

A Step-by-Step Guide ^{TO} **CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**



Dr. Bunnie L. Claxton
Dr. Marie M. Mallory

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Send all inquiries to:

4050 Westmark Drive

Dubuque, IA 52004-1840

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About the Authors



Dr. Bonnie L. Claxton served as the Director of Applied Doctoral Research at Liberty University. She is an associate adjunct professor at Colorado Christian University, Veritas Bible College, and Liberty University. She has 30 years of experience in the field of education including public, private, homeschool, and higher education. Dr. Claxton has an undergraduate degree in Early Childhood Education, a master's degree in special education, and a doctorate degree in curriculum and instruction. She recently earned a Higher Education Teaching Certificate from Harvard University. As a leader in the field of education, she has developed multiple graduate-level courses, Chaired dissertations, served as a Research Methodologist, Subject Matter Expert, and Instructional Mentor to professors. Dr. Claxton served as the Superintendent of Liberty University Online Academy; an online K-12 school with over 18,000 students. She is best known for her *Step-By-Step* book series. A few titles include *A Step-By-Step Guide to Conducting Applied Research*, *A Step-By-Step Guide to Conducting Qualitative Research*, *A Step-By-Step Guide to Conducting Quantitative Research*, *A Step-By-Step Guide to Writing a Literature Review for Doctoral Research*, and *A Step-By-Step Introduction to Research Methods: Qualitative, Quantitative, Mixed-Methods, and Applied*.



Dr. Marie M. Mallory is the Residential Chair of the Strategic and Personal Communication Department and Co-Director of the Graduate Program at Liberty University, a Subject Matter Expert, an Instructional Mentor, and a Thesis and Dissertation Chair. She is also an adjunct professor for Liberty University Online's Ph.D.

program and at Messiah University and oversees the Advertising and Forensic teams at Liberty University. She has 21 years of experience in the field of education, including public, private, homeschool, and higher education. She has developed multiple undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate-level courses, undergraduate and graduate programs, and is a research methodologist. She is an active member of multiple communication and education associations.

Overview of Textbook Features

This book is designed to guide the novice researcher through the process of conducting qualitative research for the purpose of addressing the research questions and narrowing a gap in the literature. The result is a qualitative research manuscript, often called a dissertation, capstone project, or thesis, which contains the details of a phenomenon. Features of this book are designed to support the novice researcher and include an explanation of qualitative research with details regarding how to identify a research topic, instructions on how to write research questions, and guidance on how to conduct a thorough review of the current scholarly literature. After conducting a thorough review of the literature, the researcher will learn how to conduct qualitative research by collecting and analyzing data, which is followed by the findings and discussion. Though qualitative research can be a challenge to define, and qualitative manuscripts vary greatly, this book was designed to merge the two processes together with as much accuracy and authenticity as possible while remaining loyal to both the integrity and rigor of the qualitative research process.

Chapters include:

- Chapter 1: Introduction to Qualitative Research
- Chapter 2: How to Write the Front Matter
- Chapter 3: How to Write Chapter One: Introduction
- Chapter 4: How to Write Chapter Two: Literature Review
- Chapter 5: How to Write Chapter Three: Methods
- Chapter 6: Interviews and Focus Groups
- Chapter 7: Questionnaires
- Chapter 8: Observations
- Chapter 9: Content Analysis
- Chapter 10: How to Write Chapter Four: Findings
- Chapter 11: How to Write Chapter Five: Discussion
- Chapter 12: How to Defend Your Research
- Chapter 13: How to Publish Your Research
- Chapter 14: How to Generate Content Using AI
- Chapter 15: Qualitative Research Dissertation Template

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to Qualitative Research

Introduction to Qualitative Research

Qualitative Research Defined

Qualitative Research Designs

Planning and Designing Qualitative Research

Conclusion

Chapter Highlights

Chapter 2: How to Write the Front Matter

Introduction

Outline of a Qualitative Manuscript

How to Write the Front Matter

How to Write the Title Page

How to Write the Approval Page

How to Write the Abstract

How to Write the Table of Contents

Conclusion

Chapter Highlights

Chapter 3: How to Write Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

How to Write the Overview

How to Write the Background

How to Write the Problem Statement

How to Write the Purpose Statement

How to Write the Significance of the Study

How to Write the Research Questions

How to Write the Definitions

How to Write the Summary

Conclusion

Chapter Highlights

Chapter 4: How to Write Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

How to Analyze and Synthesize Scholarly Literature

Steps to Compose a Literature Review
How to Write a Literature Review Outline
How to Write a Literature Review
How to Write the Overview
How to Write the Theoretical Framework
How to Write the Related Literature
How to Write the Summary
Conclusion
Chapter Highlights

Chapter 5: How to Write Chapter Three: Method

Introduction
How to Write the Overview
How to Write the Research Design
How to Write the Research Question(s)
How to Write the Role of the Researcher
How to Write the Trustworthiness
How to Write the Setting and Participants
How to Write the Ethical Considerations
How to Write the Procedures
How to Write the Summary
Conclusion
Chapter Highlights

Chapter 6: Interviews and Focus Groups

Introduction
Differences Between Interviews and Focus Groups
Types of Interviews
How to Write Interview Questions
Tips for Writing Interview Questions
Steps to Conduct an Interview
How to Write the Interview Procedures
How to Analyze Interview Data
Conclusion
Chapter Highlights

Chapter 7: Questionnaires

Introduction
Qualitative Questionnaires
Types of Questionnaires
How to Write Questionnaire Questions
How to Create a Questionnaire
Steps to Conduct Questionnaire Research
How to Write Questionnaire Procedures
How to Analyze Questionnaire Data

Conclusion
Chapter Highlights

Chapter 8: Observations

Introduction
Observations
Types of Observations
Steps to Conduct an Observation
How to Analyze Observation Data
How to Analyze and Report Field Notes
How to Write the Observation Procedures
Conclusion
Chapter Highlights

Chapter 9: Content Analysis

Introduction
Archival Data
Types of Document Analysis
Steps to Conduct a Qualitative Content Analysis
How to Write the Content Analysis Procedures
Conclusion
Chapter Highlights

Chapter 10: How to Write Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction
How to Write the Overview
How to Write the Description of the Participants
How to Write the Codes and Themes Development
How to Write the Results
How to Write the Summary
Conclusion
Chapter Highlights

Chapter 11: How to Write Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction
How to Write the Overview
How to Write the Discussion
How to Write the Implications
How to Write the Limitations
How to Write the Recommendations for Future Research
How to Write the Summary
Conclusion
Chapter Highlights

Chapter 12: How to Defend Your Research

Introduction

The Presentation

The Proposal Defense

The Final Defense

Chapter 13: How to Publish Your Research

Introduction

How to Transform Your Dissertation into a Manuscript for Publication

Steps to Publish Your Research

Chapter Highlights

Chapter 14: How to Generate Content Using AI

Introduction to Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Doctoral Research

AI Defined

The Purpose of AI in Doctoral Research

How to Generate Content Using AI

Steps to Generate Content Using AI

How to Use Content Generated by AI

Limitations of AI in Education

AI and Ethical Considerations

Conclusion

Chapter Highlights

Chapter 15: Qualitative Research Dissertation Template

Appendix A: Individual Scholarly Works Template

Appendix B: Comparative Scholarly Works Template

Appendix C: Action Item Table

Glossary

References

Detailed Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to Qualitative Research guides the researcher in discovering key components needed to understand and conduct qualitative research. The deliverable, a qualitative dissertation, thesis, or manuscript is described in detail. This chapter addresses the transition from novice researcher to independent researcher and scholar.

Chapter 2: How to Write the Front Matter describes how to write a formal abstract for a research study manuscript. The researcher will learn to write his or her credentials, background information, and connection to the proposed research as the investigator.

Chapter 3: How to Write Chapter One: Introduction introduces the methods needed to write the introduction to the research. Novice researchers learn how to identify a research topic and describe why the topic requires further investigation. The guidelines for determining and writing the purpose of the research and the research questions are also established in this chapter.

Chapter 4: How to Write Chapter Two: Literature Review teaches the researcher how to conduct a methodological and systematic review of the current literature. Novice researchers learn about scholarly voice, which requires formal language and tone. The deliverable for this chapter is a well-written, thorough review and synthesis of the current scholarly literature that demonstrates competence in the presentation of the current existing body of knowledge regarding the phenomenon.

Chapter 5: How to Write Chapter Three: Methods provides a detailed description of qualitative research methods required to conduct research using qualitative data collection and analysis strategies. In this chapter, the methods are described, and instructions are provided to write the Methods chapter for a qualitative manuscript.

Chapter 6: Interviews and Focus Groups instructs the learner regarding data collection and analysis for conducting interviews and focus groups. The researcher will learn to write interview questions that are grounded in and supported by scholarly literature. Ten steps will be disclosed to help researchers effectively conduct interviews to gather data relevant to answering the research questions. Additionally, an analysis of interview and focus group data collected will be described.

Chapter 7: Questionnaires function as a means of collecting data about everyday life. This chapter explores qualitative questionnaires, types of qualitative questionnaires, how to write demographic questions, how to write qualitative questionnaire open-ended questions, how to create a qualitative questionnaire, how to conduct qualitative questionnaire research, and how to write the data collection methods for qualitative questionnaires.

Chapter 8: Observations describes the value, types, uses, and processes for conducting, analyzing, and writing notes from observations. In qualitative research, it is sometimes useful to collect data about people by observing them in a natural setting. This chapter defines terms to enhance understanding of the use of observations in qualitative research.

Chapter 9: Content Analysis specifies the difference between documents and artifacts. Primary and secondary sources are explained, and the logic is provided for usage. Five steps to conducting a content analysis are explained.

Chapter 10: How to Write Chapter Four: Findings presents the information discovered during the data collection and analysis process. Writing the Findings from the data collection methods, in conjunction with the scholarly literature are explained.

Chapter 11: How to Write Chapter Five: Discussion includes the formal discussion, which are the conclusions drawn from the data collection and analysis strategies. The researcher will learn to evaluate and report the implications of the research findings.

Chapter 12: How to Defend Your Research provides the details regarding a proposal defense and a final defense for a qualitative research dissertation. Guidance regarding the focus of each defense is provided, as well as an example slide show presentation.

Chapter 13: How to Publish Your Research provides the steps needed to transition a dissertation manuscript to a journal article. The result is a condensed version of the dissertation, which is intended to be submitted to a scholarly peer-reviewed journal for publication to narrow a gap in the literature regarding the research topic.

Chapter 14: How to Generate Content Using AI stipulates guidelines for using AI in doctoral research, as well as possible ways to generate information for a dissertation utilizing ethical guidelines.

Chapter 15: Qualitative Research Dissertation Template is used as the structure for this qualitative research. This document provides the main headings required for all five chapters of the research study, as well as a checklist for each section to ensure accuracy. This is the foundational document for qualitative dissertation research.

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To my husband, Russ Claxton, you are my world, and I am grateful to you for loving me through the writing process, which takes days, weeks, months, and sometimes even years to complete. Thank you for supporting my writing endeavors! Bunnie Claxton

To my husband, David Mallory, and our four fabulous children, Gavin, Grace, Gatlyn, and Garret. Thank you for being my constant cheerleaders. Your love, prayers, encouragement, and support allow me to continue fulfilling dreams. To God for every good gift. Marie Mallory

This book was written to support the novice researcher by providing a step-by-step approach to doctoral research. It is our hope that you will use the research process to make the world a better place. We welcome your comments about the book and will gladly dialogue with you about research methodology. Please feel free to contact me at DrBunnieClaxton@gmail.com or visit my website at www.DrBunnieClaxton.com. Further, you may contact Dr. Marie Mallory at DrMarieMallory@gmail.com.

Introduction to Qualitative Research



Chapter Outline

Introduction to Qualitative Research
Qualitative Research Defined
Qualitative Research Designs
Planning and Designing Qualitative Research
Conclusion
Chapter Highlights

Objectives

By the end of this chapter, the reader will be able to:

- Define qualitative research
- Describe the purpose of qualitative research
- Explain the contents of a qualitative dissertation
- Explicate a qualitative approach to data collection
- Explain reasons to conduct qualitative research
- Describe a theoretical framework
- Describe philosophical assumptions
- List the five steps to conduct qualitative research
- Delineate ethical considerations

Key Terms

- assumptions

- autobiographical research
- axiological
- biographical research
- case study
- codes
- concepts
- conceptual framework
- constructs
- epistemological
- ethnography
- grounded theory
- hermeneutical phenomenology
- historical research
- methodological
- narrative research
- naturalistic generalizations
- ontological
- phenomenological research
- phenomenon
- philosophical assumptions
- philosophy
- qualitative research
- sampling
- seminal work
- themes
- theoretical framework
- theory
- transcendental phenomenology
- variables

Introduction to Qualitative Research

Qualitative researchers talk with and observe people to understand their perspective of life more fully.

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative researchers study fewer participants in greater detail. “Stories, not statistics, are the essence of qualitative inquiry” (Van Tassell & Novotny, 2017, p. 6). Qualitative researchers seek to understand and present the perspectives of people who have experienced a phenomenon.

Qualitative data are collected through conversations with people in real-life situations who have first-hand experiences to share. Observations are made, and notes are documented regarding people living life in a variety of circumstances and cultures. Archival and historical materials are analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of the subsistence of previous generations. The essence of qualitative research is for the researcher to seek to understand life from the perspective of the people who live it and to tell the stories of their lived experiences.

The rigor of qualitative research is expressed through the researcher’s interpretation and presentation of the data. The qualitative researcher attains meaning and relevance through the detailed descriptions of the

participant's experiences shared with the researcher. It is the narrative presentation of data that instills meaning in qualitative research.

0:00 / 3:10



Qualitative Research Defined

Qualitative research is defined in many ways; however, for this book, **qualitative research** is defined as the research of life as it exists and is lived in the real world; it is the study of the day-to-day experiences of life, and the qualitative researcher seeks to discover and describe the participants perspective. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is designed to explore social or human problems in a natural setting. Though a concise definition was presented for qualitative research, there is a lot more to it than a single definition can entail. Yin (2016) listed five features of qualitative research that elaborate on the essence of qualitative inquiry adapted as follows:

1. Studying the meaning of people's lives in their real-world roles
2. Representing the views and perspectives of the participants
3. Explicitly attending to and accounting for real-world contextual conditions
4. Contributing insights from existing or new concepts that may help to explain social behavior
5. Acknowledging the potential relevance of multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone

For the qualitative dissertation, the researcher will utilize qualitative data collection approaches to understand the perspectives and experiences of the research participants. Qualitative researchers seek to narrow a gap in the existing scholarly literature. In many cases, qualitative research study results are generalizable to a broader population represented by the participants. For this reason, doctoral candidates are often encouraged to seek publication of their research in scholarly journals.

Qualitative Research Designs

Qualitative researchers strive to talk with and observe people to understand their perspectives of real-life experiences through five basic designs, though more designs exist. This section introduces each of the five

designs for qualitative inquiry. This introduction is intended to present the novice researcher with a general idea of the five approaches to qualitative research. Yin (2016) noted that qualitative research has a variety of approaches, including 12 variants (action research; arts-based research; autoethnography; case study; critical theory; discourse analysis; ethnography; ethnomethodology; grounded theory; narrative inquiry and life history; oral history; and phenomenology). The five qualitative research designs that are introduced in this chapter include phenomenology, case study, narrative research, ethnography, and grounded theory.

Phenomenological

A phenomenological study is a form of qualitative research that seeks to discover and describe the lived experiences of the participants, including the political, historical, and social contexts. According to Creswell and Poth (2018),

a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (e.g., grief is universally experienced). The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence. (p. 75)

For **phenomenological research**, the researcher will delve into the thoughts, interpretations, emotions, and opinions of the participants to provide a culminating conception of a combination of the lived experiences of all research participants. The divergent thoughts and commonalities of thought may be presented to capture the uniqueness of the experiences. According to Yin (2016), phenomenological research “is most strongly devoted to capturing the uniqueness of events” (p. 20).

The differences in phenomenological research are represented by **hermeneutical phenomenology**, which focuses on the researcher’s interpretations of the data, and **transcendental phenomenology**, which concentrates on describing the details of the actual experiences of the participants apart from the researcher’s biases and personal opinions. Both types follow the same basic guidelines. Phenomenological research ends with conclusions formed by the researcher about the overall meaning derived from the research. Phenomenological research steps may be cyclical and overlapping, but the five basic steps for conducting phenomenological research follow.

Step 1. Determine a topic or phenomenon to be investigated

Step 2. Select participants who are well-informed regarding the topic or phenomenon

Step 3. Choose data collection methods best suited to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant’s perspective of the topic or phenomenon

Step 4. Define and implement the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies

Step 5. Present the findings and conclusions

This is a concise introduction to the phenomenological research process. The five steps to conducting a qualitative phenomenological research study are detailed next.

Steps for Conducting Phenomenological Research

Step 1. Determine a topic or phenomenon to be investigated. Phenomenological research focuses on a phenomenon to be explored. A **phenomenon** is defined as an object of human experience (van Manen, 1990). Examples of a phenomenon include the *co-teaching experiences* of middle school teachers, the *anxiety*

experienced as a result of public speaking, the *grief experienced* by spouses who lost a loved one due to COVID-19, or students who were wrongly accused of submitting work generated by artificial intelligence. When determining a topic or phenomenon to research, be cognizant that the goal of phenomenological research is to discover and describe the lived experiences of the participants in the study (Moustakas, 1994).

Step 2. Select participants who are well-informed regarding the topic or phenomenon. Participants will be purposefully selected in many phenomenological studies to inform the research phenomenon. When determining how to select participants for your research, consider the following:

- a. Who can best inform your research?
- b. How will you select the best-informed participants?
- c. Where can these best-informed participants be secured?
- d. How many participants are needed to satisfy the study?

Selecting participants for your research is called **sampling**. Essentially, you will choose a sample population who are informed about your phenomenon, and you will collect data from these well-informed participants. There are many ways to select participants for your research. As the researcher, you must consider the approach to qualitative inquiry when determining which sampling technique to use to secure the participants for your study. The table below includes basic sampling techniques used in qualitative research. There are many other procedures for eliciting participants, but this table is intended to provide basic sampling techniques.

Sampling Technique	Description
Convenience	Is easy and convenient but may not provide the most credible or valuable information regarding the phenomenon or topic of the research
Criterion	When the researcher seeks participants who meet preset criteria to ensure the participant has predetermined experience with the phenomenon
Homogeneous	Is typically used for focus group interviews and is used to choose participants with similar experiences
Purposeful	When the researcher intentionally selects information-rich participants to inform the research
Snowball	When someone makes a recommendation to the researcher for another person to participate in the study because the person they are recommending has experience with the phenomenon or topic of the research

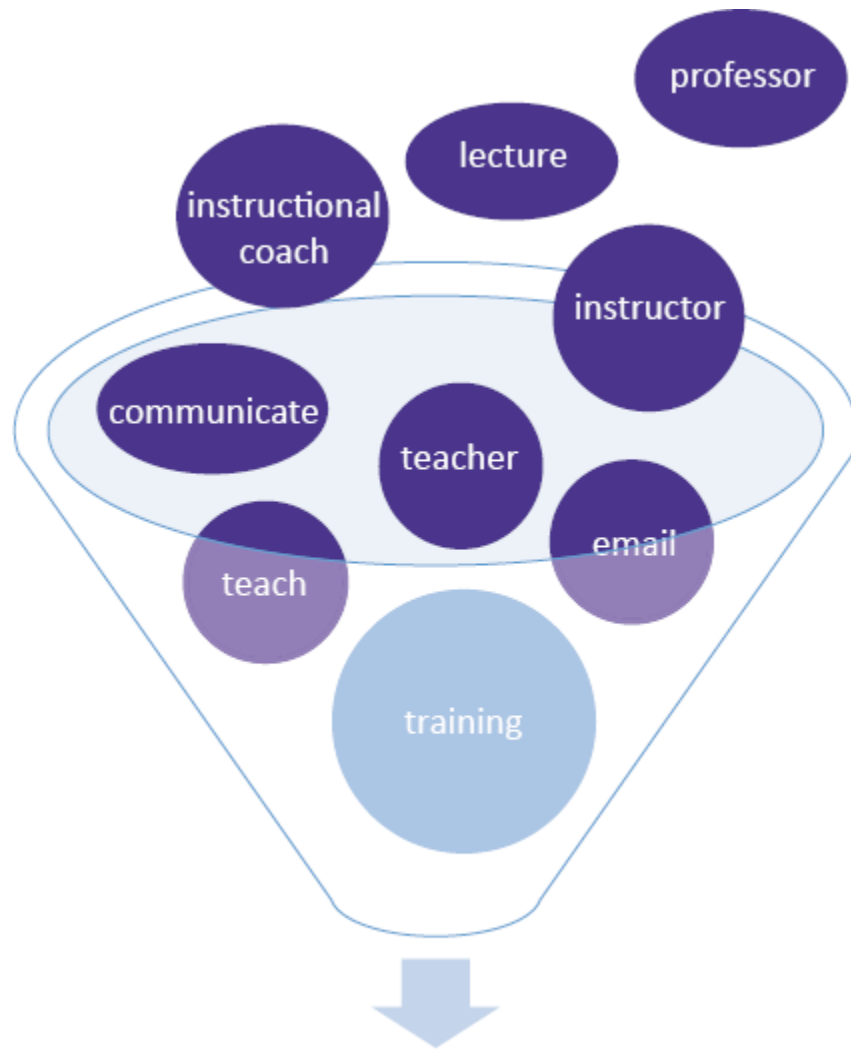
For qualitative research, choose participants who have lived experiences with your research topic. You will also determine the number of participants necessary for your specific research. Participant numbers vary greatly based on the research design.

Step 3. Choose data collection methods best suited to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant’s perspective of the topic or phenomenon. For qualitative research, there are five data collection methods. These methods include interviews, focus groups, observations, qualitative questionnaires, and content analysis, though other researchers may add or detract from this list. In this book, these five data collection methods are described.



Step 4. Define and implement the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies. Qualitative data analysis strategies include interpreting data through a process known as coding, which leads to themes. **Codes** are words that are eventually combined to become themes from the research and are derived from the data collected. Saldaña (2013) defined a code as “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” (p. 3). For example, see the chart that follows that includes code words that were developed into the more broadly defined themes. The code words in each column were derived from interview transcripts. These words were spoken repeatedly during the interview, which is how the codes were derived and categorized into broad themes. Think of the code words as being funneled into the theme located at the bottom of the funnel. **Themes** are the broad categories in which the narrow codes are funneled. Saldaña (2013) stated that a “theme is an *outcome* of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded” (p. 14). In other words, code words are spoken by the participant, but themes may not be since they may be the broad categorical word that the codes represent.

Developing codes is the first step in interpreting data (Creswell, 2013). Interpretation of data is “abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). Since the first step in interpretation is developing codes, after codes are developed, themes are generated from those codes. Next, themes are organized into larger units, and interpretations are made. The researcher will then make **naturalistic generalizations**, which state what the researcher learned through the information obtained during the data collection process (Creswell, 2013).



Professors

Code words	Code words	Code words	Code words
training	accommodations	parent	understanding
teach	study	mentor	student
teacher	tutor	help	self-disclose
email	support	mom	individual
communicate	stress	partner	guilty
instructor	quiet environment	responsible	care
instructional coach	quizzes/exam/test	assist	concern
lecture	request		empathy
professor	notes		
	extended time		
	disability services		
	disability		
	counseling		
Theme: Professors	Theme: Accommodations	Theme: Accountability	Theme: Compassion

The first column includes code words related to the overarching theme determined by the researcher to be “professor.” The researcher noted in the interview transcripts that the code words training, teach, teacher, email, communicate, instructor, instructional coach, lecture, and professor were all related to the overall theme of “professor.” As the human research instrument, the researcher would note (mentally or physically by documentation) that the code words were spoken by the participants within the context of the theme of professor. For example, for the code word “email,” the researcher could have seen in the transcription of the interviews that participants indicated professors who responded to student emails were more effective than those who neglected to respond to emails. The researcher must pay careful attention to details when interviewing (which is why note-taking is important) and while transcribing and analyzing interview transcripts to determine important code words and the overarching themes determined from the codes.

Step 5. Present the findings and discussions. For a phenomenological study, findings and discussions are presented following the data collection and analysis phase of the research process. The findings present the codes and themes discovered during data analysis and the researcher’s interpretation of the analysis. These are described in detail and typically include participant quotes as evidence. The discussions, conclusions, or interpretations are inferences drawn from the findings regarding the phenomenon and are the researchers’ interpretations based on the evidence. The researcher then presents the findings and discussions as interpretations made by the researcher during the data collection and analysis process.

Phenomenological research requires the researcher to determine a topic or phenomenon to be investigated. The researcher then selects participants who are well-informed regarding the topic or

phenomenon. Data collection methods are chosen that are best suited to elicit an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives based on their lived experiences regarding the topic or phenomenon. Data analysis strategies are selected to interpret the data, and the findings and discussions are presented. For more information regarding phenomenological research, consider consulting the founder, Edmund Husserl, and refer to the writings of Clark Moustakas and Max van Manen.

Case Study

A **case study** is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the real-life experiences of participants within a bounded case. Case study research involves the study of a single case or multiple cases within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2014). Additionally, case study research is appropriate when current issues or events are being studied, and the participants' behaviors cannot be controlled. Case study research is different than phenomenological research because the focus of case study research is on cases. In contrast, phenomenological research focuses on people and is more personally connected to the phenomenon. Case study research allows for an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon within its typical context using various data sources. Case study research allows the phenomenon to be explored from a variety of aspects of the phenomenon, and such exploration makes case study research empirically rich (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). This methodology allows the researcher to get a close and first-hand look at the real-life experiences of the participants selected for the study. Yin (2014) stated that interviews are one of the most important data-gathering tools in case study research. Creswell (2013) specified not to include more than four or five case studies in a single study as he believes four or five cases should provide sufficient opportunity to identify themes and conduct cross-case thematic analysis. Creswell and Poth (2018) define case study research as an:

approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. (pp. 96–97)

Steps for conducting case study research include:

Step 1. Identify the case or cases to be explored (must be bounded).

Step 2. Determine the data collection methods best suited to gain an in-depth understanding of the case(s).

Step 3. Determine and utilize the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies.

Step 4. Present the findings and discussion (interpretation).

Steps for Conducting Case Study Research

Step 1. Identify the case or cases to be explored (must be bounded). Case study research may include a *single case* or *multiple case* design, and though one phenomenon is often analyzed, there may be several embedded units analyzed individually or separately (within each case) and together (across units), and such rich analysis may illuminate specific details related to the outcomes of the study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The researcher must determine whether the research is best served through a single-case or a multiple-case study.

Single Case Study: The single case study design is appropriate for a study when the study is being conducted to gain insight into a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). For example, the experiences of students with autism spectrum disorder led to success in an online learning environment where the single case is identified as an online learning environment. In this scenario, the

single case is specifically identified as an online learning environment; thus, the case is bound to a single type of learning environment (online). This study will exclude other learning environments, such as a public school or private school if it does not have an online component.

Multiple Case Study: A multiple case study design is appropriate for a study designed around two or more similar cases and allows for more analytic generalizations of the findings (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). For example, a multiple case study may be identified as the experiences of students with autism spectrum disorder that led to success in a public and a private school online learning environment. The multiple cases are specifically identified as the (a) public school online learning environment and (b) private school online learning environment. Case study research is bound by certain parameters (Boblin et al., 2013), and the boundaries must be defined in case study research (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). As the researcher, you must determine whether you will use a single-case or a multiple-case design.

Step 2. Determine the data collection methods best suited to gain an in-depth understanding of the case(s). Data collection methods for case study research include qualitative data collection methods as noted in the phenomenological research section (e.g., interviews, focus groups, observations, qualitative questionnaire, and content analysis) and should be determined by the method(s) that will yield the most relevant qualitative data to address the phenomenon for the case study. Case study methodology aims to get an in-depth look at the lives of the participants in their everyday environment (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2014); thus, the data collection methods must best suit this aim.

Step 3. Determine and utilize the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies. Data analysis strategies for qualitative case study research are determined based on the data collection strategies. Yin (2014) wrote that “how” and “why” questions are most appropriate, or favored, for case study research, and Creswell (2013) posited that questions for qualitative studies need to ask “how” or “what.” For case study research, “how,” “why,” and “what” questions are suitable. Case study research is conducted in a natural setting, and a detailed report is generated of the perspectives of the participants based on the data from the participants (Creswell, 2013); thus, the most appropriate data collection and analysis strategies must be chosen to discover and describe the lived experiences of the participants. Qualitative data analysis often requires the development of codes and themes based on the data collected. These codes and themes are then detailed in the findings and conclusions section of the report. See the section on codes and themes in the phenomenological research section for more information on how codes and themes are determined.

Step 4. Present the findings and discussion (interpretation). For case study research, findings and discussions are presented like those of phenomenological research findings and discussions. Following the data collection and analysis process, the findings are presented as codes and themes discovered during data analysis. The researcher’s interpretation of the analysis is also included. These are described in detail and typically include participant quotes as evidence. The discussions, conclusions, or interpretations are inferences drawn from the findings regarding the phenomenon and are the researchers’ interpretations based on the evidence from the data collection and analysis evidence.

Case study research requires the researcher to determine a bounded single case or multiple cases. The researcher then selects the best data collection and analysis strategies to discover and describe the participants’ lived experiences regarding the phenomenon of the research within the case(s). The researcher then presents the findings and discussions as interpretations made by the researcher during the data collection and analysis process. For more information regarding case study research, consider consulting Robert Stake and Robert Yin.

Narrative

Narrative research is a form of qualitative research that focuses on a narrow participant pool or even a single individual but in immense detail. Narrative research is not necessarily bound by a progression of steps, as there is a lot of room for research choice when conducting and presenting narrative research. But, for the introduction, four basic thoughts must be considered when choosing narrative research. We consider these steps to mostly be guidelines. Steps for conducting narrative research include:

Step 1. Identify the research topic.

Step 2. Determine the type of narrative research to conduct.

Step 3. Determine the appropriate coordinating procedures.

Step 4. Present the narrative account.

Steps for Conducting Narrative Research

Step 1. Identify the research topic. As a narrative researcher, you may want to select the research topic first, or you may want to select the type of narrative research you desire to conduct first. As the researcher, you must decide. If you have a specific interest in a topic, such as females in leadership, you may determine the type of narrative research you want to conduct. However, if you do not have a research topic in mind, you may want to read about the different types of narrative research, and that information may help you determine a research topic. Determining a topic for your research may come immediately, or it may be a process that you go through until you decide on a topic that interests you and is worthy of research.

Step 2. Determine the type of narrative research to conduct. The process of conducting narrative research requires the researcher to determine a phenomenon or topic to research and the participants whose lived experiences lend to that topic. The narrative researcher may choose to conduct historical research. **Historical research** seeks to tell a story from someone or a group of people with life experiences that may be worth recording. For example, if choosing historical research, the researcher may decide to collect data from a single participant who opened a bake shop when she was 16 years old, worked there all of her life, raised her children to work in the shop, and continues to work in the shop at the age of 102. Her lived experiences, and those of her husband and children, may have historical value and be worthy of narrative research to preserve and present her lived experiences in narrative format.

Another form of narrative research that may be chosen is a biographical narrative research study. **Biographical research** seeks to record the experiences of another person's life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research is non-fiction, historical, and somewhat resembles a narrative documentary. For example, a mother of eight children whose husband died in a car wreck when the youngest child was two years old and the oldest child was 12 years old and homeschooled her children. Despite the challenges, all eight children became highly successful in multiple career fields. Her compelling story is one of the challenges faced and the grit to overcome.

Autobiographical research seeks to record one's own lived experiences and memories in a narrative format. Autobiographical research explores personal meaning using various empirical resources to triangulate information with an in-depth analysis of multiple sources to express meaning. Examples of sources of information that may be used for autobiographical research include diaries, memorials, life narratives, official documents, personal documents, oral stories, photos, videos, blogs, and letters. The autobiographical researcher seeks to construct meaning from empirical sources and presents a critical

dialogue with research findings from elsewhere and with a global perspective of social and cultural environments regarding the lived experiences of the participants (Abraham, 2012).

Other types of narrative research exist, but for brevity, the only introduction to narrative research in this book focuses on historical, biographical, and autobiographical. These three types of narrative research represent a general idea of how the narrative researcher will collect and analyze data to present the information in a narrative format.

Step 3. Determine the appropriate coordinating procedures. Just as determining a topic and choosing the type of narrative research to conduct may be an obscure process, determining the appropriate procedures may also be somewhat ill-defined. When conducting narrative research, you will spend a considerable amount of time with your participant(s) to learn more about their lived experiences. The researcher's role is to capture the lived experiences of the participants and report them in a comprehensive and engaging narrative format.

Data analysis involves cultural awareness and fieldwork, interpretation, analysis, making sense of information, and using experiences to describe and facilitate understanding of participant experiences (Adams & Manning, 2015). Some narrative researchers will conduct fieldwork, interviews, and participate in observations, while others will emphasize personal experiences and thick descriptions for their procedures. The narrative approach places less emphasis on the qualitative and quantitative data analysis procedures such as coding, themes, and statistics and places more emphasis on the interpretation and experiences presented in narrative format.

Other than spending time with the participant(s), the narrative researcher may also decide to collect written information such as personal letters, diaries, journals, or official documents such as memos and official correspondences, as noted previously. Artifacts such as personal belongings, photographs, or sentimental items may also lend to the research. Notice the variety of information that may be utilized for narrative research. The variety of information that may be collected makes it difficult to prescribe a step-by-step process for narrative research. However, the researcher is expected to collect and analyze the data to interpret and present meaning from the data in a well-organized and engaging way for the reader. This can be a monumental organizational feat, which should be considered when choosing narrative research. Additionally, the researcher must capture and convey experiences and meaning with which the researcher, research participants, and the reader must be able to identify.

Step 4. Present the narrative account. Presentation of the narrative research paper will vary by study, but general guidelines may be followed. Begin the paper by introducing the reader to the purpose of the research and the participant(s). Use this space to build interest in the paper and engage the reader. Provide the rationale for choosing narrative research and details about how data were collected and analyzed. Deciding how to present this story is often a challenge for writers who may not have anticipated the extent to which organizing narrative data must be achieved for a cohesive, engaging, and logical presentation of lived experiences in narrative format. The presentation should present the lived experiences of the participant(s), and patterns of meaning should be included (organized using logical headings and sub-headings). The paper may be organized chronologically, thematically, or by other means. An interpretation of the story by the researcher should culminate in the paper.

Narrative research focuses on a single or narrow participant pool in great detail. Narrative research is not necessarily bound by a progression of steps, as there is a lot of room for researcher choice when conducting and presenting narrative research. The narrative researcher must identify the research topic, determine the type of narrative research, and the appropriate coordinating procedures. The most challenging part of narrative research may be the presentation. For more information regarding narrative research, consider consulting Jean Clandinin and Catherine Riessman.

Ethnography

Ethnography is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of the social and cultural aspects of people's lived experiences. It involves analyzing, studying, describing, and representing people's lived experiences from a social and cultural perspective. Van Maanen (2011) defines ethnographic research as "the study and representation of culture as used by particular people, in particular places, at particular times" (p. 155). Often, ethnographic researchers observe people in a specific culture, such as the Korowai tribe in Papua New Guinea or homeless people in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The ethnographer seeks to present a comprehensive representation of society. Ethnographers primarily utilize participant observations, fieldnote writing, and interviewing as data collection methods, though other data collection forms may be appropriate for ethnographic writing. Like narrative research, ethnography researchers follow core principles and precedents rather than specific steps. Even though these are called steps for conformity, these are basic guidelines for conducting ethnography research and include the following:

Step 1. Identify the people, culture, and/or topic to be explored.

Step 2. Determine the data collection methods best suited to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic.

Step 3. Determine and utilize the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies.

Step 4. Write the research findings.

Steps for Conducting Ethnographic Research

Step 1. Identify the people, culture, and/or topic to be explored. Some ethnography researchers know in advance the people, culture, or topic they want to explore. For many, there may have been a lingering childhood desire to learn about people who have researched the Galapagos Islands. Other researchers may want to know more about K-12 learning regarding artificial intelligence or how communication and culture have changed since the invention of the iPhone. For the ethnographer, there is often a personal desire to conduct this type of research.

Step 2. Determine the data collection methods best suited to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic. The three most utilized data collection methods for ethnographic research are participant observations, fieldnote writing, and interviewing. Participant observations can be strictly observed when the researcher does not interact with the observed, or participant observations may involve the researcher as an active participant in the observations where the researcher interacts with the observed. Varying degrees of participation and observation by the researcher are possible. Observations provide the cultural context where behaviors can be observed and recorded via field notes.

Field notes are written during and about the observation experiences. Field notes are the researcher's way of recording impressions, experiences, and insights gleaned during and following the observations (Harrison, 2018). Field note writing should be viewed as a major non-participatory endeavor that results in robust information regarding the research topic. This is not simply a short diary or memo. Field notes should thoroughly describe the observational experience and include the emotional and sensational responses to the observation as well.

Interviewing is another primary data collection method for ethnography research since the researcher seeks to understand people's lived experiences. Interviews provide an additional layer of detail when used in conjunction with observations as the researcher can analyze the comparison of interview data supplied by the participant and observational data as noted by the researcher. Often, there is a difference between what is said and what is observed.

Step 3. Determine and utilize the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies. As noted previously, there is often a difference between what the researcher observes and what the interview participant says; therefore, interviews should be analyzed with observations and field note data. Interview data should be analyzed by transcribing the data and developing codes and themes. Still, the data analysis should be taken a step further, and comparisons should be made between the interview data, transcriptions, codes, themes, observation data, and field notes.

Step 4. Write the research findings. Writing is essential to ethnographic research since ethnography is produced through the writing process. The findings are a culmination of hard work, written interview notes and transcriptions, data written from observations, and field notes from observations. Data are analyzed, and findings are reported in narrative format to present the social and cultural experiences of the phenomena. The ethnographer aims to accurately represent real-world information based on experiences and knowledge learned throughout the research process (Harrison, 2018). Themes and concepts should emerge during the data analysis process. These themes and concepts are reported in the findings.

Ethnography research focuses on the study of the social and cultural aspects of people's lived experiences. The ethnographer will identify the people, culture, and/or topic to investigate. Appropriate data collection methods and data analysis strategies will be utilized, and the research findings will be written in narrative format. For more information regarding ethnography research, consider consulting David Fetterman and Harry Wolcott.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a form of qualitative research that focuses on generating or discovering a theory regarding a process or action (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A basic definition of qualitative grounded theory research is when the researcher creates a theory or conceptual framework directly grounded on their primary research. It is generally thought of as building theories grounded on data that are systematically collected and analyzed. Corbin and Strauss (1998) define grounded theory as a systematic qualitative research method that uses procedures to develop an inductively derived theory about the research phenomenon. Not all researchers agree on a precise definition of grounded research methodology, but the primary purpose of grounded theory is essentially the same. For this book, **grounded theory** is when the researcher conducts research and generates a theory or conceptual framework directly grounded on their primary research.

Grounded theory is used when existing theories cannot explain the research phenomena. Grounded theory research requires the researcher to delve deep into the research phenomena and determine a rigorous, systematic, and detailed data collection and analysis plan (Saunders et al., 2012).

The basic steps for grounded theory research are loose guidelines rather than a strict formula, which requires a systematic yet flexible approach. Grounded theory research is inductive, which means that the researcher will collect data and draw conclusions based on that data. It is a way to try to make sense of something by making observations (based on data collected) and drawing general conclusions based on that information. According to Saunders et al. (2012), grounded theory helps develop an understanding of phenomena that cannot be explained with existing theories and paradigms. This methodology offers a systematic and rigorous process of data collection and analysis, which allows the phenomena to be studied in detail. Grounded theory research fosters creativity and critical-thinking skills. The four basic steps for conducting grounded theory research follow. Steps for conducting grounded theory research include the following:

Step 1. Determine the best data collection methods applicable to the phenomenon of the research.

- Step 2.** Determine the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies.
- Step 3.** Identify concepts, themes, and/or theories as theoretical saturation is achieved.
- Step 4.** Develop a research statement or theory derived from the data analysis.

Steps for Conducting Grounded Theory Research

Step 1. Determine the best data collection methods applicable to the phenomenon of the research. Qualitative data collection methods may include interviews, focus groups, observations, documents, and other forms of data. Though grounded theory research may consist of qualitative and quantitative research methods, this chapter focuses on qualitative grounded theory methodology. The grounded theory researcher will collect and analyze data to address the research phenomenon. Data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously; each informs and streamlines the other.

Step 2. Determine the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies. For grounded theory research, the researcher will utilize a research process that “comprises a systematic, inductive, and comparative approach for conducting inquiry for the purpose of constructing theory” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 1). The grounded theory researcher gains knowledge during the data collection and analysis phase, and it takes place through discoveries made by investigating a phenomenon. Recall that grounded theory data collection and analysis strategies are intended to be a guide rather than a prescriptive process. Grounded theory methods offer the researcher “a flexible set of inductive strategies for collecting and analyzing qualitative data. These methods emphasize building inductive theories through data analysis” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 82). As data are analyzed, theoretical sampling should follow a continuous development process. Data analysis should include coding and constant comparative analysis, memoing, and theoretical sampling until saturation is achieved. As noted previously, grounded theory is an inductive methodology. Data analysis strategies include the following four phases that overlap and are cyclical in progression:

Qualitative Data Analysis Definitions	
codes	Codes are keywords, phrases, or concepts identified in the transcripts, and coding is used to identify relationships between the words, phrases, and concepts (Claxton & Michael, 2023).
themes	Themes are also known as concepts, are prominent ideas that are identified from the codes (Claxton & Michael, 2023).
categories	Categories are groups of similar concepts (themes) formed to generate a theory
theory	A theory is a collection of explanations generated during the data analysis process that explains the subject (phenomenon) of the research.

Step 3. Develop a research statement or theory derived from the data analysis. The researcher must be familiar with their own theoretical position and existing theories related to the phenomenon of the study. A theory may begin to develop as the researcher attempts to make a connection between the existing theory and the researcher’s primary research. The researcher may write a tentative theory based on their findings, or the researcher may write a theory developed from their findings. Grounded theory researchers “go beyond the data and pre-existing theoretical knowledge by modifying, elaborating upon, or rejecting theory if needed, or putting old ideas together in new ways to examine, understand, and explain the data” (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018, p. 52).

Grounded theory research is when the researcher conducts research and creates a theory or conceptual framework directly grounded on their primary research. The researcher will determine the best data collection

and analysis methods applicable to the phenomenon of the research. The researcher will then develop a research hypothesis statement or theory derived from the data analysis. For more information regarding grounded theory research, consider consulting Barney Glaser, Anselm Strauss, Kathy Charmaz, and Julie Corbin.

Planning and Designing Qualitative Research

The researcher must make many decisions to plan and design a qualitative research study. First, the researcher should determine the research topic and which qualitative research design the researcher intends to employ (phenomenological, case study, narrative, ethnography, or grounded theory). The researcher will also need to position themselves within the research study, which is known as positioning themselves or positionality.

Determine a Research Topic

Many qualitative researchers have a specific area of interest they want to explore further, but others have no idea what they want to research. Either way, determining your research topic is one of the first steps for conducting qualitative research. When determining your topic, consider the participants you will (or will not) have access to. You must have access to participants to conduct qualitative research, and this must be considered when determining your research topic.

One way to determine a topic that needs studying is to read current journal articles about your general topic. For example, suppose your general interest is in special education. In that case, you should read current journals about special education to familiarize yourself with the latest information regarding this topic (this is part of writing a literature review). When reading the journal articles, pay particular attention to the end of the journal articles when the researcher(s) makes recommendations for future research. This may provide insights into suggested research that is needed and may lead to a topic that you can research that you are interested in. The topic needs to be a current social or cultural issue and not one that is outdated or irrelevant.

Choose a Research Design

As noted above, Yin (2014) reported that qualitative research has a variety of approaches, including 12 variants (action research, arts-based research, autoethnography, case study, critical theory, discourse analysis; ethnography, ethnomethodology, grounded theory, narrative inquiry and life history, oral history, and phenomenology). You may choose to utilize any of those 12 approaches; however, only the following are described in this chapter: phenomenology, case study, narrative research, ethnography, and grounded theory. Your chosen approach will help you determine your data collection methods.

Theoretical Framework

A theory is a generalized explanation of defined constructs or ideas that asserts, explains, or predicts relationships, connections, or challenges between or among phenomena. A theory helps to explain how seemingly unrelated phenomena are intertwined to make sense (Kivunja, 2018). Theories may be difficult to understand since they are used to explain phenomena in a new way, but theories can be tested with empirical research methods. The theory explains or predicts the phenomena by explaining the relationships of the variables or constructs of the phenomena.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a **theory** or theories are “found in the literature, and they provide a general explanation of what the researcher hopes to find in a study or a lens through which to view the needs of participants and communities in a study” (p. 18). Bickman and Rog (2009) defined a theory as “a proposed explanation or description of some phenomenon” (p. 436).

Research is typically explained or supported by a theoretical framework. “The theoretical framework is 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” (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 12). Think about it like a framework for a house; it provides the structure upon which everything else is built. It is planned, organized, interconnected, and personally developed for the owner/researcher. It can be rather simple or complex, but it is the frame upon which the literature and the research are built.

Your theoretical framework provides an “explanation of a certain set of observed phenomena in terms of a system of constructs and laws that relate these constructs to each other” (Gall et al., 2006, p. 32). Just like the house frame allows for the rooms to be connected and hallways constructed between those rooms, the theoretical framework provides a systematic understanding of the topic. Remember that this framework enables the entire research study to be evident in each chapter, and it will be integrated throughout. If Maslow’s (1943) motivation theory frames your study, it will be visible in most aspects of the research. It would not make sense to state you are framing your study on Maslow’s work and then spend much of your time discussing the students’ self-efficacy instead of motivation since that would require you to frame your study within the work by Bandura (1977) using his motivation theory.

Theoretical terms that are important for you to understand include the following:

- concepts
- constructs
- variables
- theoretical framework
- conceptual framework

Concepts, constructs, and variables are often used when theories are discussed. These terms need to be clearly defined for further understanding. The first term you need to understand is a concept. **Concepts** are generalized characteristics or ideas that are associated with ideas, people, events, or objects. For example, poverty, a teacher’s attitude, dropping out of school, or an online classroom environment are all concepts. Concepts can be concrete or abstract characteristics. Concepts can be in the actual study or a possibility; they are not limited to the study population or parameters.

The next important term for you to understand is a construct. **Constructs** are broad concepts or models, often abstract, and have theoretical meaning. Constructs are the building blocks of theories. They are study-specific. Constructs often cannot be easily observed. For example, acceptance and resilience are constructs that are not easily observed. Constructs may involve multiple concepts, such as communication skills, which involve passive vocabulary and cultural influences. Constructs are often defined in the study so the readers understand what they mean in the study context.

Another term that needs a clear definition is variable. **Variables** are the concepts or constructs put into measurable form – a concrete, non-abstract form. These constructs can have at least two possible values. For example, two possible values are employment status or class size. Employment status includes employed or unemployed, and class size may vary greatly from one class to another, thus allowing for at least two possible values.

It is vital to distinguish between theoretical and conceptual frameworks since these terms are often obfuscated, though they are related. The **theoretical framework** is founded on established theories and is written to explain the research. These theories are found throughout the scholarly literature and have empirical research that lends them credibility. Researchers will utilize these theories to make new applications to specific study topics.

The **conceptual framework** is the structure that the researcher uses to make logical connections between the concepts of the study to bring understanding to the topic of study. It is the researcher's explanation of the relationships or connections of the study variables to discern how best to approach the study topic. "The conceptual framework offers a logical structure of connected concepts that help provide a picture or visual display of how ideas in a study relate to one another within the theoretical framework" (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 17).

Theory Possibilities

Consider a well-known theorist and theory – Piaget's (1936) theory of cognitive development. As with most theories, Piaget's cognitive development theory was established over time. Piaget studied children and intelligence tests. He made personal observations of his own family and noted that children think and learn differently than adults. The phenomenon of his observations is children's learning. His research led to the well-known stages of cognitive growth for a child. These explanations, which once seemed enlightening, are now part of our vocabulary and have informed much research and practice. In 1981, Kohlberg adapted Piaget's theory to develop his theory of moral development stages, and in 1982, Kegan built on Piaget's theory to understand cognitive development in adults. Current educational practices, such as using manipulatives, discovery learning, and differentiation, are all founded in the work of Piaget.

Piaget's cognitive development theory provided the constructs for Kohlberg's (1981) stages of moral development. The connections between the constructs of both theories help us understand how children learn and why all children do not learn in the same manner. We can predict that if a student has never experienced online learning, they might struggle with learning via a computer. Still, other students with computer experience would more quickly grasp that concept. Additionally, Piaget's cognitive development can be combined with other theories. For instance, it can be combined with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development to demonstrate how the scaffolding or experiential learning process is related and expand those theories more fully.

How to Choose Relevant Theories

A theory defines and explains the constructs or ideas that assert, present, or predict relationships, connections, or challenges between or among your research phenomena. To choose a theory or theories for your research, begin by determining which theories are relevant to your study. To accomplish this, conduct a thorough literature review to discover what theories other researchers have utilized to explain their research. Suppose your general research topic is to understand the influence of online learning on elementary students with attention deficit disorder. In that case, you will read articles about online learning and elementary students with attention deficit disorder. In this reading, you will probably encounter Piaget's (1981) theory on cognitive learning and developmental stages, Skinner's (1966) behavioral theories that address social-emotional communication, and disability theory as explained by Barnes (2003), Denhart (2008), Oliver (1990), and perhaps others. Consider each theory, read more about each theory, review additional articles that utilize these theories, and then consider which theories would best explain and align with your research.

Seminal Works

A **seminal work** is a primary text written by a theorist regarding a specific theory. The seminal work provides a basic understanding of the theory. Most seminal texts can be found online, but some exceptionally primitive theories may only be found in print. Sometimes, these texts are referred to as landmark studies because they laid new foundations, made new assertions, or provided new findings. Galvan and Galvan (2017) emphasized that “it is important to identify the landmark studies and theorists on your topic . . . without at least a passing knowledge of landmark studies, you will not understand the present context for your chosen topic” (p. 35). This is why it is recommended that you review scholarly literature for the theories used by previous researchers and then review the seminal text regarding the specific theories you could choose to include in your research.

Theoretical Lens

Researchers view the research topic through a theoretical lens; thus, it is essential to choose a theory or theories that are related to, and a logical choice for, the topic that you propose to study. When literature reviews are written with a theoretical framework, the topic will be viewed through the theoretical lens of previous research and theories. Since each researcher will conduct this research and present a discussion of the findings, it is important to understand how a theoretical framework contributes to a literature review. Below is a table of theories and theorists prevalent in research. Many other theories are not presented below, and you are encouraged to investigate other theoretical options.

Prevalent Research Theories
adult learning theory by Malcolm Knowles
agenda setting theory by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw
classroom management theory by Rudolf Dreikurs
cognitive dissonance theory by Leon Festinger
collaborative leadership theory by David Chrislip and Randee Larson
college readiness by David Conley
constructivist theory by Jerome Bruner
critical disability theory by Multiple theorists, dependent on usage.
ecological systems theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner
hierarchy of needs by Abraham Maslow
measurement of intelligence theory by Binet and Simon
multiple intelligences by Howard Gardner
observational learning theory by Albert Bandura
online collaborative learning Theory by Spiro, Feltovitch, and Coulson
self-determination theory by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan
self-efficacy theory by Albert Bandura
expectancy violation theory by Judee K. Burgoon
social development theory by Lev Vygotsky
social learning theory by Albert Bandura
sociocultural learning theory by Lev Vygotsky

Prevalent Research Theories
socioemotional development by Erik Erikson
theory of learning by Lev Vygotsky
transformational leadership theory by Bernard Bass and James Downtown

You may recognize many of these theories, but you may never have had a reason to write while utilizing a theory. Writing using a theory can be challenging, but, as a researcher, it is important to understand how to view research through a theoretical lens. Again, other theories are available and acceptable, and you should investigate other possibilities. Choosing an appropriate theory, or theories, for your research is critical since the research will be led, explained, and influenced by the theoretical framework.

Position Yourself in the Research

Topics with personal significance and meaning to researchers are often more carefully researched than topics of little or no personal value. However, it is also important that research is not too personal or involves excessive emotional significance for the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), the researcher needs to understand their position in the research. Human instruments have shortcomings and biases that can have an impact on the study, but many real-world phenomena topics in qualitative studies cannot be measured by external instruments, which is why human instruments are needed to make inferences about the participants' experiences.

Researcher positionality expresses the researcher's motivation for conducting the study. In qualitative research, the researcher is the human instrument. This means the qualitative researcher must fully know how their position supports the research (Xu & Storr, 2012). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the researcher is the main instrument for data collection and analysis, and since qualitative research is interpretive by nature, it is essential for the researcher to be aware of and avoid bias when collecting and reporting data. Yin (2014) further contends that case study researchers are especially prone to bias because they are familiar with the research topic at the onset of the study. That familiarity may compel the researcher to reinforce information they know about the topic and avoid information that may be contrary to their understanding.

Philosophical Assumptions

In qualitative research, there are four basic philosophical assumptions that qualitative researchers must be aware of and understand. In this book, these four philosophical assumptions are introduced. **Philosophy** in research uses our own beliefs and ideas that inform our research. **Assumptions** are beliefs and ideas that we assume. **Philosophical assumptions** are our own beliefs and ideas that we assume about a research topic and are used to inform our research, whether advertently or inadvertently. The four philosophical assumptions introduced for qualitative research are ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological.

Ontological: An ontological assumption is an idea that questions when something is real as it is constructed from the individual's mind (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Axiological: An axiological assumption is when the researcher acknowledges that their values are biases are present in the research and discusses them within the research (Creswell, 2013)

Epistemological: An epistemological assumption is when the qualitative researcher tries to maximize their understanding of their participants by experiencing the participant's lived experiences and blending what the researcher knows with the life experiences of the participant in the least biased way (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Methodological: A methodological assumption is when the researcher uses inductive judgment, studies the research topic, and uses an emerging design by revisiting the research design and experiences (Creswell, 2013).

This is a brief introduction to assumptions, and that is by design. More details will be provided in a later chapter regarding philosophical assumptions.

Conclusion

In this introduction to qualitative research chapter, qualitative research was defined. The five qualitative designs were introduced. These five designs included phenomenological, case study, narrative, ethnography, and grounded theory. Planning and designing a qualitative study were also briefly described, including theoretical information, positioning yourself in the research, and philosophical assumptions.

Chapter Highlights

Qualitative researchers talk with and observe people to understand their perspective of life more fully.

Qualitative researchers seek to understand and present the perspectives of people who have experienced a phenomenon.

The rigor of qualitative research is expressed through the researcher's interpretation and presentation of the data.

Qualitative research is defined as the research of life as it exists and is lived in the real world; it is the study of the day-to-day experiences of life, and the qualitative researcher seeks to discover and describe the participant's perspective.

A phenomenological study is a form of qualitative research that seeks to discover and describe the lived experiences of the participants, including the political, historical, and social contexts.

For **phenomenological research**, the researcher will delve into the thoughts, interpretations, emotions, and opinions of the participants to provide a culminating conception of a combination of the lived experiences of all research participants.

The differences in phenomenological research are represented by **hermeneutical phenomenology**, which focuses on the researcher's interpretations of the data, and **transcendental phenomenology**, which concentrates on describing the details of the actual experiences of the participants apart from the researcher's biases and personal opinions.

Steps to Conduct Phenomenological Research

Step 1. Determine a topic or phenomenon to be investigated

Step 2. Select participants who are well-informed regarding the topic or phenomenon

Step 3. Choose data collection methods best suited to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's perspective of the topic or phenomenon

Step 4. Define and implement the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies

Step 5. Present the findings and conclusions

Steps to Conduct Case Study Research

Step 1. Identify the case or cases to be explored (must be bounded).

Step 2. Determine the data collection methods best suited to gain an in-depth understanding of the case(s).

Step 3. Determine and utilize the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies.

Step 4. Present the findings and conclusions (interpretation).

Steps to Conduct Narrative Research

Step 1. Identify the research topic.

Step 2. Determine the type of narrative research to conduct.

Step 3. Determine the appropriate coordinating procedures.

Step 4. Present the narrative account.

Steps to Conduct Ethnographic Research

Step 1. Identify the people, culture, and/or topic to be explored.

Step 2. Determine the data collection methods best suited to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic.

Step 3. Determine and utilize the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies.

Step 4. Write the research findings.

Steps to Conduct Grounded Theory Research

Step 1. Determine the best data collection methods applicable to the phenomenon of the research.

Step 2. Determine the appropriate coordinating data analysis strategies.

Step 3. Identify concepts, themes, and/or theories as theoretical saturation is achieved.

Step 4. Develop a research statement or theory derived from the data analysis.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a **theory** or theories are “found in the literature, and they provide a general explanation of what the researcher hopes to find in a study or a lens through which to view the needs of participants and communities in a study” (p. 18).

Concepts are generalized characteristics or ideas that are associated with ideas, people, events, or objects.

Constructs are broad concepts or models, often abstract, and have theoretical meaning.

Variables are the concepts or constructs put into measurable form – a concrete, non-abstract form.

The **theoretical framework** is founded on established theories and is written to explain research.

A **seminal work** is the primary text written by the theorist regarding a specific theory.

Philosophy in research uses our own beliefs and ideas that inform our research. **Assumptions** are beliefs and ideas that we assume. **Philosophical assumptions** are our own beliefs and ideas that we assume about a research topic and are used to inform our research, whether advertently or inadvertently.

How to Write the Front Matter



Chapter Outline

Introduction
Outline of a Qualitative Manuscript
How to Write the Front Matter
How to Write the Title Page
How to Write the Approval Page
How to Write the Abstract
How to Write the Table of Contents
Conclusion
Chapter Highlights

Objectives

By the end of this chapter, the reader will be able to:

- Describe the contents of the front matter of a qualitative manuscript
- Explain what should be included on the title page of a qualitative manuscript
- Explain the contents of the approval page
- Write an Abstract
- Describe the purpose and contents of acknowledgments
- Describe the purpose and contents of the dedication
- Construct a Table of Contents

Key Terms

- Abstract
- Approval page
- Table of Contents
- Title Page

Introduction

A qualitative research manuscript includes many sections that must be completed thoroughly and that must be written in a business-professional manner. This chapter begins with the blank outline for a qualitative dissertation. The purpose of this book is to help the novice researcher complete this entire outline as a means of conducting qualitative research. The dissertation begins with the Front Matter. The Front Matter includes the following sections: Title Page, Approval Page, Abstract, Acknowledgements (optional), Dedication (optional), Table of Contents, List of Tables, List of Figures, and List of Abbreviations. The Front Matter is a critical part of the qualitative research process since it introduces the reader to the research. A good first impression is essential for an effective manuscript; thus, it is important to be deliberate in presenting the front matter in a manner that creates a professional appearance that makes a good first impression.

0:00 / 1:04



Outline of a Qualitative Manuscript

Front Matter

Title Page

Approval Page

Abstract

Copyright Page

Dedication (optional)

Acknowledgments (optional)

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Background

Problem Statement

Purpose Statement

Significance of the Study

Research Questions

Definitions

Summary

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

Theoretical Framework

Related Literature

Summary

Chapter Three: Method

Overview

Research Design

Research Questions

Role of the Researcher

Trustworthiness

Setting and Participants

Ethical Considerations

Procedures

Summary

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

Description of Participants

Codes and Themes Development

Results

Summary

Chapter Five: Discussion

Overview

Discussion

Implications

Limitations

Recommendations for Future Research

Summary

References

Appendix

How to Write the Front Matter

The front matter for a qualitative manuscript includes the following: Title Page, Approval Page, Abstract, Dedication (optional), Acknowledgements (optional), Table of Contents, List of Tables, List of Figures, and List of Abbreviations. The first page of the qualitative manuscript is the Title page.

How to Write the Title Page

The title page of a qualitative manuscript offers a first impression of the study, which signifies that the presentation is important. The title page for a qualitative manuscript should have a professional format. It should not be whimsical or elementary looking, even if the topic of the study is elementary education. This is a professional research paper, and it is based on the latest research and data available about a specific topic. Again, this is a serious document, and it should be presented as a professional document.

The **Title Page** of a qualitative manuscript reveals the title of the study, the researcher's name, the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree section, the degree, the college or university name, and the year the research was completed.

Title of the Study: The title of the study should be written in bold, title case, and it should be derived from the central research question. For the title of the research, the research question should be converted from a question to a statement. For example, if the research question was "What is the present state of students' grades versus their learning orientations in Virginia?" then the title could be "A Qualitative Phenomenological Analysis of the Grading Structure's Effects on Student Grade and Learning Orientations in Virginia."

Researcher's Name: The researcher's name should simply be written as the researcher's first, middle (if desired), and last name. There should not be any indication of a degree earned. For example, it is not appropriate to write "Dr. Student Name," "Student Name, EdD," or "Student Name, PhD."

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree: This section of the Title Page indicates to the reader the purpose for conducting this research in terms of a degree earned. For example, this section could be written for a Doctor of Philosophy degree as follows:

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

College or University: This section should include the full name of the college or university issuing the degree. This is not the site or location where the research was conducted.

Date: Only include the year the research was concluded. Do not include the month and day.

See the Title Page example that follows.

**A Qualitative Phenomenological Analysis of the Grading Structure's Effects on Student
Grade and Learning Orientations in Virginia**

by
Researchers' Name

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

College/University Name
2024

Checklist: Title Page

- ☐ title is derived from the research question
- ☐ title is written in bold, size 12 font
- ☐ includes the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree information in the format provided
- ☐ includes college or university where the degree was issued
- ☐ includes the year the report was completed or presented

How to Write the Approval Page

The Approval Page of a qualitative research manuscript is the same as the Title Page with one addition. The Approval Page includes all information on the Title Page and the name(s) and degree earned by the committee members. The approval page indicates the name and position of the persons who approved the research.

The **Approval Page** reveals the title of the study, the researcher's name, the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree section, the degree, the college or university name, the year the research was completed, and the chair(s) and degree.

Title of the Study: The title of the study should be written in bold, title case, and it should be derived from the central research question. For the title of the research, the research question should be converted from a question to a statement. For example, if the research question was "What is the present state of students' grades versus their learning orientations in Virginia?" then the title could be "A Qualitative Phenomenological Analysis of the Grading Structure's Effects on Student Grade and Learning Orientations in Virginia."

Researcher's Name: The researcher's name should simply be written as the researcher's first, middle (if desired), and last name. There should not be any indication of a degree earned included in this section. For example, it is not appropriate to write "Dr. Student Name," "Student Name, EdD," or "Student Name, PhD."

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree: This section of the approval page indicates to the reader the purpose of conducting this research in terms of a degree earned. This section should be written as

follows:

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

College or University: This section should include the full name of the college or university issuing the degree. This is not the site or location where the research was conducted.

Date: State the year the research was concluded. Do not include the month and day.

Approved by: This section includes the name or names of the chair who approved the research. The name(s) of the committee member(s) should be written to include the first name, last name, degree earned, and position on the committee. For example:

Approved by:

Marie Mallory, PhD, Committee Chair

Bunnie Claxton, EdD, Methodologist

See the Approval Page example that follows.

A Qualitative Phenomenological Analysis of the Grading Structure's Effects on Student Grade and Learning Orientations in Virginia

by

First and Last Name

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

College/University Name

2024

Approved by:

Marie Mallory, PhD, Committee Chair

Bunnie Claxton, EdD, Methodologist

Checklist: Approval Page

- ☐ title is derived from the research question
- ☐ title is written in bold, size 12 font
- ☐ includes the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree information in the format provided
- ☐ includes college or university where the degree was issued
- ☐ includes the year the research was completed or presented
- ☐ includes the first and last name of the committee chair followed by their earned degree
- ☐ includes committee member, if applicable

How to Write the Abstract

The **Abstract** is a summary of the research and is the first section people will read. The Abstract will not be fully developed until the research has concluded since some of this information will not be known until that time. For the proposal, only include information currently known regarding the research, such as the background, significance of the research, research question(s), and data collection and analysis methods.

The abstract should be approximately 250 words, as brevity makes the summary more appealing to readers (APA, 2020). The first sentence of the abstract should not be indented. The abstract should not include citations or direct quotes. The abstract should be written using the following format:

The purpose of this qualitative (design) study was to (explore or explain) (insert the topic). The problem was that (insert the specific problem). The rationale for the research was (state the rationale). The research question was (state the research question(s)). The data collection methods for this research included (state the forms of data collection used). Data were analyzed by (concisely state the qualitative data analysis strategies).

The Abstract should begin by specifically stating the research design (qualitative), research method (i.e., phenomenological), and the topic of the research in a concise sentence. The purpose of the research will remain constant throughout the entire manuscript since the purpose of the study remains the same throughout the research process. The abstract should specifically begin by stating, “The purpose of this qualitative (design) research was to...” The purpose statement may be followed by the problem statement and then the rationale for the research. The rationale of the study should include one or two sentences stating why the research needed to be conducted. Again, this should specifically state, “The rationale for this research was...” After the rationale is presented, the research question should be included. Following the research question, the methods for data collection should be mentioned, as well as concisely written and appropriate data analysis strategies. See the Abstract example that follows.

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research was to explore the experiences of students regarding their grades and learning orientations. The problem is how the grading system affects students’ grades and learning orientations in Virginia. The rationale for this study was to build on previous research that has identified that learning-oriented students are better prepared for success in the educational environment than grade-oriented students, while most students report being grade-oriented. The research questions for the study are as follows: (a) How do

students describe their grades and learning orientations, and (b) What factors of grading systems are perceived by students as having an impact on their grades and learning orientations? The data collection method for this project included interviews and a focus group with current students from a variety of institutions and fields of study and a document analysis. Once collected, the data were analyzed using Claxton and Mallory’s (2024) qualitative data analysis process, which allowed the researcher to triangulate the data to determine four themes related to the grading system that students expressed influenced their grades and learning orientations. The four themes included assignments, grading practices, assessments, and relationships. According to the constructs of the theory of interest and the self-determination theory, each of these themes related to how students are graded inherently and invisibly influences how students perceive and engage with the learning environment.

Keywords: grades, grading system, grade orientation, learning orientation, learning

Checklist: Abstract

- ☐ includes the research design
- ☐ includes the research method
- ☐ includes the purpose of the study
- ☐ includes the rationale
- ☐ includes the research questions
- ☐ includes the method for data collection and corresponding data analysis
- ☐ includes approximately five to seven keywords
- ☐ is approximately 250 words
- ☐ does not include or need a citation
- ☐ is not indented
- ☐ is written in accurate tense

How to Write the Table of Contents

The **Table of Contents** is a list, including page numbers, of the major sections of the manuscript; it should be simple yet professional-looking. The Table of Contents should contain, at a minimum, level one and two headings. The major headings should include the ones in the figure that follows, but these headings may vary slightly based on the specific research study and institutional requirements. The chapters include Chapter One: Introduction, Chapter Two: Literature Review, Chapter Three: Method, Chapter Four: Findings, and Chapter Five: Discussion. The Table of Contents example that follows provides the general idea for a qualitative research manuscript, though these may vary per institution. See the Table of Contents example that follows.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Copyright Page	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgments	vi
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
List of Abbreviations	x
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Overview	1
Background	1
Problem Statement	2
Purpose Statement	2
Significance of the Study	2
Research Questions	2
Definitions	3
Summary	3
Chapter Two: Literature Review	4
Overview	4
Theoretical Framework	4
Related Literature	4
Summary	4
Chapter Three: Method	5
Overview	5
Research Design	5
Research Questions	5
Role of the Researcher	5
Trustworthiness	5

Setting and Participants	6
Ethical Considerations	6
Procedures	6
Summary	8
Chapter Four: Findings	9
Overview	9
Description of Participants	9
Codes and Theme Development	9
Results	9
Summary	10
Chapter Five: Discussion	11
Overview	11
Discussion	11
Implications	11
Limitations	11
Recommendations for Future Research.....	12
Summary	12
References	13
Appendix A: Consent Form	14
Appendix B: Interview Questions	14
<i>Continue as needed.</i>	

Checklist: Table of Contents

Includes the following headings:

- ☐ Chapter One: Introduction
- ☐ Chapter Two: Literature Review
- ☐ Chapter Three: Method
- ☐ Chapter Four: Findings
- ☐ Chapter Five: Discussion

- ☐ References
- ☐ Appendices
- ☐ includes all level-one and level-two headings
- ☐ includes level-three headings, if appropriate
- ☐ is interactive, if required by the institution

Conclusion

The front matter of a qualitative manuscript is a lot of information in relatively few pages. The information needs to be written professionally and concisely to communicate as much as possible in as few words as are necessary. The front matter begins with a professionally presented Title Page. The Title Page is followed by a concise Table of Contents with level one and level two headings. At the culmination of the study, the Abstract will be written to include a brief synopsis of the study with findings. The front matter offers a first impression; thus, this is important information that must be presented professionally, effectively, and concisely.

Chapter Highlights

The front matter for a qualitative manuscript includes the following: Title Page, Approval Page, Abstract, Dedication (optional), Acknowledgements (optional), Table of Contents, List of Tables, List of Figures, and List of Abbreviations.

The title page of a qualitative manuscript offers a first impression of the study, which signifies that the presentation is important.

The **Title Page** of a qualitative manuscript reveals the title of the study, the researcher's name, the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree section, the degree, the college or university name, and the year the research was completed.

The **Approval Page** reveals the title of the study, the researcher's name, the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree section, the degree, the college or university name, the year the research was completed, and the chair(s) and degree.

The **Abstract** is a summary of the research and is the first section people will read.

The Abstract will not be fully developed until the research has concluded since some of this information will not be known until that time.

The **Table of Contents** is a list, including page numbers, of the major sections of the manuscript; it should be simple yet professional looking.

How to Write Chapter One: Introduction



Chapter Outline

Introduction
How to Write the Overview
How to Write the Background
How to Write the Problem Statement
How to Write the Purpose Statement
How to Write the Significance of the Study
How to Write the Research Questions
How to Write the Definitions
How to Write the Summary
Conclusion
Chapter Highlights

Objectives

By the end of this chapter, the reader will be able to:

- Explicate the significance of the study
- List the necessary elements of a manuscript Introduction
- Delineate the difference between a problem statement and a purpose statement
- Explain how to write research questions
- Write definitions for a research study

Key Terms

- background
- problem statement
- purpose statement
- research questions
- significance of the study

Introduction

Chapter One: Introduction of your research manuscript provides a comprehensive introduction to your research and includes the background, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, and definitions relevant to your research. The information you provide should be clear and well-defined. In the opening paragraph(s), you will introduce your topic in a manner that generates interest. In this chapter, you will learn how to write each section of Chapter One: Introduction for your research manuscript. Chapter One: Introduction includes the following headings:

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview
Background
Problem Statement
Purpose Statement
Significance of the Study
Research Questions
Definitions
Summary

To begin to write Chapter One, you will write an Overview. This is the first section needed for Chapter One: Introduction.

How to Write the Overview

The Overview for the Introduction chapter should include a presentation of the main headings in Chapter One of your manuscript. The Overview paragraph exists to communicate to the reader the information located in this chapter in a concise manner. The first sentence in the Overview paragraph presents the method (which is qualitative), the design (phenomenological, case study, narrative, ethnography, or grounded theory), and the topic of the study. Next, the reader is introduced to the remaining sections in this chapter. The Overview paragraph should consist of approximately four sentences. Do not include information that requires a citation. The purpose of the Overview is to provide the reader with the purpose of the research and the contents of this chapter. Do not use this section to elaborate on the details of your research, as this is meant to be an overview of Chapter One of your dissertation and not an Overview of your research topic. The following headings should be introduced in the Overview: Background, Problem Statement, Purpose Statement, Significance of the Study, Research Questions, Definitions, and Summary. See the Overview example that follows.

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to explore the experiences of students regarding how they have been graded and assessed. The problem is that the grading system negatively affects students' grades and learning orientations. This chapter serves as the introduction to the study. This chapter includes the Background, Problem Statement, Purpose Statement, Significance of the Study, Research Questions, and Definitions relevant to the research, and it concludes with a Summary.

Checklist: Overview

- ☐ uses a level-one heading to cue the reader
- ☐ begins with the purpose, including the method and design
- ☐ briefly notes the topic or problem being investigated
- ☐ presents the major headings of Chapter One: Introduction
- ☐ is approximately four sentences

How to Write the Background

The Background section introduces your problem to the reader and provides any necessary background information regarding the research topic. The goal of this section of the manuscript is to provide the reader with an overview of the history of the issue and how it has been studied. You should set forth a review of your area of research, including relevant history, previous studies on the issue, and current information. If possible, you should use this opportunity to provide the root or cause of the problem, then work forward to current research or literature. This should clarify the importance of your manuscript. While you will elaborate on the significance of your study later in this chapter, it is imperative that you establish the relevance of your study at this point through the historical literature. A well-written Background section will explain the background and describe the history of your research problem and lead to an easily established problem statement. You may