

...two more or less self-contained studies, with introductions, research questions/hypotheses, results sections, and discussion sections. Usually, however, there is an overall introduction that provides a rationale for both studies and an overall discussion that integrates the findings from both studies. Daena Goldsmith's (2000) article on how utterance sequencing mitigates possible face threats in soliciting advice illustrates this type of organization. She provides an overall introduction that provides a rationale for both studies. Then she presents two "self-contained" studies—the first qualitative and the second quantitative—linked together because the second study is based on the findings from the first study. She concludes the article with an overall discussion.

Alternatively, researchers write up the results of their hybrid study in traditional Introduction-Method-Results-Discussion format. Quantitative and qualitative methods are both described in the Method section. The Results section presents both quantitative and qualitative findings interwoven together. Michael Papa and his colleagues

(2000) used this format in presenting their study of the effects of a radio soap opera in India, based on survey, content analysis, and interview methods.

Regardless of which form hybrid multi-method research takes, the qualitative portion of the data tends to be reported in a realist manner.

Checklists for Reading Communication Research Reports

Our basic philosophy in writing this book is that the best preparation we can provide for becoming a literate reader of communication research reports is to understand how the research was conducted. The remainder of the book is designed to give you the knowledge you need to become that literate reader. Having said that, however, we'll provide you here with two tools that should assist you in reading research reports in communication. Figure 2-1 presents a checklist of questions to ask when reading a quantitative report. Figure 2-2 presents a checklist of questions to ask when reading a qualitative report. Obvi-

1. Is this study quantitative or qualitative in nature? If qualitative, see Figure 2-2.
2. What is the basic paradigm of knowing in which this study is embedded? What is the basic purpose or goal of research in this tradition?
3. What is the purpose of this particular study? Try to locate the researcher's purpose statement.
4. What is the rationale for why this study needed to be done? See if you can summarize the researcher's argument in a few sentences.
5. What are the variables in the study? Which are the independent variables? The dependent variables?
6. What are the study's research questions or research hypotheses? Are they directional or nondirectional? Questions/hypotheses of difference or association between variables?
7. Do the research questions/hypotheses flow logically out of the review of literature provided by the researcher?
8. How was each variable operationalized, or measured? For each operationalization, are you given information to persuade you that it had adequate measurement reliability and measurement validity? How was reliability determined? Validity?
9. What was the unit of analysis in the study?
10. How were units sampled for inclusion in the study? Do the sampling procedures allow you to generalize from the immediate sample used in the study to a larger population? In other words, did the sampling plan have adequate external validity?
11. How would you describe the basic design employed in the study: survey research, experimental research, quasi-experimental research, content analysis, or interaction analysis?
12. Were the procedures used in implementing the design adequate to allow confidence in the explanatory claims made by the researcher? In other words, did the design display adequate internal validity?
13. Was the conduct of the study ethical?
14. Were statistical inferences made from the data? Did statistical tests examine differences or relationships between variables?
15. Did the results of the statistical tests achieve a significance level of $\leq .05$?
16. What were the results of the study with respect to the initial research questions and/or research hypotheses?
17. Was the study presented in a thorough and readable manner? Were you given enough information to allow for replication of the study?
18. What are the weaknesses of the study?
19. What are the strengths of the study?
20. What are the implications of the study? That is, what's the "so what?" value of the study?

FIGURE 2-1 Checklist of Questions to Ask in Reading Quantitative Research Reports

1. Is this study quantitative or qualitative in nature? If quantitative, see Figure 2-1.
2. What is the basic paradigm of knowing in which this study is embedded? What is the basic purpose or goal of research in this tradition?
3. What is the purpose of this particular study? Try to locate the researcher's purpose statement.
4. What is the rationale for why this study needed to be done? See if you can summarize the researcher's argument in a few sentences.
5. Did this study use participant-observation methods? If "no," proceed to question 9 below. If "yes," continue.
6. How did the researcher gain access to the field site?
7. What role(s) did the researcher occupy? For how long?
8. How were field notes taken? Was a reflexive journal maintained?
9. Did this study use qualitative interviewing? If "no," proceed to question 12 below. If "yes," continue.
10. What kind of qualitative interviewing was conducted?
11. What questions were asked of participants?
12. Did this study use discourse analysis? How was transcription conducted?
13. Did this study rely on social texts as data? What were they?
14. What was the study's sampling plan?
15. Was the study conducted in an ethical manner?
16. What was the researcher's analytic framework that guided data analysis?
17. How were the data analyzed?
18. Are the researcher's interpretive findings dependable, or trackable?
19. Are the researcher's interpretive findings confirmable—characterized by a systematic, coherent reasoning process from evidence to conclusions?
20. Are the researcher's interpretive findings credible—do they ring true to the native?
21. Does the study provide "thick description" to allow you to determine the transferability of the findings?
22. What is the narrative style of the study's write-up—realist, confessional, or impressionist?
23. What are the weaknesses of the study?
24. What are the strengths of the study?
25. What are the implications of the study? That is, what's the "so what?" value of the study?

FIGURE 2-2 Checklist of Questions to Ask in Reading Qualitative Research Reports

ously, in the case of quantitative–qualitative hybrid research, you will need to use both checklists. You don't yet know how to answer most of these questions—that's what the rest of the book is for. You may find it useful to return to these checklists as you progress through remaining chapters. As you use these checklists, it is important to recognize three overarching principles:

1. *Try not to evaluate a study outside the parameters of the approach to knowing in which it is positioned.* Don't critique a quantitative study because it's not qualitative, and vice versa. Don't critique an experiment because it's not a survey, and so forth. Figure out where the study is positioned, and evaluate it against the criteria appropriate for that research approach.
2. *Try not to reject findings because a study and its method are not perfect.* We have never read a "perfect study" or encountered "the perfect method." All research methods have limitations. Hopefully,

the limitations of one method or study are offset by the strengths of a second method or study, whose own weaknesses are offset by the strengths of a third method or study, and so forth. Research is an imperfect business. Make a judgment call about a study based on an overall assessment of its strengths and limitations. Each study has something to contribute, just as each study has weaknesses. Because of this fact, our own preference is multi-method research.

3. *Try not to confuse form with substance.* Many consumers of research reports experience qualitative reports as easy to read, whereas quantitative reports are experienced as more challenging because of their technical terminology. For some readers, this means that quantitative reports must be somehow better because they seem more scientific than qualitative reports. By contrast, other readers conclude that qualitative reports must be better because they can be understood more

readily. We find both kinds of judgments to be flawed. Qualitative reports are just as scientific as quantitative reports, but they present different ways of being scientific. Qualitative reports may employ fewer technical terms than quantitative reports in the write-up of the study, but they require just as much technical knowledge to evaluate (compare Figures 2-1 and 2-2).

At this point in your reading, you should be prepared to read communication research, at least in a cursory manner, in order to find out what we already know. This will help you in narrowing down your topic area. You will also narrow your topic depending on your research purpose.

DETERMINING YOUR PURPOSE

Communication research, of course, serves many purposes. Four of the most common and useful purposes are *exploration*, *description*, *causal/functional explanation*, and *understanding*. Although a given study can have more than one of these purposes—and most do—examining them separately is useful because each has different implications for other aspects of research design.

Exploration

Sometimes, communication research is conducted to explore a topic, or to provide a beginning familiarity with that topic. This approach is typical when a researcher examines a new interest or when the subject of study itself is relatively new.

As an example, let's suppose that widespread taxpayer dissatisfaction with the government erupts into a taxpayers' revolt. People begin refusing to pay their taxes, and they organize themselves around that issue. You might like to learn more about the swirl of political discourse that surrounds this movement. What are the arguments employed by members of the movement? How persuasive are their messages in recruiting others to join their cause? What are the counterarguments by the government? You might undertake an exploratory study to obtain at least approximate answers to some of these questions. You might talk to people who define themselves in taxpayer revolt, analyzing their arguments. You might interview other people to gain insight into what they find persuasive—or not—about the movement's rhetoric. You might systematically analyze the arguments of the movement and of the government that have appeared in selected national newspapers since the revolt began.

Exploratory studies are also appropriate for more persistent phenomena. Suppose that you're unhappy with

your college's graduation requirements for the communication studies major and want to help change them. You might study the history of these requirements at the college and meet with college officials to learn the reasons for the current standards. You could talk to several students who currently are majors to get a rough idea of their sentiments on the subject. Although this last activity would not necessarily yield an accurate picture of student opinion, it could suggest what the results of a more extensive study might be.

Sometimes, exploratory research is pursued through the use of *focus groups*, or guided small-group discussions. This technique is frequently used in market research; we'll examine it further in Chapter 14.

Exploratory studies are typically done for three purposes: (1) to satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding, (2) to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study, and (3) to develop the methods to be employed in any subsequent study.

Not long ago, for example, one of us became aware of the growing popularity of something called "channeling," in which a person known as a *channel* or *medium* enters a trance state and begins speaking with a voice that claims it originates outside the channel. Some of the voices say they come from a spirit world of the dead, some say they're from other planets, and still others say they exist on dimensions of reality difficult to explain in ordinary human terms. You may be familiar with channeling through the "Seth" books of Jane Roberts (1974) or more recent books by Shirley MacLaine (1983).

The channeled voices, often referred to as *entities*, sometimes use the metaphor of radio or television for the phenomenon they represent. "When you watch the news," one said in the course of an interview, "you don't believe Dan Rather is really inside the television set. The same is true of me. I use this medium's body the way Dan Rather uses your television set."

The idea of channeling is interesting from several perspectives, not the least of which is the methodological question of how to study scientifically something that violates so much of what we take for granted, including scientific staples such as space, time, causation, and individuality.

Lacking any rigorous theory or precise expectations, the initial goal was merely to learn more. Using some of the techniques of qualitative research discussed in Part 3, information was collected and preliminary categories were formed for making sense of the observations. Books and articles about the phenomenon were read, and people who had attended channeling sessions were interviewed. Channeling sessions were attended, observing others who attended as well as the channel and entity.