
- Why did you analyze the data in the way that you did? How might you have analyzed your data differently?
- What might be an alternative interpretation of your findings?
- What suggestions might you offer somebody about to conduct a study of this nature?

The committee will naturally be interested in hearing more about the outcomes of the study and its implications and/or impact:

- What is the most important contribution your study can make to your profession, community, or society?
- Can you discuss the potential transferability of your study?
- Will your research change current thinking in the field? If so, how, and in what ways?
- What are the conflicting issues in your field (every field has conflicts—hence, the research problem), and what contributed most to your understanding of these issues?
- In what ways do you expect that your work will clarify the conflicting issues in your field?
- What do you see as the main contributions of your research for your discipline?
- What specific aspects of your findings can be applied to practice?
- How would a policy maker be able to potentially utilize your findings?
- In what ways, if at all, does your study contribute to the existing literature and/or prior research in the field? In what ways does it extend the literature? Contradict the literature? Fill gaps in the literature? Clarify contradictions in the literature?
- If you were to redo this study, how might you conduct this study differently? How might you change your research methodology? Why?
- How could you build on or extend this research in the future?
- How will you be able to communicate your work to other scholars in your field?
- What could you do with the study's findings, personally or professionally, to make a difference?
- How would you condense your research into a publishable journal article? What would be the key sections you might include? Why?

Remembering that your theoretical or conceptual framework is the means through which you articulated the significance of your research, your chosen research design, the significance of your findings, and how your study makes a contribution to knowledge, consider some questions pertaining to your study's framework. Such questions might include:

- How did you arrive at your theoretical or conceptual framework?
- What are the key theoretical or conceptual components of your framework?
- What informed your framework? In other words, how did you decide upon the components that you include in your theoretical or conceptual framework?
- How did the components of your framework assist you in visualizing and explaining what you intended to investigate?
- How and in what ways did you use your framework to design your research and analyze your findings?
- Were there any other concepts or theories you considered initially but did not include in your framework? Why not?

The discussion during the defense can evolve in many directions and on many levels. It pays to be prepared for all the prior potential questions, as well as any that your advisor and other critics might have raised with you over the course of discussions about your research. You are certainly free to refer as needed to your dissertation as you respond to questions. Be sure that you understand what is being asked of you before attempting to answer questions. If you are uncertain as to any question that is posed to you, ask that the question be rephrased or restated. Try at all times to provide clear, logical answers. Present your reasoning carefully. Avoid overlong and verbose answers that might take you off course. Count on being asked a few questions that you may not have anticipated. If you do not have an answer to a particular question, acknowledge that you need more time to think about the issue.

As the defense meeting draws to a close, you will be asked to leave the room, affording the committee members privacy in their final deliberations regarding your dissertation. Having heard each other's perspectives, they collectively assess the extent to which their individual views are congruent. Depending on the quality of the dissertation, the meeting can conclude with one of several outcomes. What everybody hopes for, of course, is approval. What everybody dreads—and which is hardly likely to occur—are substantive revisions that might necessitate another meeting. Typically, some revisions are necessary, and the committee members arrive at agreement as to what changes they would recommend. Usually, the dissertation chair or sponsor is charged with ensuring that these requests are addressed in the finally approved document.

Post-Defense Preparation

Making Revisions to Your Manuscript

On the basis of the committee members' discussion, there are likely to be a number of suggestions, additions, and/or corrections. In a few cases, substantive or major alterations may be required. The most likely outcome, however, is a pass with the request for minor revisions. These revisions can include some further analyses, expansions to the literature review, additional methodological details, and additional conclusions and/or recommendations. You might be required to reorder parts or sections of the text, clarify and/or elaborate some discussion points, and rewrite or omit sections that seem confusing, as well as attend to various technical, grammatical, and/or editorial details.

Generally, a post-defense meeting is held with your dissertation chair or sponsor to discuss the necessary changes, reconcile any contradictory feedback, and make sure that you understand what needs to be done. We strongly suggest that, within a few days, with the defense discussion still fresh in your mind, you make a point of processing all the feedback you received. Be sure you understand clearly what needs to be changed and how to proceed. Most minor revisions can usually be completed within a week or two. The sooner you tackle the required revisions, the sooner you will be able to submit a final copy of the document to your office of doctoral studies for a final round of proofreading. Allowing sufficient time for possible redrafting is especially important if you hope to graduate in the same semester in which the dissertation was completed and defended. Filing the final dissertation means that the approval of any revisions as indicated by your dissertation chair or sponsor is complete.

Although you have revised and refined your manuscript many times prior to the defense, following the required revisions, you need to carefully and meticulously edit your manuscript one final time. The purpose for this final review is to check accuracy regarding content as well as mechanics and style. There is no substitute for painstaking proofreading.

In doing a final check of your entire manuscript, look for the following requirements:

- Have you addressed all issues that were raised by the committee members?
- Have you added the necessary sections in the most logical places so as not to interrupt the flow of the discussion?
- Regarding any added material, have you checked with your style manual regarding mechanics, style, and consistency?
- Are all headings and subheadings formatted in accordance with the guidelines specified in the style manual?
- If necessary, have you added and/or deleted any citations?
- Have you adjusted your reference list according to all additions and/or deletions of citations?
- Have you adjusted your abstract according to any changes that were made?
- Have you added your acknowledgments and/or dedication? This appears after the abstract and is an opportunity to express appreciation to those who have contributed significantly to the completion of your dissertation.
- Have you checked that your table of contents corresponds with all headings, subheadings, and pagination? This check is especially important if you have adjusted your margins for binding purposes.
- Have you checked that all tables and figures are correctly numbered and labeled throughout?
- Have you reread and edited your manuscript one final time?
- Have you performed a final spell-check on the entire manuscript?

The instructions for preparing final copies of your dissertation can be quite complex, and these differ from university to university. As such, we recommend that you consult with your institution's office of doctoral studies regarding format and style details, as well as the number of copies of the dissertation and abstract that you are required to submit and to whom. Generally, you can rely on your advisor to clarify procedures regarding your university's protocol for completion of the dissertation process, including final approval and sign-off.

Publishing and Presenting Your Research

The dissertation process comes to a definitive end when the final document is submitted and the doctoral degree is awarded. You have undoubtedly devoted an extensive amount of time and energy to your research. Finally, having reached the end of the trail, you should feel a well-deserved sense of accomplishment. This is a time to bring closure to your doctoral program. It is also a time to move forward and celebrate your enhanced knowledge and expertise. Completion of the dissertation is a significant milestone of an ongoing journey. As is usually the case, as one door closes, another door opens.

At this juncture, you might consider looking beyond the dissertation and contemplating new projects, particularly those you may have deferred while working on your dissertation. Think especially of how you can more fully share what you have researched with a broader audience than the academic community. Following your immersion in your research, you will certainly want to disseminate your findings to others, enabling others to have access to cutting-edge information as well as extending your own professional network. Presenting and/or publishing your findings is a way to contribute to the ongoing knowledge base and work toward advancing your professional career.

The dissemination of research is fundamental to its credibility and to its capacity to bring about some change in your community or your profession, or in society at large. Research findings should also always be subject to replication by others. Your study's findings should therefore be brought into the public domain, not merely to facilitate their potential verification but also to contribute to knowledge in the field and enable other professionals or members of the public to act on them where appropriate.

Research Publication

Your dissertation does not and should not exist in an "intellectual vacuum." The academic journal is the principal medium for the dissemination and sharing of research findings to a wider audience. Moreover, in the broader academic job market, most positions require that candidates have an established or at least emerging publication track. Indeed, "publish or perish" is the injunction that rings true for most of us, especially if you aspire to a university career as a teacher and/or researcher.

All of the main subject areas of research in the social sciences, and many areas of minority interest, have academic journals devoted to them. Journals exist in many different languages and are increasingly available electronically. It is clearly important that research published in academic journals is as trustworthy as possible. Toward this end, most academic journal submissions undergo a peer review process. Each of the major journals provides information pertaining to application and submission details. It is important that you select a journal whose articles match your research topic and your particular study. Some journals focus on empirical research, while others publish theoretical or applied articles. Also be aware that journals are rated in quality based on refereeing systems and how often they are cited by other researchers. In this regard, you might refer to the *Social Science Citation Index* and the *Arts and Humanities Citations Index.*

Remember that the style of your writing should be sensitive to and reflect the targeted audience, be it academics, practitioners, policy makers, or laypersons (general public). Communication should always be designed with an audience in mind. As the researcher, you will need to be aware of and remain accountable to the demands of the intended publication outlet and be aware of and remain responsive to your audience(s)—as such, adapting and framing your text accordingly. The information revolution and its impact on genres and audiences of qualitative research remains an evolving process. Postmodernism (in its various forms) has alerted us to the diversity of writing styles and "textual shifts" in the social sciences, engendering different assumptions regarding textual representation. Researchers' decisions about what to report, how, and to what audience involve reflexive political choices.

Reworking a lengthy, formal, and often technically intricate dissertation requires a major rewrite and, hence, often lengthy time commitment. As Wolcott (2009) points out, when writing a journal article you need to "de-dissertationize" your work. You will have to not only shorten your piece by avoiding too much detail (most journal articles cap the word count at around 6,000) but also be clearly focused on one aspect or topic that will make a compelling argument that will intrigue readers of the journal you have selected. Remember, in the review process, most articles (if not rejected) are returned—sometimes more than once—with a request for some degree of revision—sometimes substantial—adding more time to the already tedious process. You should treat "revise and resubmit" as a golden opportunity to persevere! Many student researchers grapple with how to transform their fieldwork experience, represented in the vast amounts of data gathered, into publishable journal articles. Questions such as the following emerge: What do I want to write about? On which aspects of the data do I need to focus? How do I construct a compelling argument? How do I reduce what I have to say so that it fits into a journal-sized article? What did I find most interesting, and how does it link with relevant theory or concepts? To initiate the process of publishing, you may want to talk to your dissertation advisor or other established academic colleagues regarding advice on specific journals and realistic and appropriate publishing opportunities. You might also visit your university library and peruse all journals pertinent to your field of interest and potential audience(s).

Online Publishing

With the burgeoning digital revolution, the Internet has become a major venue for writing, publishing, and consuming academic research. Social media is broadly understood as Internet-based applications or collaboration tools that carry consumer-generated content and through which information can be shared in virtual communities and networks. Material published online ranges from blogs to open-access journals to traditional books and articles digitalized for the purposes of online consumption and dissemination. Clark and Sousa (2017) talk about "bringing your work alive to people and communities," the implication being that researchers have a responsibility to share findings outside of academia. There are many diverse ways that a researcher can share the insights from qualitative work with different audiences, including mass media (the web, newspaper, television, and radio), social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat), and blogs—all of which offer potential avenues to share research findings with those outside of academia.

Instant access to global audiences has transformed the review process as well as the ways in which audience expectations are addressed (Marvasti, 2017; Mollett, Brumley, Gilson, & Williams, 2018). As Marvasti (2017) points out, "The web collapses the distance between writing and publishing so that what is typed on a computer keyboard is instantly posted online and thus available to a global audience" (p. 439). While certainly convenient and time saving, this method of publishing is not unproblematic. While exceedingly recognized as a legitimate way of disseminating scholarly research, this approach includes some advantages: It provides greater flexibility for editing and revising, offers universal access, and includes the possibility of including multimedia content and hypertext capacity (whereby instead of following the text in a linear fashion, readers can move from one part of the text to another by clicking on an image or a word). That said, online or e-publishing presents new challenges, including lack of thorough review or peer review, or even no review at all, which could in many instances lead to loose standards and requirements, and therefore an absence of methodological, theoretical, or conceptual soundness. A further caveat is that online publishing does not allow for the researcher–author to be aware of and accountable to the demands of an intended publication outlet and its consumers. As such, online publishing, in circumventing the rigor that characterizes the traditional peer review process, is frowned upon by academics in many circles. Consequently, academic publications that are exclusively available online are often deemed less prestigious and less credible, especially if the journal has a high acceptance rate and requires a sizeable fee from its authors. Online publishing is a growing trend, but it certainly challenges the conventional views of authorship, peer review, legitimacy, and academic integrity. While it does offer some unique features, if you are considering online publication for your research, it is certainly worth being aware of the limitations and academic critique associated with this method of publishing.

Presenting or Showcasing Your Research

In addition to publications, completion of the dissertation provides you with an opportunity to present your study in other academic settings and research forums, such as graduate seminars, conferences, and professional associations. A good first step is to present your research to professional associations or organizations in your field. Research conference formats include formal presentation of papers; participating in roundtables, panel discussions, or poster sessions; making formal addresses; and leading seminar or workshop sessions. Scan professional journals for "call for papers"—a formal invitation to submit an application to present research.

A key benefit to presenting your research after it is complete is that it helps you to summarize the dissertation for possible publication. Student researchers can also benefit from presenting their research at discipline-related conferences during the course of their research, in that presenting preliminary research while the study is under construction is a valuable opportunity for feedback and critique from colleagues and other professionals and/or academics in the field.

The final chapter of your dissertation contains recommendations regarding implications for action, in which you make concrete and practical suggestions to practitioners in the field that are directly related to your study's findings. Often, recommendations are made regarding creation of specific products such as handbooks, training materials, manuals, and programs. Taking time to follow up on creating some of these products makes a practical and worthy contribution to the field of practice.

As you go about considering different ways to disseminate your research, there are various resources that offer emerging and experienced scholars from all disciplines a comprehensive review of the essential elements needed to craft scholarly papers suitable for submission to academic journals. Included are discussions regarding the components of different types of manuscripts, submission and review processes, quality writing skills, suggestions for working collaboratively with editors and coauthors, dealing with rejection, and tackling the challenges inherent in rewriting and resubmitting one's work. In addition, some texts deal with fundamentals of a good review and offer guidance for becoming a manuscript reviewer—an emergent and often rewarding task when one reaches the postdoctoral phase.

The following resources address the process of turning a dissertation into a publishable manuscript, providing practical advice for writing a publishable qualitative article and outlining the various features that will increase the chances of your manuscript being accepted for journal publication:

http://supp.apa.org/style/pubman-ch08.pdf
http://www.parint.org/isajewebsite/bookimages/isaje_2nd_edition_chapter6.pdf

Following are some additional recommended resources that you might consider perusing regarding publication and presentation of your research.

Annotated Bibliography

Allen, M. (2016). *Essentials for publishing qualitative research.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

This text is part of the Qualitative Essentials book series that provides a comprehensive but succinct overview of topics in qualitative inquiry. This helpful and practical guide offers students an understanding of the process of publishing qualitative research. The author offers a behind-the-scenes look at publishing while providing a pragmatic guide to publishing qualitative work as either journal articles or book chapters.

Mollett, A., Brumley, C., Gilson, C., & Williams, S. (2018). *Communicating your research with social media: A practical guide to using blogs, podcasts, data visualizations, and video*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Adopting social media as a vehicle to communicate academic research is not an easy task and is generally not very well understood. This book explains how to communicate research through blogs, podcasts, data visualizations, and video. Included is a step-by-step breakdown of the strategic capabilities of this medium, highlighting the possibilities, as well as the pitfalls, when promoting one's research through digital and social channels.

Nygaard, L. (2016). *Writing for scholars: A practical guide to making sense and being heard*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book guides you through the process of writing and presenting your research in order to help you make your voice heard within the academic community. Grounded in real-world advice rather than abstract best practice, the author demonstrates a number of approaches to writing in order to help you identify those most suited to your own project.

Rocco, T., Hatcher, T., & Creswell, J. W. (2011). *The handbook of scholarly writing and publishing.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This resource offers emerging and experienced scholars from all disciplines a comprehensive review of the essential elements needed to craft scholarly papers and other writing suitable for submission to academic journals. The authors discuss the components of different types of manuscripts, explain the submission process, and offer suggestions for working with editors and coauthors, dealing with rejection, and rewriting and resubmitting work. The book includes suggestions for developing quality writing skills and offers guidance for becoming a manuscript reviewer.

Rosaline, B. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

There are many challenges involved in presenting and publishing qualitative research. The standard journal format of introduction/background, methods, sample, findings, discussion, and conclusions/recommendations does not leave much room for maneuver. Particularly taxing is the distinction between results and discussion, especially given the iterative nature of the qualitative analysis process. Word limits often present another challenge, and this varies considerably from journal to journal. Chapter 12, "Presenting and Writing Up Qualitative Research," addresses some of the challenges involved in writing-up qualitative research, and suggestions are provided regarding formulating a publications plan.

Wallace, M., & Wray, A. (2016). *Critical reading and writing for postgraduates* (3rd ed.). London, England: Sage.

Reading critically and writing using critical techniques are crucial skills for academic work. In a practical and engaging way, this book provides tools for analyzing texts and structuring critical reviews. Numerous diagrams, exercises, and concept explanations are designed to enable you to more easily understand and apply the various approaches, and a glossary is also included to help with understanding of key terms. The current edition includes a companion website that provides additional resources to help apply critical reading and writing techniques.

Wolcott, H. (2009). *Writing up qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This is a valuable classic resource for academic writers at any stage of their careers. Graduate students will find the discussion of breaking out of the prescribed formulas of the dissertation genre very helpful. New academics will enjoy the advice for keeping writing relevant to the audience, as well as the chapters on negotiating the publication process. Wolcott offers practical suggestions for how to proceed with the mechanics of preparing an article or book for publication using lively examples from his more than 40 years of experience in the field.

Part III: Summary and Discussion

Nearing Completion

Part III of this book addresses the final stages of the dissertation process, and we offer suggestions regarding the various activities involved.

- It is crucial that all the necessary elements that constitute a dissertation are clearly, evidently, and strongly aligned with one another. At the end of the process, it is necessary that you revisit all your chapters of your dissertation and check that each element flows sequentially from the elements prior to it, and that each element leads logically to the elements that succeed it.
- The first thing your readers will read, and something you will need to revise following the completion of your study, is the title of your dissertation. Therefore, the wording of your title deserves careful consideration. By conveying the key concepts of your study, the title attracts the attention of interested readers. The title also enables your work to be correctly catalogued, and effective wording is essential for retrieval purposes.
- You want your study's abstract to be an accurate representation of all the hard work you have devoted to this project. More important, you want people who are studying issues related to yours to find your study among all the others. Therefore, in your abstract, careful wording and attention to key elements are essential. An abstract should generally state the research problem, describe the research approach, and announce key findings, conclusions, and recommendations. There is usually a specified word limit. Within that word limit, try to make your abstract as comprehensive and informative as possible.
- Although format and style are a function of institutional and/or departmental regulations, some general rules can be adopted in designing the layout of your manuscript. We offer various ideas on what to check in assembling your manuscript.
- In preparing for your defense, check that all necessary documentation is completed in a timely manner. You do not want any unnecessary delays at this point. Customs and routines surrounding the number of faculty who attend a dissertation defense vary among institutions and programs. Make sure that you are familiar with the system adopted by your university regarding the dissertation committee structure as well as the process for preparing for that structure. At many universities, students have the opportunity to request specific faculty members to serve on their dissertation committees. If you have the freedom to exercise some choice, committee membership should be designed to maximize the support and assistance available.
- The dissertation defense, in effect, moves your dissertation from the private domain into the arena of public discourse. As a result of your research, you are now considered a specialist in your topic area. Part of being an acknowledged specialist is the ability to explain your work logically and intelligently. Under all imaginable circumstances, everybody on your committee wants you to do well. With a solid, thoughtful, and well-prepared presentation, you are highly likely to be successful.
- Following the defense, there are almost always some revisions you will have to make. Within a few days, with the defense discussion still fresh in your mind, you should make a point of processing all the feedback you received. The sooner you tackle the required revisions, the sooner you will be able to submit a final copy of your document to the office of doctoral studies for a final round of proofreading. As you incorporate the necessary revisions, make sure that any and all additions conform to the style manual that you are using.
- Disseminating your research can take various forms. Peer-reviewed academic journals are the principal scholarly medium for sharing research findings with a wider audience. While certainly convenient and time saving, online publishing is not unproblematic because of loose requirements and standards, and little or no review. If you are considering online publication for your research, it is certainly worth considering the limitations and academic critique associated with this method. In addition to publications, completion of the dissertation provides you with an opportunity to present or showcase your study in other academic settings and research forums, such as graduate seminars, conferences, and professional associations.

Afterword

A dissertation is an extensive, challenging, and rigorous scholarly endeavor. As such, completing it represents the pinnacle of academic achievement. This book traces the path of the dissertation process from the time your research was the beginning of an idea to its final successful completion.

The intention is that this book provides the guidance and initiative for careful and systematic planning, preparation, and management of what might at first seem to be a nebulous and seemingly impossible task. Hopefully, with this road map in hand, you are now better equipped for the challenges ahead and are on your way to graduating with your doctorate. The dissertation journey is about achieving several milestones, one at a time. Once you have made the decision to complete your dissertation, which is a significant milestone in itself, do not allow one day to go by without doing *something.* Certainly you can expect your initial projections to be revised and re-revised. But keep a positive attitude, actively finding ways to move forward and *succeed.*

Based on globalizing forces, new theoretical perspectives, increasingly expanding critical research, enhanced technology, and other sociocultural changes that continue to impact the work of social scientists, innovative methods and approaches are emergent and evolving. The field of qualitative research continues to transform itself. Paradigm shifts and deep dialogues have become a constant presence within and across the theoretical frameworks that organize both qualitative inquiry and social and human sciences. The literature clearly reflects an ongoing need for a critical, interpretive, compassionate, multivoiced, civic social science that is directed to praxis and social change and that strives to combat repression and oppression in our daily lives. It has been gratifying to see that as graduate students continue to engage in their research, many are forging new pathways that challenge boundaries and build bridges across traditions and genres, thereby expanding and significantly enhancing the field. It is these bold efforts that continue to develop qualitative inquiry as a growing, thriving, dynamic, and ever-evolving multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary endeavor.

As an adult educator, it is my philosophy that what matters ultimately in life is not only what one has learned but also what one has taught. My hope is that if this book has given you some new knowledge, skills, and insight, you will pass what you have learned on to somebody else who is starting off on the qualitative dissertation process or who might be stuck along the way and attempting to move forward.

And may we all continue to apply what we learn to build a more compassionate and just world, because I know and trust that learning powers change.

My best wishes for your continued success.

—Linda Dale Bloomberg

Appendices

Note: Those appendices that are completed samples of the various templates provided throughout this book are included in the companion website study.sagepub.com/bloomberg4e. This includes appendices E, G, H, K, L, M, N, O, P, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, AA, BB, CC, DD, EE, FF, GG. Refer to pages xxv–xxvi for a complete list.

Appendix A: Rubric for Evaluating a Completed Qualitative Dissertation

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
Title Page	1. Title is complete within character limit. 2. Includes all keywords that will promote proper categorization into databases, including purpose of study, type of study, and type of participants. 3. All relevant parts of the title page are included (author's full name, degree to be conferred, name of university, year). 4. APA style is completely correct.	1. Title is appropriate but may not be very concise. 2. Most keywords are included. 3. All relevant parts of the title page are included (author's full name, degree to be conferred, name of university, year). 4. APA style is completely correct.	1. Title does not effectively convey all aspects of the study, or some needed elements are missing. 2. Key words may or may not be included. 3. All relevant parts of the title page may or may not be included (author's full name, degree to be conferred, name of university, year). 4. APA style is not completely correct.	1. Title is not appropriate for a dissertation. 2. Most keywords are missing. 3. Most relevant parts of title page are not included. 4. Title page does not follow APA style.
Abstract	1. Abstract includes problem, purpose, scope of study, research tradition, number and type of participants, methodology, major findings. Implications/ limitations of these findings stated clearly and concisely. 2. Writing is organized, coherent, and grammatically correct. 3. Format and style are correct as per APA guidelines. 4. Word limit is accurate as per APA guidelines.	1. Abstract includes all essential information but is misleading due to a lack of concise sentence structure, or there may be some information missing. 2. Writing is organized, coherent, and grammatically correct. 3. Format and style are correct as per APA guidelines. 4. Word limit is accurate as per APA guidelines.	1. Abstract is missing essential information. 2. Writing may or may not be organized, coherent, and grammatically correct. 3. Format and style may or may not be correct as per guidelines in APA style manual. 4. Word limit may or may not be accurate as per APA guidelines.	1. Abstract has some incorrect information or does not accurately portray the study. 2. Writing is mostly disorganized, incoherent, or grammatically incorrect. 3. Format and style are mostly incorrect as per APA guidelines. 4. Word limit has been significantly exceeded.

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
Literature Review Scoring Rubric	See Appendix B	See Appendix B	See Appendix B	See Appendix B
Introduction	1. The research topic is relevant to the program of study, and the content is current and timely in terms of the researcher's field of interest. 2. Clear statement of research problem. Description of background to the problem is provided. 3. Relationship of the problem to previous research is clearly stated, and relevant literature is cited. 4. How this research might contribute to the knowledge base and/or practice and/or policy is clearly stated. 5. Researcher's perspective and relationship to the problem is discussed, and all researcher's assumptions and biases are made explicit. 6. Purpose of the study is clearly, succinctly, and unambiguously stated. 7. It is clear how the purpose will address the problem. 8. Stated purpose is relevant to chosen qualitative research tradition.	1. The research topic is somewhat relevant to the program of study, and somewhat current in terms of the researcher's field of interest. 2. Statement of research problem, description of background to the problem, and relationship of the problem to previous research could be stated more clearly. 3. Explanation of how this research will contribute to the knowledge base and/ or practice and/or policy is included, but it could be more specific. 4. Researcher's perspectives and assumptions are provided but could be stated more clearly. 5. Purpose of the study, how the purpose will address the problem, could be explained more clearly. 6. The relevance of the study's purpose vis-à-vis the chosen qualitative tradition could be explained more clearly.	1. The research topic is vague in its relationship to the program of study and to the researcher's field of interest. 2. Statement of research problem, description of background to the problem, and relationship of the problem to previous research is unclear or vague. 3. There is little justification for how this research will contribute to the knowledge base and/or practice and/or policy. 4. Researcher's perspectives and assumptions are unclear or vague. 5. Purpose of the study, how the purpose will address the problem, is unclear or vague. 6. The relevance of the study's purpose vis-à-vis the chosen qualitative tradition is unclear or vague.	1. The research topic has no or very little relationship with the program of study. 2. Statement of research problem, description of background to the problem, and relationship of the problem to previous research is very unclear, messy, or missing. 3. There is no justification for how this research will contribute to the knowledge base and/or practice and/or policy. 4. Researcher's perspectives and assumptions are very unclear or missing. 5. Purpose of the study, how the purpose will address the problem, is very unclear or missing. 6. The relevance of the study's purpose vis-à-vis the chosen qualitative tradition is very unclear, messy, or missing.

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
Research Questions	1. Research questions are open ended and answerable; answers will clearly shed light on research problem. 2. All research questions are interconnected; there is a meaningful relationship among them. 3. There is clear and strong alignment among problem, purpose, and research questions.	1. Research questions are open ended, but it could be made clearer how answers will shed light on research problem. 2. Relationship among the research questions could be clearer. 3. Alignment among problem, purpose, and research questions could be stronger.	1. Research questions are open ended, but it is unclear how answers will shed light on research problem. 2. Relationship among the research questions is unclear or vague. 3. Alignment among problem, purpose, and research questions is unclear or vague.	1. Answers to research questions would not shed light on research problem. 2. There is no relationship among the research questions. 3. There is no alignment among problem, purpose, and research questions.
Research Design	1. Research design is appropriate and feasible as a means of qualitative inquiry. 2. The type of data being collected is clearly described. 3. A well-thought-out rationale is provided to justify the study. 4. A convincing argument is made for the importance or significance of the study.	1. Research design is appropriate and feasible as a means of qualitative inquiry. 2. The type of data being collected is briefly discussed but not clearly or sufficiently described or explained. 3. The rationale provided to justify the study is not clearly described or explained. 4. The argument made for the importance or significance of the study needs additional explanation or clarification.	1. Research design is not appropriate or feasible as a means of qualitative inquiry. 2. The type of data being collected is not clearly described or explained. 3. The rationale provided to justify the study is unclear or vague. 4. The argument made for the importance or significance of the study is unclear, vague, or weak.	1. Research design is both inappropriate and/or unfeasible as a means of qualitative inquiry. 2. Description or explanation of the type of data being collected is absent or unclear. 3. The rationale provided to justify the study is absent. 4. There is no argument made for the importance or significance of the study. If there is an argument made, it is very weak.

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
Methodology: Selection of Participants and Research Setting	1. Sample is ideal for the questions being asked. 2. Sampling strategy is appropriate, and criteria for sampling selection are stated and explained, including access and consent. 3. Participant information includes number and all necessary characteristics. (This should include demographic, perceptual, and contextual information.) 4. Transferability is adequately addressed regarding setting and time.	1. Sample is appropriate for the questions being asked. 2. Sampling strategy and criteria for sampling selection are not clearly or sufficiently described. 3. Participant information includes some but not all necessary characteristics. (This should include demographic, perceptual, and contextual information.) 4. Transferability is addressed regarding setting and time but not in sufficient detail.	1. Sample is not appropriate for the questions being asked. 2. Sampling strategy and criteria for sampling selection are not clearly explained. 3. Participant information lacks clarity. 4. Transferability regarding setting and time lacks clarity.	1. Sample is undefined. 2. Sampling strategy and criteria for sampling are not discussed and/or are not appropriate. 3. Participant information is not provided. 4. Transferability regarding setting and time is either inaccurate or is not discussed.
Methodology: Data Collection	1. The type of data being collected is clearly described and justified for the importance and/or significance of the study. 2. The process for collecting data is explained and methods are described with sufficient detail that a reader could replicate the study consistent with research questions. 3. It is clear what methods were selected to obtain data, when and from whom.	1. The type of data being collected is briefly outlined regarding the importance and/or significance of the study. 2. The process for collecting data is briefly explained but needs additional detail so that a reader could replicate the study consistent with research questions. 3. Methods selected to obtain data, when and from whom, could be described more clearly.	1. The type of data being collected is identified but not described. 2. The process for collecting data is identified but not described in detail, and it is unclear whether a reader could replicate the study consistent with research questions. 3. Methods selected to obtain data, when and from whom, are vague or unclear.	1. There is no mention of the type of data being collected. 2. The process for collecting data and methods selected is not explained. 3. There is no rationale for selection of instruments used. 4. If instruments are developed specifically for this study, procedures involved in development, validation, and administration are not explained.

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
	4. A clear rationale for selection of instruments used is provided. 5. If instruments are developed specifically for this study, procedures involved in development, validation, and administration are clearly documented. 6. All data collection methods are congruent with the problem being investigated and the specific qualitative tradition employed. 7. Triangulation of data collection methods has been achieved. 8. Dependability has been satisfied and clearly addressed and explained. One can track the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret data.	4. A rationale for selection of instruments used is provided but needs additional clarification or explanation. 5. If instruments are developed specifically for this study, procedures involved in development, validation, and administration need additional clarification or explanation. 6. Congruence between data collection methods, research problem, and the specific qualitative tradition could be clearer. 7. Triangulation of data collection methods could be clearer or more specific. 8. Dependability has been somewhat satisfied. One can track some, but not all, of the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret data.	4. A rationale for selection of instruments used is provided but is vague or unclear. 5. If instruments are developed specifically for this study, procedures involved in development, validation, and administration are vague or unclear. 6. Congruence between data collection methods, research problem, and the specific qualitative tradition are vague or unclear. 7. Triangulation of data collection methods is unclear. 8. Dependability has been only minimally or vaguely addressed.	5. There is no congruence between data collection methods, research problem, and the specific qualitative tradition. 6. There is no evidence of triangulation of data collection methods. 7. There is no evidence of dependability, or evidence that dependability was even addressed.
Methodology: Procedure	The procedure is appropriate for the research questions and is described in order or sequence, with enough detail that a reader could replicate the study. Instructions and protocol are included. In addition:	The procedure is appropriate and the description is mostly complete, but some minor details may be missing, or some procedural aspects could be explained more clearly.	The procedure is appropriate, but description is not in order or sequence, and/or it may be difficult to follow, and/or a few major details are absent.	The procedure is not appropriate, and/or the description is unclear, and/or many major details are absent.

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
	1. A convincing argument for choosing qualitative research and particular research tradition is provided. 2. All decisions made during the course of the study, including any changes or modifications in focus, direction, and design are discussed. 3. All limitations and delimitations pertaining to study are discussed, including how the researcher attempted to address limitations. 4. Specialized instructions or a data collection protocol is included as part of the study or as an appendix. 5. Methodological procedures are explained as fully meeting all ethical standards and requirements.	A few of the procedural criteria listed in the left column are missing or are not fully addressed.	Many of the procedural criteria listed in the left column are missing or are not fully addressed.	Most or all of the procedural criteria listed in the left column are missing and remain unaddressed.
Analysis of Data and Presentation of Findings	1. Data analysis is well planned. Data analysis steps are clearly articulated, including clear explanation of how data were managed and organized for analysis.	1. Data analysis is well planned. Data analysis steps are identified but may exclude clear explanation of how data were managed and organized for analysis.	1. Data analysis steps are identified, but explanation of how data were managed and organized for analysis is vague or unclear.	1. Data analysis steps are not identified. 2. Coding process is not described and/or coding scheme is not included. 3. Some or all of the findings statements are missing or inaccurately presented.

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
	2. The coding process is clearly described, and an organized and comprehensive coding scheme is included. 3. All findings statements are clearly and precisely stated. 4. Findings are summarized and aggregated, and clearly and coherently organized and presented in direct response to the research questions. 5. Findings are free from interpretation and are reported accurately and objectively. 6. The narrative and tables/ figures (as applicable) are easy to understand and summarize the findings in a way that responds to all of the research questions. 7. Examples of specific evidence (quotations or other qualitative data including artifacts or visuals) are provided to support all the findings of the study.	2. The coding process is described and coding scheme is included, but explanation and/or presentation could be clearer. 3. All findings statements are stated but could be clearer. 4. Findings are summarized and aggregated in a way that mostly addresses the research questions. The process of summarizing data may not be complete or comprehensive. 5. Findings are generally free from interpretation and are reported accurately and objectively. 6. The narrative and tables/ figures (as applicable) summarize the findings but do not always directly address the research questions. 7. Examples of specific evidence (quotations or other qualitative data including artifacts or visuals) are provided to support only some of the findings of the study.	2. Coding process is described and coding scheme is included, but explanation and/or presentation are vague or unclear. 3. Some or all of the findings statements are unclear or vague. 4. Findings are summarized and aggregated but are not clearly organized according to research questions, nor do they directly address all the research questions. The process of summarizing data is unclear or incomplete. 5. Findings are not all free from interpretation and/or are not always reported accurately and objectively. 6. The narrative and tables (as applicable) summarize the findings but mostly do not address the research questions. 7. Examples of specific evidence that support the findings of study are mostly inappropriate or absent.	4. Findings are summarized and aggregated, but large portions of data are omitted or missing. The process of summarizing data is messy or absent. 5. Findings are not free from interpretation and/or are not reported accurately and objectively. 6. The narrative and tables/ figures (as applicable) summarize the findings but do not address any of the research questions. 7. Examples of specific evidence that support the findings of study are inappropriate or absent. 8. No conceptual insights emerge from the analysis. Instead, the results simply reflect the idiosyncratic views of the author. There is no conceptual framework, or if there is one, it is very unclear, messy, and/or inaccurate and does not enhance the study in any way.

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
	8. The study's conceptual framework clearly and logically illuminates the relationships among the study's theoretical and/or conceptual variables.	8. Some conceptual insights emerge from the analysis. The conceptual framework is clear and easy to understand.	8. Few conceptual insights emerge from the analysis. If a conceptual framework has been developed, it is unclear or imprecise in parts.	
Discussion: Interpretation	1. The discussion includes a restatement of the findings. 2. Interpretations are clear, thoughtful, and reasonable. The argument flows logically and coherently. 3. Interpretations are relevant to research problem, purpose, and research questions. 4. Major themes or patterns are interrelated to show a higher level of analysis and abstraction. 5. Analysis is positioned and discussed in terms of relevant related bodies of literature and previous research.	1. The discussion includes a restatement of the findings, but this could be clearer and more focused. 2. Interpretations could be more clearly stated. The argument could flow more coherently. 3. Interpretations are mostly relevant to research problem, purpose, and research questions. 4. Major themes or patterns are interrelated to show a relatively high level of analysis and abstraction. 5. Analysis is discussed in terms of relevant related bodies of literature and previous research, but integration could be tighter.	1. The discussion includes a restatement of the findings, but this discussion lacks clarity and focus. 2. Interpretations are unclear or vague. The argument does not flow logically and coherently. 3. Interpretations are sometimes relevant to research problem, purpose, and research questions. 4. Major themes or patterns are somewhat interrelated but show a low level of analysis and abstraction. 5. Analysis is discussed in terms of relevant related bodies of literature and previous research, but integration is lacking.	1. The discussion does not include a restatement of the findings. 2. Interpretations are unfounded, unrealistic, or naïve. The argument does not flow logically and coherently at all. 3. Interpretations are not relevant to research problem, purpose, and research questions. 4. There is no interrelationship of any major themes or patterns in the data. 5. Analysis is not discussed in terms of relevant related bodies of literature and previous research.

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
	6. All information presented in tables/ figures is consistent with information presented in the narrative. 7. The researcher clearly acknowledges multiple ways of interpreting findings and is open to alternative interpretive possibilities. The researcher revisits and actively reflects upon initial assumptions and/or biases. 8. There is clear and logical argument in support of credibility. By way of various appropriate strategies, the researcher has accurately represented what the participants think, feel, and do. 9. Comprehensive overview synthesizes and integrates all key points. 10. There is clear overall alignment among all dissertation elements.	6. Information presented in tables/figures is mostly consistent with information presented in the narrative. 7. The researcher acknowledges multiple ways of interpreting findings and is open to alternative interpretive possibilities but has not revisited and reflected upon initial assumptions and/or biases. 8. Credibility has been somewhat satisfied. The argument for establishing credibility could be clearer and more substantial. 9. An overview synthesizes and integrates all key points, but this could be tighter and more comprehensive. 10. Overall alignment among all dissertation elements could be somewhat strengthened.	6. Information presented in tables/figures is sometimes consistent with information presented in the narrative. 7. The researcher infers that there are multiple ways of interpreting findings, but this is not adequately addressed. The researcher has also not revisited and reflected upon initial assumptions and/or biases. 8. Credibility has been only minimally or vaguely addressed. 9. An overview summarizes key points, but there is no integration or synthesis. 10. Overall alignment among dissertation elements is unclear or vague.	6. Information presented in tables/figures is mostly not consistent with information presented in the narrative. 7. The researcher does not acknowledge that there are multiple ways of interpreting findings, and has not revisited or reflected upon initial assumptions and/or biases. 8. There is no evidence or discussion related to credibility. 9. There is no overview summary, integration, or synthesis. 10. Overall alignment among dissertation elements is unclear, incorrect, or missing.

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
Discussion: Conclusions and Recommendations	1. A complete picture of the research is portrayed, affording the reader an in-depth understanding of the study and its implications. 2. Any limitations related to context, available evidence, and alternative interpretations are acknowledged, considered, and critically evaluated. 3. All conclusions are presented as strong conclusive statements, are clearly derived from the study's findings and are warranted by the findings, are logical and clearly explained, and are not mere restatements of the findings. 4. All recommendations are justified by the findings, are actionable, and include applications for practice, policy, and further research. 5. A final take-home message is clearly articulated by way of a comprehensive and integrated synthesis.	1. An almost complete picture of the research is portrayed, affording the reader a relatively good understanding of the study and its implications. 2. Any limitations related to context, available evidence, and alternative interpretations are considered but not sufficiently considered or critically evaluated. 3. Most conclusions are presented as strong conclusive statements, are clearly derived from the study's findings and are warranted by the findings, are logical and clearly explained, and are not mere restatements of the findings. 4. Most recommendations are justified by the findings, are actionable, and include applications for practice, policy, and further research. 5. A final take-home message is included but is only somewhat comprehensive.	1. An inconclusive picture of the research is offered. 2. Limitations of context, available evidence, and alternative interpretations are mentioned but not sufficiently discussed. 3. Most conclusions are not presented as strong conclusive statements, and/or are not clearly derived from study's findings, and/or are mostly not warranted by the findings. 4. Most recommendations are not justified by the findings, and/or are not actionable, and/or do not have applications for practice, policy, and further research. 5. A simple take-home message is presented, but this needs fuller articulation.	1. There is a very limited picture of the research. 2. Limitations of context, available evidence, and alternative interpretations are not discussed. 3. The conclusions are mere restatements of the study's findings. 4. The recommendations are not justified by the findings, and/or are not actionable, and/or do not have applications for practice, policy, and further research. 5. The study does not include a final take-home message.

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
References	1. References include all, and only cited, publications. 2. References are all appropriately scholarly and appropriate to the topic. 3. Sufficient recent sources make the review current, and relevant classic studies are included if applicable and available. 4. Original articles/chapters are clearly cited. 5. All references adhere to APA style format.	1. The reference list may leave out some cited article or include some that were not cited. 2. References are appropriately scholarly but may include some that are somewhat tangential. 3. Sources include a good mix of recent and classic, as necessary. 4. All references adhere to APA style format.	1. Some references may not be appropriate for the topic. 2. Key references are clearly cited from other sources and not integrated. 3. Sources do not include a good mix of recent and classic literature. 4. References may or may not adhere to APA style format.	1. The reference list is more like a bibliography of related sources. 2. References may not be scholarly sources or otherwise appropriate for the assignment (e.g., too many secondary sources), or they may not be current. 3. References mostly do not adhere to APA style format.
Academic Writing Style	1. There is clear organization to the document, and transitions are smooth and effective. Headings and subheadings are used effectively to structure and present the discussion. 2. Writing throughout is scholarly and academic. Tone is appropriately formal. 3. Topic sentences are appropriate for paragraphs, and key ideas are explained and described as needed. 4. Punctuation and grammar are correct, including correct tenses and voice.	1. Organization of the document is effective, although improvements could be made. Transitions are generally, but not always, smooth, and paragraphs may stray from the central idea. 2. Writing throughout is mostly scholarly and academic. Tone is mostly appropriately formal. 3. Topic sentences are mostly appropriate for paragraphs, and key ideas are mostly explained or described as needed.	1. Organization of the document is inadequate, making the paper difficult to follow. Transitions are sometimes there but could be improved. 2. Writing is not always scholarly, and tone is occasionally colloquial. 3. Topic sentences are mostly inappropriate for paragraphs, and key ideas are mostly not explained or described as needed. 4. Punctuation and grammar are usually correct, but there are consistent mistakes.	1. Organization of the document is messy or confusing. Transitions are missing or are very weak. 2. Tone is consistently too informal or colloquial. 3. There are mostly no topic sentences, and key ideas are mostly not explained or described as needed. 4. Punctuation, grammar, and spelling errors exist throughout. 5. Sentences are not concise, and word choice is vague. 6. There is much needless repetition, and/or there are parts with insufficient or missing detail.

	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
	5. All spelling is correct. 6. Sentences are concise and word choice is precise, with nonbiased language. 7. Proper paraphrasing is used, and quotation marks are used appropriately when necessary.	4. Punctuation and grammar are almost completely correct. 5. Mostly, spelling is correct. 6. Sentences are generally concise and word choice is usually precise. 7. Paraphrases are usually used, and quotation marks are used appropriately if necessary.	5. There is some incorrect spelling throughout. 6. Sentences are not always concise, and word choice is sometimes vague. 7. Author includes many quotes or improper "paraphrases" that may constitute unintentional plagiarism.	7. Author tends to string together quotations without sufficient original input.
APA Style	1. Information is included in appropriately titled sections. 2. Title page, in-text citations, paper format, and Reference page are in APA style with no mistakes. 3. All headers, tables and figures, margins, captions, etc., are in APA style.	1. For the most part, information is included in the appropriately titled sections. 2. Style is generally correct and includes correct spacing, fonts, and margins. Page breaks are in appropriate places, and sections are in order. 3. There may be minor errors in punctuation, references, in-text citations, statistical copy, or headers.	1. For the most part, information is included in the appropriately titled sections. 2. There are consistent APA style errors in referencing, spacing, statistical copy, or headers.	1. Information is consistently included in the incorrect sections (e.g., materials described in procedure; discussion included in findings). 2. There are many inconsistent style errors throughout the document.

Source: This rubric is part of Bloomberg, L. D. (2015). *Qualitative dissertation evaluation.* Unpublished manuscript.

Source: This rubric is part of Bloomberg, L. D. (2015). *Qualitative dissertation evaluation.* Unpublished manuscript.

Appendix B: Rubric for Evaluating a Literature Review

Category	Criterion	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
1. Coverage	**A. Justified criteria for inclusion and exclusion from review**	– Discussed exactly what should have been in the review and was neither over- nor underinclusive.	– The review justified the inclusion and exclusion of literature.	– The review discussed the literature included and excluded.	– The review did not discuss the criteria for inclusion or exclusion.
2. Synthesis	**B. The review distinguishes what has been done in the field from what needs to be done** **C. Situates the topic or problem within the broader scholarly literature** **D. Situates the research within the historical context of the field** **E. Articulates important phenomena relevant to the topic** **F. Theoretical or conceptual framework is included as relevant.** **G. Synthesizes and gains a new perspective on the literature**	– The review offered new perspective on the state of the field. – The topic was examined in a way that showed a new way of thinking about it in the scholarly literature. – A new and insightful way of examining the history of the topic was revealed. – New and insightful definitions of existing and new constructs were attained. – Theoretical or conceptual underpinnings that directly apply to the study were introduced and comprehensively explained. – New and undiscovered relationships in the literature were identified.	– The review critically examined the state of the field. – The topic was clearly situated within the broader body of scholarly literature. – The history of the topic was critically examined. – Ambiguities in definitions and/or vocabulary were resolved. – The review noted ambiguities in the literature and proposed new relationships. – The review includes theory or concepts that have application to the study, but are not sufficiently explained.	– The review discussed what has and has not been done in the field. – There was some discussion of the broader body of scholarly literature. – There was some mention of the history of the topic. – The key vocabulary was defined. – There was some review of relationships among key variables and phenomena. – Theory or concepts are introduced, but it is not clear at all how these apply to the study. – There was some critique of the literature.	– The review did not distinguish what has and has not been done in the field. – The topic was not placed in the broader scholarly literature. – The history of the topic was not discussed. – The vocabulary was not discussed. – The key variables and phenomena were not discussed. – No theoretical or conceptual framework is included. – The literature was accepted at face value.
3. Methodology	**H. Identifies the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used in the field and their advantages and disadvantages** **I. Relates ideas, concepts, and/or theories in the field to research methodologies**	– The review criticized the existing methods and offered new ways to think about the standard or predominant methodology. – The new methods suggested ways to resolve unjustified claims in the literature.	– The research methods common to the literature were critiqued. – The appropriateness of the research methods to warrant the claims was critiqued.	– There was some discussion of the research methods used to produce the claims in the literature. – There was some discussion of appropriateness of research methods that warrant claims in the literature.	– Research methods of the studies were not discussed.
4. Significance	**J. Rationalizes the practical significance of the research problem** **K. Rationalizes the scholarly significance of the research problem**	– A new perspective was added to the practical significance of the research that was not found before in the literature. – A new perspective was added to the scholarly significance of the research that was not found before in the literature. – Includes comprehensive discussion around what is missing in theory and/or research, and/or indicates gap in knowledge.	– The practical significance of the research was critiqued. – The scholarly significance of the research was critiqued. – The gap or missing information is identified and appropriately outlined.	– The practical significance of the research was discussed. – The scholarly significance of the research was discussed. – The gap or missing information is mentioned but not sufficiently discussed.	– The practical significance of the research was not discussed. – The scholarly significance of the research was not discussed. – No gap or missing knowledge is identified or discussed.

Category	Criterion	Outstanding	Acceptable	Minimally Acceptable	Unacceptable
5. Rhetoric (writing effectively)	**L. The review is coherent, and the structure is clear and ordered**	– The writing was coherent and well developed so that it offered new ways to write about and think about this literature, adding to the theoretical or applied knowledge base.	– The writing was well developed and coherent.	– There was some coherent structure.	– The paper was poorly conceptualized, haphazard, and/or messy.
6. Style	**M. The writing is compelling** **N. The tone is consistently professional** **O. Grammar, spelling, and writing mechanics are free of errors**	– The writing is generally engaging. – The tone is generally professional and appropriate for an academic research paper. – There are only a few errors in grammar, spelling, and/or writing mechanics.	– The writing is engaging in some parts of the review but not in others. – The tone is not consistently professional. – There are various errors in grammar, spelling, and/or writing mechanics.	– The writing overall is dull and unengaging. – The tone is largely unprofessional. – There are many errors interspersed throughout the review.	– The writing is of a poor quality and difficult to follow. – It is difficult to discern the tone. – The writing is of a very poor quality, and sentence structure is very awkward.
7. Format	**P. Length is appropriate as required** **Q. Citations within the paper are accurate** **R. References are professionally legitimate and correctly stated** **S. APA format is accurate and consistent**	– The review is the correct number of specified pages. – Citations, references, and APA format are all accurate and consistent.	– The length exceeds the word or page limit, or does not meet the word or page limit. – Citations, references, and APA format are mostly accurate.	– The length exceeds the word or page limit, or does not meet the word or page limit. – There are frequent errors regarding citations, references, and/or APA format.	– The length exceeds the word or page limit, or does not meet the required word or page limit. – The review is characterized by gross inaccuracies with citations, references, and APA format.

Source: This rubric is part of Bloomberg, L. D. (2015). *Qualitative dissertation evaluation.* Unpublished manuscript.

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Appendix C. Commonly Used Electronic Library Databases

ABI/INFORM

Provides access to business information in more than 800 journals. Excellent source of information on management, the corporate environment, and business conditions. Consists of bibliographic entries and abstracts.

Academic Search Premier

This is a strong general purpose database that covers fields such as the social sciences, business and economics, general sciences, and humanities. Many of the articles are available in full text form.

Current Contents Search®

Provides access to tables of contents and bibliographic data from more than 7,000 of the world's leading scientific and scholarly journals and more than 2,000 books. Offers full, up-to-date journal information, as well as reprint and research addresses.

Education Full Text/Education Research Complete

Includes journal articles, monographs, and yearbooks related to education. There is substantial overlap with ERIC, but it does cover 40 journals not indexed in ERIC.

Emerald Management Xtra 150

This is the largest, most comprehensive collection of peer-reviewed management journals. It features access to 150 full-text journals, with reviews from the top 300 management journals, including, among others, *Cross Cultural Management*, *Education and Training*, *Development and Learning in Organizations*, *European Journal of Innovation Management*, *Handbook of Business Strategy*, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, *Journal of Educational Administration*, *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, *The Learning Organization*, *Multicultural Education and Technology Journal*, *Quality Assurance in Education*, and *Strategy and Leadership.*

ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)

Provides access to approximately 1 million abstracts of documents and journal articles related to educational research and practice. These include conference papers, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, government reports, books, book chapters, reports, and unpublished documents. Most documents published by ERIC are available in full text and can be purchased from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service using the form and procedures found in the back of *Review of Research in Education.*

JSTOR

JSTOR stands for journal storage. This is a wide-ranging database and archive of important scholarly journals spanning both multidisciplinary and discipline-specific collections. The Arts & Sciences Collections represent more than 600 journals in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Because of *JSTOR's* archival mission, it is not a current issues database. *JSTOR* is a wide-ranging database containing back files from many scholarly journals.

MUSE

The foremost collection of more than 150 peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journals from leading university presses, not-for-profit publishers, and prestigious scholarly societies. It offers comprehensive coverage of journals in the humanities and social sciences, including education.

PAIS International (Public Affairs Information Service)

Index to political, economic, and social issues. This database covers the public and social policy literature of business, economics, finance, law, international relations, public administration, and political science, among others. Dating from 1972 to the present, PAIS contains abstracts of journal articles, books, statistical yearbooks, conference proceedings, research reports, and government documents from all over the world.

Political Science Abstracts

Important source for political science articles published since 1976. Contains abstracts of materials from professional journals, news magazines, and books. Useful resource for charting political issues and processes and public policy worldwide.

ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database

This is one of the most comprehensive collections of dissertations and theses and is the official digital dissertations archive for the Library of Congress and the database of record for graduate research. The site includes 2.7 million searchable citations to dissertations and theses from around the world from 1861 to the present, together with 1.2 million full-text dissertations that are available for download in PDF format. Over 2.1 million titles are available for purchase as printed copies. The database offers full text for most of the dissertations added since 1997 and strong retrospective full-text coverage for older graduate works. More than 70,000 new full-text dissertations and theses are added to the database each year through dissertation publishing partnerships with 700 leading academic institutions worldwide and collaborative retrospective digitization of dissertations through UMI's Digital Archiving and Access Program.

PsycINFO®

Comprehensive international database covering the academic, research, and practice literature on topics in psychology and related disciplines, including education, social work, medicine, psychiatry, criminology, and organizational behavior. This database indexes more than 850 journals under 16 different categories of information. It allows you to limit your search to reviews of literature or specific types of research studies, such as case studies or experimental research, and provides a link to more recent studies that have cited the study that is presented. *PsycINFO®* also provides indices to journals, dissertations, book chapters, books, technical reports, and other documents from 1887 to the present, with optional access to *Historic PsycINFO®*, an archival file database.

Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)

Covers about 5,700 journals that represent virtually every discipline in the social sciences. Provides access to 300 major international periodicals in the social sciences and related disciplines: anthropology, environmental sciences, law and criminology, psychology, political science, public health, sociology, urban studies, and women's studies. Like *PsycINFO*®, it can be used to locate articles and authors who have conducted research on a topic. You can also trace all studies since the publication of the key study that have cited the work. Using this system, you can develop a chronological list of references that document the historical evolution of an idea or study.

Social Work Abstracts

Contains information on the fields of social work and human services from 1977 to the present. Provides coverage of more than 450 journals in all professional areas, including theory and practice, areas of service, and social issues. Useful for research in the areas of social sciences, public health, criminology, and education.

Sociological Abstracts

This database contains abstracts to articles in more than 2,500 journals as well as book reviews and abstracts for dissertations and books. Provides access to the most current worldwide findings in theoretical and applied sociology, social science, and policy science. Features journal citations and abstracts, book chapters, and software review citations. This database is useful for interdisciplinary research on social science issues and for practitioners seeking sociological perspectives on various disciplines.

Wilson Social Sciences Abstracts and Full Text

Contains abstracting and indexing coverage for all 513 periodicals included in Social Sciences Index, as well as the full text of more than 150 periodicals. Subjects include anthropology, criminology, psychology, public administration, and sociology.

Appendix D. Style Manuals for the Social Sciences

Most universities require consistent use of a particular style manual to format your dissertation and to cite references. Most widely used primary text style manuals in the social sciences include the following:

American Anthropological Association. (2015). *AAA style guide.* Available from http://www.aaanet.org/publications/guidelines.cfm. (Follows *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed.).

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Concise rules of APA style* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

American Sociological Association. (2014). *American Sociological Association style guide* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Modern Language Association of America. (2016). *MLA style manual and guide to scholarly publishing* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Author.

Turabian, K. L. (2018). *A manual for writers of research papers, theses, and dissertations: Chicago style for students and researchers* (9th ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

University of Chicago. (2017). *The Chicago manual of style: The essential guide for writers, editors, and publishers* (17th ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

There are also some useful secondary sources available:

Gibaldi, J. (2012). *MLA handbook for writers of research papers* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Modern Language Association of America.

Hacker, D., & Sommers, N. (2016). *A writer's reference* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Lipson, C. (2018). *Cite right: A quick guide to citation styles—MLA, APA, Chicago, the sciences, professions, and more* (3rd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Schwartz, B. M., Landrum, R. E., & Guring, R. A. (2017). *An easyguide to APA style* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendix F. Overview of Purposeful Sampling Strategies

Purposeful Sampling Strategy	Explanation
Typical case sampling	Participants are selected because they represent the norm or average and are in no way atypical, extreme, or unusual. The researcher should begin by gaining consensus with peers or colleagues regarding what would be regarded as typical of the phenomenon to be studied.
Critical or crucial case sampling	Participants who can be used to make a previously justified point particularly well or dramatically, or who are known to be particularly important or are key informants, are selected for in-depth study.
Snowball, network, or chain sampling	A few participants who possess certain characteristics are selected, and they are asked to identify and refer others who are known to have the same or similar characteristics, and who might be good sources given the focus of inquiry. The researcher does the recruiting.
Negative case sampling	Participants that are expected to disconfirm the researcher's expectations or are purposively selected. As the researcher develops a tentative conclusion based on the data, it becomes important to search for instances in which the expectation might not hold so that potential issues can be addressed or qualifications can be made.
Criterion sampling	Participants are chosen because they meet a certain set of criteria as predetermined by the researcher.
Extreme or deviant sampling	Participants are selected because they represent the extremes related to an experience or phenomenon. The strategy to select cases from the extremes is because these are potentially rich and unusual sources of information for comparative purposes.
Maximum variation or heterogeneity sampling	Participants are selected because they represent the widest possible range of the characteristics or dimensions being studied. This method identifies important common themes or patterns that cut across variations (Patton, 2015). This strategy was first identified by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their presentation of grounded theory.
Homogenous sampling	In contrast to maximum variation or heterogeneous sampling, participants with only similar experiences or characteristics are selected for intensive study. The focus is on similarities rather than variation or differences.
Stratified purposeful sampling	This is a hybrid approach where one sampling method is selected, and then other methods are added. Sampling in this way illustrates subgroups of interest, facilitates comparisons among them, and adds to triangulation.
Theoretical or theory-based, or concept sampling	Purposeful sample selection is ongoing to illuminate the theoretical or conceptual ideas of interest. As the theoretical framework emerges through data analysis, the researcher decides from whom to collect additional data. Sampling is an evolving process guided by emerging theory. Grounded theoretical sampling was initially developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967).
Intensity sampling	The researcher seeks information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely (Patton, 2015).
Purposeful Sampling Strategy	**Explanation**
Emergent or opportunistic sampling	The researcher takes advantage of emerging opportunities to select participants. This might involve critical, negative, extreme, or typical sampling. Since qualitative research is an ongoing and emergent process, the researcher might not be able to affirm the sample in advance, as the focus of the study might change and opportunities that could not be foreseen might arise.
Convenience sampling	This is the least desirable sampling strategy. Tendency is to rely on participants who are readily available. This can save time and effort but is at the expense of information and credibility. Relying on convenience or opportunities can sometimes tend to produce "information-poor" rather than "information-rich" cases (Patton, 2015).
Purposeful random sampling	One of the purposeful sampling procedures mentioned above is used, followed by a randomization procedure. This sequential strategy is appropriate when the potential number of cases within a purposeful category is more than what can be studied given the available time and resources and adds to triangulation and credibility (Patton, 2015).

Source: This summary chart first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2007). *Understanding qualitative inquiry: Content and process* (Part I). Unpublished manuscript.

Note 1: Quantitative studies employ random probability sampling so that results can be generalized. Since generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research, a purposeful (or purposive) sampling strategy is employed to provide context-rich accounts of specific populations. The researcher specifies the characteristics or attributes of the population of interest, and then locates individuals who display those characteristics or attributes.

Note 2: The sample size in qualitative research is relatively small but consists of "information-rich" cases. In-depth interviews make a large sample size unnecessary, particularly as qualitative researchers do not seek to generalize. It is recommended that researchers use their judgment regarding the number of participants in the sample.

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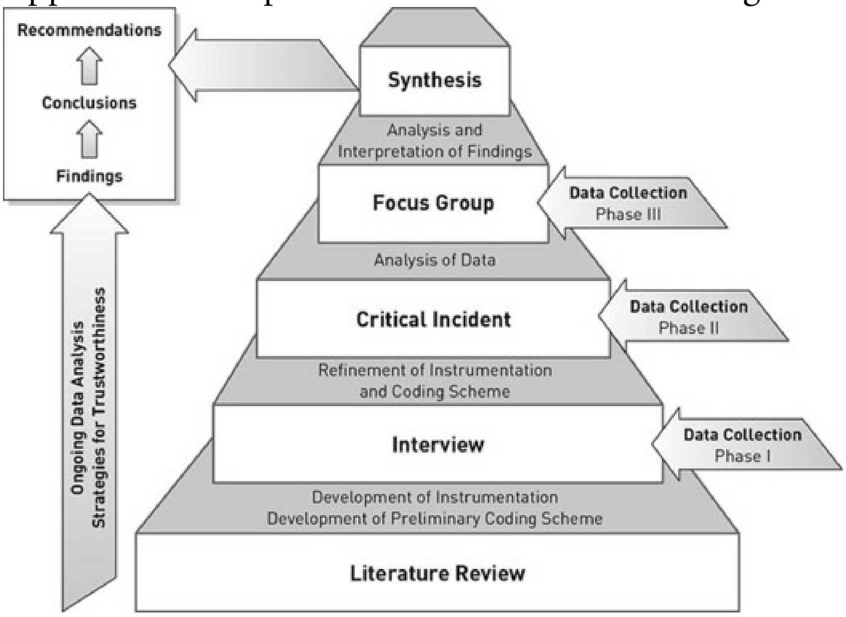
Appendix I. Sample Flowchart of Research Design



Source: This figure first appeared in Bloomberg, L. D. (2007). *Understanding qualitative inquiry: Content and process* (Part I). Unpublished manuscript.

Appendix J. Qualitative Data Collection Methods: A Summary Overview

Method	Function
Document review	• Data are collected in their natural setting • Records, documents, and artifacts provide contextual information and insights into material culture • Facilitates discovery of cultural nuances
Survey	• Provides demographic information • Provides contextual information • Provides perceptual information • Can include both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (open-ended) elements
Interview	• Fosters interactivity with participants • Elicits in-depth, context-rich personal accounts, perceptions, and perspectives • Data are collected in their natural setting • Interviews can be unstructured, structured, or semistructured • Explains and describes complex interactions and processes • Facilitates discovery of nuances in culture
Focus group	• Notes or verbatim transcriptions are used to document the interview • Fosters interactivity and dialogue among participants • Describes complex interactions • Clarifies and extends findings yielded by other methods • Allows for increased richness of responses through synergy and interaction
Observation	• Notes or verbatim transcriptions are used to document the interview • The researcher observes and records behavior but does not interact with participants • Provides data collected in their natural setting • Useful for describing complex processes and interactions • Runs the risk of observer effect and observer bias
Participant observation	• Field notes are used to document observations • Fosters face-to-face interaction with participants • Provides data collected in their natural setting • Facilitates insight into complex social and cultural nuances by allowing the researcher to develop relationships with participants • Runs the risk of observer effect and the potential for the researcher to become emotionally involved
Critical incident	• Field notes are used to document observations • Engages participants in the reflective process regarding extreme situations (high and low points of an experience) • Draws on the personal meaning of experience
Life history	• Provides critical perceptual information • Discovers retrospective information and its impact on current experiences • Enhances participants' critical thinking, reflection, and depth of response • Encourages participants to extract deeper meaning from their own experiences

Note: Rather than rely on any one method, qualitative researchers typically triangulate a variety of data collection methods to ensure trustworthiness.

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Appendix Q. Template for Document Summary Form

Name or Type of Document:
____

Document No.:
____

Date Received:
____

Date of Document:
____

Event or Contact With Which Document Is Associated:
____

- ☐ Descriptive
- ☐ Evaluative
- ☐ Other ______________________________

Page #	Keywords/Concepts	Comments: Relationship to Research Questions

Brief Summary of
Contents:______________________________

____

Significance or Purpose of Document:

____

____

Is There Anything Contradictory About Document?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Salient Questions/Issues to
Consider:______________________________

____

Additional Comments/Reflections/Issues:

____

____

____

Source: Adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 54–55).

Appendix R. Template for Participant Summary Form

Participant Name: ____

Type of Contact: (Check where appropriate)

- □ Face to Face
- □ Phone
- □ Videoconference, Skype, Zoom, or other online meeting platform
- □ E-mail

Contact Date: ______________________

Today's Date: ______________________

Summary of Information for Each Research Question:

Research Question 1

Research Question 2

Research Question 3

Research Question 4

Research Question 5

Additional Information Needed:

____

____

____

____

Overall Impressions, Questions, Concerns, Issues Still to Be Addressed:

____

____

____

____

Source: Adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994, "Contact Summary Form," pp. 52–54); Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014, "Contact Summary Form," pp. 124–127).

Appendix Z. Qualitative Data Analysis Software Resources

Analyzing qualitative data is an inductive process involving the reduction of information by organizing it into themes and patterns. Many software packages for qualitative data analysis are currently available. Searching for the most appropriate software is important so that it directly supports and is usable in terms of your chosen research design and approach. Software can perform specialized searching and sorting tasks. However, be aware that the software does not do the thinking for you! These programs do not engage in interpretive work, nor were they designed to do this!

Program Name	Website
AnSWR	http://answr.software.informer.com/ Suited for coordinating and conducting team-based analysis projects that integrate qualitative and quantitative techniques.
ATLAS.ti	http://www.atlasti.com/ Friese, S. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis with ATLAS.ti* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (See Note 2)
Dedoose	http://www.dedoose.com/ A cross-platform app for analyzing mixed methods research with text, photos, audio, and videos.
The Ethnograph	http://www.QualisResearch.com
EZ-Text	https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/library/software/index.html
HyperRESEARCH (ResearchWare Inc.)	http://researchware.com
NVivo8 (QSR International)	http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx http://library.columbia.edu/locations/dssc/nvivo_guide.html http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/free-nvivo-resources/tutorials
MAXQDA	http://www.maxqda.com/
Qualrus (Idea Works Inc.)	http://www.qualrus.com/
QDA Miner (Provalis Research)	https://provalisresearch.com/products/qualitative-data-analysis-software/freeware/
Quirkos	https://www.quirkos.com/
Transana	http://www.transana.org/ (used for analysis of video, auditory, and still-image data)
Weft QDA (free of charge)	www.pressure.to/qda/

Note 1: Information regarding the features, functions, and capabilities of the software is included in each of the program websites.

Note 2: Friese (2014) is a step-by-step guide to using Atlas.ti, featuring methodological and technical support, practical exercises, and a companion website with online tutorials.

Note 3: Bazeley and Jackson (2014) is a useful introductory text for planning and conducting qualitative data analysis with NVivo. This text is a mix of practical instruction, methodology, and real-world examples, and illustrates how NVivo can accommodate analysis across a wide range of research questions, data types, perspectives, and methodologies.

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