

Reading and Writing Social Research

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Social research is useless unless communicated effectively to others. Special skills are involved in reading the research of others and writing about your own.



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The Ethics of Reading and Writing Social Research

Introduction

Meaningful scientific research is inextricably wed to communication, but it's not always an easy or comfortable marriage. Scientists—social and other—are not necessarily good at communicating their methods and findings. Thus, reading and understanding the research of others is often difficult, and you may also struggle to write up your own research in ways that communicate your ideas effectively. This final chapter addresses these two problems.

We'll begin with reading social research, then we'll turn to writing it. Although my guidance on both topics will be helpful, you'll find that doing each well lies in practice. The more you read social science research, the easier it gets, and the same is true of writing it. The ethical dimension of doing so also becomes clearer, as the final section of this chapter discusses.

Reading Social Research

Before you read social research, you need to decide which studies to read. With the exception of some grounded theory methodologists, most social researchers begin the design of a research project with a review of the literature, as indicated in Chapter 4. Most original research is seen as an extension of what has previously been learned about a particular topic. A review of the literature is the way we learn what's already known and not known.

Organizing a Review of the Literature

In most cases, you should organize your search of the literature around the key concepts you wish to study; alternatively, you may want to study a certain population: veterans of the Iraqi War, computer hackers, Catholic priests, gay athletes, and so forth. In any case, you'll identify a set of terms that represent your core interests.

Your college or university library will probably have several search programs you can use at the library or online. Let's say you're interested

in designing a study of attitudes toward capital punishment. If your library provides access to InfoTrac College Edition or a similar program, you might discover, as I just did, 8,735 newspaper references and 5,489 periodical references to capital punishment. In such situations, InfoTrac College Edition is indexed to allow narrowing the search, and I soon discovered 249 entries for "public opinion" on capital punishment. Some of the entries were bibliographic citations and some were full-text articles I could read online.

When reading or accessing an article online, you should see if you can download it as a pdf version. This format replicates the document with the original pagination, which will be useful if you wish to quote or cite specific portions of the article. Sometimes you can read abstracts or even full articles for free, and sometimes you may need to buy the articles.

Another resource available to everyone is the Library of Congress, easily accessed online. Clicking on "Basic Search" or "Guided Search" will open up a vast resource for you. When I specified the keyword as "capital punishment" and limited the search to English-language books published between 2000 and 2005, the site listed 3,674 entries, such as the following:

- Abolition of the death penalty: SAHRDC's submission to the National Commission for the Review of the Working of the Constitution.
- America's experiment with capital punishment: reflections on the past, present, and future of the ultimate penal sanction / [edited by] James R. Acker.
- Beyond repair?: America's death penalty / edited by Stephen P. Garvey.
- Capital punishment: a bibliography / C. Cliff, editor.
- Death penalty: influences and outcomes / edited by Austin Sarat.

Sometimes a simple web search is a useful way to begin. Use a search engine such as Google or Yahoo to look for web resources on "capital punishment" or "death penalty." Be sure to use quotation marks to look for a phrase rather than

two separate words. You might also add “public opinion” to the request to narrow the field of possible resources. In general, online searches tend to turn up huge numbers of entries, most of which will not help you much. You’ll need some time to separate the wheat from the chaff. Later in this chapter, I’ll give you more-detailed guidelines for searching the web.

No matter how you start the literature-review process, you should always consider a technique akin to snowball sampling, discussed in Chapter 7. Once you identify a particularly useful book or article, note which publications its author cites. Some of these will likely be useful. In fact, you’ll probably discover some citations that appear again and again, suggesting that they’re core references within the subject matter area you’re exploring. This last point is important, because the literature review is not about providing “window dressing” in the form of a few citations. Rather, it’s about digging into the body of knowledge that previous researchers have generated—and taking advantage of that knowledge as you design your own inquiry.

Once you’ve identified some potential resources, you must read them to find anything of value to your project. Here are some guidelines for reading research publications.

Reading Journals versus Books

As you might have guessed, you don’t read a social research report the way you’d read a novel—that is, reading it sequentially from beginning to end. You can, of course, but it’s not the most effective approach. Journal articles and books are laid out somewhat differently, so here are some initial guidelines for reading each.

Reading a Journal Article

In most journals, each article begins with an abstract. Read it first. It should tell you the purpose of the research, the methods used, and the major findings.

abstract A summary of a research article. The abstract usually begins the article and states the purpose of the research, the methods used, and the major findings.

In a good detective or spy novel, the suspense builds throughout the book and is resolved in some kind of surprise ending. This is not the effect most scholarly writers are going for. Social research is purposely anticlimactic. Rather than stringing the reader along, dragging out the suspense over whether *X* causes *Y*, social researchers willingly give away the punch line in the abstract.

The **abstract** serves two major functions. First, it gives you a good idea as to whether you’ll want to read the rest of the article. If you’re reviewing the literature for a paper you’re writing, the abstract tells you whether that particular article is relevant. Second, the abstract establishes a framework within which to read the rest of the article. It may raise questions in your mind regarding method or conclusions, thereby creating an agenda to pursue in your reading. (It’s not a bad idea to jot those questions down, to be sure you get answers to them.)

After you’ve read the abstract, you might go directly to the summary and/or conclusions at the end of the article. That will give you a more detailed picture of what the article is all about. (You can also do this with detective and spy novels; it makes reading them a lot faster but maybe not as much fun.) Jot down any new questions or observations that occur to you.

Next, skim the article, noting the section headings and any tables or graphs. You don’t need to study any of these things in your skimming, though it’s okay to dally with anything that catches your attention. By the end of this step, you should start feeling familiar with the article. You should be pretty clear on the researcher’s conclusions and have a general idea of the methods used in reaching them.

When you now carefully read the whole article, you’ll have a good idea of where it’s heading and how each section fits into the logic of the whole article. Keep taking notes. Mark any passages you think you might like to quote later on.

After carefully reading the article, it’s a good idea to skim it quickly one more time. This way you get back in touch with the forest after having focused on the trees.

If you want to fully grasp what you’ve just read, find someone else to explain it to. If you’re doing the reading in connection with a course, you should have no trouble finding someone



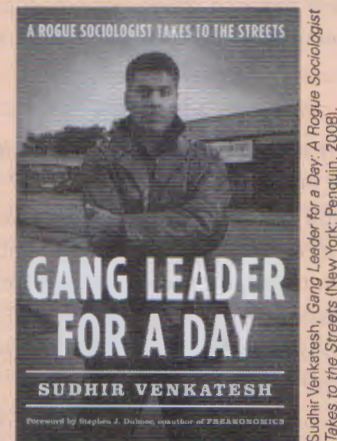
Research in Real Life

Gang Leader for a Day

Probably everyone has ideas about life in juvenile gangs, mostly as portrayed in movies and on TV. But Sudhir Venkatesh was interested in finding things out for himself. When Venkatesh was a graduate student, his professor suggested that he head off to the South Side of Chicago and interview people who live there (recall the Elijah Anderson book discussed in Chapter 5). Before long, the young sociologist found himself being challenged by a group of gang members who demanded to know what gang he belonged to. They were not immediately impressed by learning that he was a sociologist, but eventually the gang leader took an interest in him and began trying to answer the survey questions. Finally, he informed Venkatesh that the only way to understand life in the streets was to “hang out,” which led to a six-year research project.

While we tend to think of urban gangs as a threat to social order, Venkatesh found that they could also be seen as the *source* of social order in many impoverished neighborhoods. The gang leader needed to

be able to manage the members of his gang but also a broader constituency, including prostitutes and pimps, thieves, corrupt police, and others.



willing to listen. If you can explain it coherently to someone who has no prior contact with the subject matter, however, you'll have an absolute lock on the material.

Reading a Book

The approach for articles can be adapted to reading a book-length report, sometimes also called a **research monograph**. These longer research reports cover the same basic terrain and follow roughly the same structure. Instead of an abstract, the preface and opening chapter of the book lay out the purpose, method, and main findings of the study. The preface tends to be written more informally and is easier to understand than an abstract.

As with an article, it's useful to skim through the book, getting a sense of its organization, such as its use of tables, graphs, and other visuals. You should come away from this step feeling somewhat familiar with the book. And as I suggested in connection with reading an article, you should take notes as you go along, writing down things you observe and questions that are raised.

As you settle in to read the book more carefully, you should repeat this same process with each chapter. Read the opening paragraphs to get a sense of what's to come and then skip to the

concluding paragraphs for the summary. Skim the chapter to increase your familiarity with it, and then read more deliberately, taking notes as you go.

It's sometimes okay to skip portions of a scholarly book, unlike the way you were taught to read and appreciate literature. This all depends on your purpose in reading it in the first place. Perhaps there are only a few portions of the book that are relevant to your purposes. However, realize that if you're interested in the researcher's findings, you must pay some attention to the methods used (for example, who was studied, how, when?) in order to judge the quality of the conclusions offered by the author. See the Research in Real Life box, “Gang Leader for a Day,” to learn about a book-length report you might want to practice on.

Evaluating Research Reports

In this section, I provide sets of questions you might ask in reading and evaluating a research

research monograph A book-length research report, either published or unpublished. This is distinguished from a textbook, a book of essays, a novel, and so forth.

- Are any of the questions double-barreled? Look for conjunctions (such as *and*, *or*). Are respondents being asked to agree or disagree with two ideas, when they might like to agree with one and disagree with the other?
- Do the questions contain negative terms? If so, respondents may have misunderstood them and answered inappropriately.
- Is there a danger of social desirability in any of the questions? Is any answer so right or so wrong that respondents may have answered on the basis of what people would think of them?
- How would you yourself answer each item? As a general rule, test all questionnaire items by asking yourself how you would answer. Any difficulty you might have in answering might also apply to others. Then, try to assume different points of view (for example, liberal and conservative, religious and unreligious) and ask how the questions might sound to someone with each point of view.
- Has the researcher conducted a secondary analysis of previously collected data? If so, determine the quality of the research that produced the data originally. Also, are the data available for analysis appropriate to the current purposes? Do the questions originally asked reflect adequately on the variables now being analyzed?

Field Research

- What theoretical paradigm has informed the researcher's approach to the study?
- Has the researcher set out to test hypotheses or generate theory from the observations? Or is there no concern for theory in the study?
- What are the main variables in this study? How have they been defined and measured? Do you see any problems of validity?
- How about reliability? Would another researcher, observing the same events, classify things the same way?
- Is there any chance that the classification of observations has been influenced by the way those classifications will affect the research findings and/or the researcher's hypotheses?
- If descriptive conclusions have been drawn—for example, “the group's standards were quite conservative”—what are the implicit standards being used?
- How much can the study's findings be generalized to a broader sector of society? What claims has the researcher made in this regard? What is the basis for such claims?
- If people have been interviewed, how were they selected? Do they represent all appropriate types?
- How much did the researcher participate in the events under study? How might that participation have affected the events themselves?
- Did the researcher reveal his or her identity as a researcher? If so, what influence could that revelation have had on the behavior of those being observed?
- Does the research indicate any personal feelings—positive or negative—about those being observed? If so, what effect might these feelings have had on the observations that were made and the conclusions that were drawn from them?
- How has the researcher's own cultural identity or background affected the interpretation of what has been observed?

Content Analysis

- What are the key variables in the analysis? Are they appropriate to the research question being asked?
- What is the source and form of data being analyzed? Are they appropriate to the research questions being asked?
- Is the time frame of the data being analyzed appropriate to the research question?
- What is the unit of analysis?
- If a quantitative analysis has been conducted: (1) has an appropriate sample been selected from the data source and (2) have the appropriate statistical techniques been used?
- If a qualitative analysis has been conducted, (1) has an appropriate range of data been examined and (2) are the researcher's conclusions logically consistent with the data presented?

Analyzing Existing Statistics

- Who originally collected the data being reanalyzed? Were there any flaws in the

data-collection methods? What was the original purpose of the data collection? Would that have affected the data that were collected?

- What was the unit of analysis of the data? Is it appropriate to the current research question and the conclusions being drawn? Is there a danger of the ecological fallacy?
- When were the data collected? Are they still appropriate to present concerns?
- What are the variables being analyzed in the present research? Were the definitions used by the original researchers appropriate to present interests?

Comparative and Historical Research

- Is this a descriptive or an explanatory study? Does it involve cross-sectional comparisons or changes over time?
- What is the unit of analysis in this study (for instance, country, social movement)?
- What are the key variables under study? If it's an explanatory analysis, what causal relationships are examined?
- Does the study involve the use of other research techniques, such as existing statistics, content analysis, surveys, or field research? Use the guidelines elsewhere in this section to assess those aspects of the study.
- Is the range of data appropriate to the analysis—for example, the units being compared or the number of observations made for the purpose of characterizing units?
- If historical or other documents are used as a data source, who produced them and for what purposes? What biases might be embedded in them? Diaries kept by members of the gentry, for example, will not reflect the life of peasants of the same time and country.

Evaluation Research

- What is the social intervention being analyzed? How has it been measured? Are there any problems of validity or reliability?
- Have the appropriate people (or other units of analysis) been observed?
- How has "success" been defined? Where would the success be manifested—in individuals, in organizations, in crime rates? Has it been measured appropriately?

- Has the researcher judged the intervention a success or a failure? Is the judgment well founded?
- Who paid for the research, and who actually conducted it? Can you be confident of the researcher's objectivity? Did the sponsor interfere in any way?

Data Analysis

- Did the purpose and design of the study call for a qualitative or a quantitative analysis?
- How have nonstandardized data been coded? This question applies to both qualitative and quantitative analysis. To what extent were the codes (1) based on prior theory or (2) generated by the data?
- Has the researcher undertaken all relevant analyses? Have all appropriate variables been identified and examined? Could the correlation observed between two variables have been caused by a third, antecedent variable, making the observed relationship spurious?
- Does a particular research finding really matter? Is an observed difference between subgroups, for example, a large or meaningful one? Are there any implications for action?
- Has the researcher gone beyond the actual findings in drawing conclusions and implications?
- Are there logical flaws in the analysis and interpretation of data?
- Have the empirical observations of the study revealed new patterns of relationships, providing the bases for grounded theories of social life? Has the researcher looked for disconfirming cases that would challenge the new theories?
- Are the statistical techniques used in the analysis of data appropriate to the levels of measurement of the variables involved?
- If tests of statistical significance were used, have they been interpreted correctly? Has statistical significance been confused with substantive significance?

Reporting

- Has the researcher placed this particular project in the context of previous research on

the topic? Does this research add to, modify, replicate, or contradict previous studies?

- In general, has the researcher reported the details of the study design and execution fully? Are there parts of the report that seem particularly vague or incomplete in the reporting of details?
- Has the researcher reported any flaws or shortcomings in the study design or execution? Are there any suggestions for improving research on the topic in the future?

I hope this section will prove useful to you in reading and understanding social research. The exercises at the end of this chapter will walk you through the reading of two journal articles: one qualitative and one quantitative. As I said earlier, you'll find that your proficiency in reading social research reports will mature with practice.

Before discussing how to go about creating social research reports for others to read, let's look at how to read and evaluate data from the Internet, which can provide an abundance of useful information if you know how to search it, but also a lot of junk if you don't.

Using the Internet Wisely

In the closing decade of the twentieth century, the Internet developed into a profoundly valuable tool for social research. As it expands exponentially, the web is becoming the mind of humanity, the repository of human knowledge, opinions, and beliefs—carrying with it intellectual insights, misconceptions, and outright bigotry. Clearly, it will continue to evolve as an increasingly powerful entity. As with gunpowder and television, there are no guarantees that it will always be used wisely. I've opted to encourage use of the web rather than opposing it, but I'm mindful of the problems that have made some of my colleagues more cautious in the past.

In this section of the chapter, I address the major problems inherent in using the web and suggest ways to avoid them.

Some Useful Websites

As the World Wide Web has evolved, the online resources available to social researchers (and others) have expanded enormously. Moreover,

I'll bet you are already able to search the web for information of interest to you. To focus your interest for present purposes, let me mention just a few generally useful websites that you might like to check out:

- General Social Survey (GSS)
- U.S. Bureau of the Census
- USA Statistics in Brief
- Statistical Resources on the Web, University of Michigan
- Social Sciences Virtual Library
- Yahoo Social Sciences
- QUALPAGE: Resources for Qualitative Research
- Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, University of Surrey, England

Now, let's assume you need some information that you suspect is somewhere on the web, but you don't know where. Here are some ideas about becoming a web detective.

Searching the Web

There are millions and millions of pages of information on the web. Estimating the number of "facts" or pieces of data on the web would be impossible, but most of the factual questions you might have can be answered by using the Internet. Finding answers involves skill, however.

Here's an example. Let's say you want to examine differences in the infant mortality rates (IMR) of countries around the world. You may already know of some websites that are likely to have that information, but let's assume you don't.

On the search engine of your choice, search for "infant mortality rate." If you put your request inside quotation marks, as I did, the search engine will look for that exact phrase instead of reporting websites that happen to have all three words. Figure 17-1 presents the initial results I received.

As you can see, our search yielded over half a million websites potentially relevant to our inquiry. Some of the websites shown in the figure focus on the definition of infant mortality rate; others provide data pertaining to the world or specific countries. Some would let us compare different countries; others show IMR changes over time. Let's say we are specifically interested

Infant mortality rate - The World Factbook

<https://www.cia.gov/.../2091rank.html> ▾ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) ▾

Infant mortality rate compares the number of deaths of infants under one year old in a given year per 1,000 live births in the same year. This rate is often used as ...

List of countries by infant mortality rate - Wikipedia, the free ...

en.wikipedia.org/.../List_of_countries_by_infant_mortality_rat... ▾ Wikipedia ▾

The **infant mortality rate (IMR)** is the number of deaths of infants under one year old per 1,000 live births. This rate is often used as an indicator of the level of ...

Infant mortality - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infant_mortality ▾ Wikipedia ▾

Infant mortality rate (IMR) is the number of deaths of children less than one year of age per 1000 live births. The rate for a given region is the number of children ...

Infant mortality rate - Causes - Measuring IMR - Societal infrastructure

Infant Mortality - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<www.cdc.gov/.../inf...> ▾ United States Centers for Disease Control and Preve... ▾

Oct 1, 2012 - The death of a baby before his or her first birthday is called infant mortality. The **infant mortality rate** is an estimate of the number of infant deaths ...

Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births) | Data | Table

<data.worldbank.org/Indicators> ▾ World Bank ▾

Infant mortality rate is the number of infants dying before reaching one year of age, per 1,000 live births in a given year. Estimates developed by the UN ...

Images for "Infant Mortality Rate"

Report images



More images for "Infant Mortality Rate"

Infant Mortality Rate - The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation

<kff.org/global-indicator/infant-mortality-rate/> ▾ Kaiser Family Foundation ▾

Infant Mortality Rate (Total Deaths per 1,000 Live Births) Infant Mortality Rate: The number of infant deaths in a given year divided by the number of live births ...

FIGURE 17-1

Search for "Infant Mortality Rate"

© 2014 Google. Downloaded May 9, 2014, 1:00 P.M. CST



Tips and Tools

Using Google Scholar

In searching the web for research materials, you can narrow your focus with Google Scholar. Let's say you're interested in studying "same-sex marriage" and want to know what research has already been done on that topic. Enter that phrase in the box and click the "Search" button. A regular Google search would have turned up many websites that used the words *same-sex marriage* but were not much use in a research literature review. Google Scholar, though, will provide you with richer

pickings, although you'll still need to judge the quality of the documents that are brought up through the search.

You can also take advantage of the "Advanced Scholar Search" to specify a set of words, indicating that all must appear in an article—or just some of them. You can specify a particular author or journal, and you can indicate which scholarly field you are interested in, thus limiting the search to articles in that field.

in infant mortality in Africa. To accomplish this, I have added the word *Africa* to the request: Africa "infant mortality rate."

Like many other search engines, Google interpreted this as a request to find websites that contain the word *Africa* plus the exact phrase *infant mortality rate*. Figure 17-2 presents the first set of results.

While some of the websites in Figure 17-2 are still quite general, we can assume they contain information about African IMRs. Some in the list deal specifically with Africa.

The first web link is to Wikipedia, a free encyclopedia compiled by the web community. The rapid growth of Wikipedia has been a source of conversation and concern among academics. No one questions how extensive or user-friendly it is, but some worry that entries are not always accurate and errors may go unnoticed. Once in a while, true mischief has been perpetrated, with opposing political candidates maliciously altering each other's entries in the encyclopedia, for example.

In one response to academic concerns, the history department at Middlebury College (2007), one of the nation's most highly rated liberal arts colleges, told students they could not cite Wikipedia as a source in term papers and exams. Lest this be seen as a condemnation of Wikipedia, however, Middlebury clarified:

While the department did vote to restrict the use of the online encyclopedia as a source in course work, it did not suggest, as some reports had it, that students should be prevented from accessing Wikipedia or should not use it as a research tool. In fact, the department praised Wikipedia as

"extraordinarily convenient and, for some general purposes, extremely useful."

Realize that Figure 17-2 only presents the first few websites returned by the Google search. Google reported that it had found about 1,630,000 websites that seemed to have the information we were seeking.

Conducting this search on your own and visiting the web links that result is a useful exercise. (See the Tips and Tools box, "Using Google Scholar," for more on searches.) You'll find that some of the sites are discussions of the topic rather than tables of data. Others present a limited set of data ("selected countries"). Thus, compiling a list of web links like this is a step along the way to obtaining relevant data, but it's not the final step.

Evaluating the Quality of Internet Materials

There are other tricks to conducting effective web searches, but you now know enough to begin learning through experience. You'll quickly learn that finding data on the web is relatively easy. Evaluating what you've found is a bit more difficult, however. I've already alluded to the matter of quality, but there's quite a bit to be said on the topic. In fact, many other people have said many other things about it. What do you suppose is your best source of such advice? If you said, "The web," you got it.

Open up a search engine and ask it to find websites having to do with "evaluating websites" or "evaluating web sites." Figure 17-3 gives you some idea of the extent of advice available to you.

The infant mortality rate (IMR) is the number of deaths of infants under one year old per 1,000 live births. This rate is often used as an indicator of the level of health in a country. The infant mortality rate of the world is **49.4** according to the United Nations and **42.09** according to the CIA World Factbook.

List of countries by infant mortality rate - Wikipedia, the free ...
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_infant_mortality_rate Wikipedia ▾

Feedback

Infant mortality rate - The World Factbook

https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/docs/infant_mortality_rate.html ▾ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) ▾

Infant mortality rate compares the number of deaths of infants under one year old in a given year per 1,000 live births in the same year. **51**, South Africa. **41.61**.

List of countries by infant mortality rate - Wikipedia, the free ...

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_infant_mortality_rate ▾ Wikipedia ▾

List of countries by **infant mortality rate** ... The **infant mortality rate (IMR)** is the number of deaths of infants under one year old per 1,000 **South Africa**, **42.15**, - >.

WHO | Infant mortality

www.who.int/gho/urban_health/en/ ▾ World Health Organization ▾

For example, the urban poorest 20% in **Africa** have witnessed a decrease in **infant mortality rate** from 99 per 1000 live births in the 1990s to 70 per 1000 live ...

Africa's infant mortality rate threatens growth potential - SA...

www.sabc.co.za/.../Africa's-Infant-Mortality-Rate-Threatens-Growth-Potential ▾ South African Broadcasting Corporation ▾

Aug 1, 2013 - **Africa's** growth potential is at risk if the continent does not take care of its new- borns who continue to die at birth.

Infant mortality rate by country - Thematic Map - Africa - M...

www.indexmundi.com/map/?v=29&r=af&l=en ▾

Reading Data. Please Wait. Rendering Map. Please Wait. ☐ 9 - 22 ☐ 22 - 34 ☐ 34 - 47 ☐ 47 - 60 ☐ 60 - 74 ☐ 74 - 88 ☐ 88 - 102 ☐ 102 - 116. Mauritius, 11.2.

Images for Africa "Infant mortality rate"

Report images



More images for Africa "infant mortality rate"

FIGURE 17-2

Search for "Africa 'Infant Mortality Rate'"

© 2014 Google. Downloaded May 9, 2014, 1:05 P.M. CST

Citing Internet Materials

If you use materials from the web, you must provide a bibliographic citation that allows your reader to locate the original materials—to see them in context. This also protects you from the serious problem of plagiarism, discussed a little later in this chapter.

There are many standardized formats for bibliographic citations, illustrated in the “Tips and Tools” box presented later on. Web materials, unfortunately, don’t fit some of those familiar formats.

Many organizations, however, have risen to the challenge of web citations. If you don’t believe me, go to your favorite search engine and look for “web citations.” You’ll find plenty of guidance.

Your instructor may prefer a specific format for web citations. However, here are the elements commonly suggested for inclusion:

- The **URL** or web address. For example, www.fedstats.gov/qf/states/50000.html provides demographic data for comparing Vermont with the United States as a whole. So if I tell you that Vermont grew 8.2 percent during the 1990s, you can go directly to the source of my data.
- The date and time when the site was accessed. Many, like the one just cited, do not change, but many others do. It may be useful for the reader to know when you visited the site in question.
- If you’re citing text materials, there may very well be an author and title, as well as publishing information. These should be cited the same way you would cite printed materials: for example, John Doe. 2014. “How I Learned to Love the Web.” *Journal of Web Worship* 5 (3): 22–45.
- Sometimes, you’ll use the web to read a published journal article, locating it with InfoTrac College Edition or another vehicle. Such materials may be presented in a print format, with page numbers. If so, cite the appropriate page number. Lacking that, you

URL Web address, typically beginning with “http://”; stands for “uniform resource locator” or “universal resource locator.”

may be able to cite the section where the materials in question appeared. The goal in all this is to help your reader locate the original web materials you’ve used. Although you sometimes cannot give a precise location in an article posted to a website, most browsers allow users to search the site for a specified word or phrase and thus locate the materials being cited.

Writing Social Research

Unless research is properly communicated, all the efforts devoted to the various procedures discussed throughout this book will go for naught. This means, first and foremost, that good social reporting requires good English (or Spanish or whatever language you use). Whenever we ask the figures “to speak for themselves,” they tend to remain mute. Whenever we use unduly complex terminology or construction, communication suffers.

My first advice to you is to read and reread (at approximately three-month intervals) an excellent small book by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (2000). If you do this faithfully, and if even 10 percent of the content rubs off, you stand a good chance of making yourself understood and your findings appreciated.

Next, you need to understand that scientific reporting has several functions:

- First, your report should communicate a body of specific data and ideas. You should provide those specifics clearly and with sufficient detail to permit an informed evaluation by others.
- Second, you should view your report as a contribution to the general body of scientific knowledge. While remaining appropriately humble, you should always regard your research report as an addition to what we know about social behavior.
- Finally, the report should stimulate and direct further inquiry.

Some Basic Considerations

Despite these general guidelines, different reports serve different purposes. A report appropriate for

one purpose might be wholly inappropriate for another. This section deals with some of the basic considerations in this regard.

Audience

Before drafting your report, ask yourself who you hope will read it. Normally you should make a distinction between scientists and general readers. If the report is written for the former, you can make certain assumptions about their existing knowledge and therefore summarize certain points rather than explain them in detail. Similarly, you can use more technical language than would be appropriate for a general audience.

At the same time, remain aware that any science has its factions and cults. Terms, assumptions, and special techniques familiar to your immediate colleagues may only confuse other scientists. The sociologist of religion writing for a general sociology audience, for example, should explain previous findings in more detail than he or she would if addressing an audience of sociologists of religion.

Form and Length of Report

My comments here apply to both written and oral reports. Each form, however, affects the nature of the report.

It's useful to think about the variety of reports that might result from a research project. To begin, you may wish to prepare a short research note for publication in an academic or technical journal. Such reports are approximately one to five pages long (typed, double-spaced) and should be concise and direct. In a small amount of space, you can't present the state of the field in any detail, so your methodological notes must be abbreviated. Basically, you should tell the reader why you feel your findings justify a brief note, then tell what those findings are.

Often researchers must prepare reports for the sponsors of their research. These reports can vary greatly in length. In preparing such a report, you should bear in mind its audience—scientific or lay—and their reasons for sponsoring the project in the first place. It is both bad politics and bad manners to bore the sponsors with research findings that have no interest or value to them. At the same time, it may be useful to summarize how the research has advanced basic scientific knowledge (if it has).

Working papers are another form of research reporting. In a large and complex project especially, you'll find comments on your analysis and the interpretation of your data useful. A working paper constitutes a tentative presentation with an implicit request for comments. Working papers can also vary in length, and they may present all of the research findings of the project or only a portion of them. Because your professional reputation is not at stake in a working paper, feel free to present tentative interpretations that you can't altogether justify—identify them as such and asking for evaluations.

Many research projects result in professional papers, or those delivered at professional meetings. Often, these serve the same purpose as working papers. You can present findings and ideas of possible interest to your colleagues and ask for their comments. Although the length of professional papers varies, depending on the organization of the meetings, it's best to say too little rather than too much. Although a working paper may ramble somewhat through tentative conclusions, conference participants should not be forced to sit through an oral unveiling of the same. Interested listeners can always ask for more details later, and uninterested ones can gratefully escape.

Probably the most popular research report is the article published in an academic journal. Again, lengths vary, and you should examine the lengths of articles previously published by the journal in question. As a rough guide, however, 25 typed, double-spaced pages is a good length. Student term papers should follow this model as well. As a general rule, a term paper that would make a good journal article also makes a good term paper.

A book, of course, represents the most prestigious form of research report. It has the length and detail of a working paper but is more polished. Because publishing research findings as a book lends them greater substance and worth, you have a special obligation to your audience. Although some colleagues may provide comments, possibly leading you to revise your ideas, other readers may be led to accept your findings uncritically.

Aim of the Report

Earlier in this book, we considered the different purposes of social research projects. In preparing

your report, keep these different purposes in mind.

Some reports focus primarily on the exploration of a topic. As such, their conclusions are tentative and incomplete. If you're writing this sort of report, clearly indicate to your audience the exploratory aim of the study and present the shortcomings of the particular project. An exploratory report points the way to more-refined research on the topic.

Most research reports have a descriptive element reflecting the descriptive purpose of the studies they document. In yours, carefully distinguish those descriptions that apply only to the sample and those that apply to the population. Give your audience some indication of the probable range of error in any inferential descriptions you make.

Many reports have an explanatory aim: pointing to causal relationships among variables. Depending on your probable audience, carefully delineate the rules of explanation that lie behind your computations and conclusions. Also, as in the case of description, give your readers some guide to the relative certainty of your conclusions.

If your intention is to test a hypothesis based in theory, you should make that hypothesis clear and succinct. Specify what will constitute acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis and how either of those reflects on the theoretical underpinnings.

Finally, some research reports propose action. For example, if you've studied prejudice, you may suggest in your report how prejudice can be reduced on the basis of your research findings. This suggestion may become a knotty problem for you, however, because your values and orientations may have interfered with your proposals. Although it's perfectly legitimate for such proposals to be motivated by personal values, you must ensure that the specific actions proposed are warranted by the data. Thus, you should be especially careful to spell out the logic by which you move from empirical data to proposed action.

Organization of the Report

Although the various forms and purposes of reports somewhat affect the way they are organized, knowing a general format for presenting

research data can be helpful. The following comments apply most directly to journal articles, but with some modification they apply to most forms of research reports as well.

Purpose and Overview

It's always helpful if you begin with a brief statement of the purpose of the study and the main findings of the analysis. In a journal article, as we've seen, this overview sometimes takes the form of an abstract.

Some researchers find this difficult to do. For example, your analysis may have involved considerable detective work, with important findings revealing themselves only as a result of imaginative deduction and data manipulation. You may wish, therefore, to lead the reader through the same exciting process, chronicling the discovery process with a degree of suspense and surprise. To the extent that this form of reporting gives an accurate picture of the research process, it has considerable instructional value. Nevertheless, many readers may not be interested in following your entire research account, and not knowing the purpose and general conclusions in advance may make it difficult for them to understand the significance of the study.

An old forensic dictum says, "Tell them what you're going to tell them; tell them; and tell them what you told them." You would do well to follow this dictum.

Review of the Literature

Next, you must indicate where your report fits into the context of the general body of scientific knowledge. After presenting the general purpose of your study, you should bring the reader up-to-date on the previous research in the area, pointing to general agreements and disagreements among the previous researchers. Your review of the literature should lay the groundwork for your own study, showing why your research may have value in the larger scheme of things.

In some cases, you may wish to challenge previously accepted ideas. Carefully review the studies that have led to the acceptance of those ideas, then indicate the factors that have not been previously considered or the logical fallacies present in the previous research.

When you're concerned with resolving a disagreement among previous researchers, you



Tips and Tools

Citing Bibliographic Sources

It's important to cite the bibliographic sources that comprise your review of the literature and other readings that figure in your paper; it's nearly as important to cite them properly. The good news is that proper citation isn't that hard to do. The bad news is that several formats are in common use. I'll illustrate a few of the most common formats here, but you should ask your instructor what version to use. I'll illustrate both a book and an article. Here is the pertinent information for each:

Book Information

Author: C. Wright Mills
 Title: *The Power Elite*
 City of publication: New York
 Publisher: Oxford University Press
 Year of publication: 1956

Article Information

Authors: Sharon Sassler and Anna Cunningham
 Title: *How Cohabitors View Childbearing*
 Journal name: *Sociological Perspectives*
 Year of publication: 2008
 Month/season of publication: Spring
 Volume: 51
 Number: 1
 Pages: 3–28

With such "raw data" in hand, you can format them by following any of the following bibliographic styles.

ASA Style Guide (American Sociological Association)

Mills, C. Wright. 1956. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sassler, Sharon, and Anna Cunningham. 2008. "How Cohabitors View Childbearing." *Sociological Perspectives* 51:3–28.

MLA Style Guide (Modern Language Association)

Mills, C. Wright. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.

Sassler, Sharon, and Anna Cunningham. "How Cohabitors View Childbearing." *Sociological Perspectives* 51.1 (2008): 3–28.

APSA Style Guide (American Political Science Association)

Mills, C. Wright. 1956. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sassler, Sharon, and Anna Cunningham. 2008. "How Cohabitors View Childbearing." *Sociological Perspectives* 51(Spring): 3–28.

APA Style Guide (American Psychological Association)

Mills, C. Wright. (1956). *The power elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sassler, S., & Cunningham, A. (2008). How cohabitators view childbearing. *Sociological Perspectives*, 51(1), 3–28.

should summarize the research supporting one view, then summarize the research supporting the other, and then suggest the reasons for the disagreement.

Your review of the literature serves a bibliographic function for readers, by indexing the previous research on a given topic. This can be overdone, however, and you should avoid an opening paragraph that mentions every previous study in the field and goes on for three pages. The comprehensive bibliographic function can best be served by a reference list at the end of the report, and the review of the literature should focus only on those studies that have direct relevance to the present one. See the Tips and Tools box, "Citing Bibliographic Sources" to learn how to do this in good form.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Whenever you're reporting on the work of others, you must be clear about who said what. That

is, you must avoid **plagiarism**: the theft of another's words and/or ideas—whether intentional or accidental—through the presentation of those words and ideas as your own. Because this is a common and sometimes unclear problem for college students, especially in regard to the review of the literature, we'll consider the issue here. Realize, of course, that these concerns apply to everything you write.

Here are the ground rules regarding plagiarism:

- You cannot use another writer's exact words without using quotation marks and giving a complete citation, which indicates the source of the quotation such that your reader could locate the quotation in its original context. As a general rule, taking a passage of eight or

plagiarism Presenting someone else's words or thoughts as though they were your own, constituting intellectual theft.

more words without citation is a violation of federal copyright laws.

- It's also not acceptable to edit or paraphrase another's words and present the revised version as your own work.
- Finally, it's not even acceptable to present another's ideas as your own—even if you use totally different words to express those ideas.

The following examples should clarify what is or is not acceptable in the use of another's work.

The Original Work

Laws of Growth

Systems are like babies: once you get one, you have it. They don't go away. On the contrary, they display the most remarkable persistence. They not only persist; they grow. And as they grow, they encroach. The growth potential of systems was explored in a tentative, preliminary way by Parkinson, who concluded that administrative systems maintain an average growth of 5 to 6 percent per annum regardless of the work to be done. Parkinson was right so far as he goes, and we must give him full honors for initiating the serious study of this important topic. But what Parkinson failed to perceive, we now enunciate—the general systems analogue of Parkinson's Law.

The System Itself Tends to Grow At 5 To 6 Percent Per Annum

Again, this Law is but the preliminary to the most general possible formulation, the Big-Bang Theorem of Systems Cosmology.

Systems Tend To Expand To Fill The Known Universe

(Gall 1975: 12–14)

Now let's look at some of the acceptable ways you might make use of Gall's work in a term paper.

- **Acceptable:** John Gall, in his work *Systemantics*, draws a humorous parallel between systems and infants: "Systems are like babies: once you get one, you have it. They don't go away. On the contrary, they display the most remarkable persistence. They not only persist; they grow."*
 - **Acceptable:** John Gall warns that systems are like babies. Create a system and it sticks around. Worse yet, Gall notes, systems keep growing larger and larger.†
 - **Acceptable:** It has also been suggested that systems have a natural tendency to persist, even grow and encroach (Gall 1975: 12).
- Note that the last format requires that you give a complete citation in your bibliography or reference list, as I do in this book. Complete footnotes or endnotes work as well. See the publication manuals of various organizations such as the APA or the ASA, as well as the *Chicago Manual of Style*, for appropriate citation formats.
- Here now are some unacceptable uses of the same material, reflecting some common errors.
- **Unacceptable:** In this paper, I want to look at some of the characteristics of the social systems we create in our organizations. First, systems are like babies: Once you get one, you have it. They don't go away. On the contrary, they display the most remarkable persistence. They not only persist; they grow. [It's unacceptable to quote someone else's materials directly without using quotation marks and giving a full citation.]
 - **Unacceptable:** In this paper, I want to look at some of the characteristics of the social systems we create in our organizations. First, systems are a lot like children: once you get one, it's yours. They don't go away; they persist. They not only persist, in fact: They grow. [It's unacceptable to edit another's work and present it as your own.]
 - **Unacceptable:** In this paper, I want to look at some of the characteristics of the social systems we create in our organizations. One thing I've noticed is that once you create a system, it never seems to go away. Just the opposite, in fact: They have a tendency to grow. You might say systems are a lot like children in that respect. [It's unacceptable to paraphrase someone else's ideas and present them as your own.]

*John Gall, *Systemantics: How Systems Work and Especially How They Fail* (New York: Quadrangle, 1975), 12.

†John Gall, *Systemantics: How Systems Work and Especially How They Fail* (New York: Quadrangle, 1975), 12.

Each of the preceding unacceptable passages is an example of plagiarism and represents a serious offense. Admittedly, there are “gray areas.” Some ideas are more or less in the public domain, not “belonging” to any one person. Or you may reach an idea on your own that someone else has already put in writing. If you have a question about a specific situation, discuss it with your instructor in advance.

I’ve discussed this topic in some detail because, although you must place your research in the context of what others have done and said, the improper use of their materials is a serious offense. Learning to avoid plagiarism is a part of your “coming of age” as a scholar.

Study Design and Execution

A research report containing interesting findings and conclusions will frustrate readers if they can’t determine the methodological design and execution of the study. The worth of all scientific findings depends heavily on the manner in which the data were collected and analyzed.

In reporting the design and execution of a survey, for example, always include the following: the population, the sampling frame, the sampling method, the sample size, the data-collection method, the completion rate, and the methods of data processing and analysis. Comparable details should be given if other methods are used. The experienced researcher can report these details in a rather short space, without omitting anything required for the reader’s evaluation of the study.

Analysis and Interpretation

Having set the study in the perspective of previous research and having described the design and execution of it, you should then present your data. This chapter momentarily will provide further guidelines in this regard. For now, a few general comments are in order.

The presentation of data, the manipulation of those data, and your interpretations should be integrated into a logical whole. It frustrates the reader to discover a collection of seemingly unrelated analyses and findings with a promise that all the loose ends will be tied together later in the report. Every step in the analysis should make sense at the time it’s taken. You should present

your rationale for a particular analysis, present the data relevant to it, interpret the results, and then indicate where that result leads next.

Summary and Conclusions

According to the forensic dictum mentioned earlier, summarizing the research report is essential. Avoid reviewing every specific finding, but review all the significant ones, pointing once more to their general significance.

The report should conclude with a statement of what you’ve discovered about your subject matter and where future research might be directed. Many journal articles end with the statement, “It is clear that much more research is needed.” This conclusion is probably always true, but it has little value unless you can offer pertinent suggestions about the nature of that future research. You should review the particular shortcomings of your own study and suggest ways those shortcomings might be avoided.

Guidelines for Reporting Analyses

The presentation of data analyses should provide a maximum of detail without being cluttered. You can accomplish this best by continually examining your report to see whether it achieves the following aims.

If you’re using quantitative data, present them so the reader can recompute them. In the case of percentage tables, for example, the reader should be able to collapse categories and recompute the percentages. Readers should receive sufficient information to permit them to compute percentages in the table in the direction opposite from that of your own presentation.

Describe all aspects of a quantitative analysis in sufficient detail to permit a secondary analyst to replicate the analysis from the same body of data. This means that he or she should be able to create the same indexes and scales, produce the same tables, arrive at the same regression equations, obtain the same factors and factor loadings, and so forth. This will seldom be done, of course, but if the report allows for it, the reader will be far better equipped to evaluate the report than if it does not.

Provide details. If you’re doing a qualitative analysis, you must provide enough detail that your reader has a sense of having made the

observations with you. Presenting only those data that support your interpretations is not sufficient; you must also share those data that conflict with the way you've made sense of things. Ultimately, you should provide enough information that the reader might reach a different conclusion than you did—though you can hope your interpretation will make the most sense. The reader, in fact, should be in position to replicate the entire study independently, whether it involves participant observation among heavy metal groupies, an experiment regarding jury deliberation, or any other study format. Recall that replicability is an essential norm of science. A single study does not prove a point; only a series of studies can begin to do so. And unless studies can be replicated, there can be no meaningful series of studies.

Integrate supporting materials. I've previously mentioned the importance of integrating data and interpretations in the report. Here is a more specific guideline for doing this. Tables, charts, and figures, if any, should be integrated into the text of the report—appearing near that portion of the text discussing them. Sometimes students describe their analyses in the body of the report and place all the tables in an appendix. This procedure greatly impedes the reader, however. As a general rule, it's best to (1) describe the purpose for presenting the table, (2) present it, and (3) review and interpret it.

Draw explicit conclusions. Although research is typically conducted for the purpose of drawing general conclusions, you should carefully note the specific basis for such conclusions. Otherwise you may lead your reader into accepting unwarranted conclusions.

Point to any qualifications or conditions that would help the reader evaluate your conclusions accurately. Typically, you know best the shortcomings and tentativeness of your conclusions, and you should give the reader the advantage of that knowledge. Failure to do so can misdirect future research and result in a waste of research funds.

As I said at the outset of this discussion, research reports should be written in the best possible literary style. Writing lucidly is easier for some people than for others, and it's always harder than writing poorly. I again refer you to the Strunk and White book. Every researcher would do well to follow this procedure: Write.

Read Strunk and White. Revise. Reread Strunk and White. Revise again. This will be a difficult and time-consuming endeavor, but so is science. In my own work, I have been uncomfortably guided by words widely attributed (though uncited) to Albert Einstein: "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." More than once I have been driven to improve my understanding of something I thought I already understood.

A perfectly designed, carefully executed, and brilliantly analyzed study will be altogether worthless unless you can communicate your findings to others. This section has attempted to provide some guidelines toward that end. The best guides are logic, clarity, and honesty. Ultimately, there is no substitute for practice.

Going Public

Though I have written this chapter with a particular concern for the research projects you may be called on to undertake in your research methods course, you should realize that graduate and even undergraduate students are increasingly presenting the results of their research as professional papers or published articles.

If you would like to explore these possibilities further, you may find state and regional associations more open to students than national associations are, although students may present papers to the American Sociological Association, for example. Some associations have special sessions and programs for student participants. You can learn more about these possibilities by visiting the associations' websites to learn of upcoming meetings and the topics for which papers are being solicited.

Typically, you'll submit your paper to someone who has agreed to organize a session with three to five papers on a particular topic. The organizer chooses which of the submissions will be accepted for presentation. Oral presentations at scholarly meetings are typically 15–20 minutes long, with the possibility of questions from the audience. Some presenters read a printed paper, whereas others speak from notes. Increasingly, presenters use Power Point or similar computer-generated presentations.

To publish an article in a scholarly journal, you would do well to identify a journal that

publishes articles on the topic of your research. Again, the journals published by state or regional associations may be more accessible to student authors. Each journal will contain instructions for submitting articles, including instructions for formatting your article. Typically, articles submitted to a journal are circulated among three or so anonymous reviewers, who make comments and recommendations to the journal's editor. This is referred to as the "peer-review" process. Sometimes manuscripts are accepted pretty much as submitted, some are returned for revision and resubmission, and still others are rejected. The whole process from submission to a decision to publish or reject may take a few months, and there will be a further delay before the article is actually published.

The peer-review process is a distinguishing feature in academic publishing. The purpose is to help ensure that the book or article is considered a worthwhile addition to what is known about the topic under study. There is, to be sure, the possibility that peer review may favor established points of view over innovative ones, but the large number of publishing options makes it likely that a friendly journal or publisher might be found. Each would exercise peer judgment as to the scholarly quality of pieces submitted for publication. With the growth of online journals, you will find some that are peer-reviewed and others that are reviewed and judged by the editor in charge.

To meet the costs of publication, a journal will sometimes require that authors pay a small fee on acceptance. Typically, authors receive extra copies of their article—called "reprints"—to give to friends and family and to satisfy requests from professional colleagues.

The Ethics of Reading and Writing Social Research

I've already commented on some ethical issues involved in writing research reports. However, there are also some ethical issues at play in terms of reading the research literature. In reviewing the literature, you might gravitate toward reports that support a point of view you may be fond of. Further, the power of the Internet for fast and expansive searches, while wonderful in most

respects, can allow even more cherry-picking of supportive research literature. This places an ever-greater burden on researchers to exercise professional honesty in representing the history of research findings in a particular area.

Since this chapter concludes the main body of the book, I hope this final section makes clear that research ethics constitute a fundamental component of social science and not merely a nice thing to consider as long as it doesn't get in the way. Research ethics has not always been recognized in this fashion. When I first began writing textbooks there was some objection to including this topic. It wasn't so much that researchers objected to the ethical treatment of subjects—it simply wasn't considered a proper topic for a book like this one. Attitudes have changed substantially over the years, however. I hope the discussions of ethics will help you as you practice social research, in whatever form, throughout your life.

This chapter, and indeed this book, has provided what I hope will be a springboard for you to engage in and enjoy the practice of social research. The next time you find yourself pondering the cause of prejudice, or observing a political rally, or just plain curious about the latest trends in television, I trust you'll have the tools to explore your world with a social scientific eye.

MAIN POINTS

Introduction

- Meaningful scientific research is inextricably wed to communication; knowing how to read and write such research requires practice.

Reading Social Research

- Social researchers can access many resources, including the library and the Internet, for organizing a review of the literature.
- Reading scholarly literature is different from reading other works, such as novels.
- In reading scholarly literature, you should begin by reading the abstract, skimming the piece, and reading the conclusion to get a good sense of what it's about.
- Readers of social science literature should form questions and take notes as they go along.
- The key elements to note in reading a research report include theoretical orientation, research

design, measurement methods, sampling (if any), and other considerations specific to the several data-collection methods discussed in this book.

Using the Internet Wisely

- The Internet is a powerful tool for social researchers, but it also carries risks.
- Not everything you read on the web is necessarily true or useful.
- Original sources of data are preferred over those that take data from elsewhere.
- In evaluating a web source, you should ask the following:
Who or what is the author of the website?
Is the site advocating a particular point of view?
Does the site give accurate and complete references?
Are the data up-to-date?
- Official agencies usually serve as a good source of data, although the data are subject to error.
- The reader of a report should verify (cross-check) data wherever possible.
- Web citations, like other bibliographic references, should be complete—allowing the reader to locate and review the materials cited.

Writing Social Research

- Good social research writing begins with good writing, which means, among other things, writing to communicate rather than to impress.
- Being mindful of your audience and purpose in writing the report is important.
- Avoiding plagiarism—that is, presenting someone else's words or thoughts as though they were your own—is essential. Whenever using someone else's exact words, you must be sure to use quotation marks or some other indication that you're quoting. In paraphrasing someone else's words or ideas, you must provide a full bibliographic citation of the source.
- The research report should include an account of the study design and execution.
- The analysis of a report should be clear at each step, and its conclusion should be specific but not overly detailed.
- To write good reports, researchers need to provide details, integrate supporting materials, and draw explicit conclusions.
- Increasingly, students are presenting papers at professional meetings and publishing articles in scholarly journals.

The Ethics of Reading and Writing Social Research

- A review of the literature should not be biased toward supporting a particular point of view.

- Research ethics is a fundamental component of social science, not a nice afterthought.

KEY TERMS

The following terms are defined in context in the chapter and at the bottom of the page where the term is introduced, as well as in the comprehensive glossary at the back of the book.

abstract	research monograph
plagiarism	URL

PROPOSING SOCIAL RESEARCH: PUTTING THE PROPOSAL TOGETHER

If you've been doing the Proposing Social Research exercises all through the book, you should have just about everything you need now to create the finished product. This chapter has given you some additional guidance on reviewing the literature—both printed and online—and on writing social research, so you can review what you've written already and tidy it up. Appendix A will provide further guidelines on the presentation of your bibliography.

Now you're ready to assemble the parts into a coherent whole. Here is the outline we discussed in Chapter 1.

Introduction (Chapter 1)
Review of the Literature (Chapters 2, 17; Appendix A)
Specifying the Problem/Question/Topic (Chapters 5, 6, 12)
Research Design (Chapter 4)
Data-Collection Method (Chapters 4, 8, 9, 10, 11)
Selection of Subjects (Chapter 7)
Ethical Issues (Chapter 3)
Data Analysis (Chapters 13, 14, 15, 16)
Bibliography/References (Chapter 17; Appendix A)

Perhaps you'll be able to present this proposal as evidence that you've mastered the materials of the textbook. Or, something similar to this could be used to propose a senior thesis or graduate dissertation. If you go on to a career in social research, you could use a proposal like this to obtain funding to support your research. If you're applying for funding, you should also include a project budget to indicate how much support you'll need and for what.

Whichever way you use this kind of document, I wish you every success.

INSTRUCTOR'S EDITION



THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

FOURTEENTH EDITION



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