

# Chapter I. What are Research Methods?

Like all research projects, this text begins with questions: What is research? Who does research? Why do research?

Research is the systematic asking of questions and congruent use of methods to learn answers to interesting, important questions. Whether or not your research has been purposeful in the past, *you* do research all the time.

When you try to decide which deodorant is most effective by trying different brands, you're doing research. When you ask friends for recommendations about where to go to dinner, you're doing research. When you experiment with different routes to find the best way to get to work, you're doing research. And why? Because you want to know. Because you want to try to know. But such information-gathering often takes particular routes, requires specific tools, and is measured very differently. That's where research methods come in. If you buy deodorant, you test it on yourself, a human subject. If you ask friends for dinner reservations, you might send a group text that acts as a survey, see who weighs in, and find out if their opinions match. When you drive a particular route, you are engaging with a particular site and measuring time. Each of these ways of using particular tools to answer a question you have are different kinds of research methods.

**Research methods** are the tools, instruments, practices, processes—in-  
sert whatever making metaphor you prefer—that allow you to answer questions of interest and contribute to a **critical conversation**, or a grouping of recognized ideas about that interest. The critical conversation comes out of our preliminary discovery about a particular question or set of questions—discovery work known as **rhetorical invention**, or a starting place for thinking, researching, and writing. Just as an entrepreneur might invent an as-seen-on-TV product that comes out of months of consumer observations and materials testing, writers invent their ideas through gathering data in particular and diverse ways. That gathering place is the locus of research methods, which we separate out in this book as working with sources

(Chapter 3), working with words (Chapter 4), working with people (Chapter 5), working with places and things (Chapter 6), and working with visuals (Chapter 7). Here, it's important to note that the word “methods” is derived from the Greek terms *meta-* (above, beyond) and *-hodos* (routes, pathways).

### Try This: Preview Your Awareness of Research Methods (15 minutes)


Think about the ways you've used different methods to solve problems and answer questions in your life, then begin to apply those experiences to your understanding of research methods:

1. Make brief lists of ways/tools/methods you know of (or make up a method—be creative!) to
  - a. **work with sources** (the focus of Chapter 3 in this book). As a starting point, you might include different library databases you have accessed, or you might note various libraries you have visited—what else?
  - b. **work with words or texts** (the focus of Chapter 4 in this book). As a starting point, you might include different patterns you might look for in a text, like how many times a word appears or how many times it appears in combination with a related word—what else?
  - c. **work with people** (the focus of Chapter 5 in this book). As a starting point, you might consider that talking with folks individually is just one of the many ways of learning about them. What are some other ways to learn about people, their behaviors, and their opinions?
  - d. **work with places and things** (the focus of Chapter 6). As a starting point, consider how the resources you can access at your university and the spaces you inhabit in your daily life impact your experience at the university. How might you systematically catalogue such observations?
  - e. **work with visuals** (the focus of Chapter 7 in this book). As a starting point, you might just consider the visuals you have come across in the day so far. What were they? What did they communicate? How did they impact you? How can visuals share information about research, and how might they be the subject of a research project?
2. Test your invention work by turning to each chapter and scanning the methods we survey. Note, in particular, where we have given name to a method you identified but did not have a term for, where we have overlaps, where you identified an idea that we have not listed. The methods we consider in this text are just a starting point, and you may find that you need to combine them to get answers you're interested in, you may need to look for methods outside the text, or you may need to design a new method to accommodate your project.

Considered with this in mind, research methods train researchers on the available routes and pathways to generating new knowledge. Through writing and delivery (circulation), researchers and the texts they produce both participate meaningfully in and also continue to shape research conversations (i.e., what is known and what is knowable). Our approach in this text recognizes that you may have research questions about different areas of interest, so it is important to have access to multiple methods that might effectively lead you to a satisfying answer to your research question.

The thinking and decisions about research that we will ask you to make in this text are complex. Often textbooks are intended to boil down ideas to their simplest parts, but we are purposeful in offering complexity, both because we know students are smart and can make sense of it, and because interesting research is complex. You won't initially end up with clean, clear, easy answers, but that is by design. Real research is messy and requires rethinking. It often also includes periods of not-knowing, which can be uncomfortable. Get ready to take risks, to experiment, and to not find the answer on the first try.

The process the preceding “Try This” asks you to recall—that of identifying interesting questions, matching appropriate methods, considering possible answers, and reflecting on this process to improve it in future iterations—is the process of conducting research. In this text, we will encourage you to tap into this curiosity, innovation, and reflection and deploy it systematically in your academic research writing projects. As students you have the opportunity to contribute to our understanding of the world through your research. Instead of simply asking you to read what others have learned through research (which is also very important!), in this text we ask you to jump in right away and participate in knowledge-making. We will alternate between **invention**—opportunities for you to try out informal writing and activities related to your research question—and **delivery**\*—opportunities for you to develop specific writing products that get you closer to answering your research question. We will also ask you to compose in multiple genres (proposals, memos, literature reviews, maps, etc.) and modes (visual, written, oral, aural), a recognition that research takes many forms and relies on multiple senses.



We often spend a lot of time on delivery—the product of our reading, writing, and researching—but in this text we ask you to rebalance that attention to invention—starting points for reading, writing, and researching processes.



Even though you may have been taught that writing proceeds in a straight line—from freewriting to outlining to drafting—research shows that as we write, we move between and among these phases. Writing—and research—is far more like a tornado than a straight line.

## ■ Uncertainty and Curiosity

Research does not start with a thesis statement. It starts with a question. And though research is **recursive**,\* which means that you will move back and forth between various stages in your research and writing process, developing an effective question might in itself be the most important part of the research process. Because there's really no point in doing a research project if you already know the answer. That is boring. But it is how we are often taught to do research: we decide what we're going to argue, we look for those things that support that argument, and then we write up the thing that we knew from the outset. If that sounds familiar, we suggest that you scrap that plan.

Instead, we suggest approaching research with an orientation of openness, ready and willing to be surprised, to change your mind. Of course, you never approach research in a vacuum. You probably have ideas about whatever it is that you're working on. You probably have thoughts about what the answers are to your research questions, and that is as it should be, but that statement of belief should not be where you start.

### **Try This: Consider Everyday Contexts You Have Engaged in Research (15 minutes)**

Take a moment to think about the many occasions when you have gathered information to answer a question outside of an academic context (i.e., What is the most effective deodorant? Where is the best place to eat? What is the fastest route home?):

1. First, make a list of some of these everyday questions you have identified and the answers you have come up with in your research.
2. Select one that is still interesting to you—one that you may have answered but suspect there are more answers to or one that the answer you identified was only partial.
3. Note the method or tool you selected to answer the question.
4. Make a list of other methods you might employ to answer your original question.
5. Reflect on how identifying alternative research methods might lead you to different answers to your original question, then make a new research plan.

We hope you cultivate an exploratory motive, an orientation of openness, and a willingness to learn. Adopting such a disposition is your work. Get ready to find data that conflicts with what you have come to know about a particular issue. You might even think about your thesis statement as the last thing that you develop in your research project. *Let curiosity drive you forward in your work.* Research is really only worth engaging in if you learn something from it.

We often think about research as knowing, but it's really about the *making* of knowledge(s), the movement from not knowing to beginning to know, figuring things out, trying to solve or sort out tricky problems. At the end of an effective research project, we usually have more questions than we started with. Sure, we answer the initial question (if all goes well), but that process of building knowledge usually leads to more questions and helps us recognize what we don't know.

Developing a research orientation includes seeing the world around you as abundant with research opportunities. Harness your curiosity, embrace uncertainty, and begin looking for researchable questions.

### **Try This: Make a List of Curios (30 minutes)**

Reflect on times that you've gotten wrapped up in something—when you looked away from the clock and suddenly two hours had passed. What were you doing? Cooking, reading, engaging in a good conversation, playing a game, watching tv, hiking? Identify that experience and consider the following questions:

- What was it that made time fly?
- How might you capture that energy in a research experience?

Now make a curio cabinet of sorts. A curio is a special, mysterious object that inspires curiosity. Cabinets of curiosities were popularized in Europe in the late sixteenth century. They featured items from abroad and unique artifacts from the natural world. Such spaces allowed collectors to assemble and display collections that catalogued their interests and travels and that inspired awe in their reception. Create a curio cabinet for yourself, either by assembling a collection of artifacts that describe your interests, composing an image that represents your curiosities, or developing a textual representation of questions that interest you.

No matter where your research and writing take you—in terms of major, interest, or profession—it’s useful to consistently reflect on what, why, and how you’re conducting research at each step in the process. This attention to thinking about your thinking is called **metacognition**. This process may sound exhausting, and it can be, especially at first, but being metacognitive about your research will help you **transfer** your learning into new contexts. Having this orientation toward your research ensures that you have **intention** in each step you take. The more you practice this approach to research, the easier it gets so that it eventually becomes instinctual.

## ■ Rhetorical Foundations of Research

What we have described thus far is a **rhetorical approach** to the research process. Derived from classical Greek influences, the five ancient **canons** of rhetoric include **invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery**. In the context of writing and research, these long established, foundational concepts also go by other names, such as pre-writing, organization, mechanics and grammar, process, and circulation of a research product. We want to keep in mind these qualities of effective communication throughout the chapter, but we’ll spend significant time with invention and delivery—canons that we think often get pushed aside or treated as afterthoughts in many approaches to research and research-based writing and that we pay particular attention to in this text.

As you familiarize yourself with an issue and the way scholars have talked about it, take note of the specific ways they talk about the issue and consider why that is. This is how you develop a rhetorical awareness of the ways in which research is constructed. So when you read, read like a researcher: consider both *what* is said about an issue and *how* it is said. Identify the **rhetorical situation** of the piece of writing; this includes the **context** in which it is written, the **audience** for whom it is written, and its **purpose**.

In this book, we aim to familiarize you with a range of research genres. We begin here with a research proposal, but throughout this book we also high-

light other research genres that may be more or less familiar to you: literature reviews, coding schemas, annotated maps, research memos, slide decks, and posters. Each time you encounter a new genre, we encourage you to place it in its communicative context: What is the reason to compose this way? What need does it fulfill for its audience? What situation is it most suited to? What communication problem does it solve? We hope that working through research genres in this way will also help you understand your own research process more fully.

### **Try This: Go on a Scavenger Hunt to Identify Genres in “The Wild” (30 minutes)**

With a partner or two, walk around identifying, photographing, documenting, and analyzing genres in your midst. If you're at a university, you might see posters, signs, and bulletin boards. If you're at home, you'll see different genres, and if you're at a coffee shop, you'll see yet another set of genres.

Consider this: one genre found in a coffee shop is a menu. It might be on a board, or there may be paper menus that each customer can pick up, but this genre is reliably found in coffee shops throughout the US. Wherever you are, be attentive to the genres that surround you by doing the following:

1. Make a list of the genres (the kind of texts) that make up your immediate environment.
2. Choose one genre that interests you and consider its rhetorical situation:
  - a. What is the context in which it is written?
  - b. Who is its audience?
  - c. What is the genre's purpose?
3. More broadly, consider the genre's communicative context:
  - a. How is this particular example of the genre composed?
  - b. What communication problem does it solve?

How might such rhetorical knowledge about genre impact your approach to matching research questions to methods and delivery?

## Research Example: Student Writing Habits

Let's use an example to illustrate what happens at the beginning of a research project. Like us, you might be interested in student writing habits. In particular, you might research *when* (and why) students begin a research project: Do they begin when it is assigned? Two weeks in advance? The night before?

Other researchers have looked at this issue, so you might begin by examining what they have found. These **secondary sources**, the findings of other thinkers, constitute the critical conversation and might give you ideas for how you might proceed in your own project (for a method to use for tracing sources and their connections, see Chapter 3). Thus, examining this conversation might function as **pre-writing**, **brainstorming**, or **invention** for your research. Rhetorician Kenneth Burke uses the metaphor of a party to describe how critical conversations work: When you arrive at the party, the conversations have been going on for a while, and guests take turns articulating their points of view, sometimes talking over each other, sometimes interrupting, laughing, disagreeing, and agreeing. After listening for a while, you understand the conversation and have something to say, so you chime in, maybe building on what a previous guest has said or contrasting your ideas with a friend's. Finally, you're tired and have to head home, but when you do, the sounds of the party are still ringing in your ears, and the conversation will clearly continue.

But if you're conducting **primary research** that moves beyond **working with sources**, the key is to next find out what this particular issue looks like in your local context, or in a specific context in which you're interested. Most likely, scholars have not examined the issue of when students begin their assignments at your institution, and many factors may impact your context that might make your findings different than what you've learned from other scholars. Research methods give researchers recognizable ways to continue the party conversation started by secondary sources.

So the next step is effective **research design**. You might articulate this plan in a **research proposal**, further detailed at the end of this chapter. When you




are beginning a new research project, the design is expected to be mixed up and messy, because oftentimes you are sorting through many different possibilities. Thus, we encourage you to notice and to write about the messiness of an emerging research design, pausing often to pose the following questions: What are you wondering about *now*?\* and, How are these curiosities connecting, drawing your attention to matters you hadn't considered before? While it's important to notice these inklings as you go, many effective researchers also write about them as a way to record (to help with memory) and focus. The activity of writing while researching demands patience and persistence, and yet the emerging research design will be magnitudes more refined in later stages as a result.

Design your research project so that your questions, methods, data, findings, and conclusions match up and so that you select or develop **primary source data** that will be most useful for your particular interest. For instance, if you only have data for about 30 students on campus, you can't generalize about how *all students* approach the writing process. If you only know when these students start working on a given writing project, you won't know why they started at that particular time. This doesn't mean the information you have isn't useful; it just means that you need to stay close to your data and only make sense of the information you have. Make note of things you want to know and wish you had more data about so you can develop the project if the opportunity arises.

For this research project on timing in student writing projects, you might develop a survey that asks students when they begin their research project as well as a series of related questions about motivation and timing. If you design a survey that gives students choices to select answers that range from "I begin a project when it is assigned" to "I begin a project the morning that it's due," you will develop **quantitative** data, or representative numbers, that answer your question. If you're interested in longer, more nuanced answers, you might also provide open-ended questions on your survey, and you'll develop both quantitative and **qualitative** data, or non-numeric data not organized according to a specific, numerical pattern.

A **survey** develops data that might be easily counted and categorized and can be offered to many folks. But you might be interested in more specific,



Writing is a thinking process, not just a communication process. Integrate writing into your research process as a method for thinking through your ideas.

extensive qualitative data than what you can gather through a survey. Your interest might be not just when students start a project, but also why they start at that specific time and if that starting time is a habit or if it depends on what they're writing about or in which class it is assigned. If these are your interests, it might be more effective to work with people (see Chapter 6) to develop an **interview protocol** or a **case-study** approach, methods that would require you to ask fewer people about their study habits but would allow you to develop a deeper understanding of each individual student's writing habits. One isn't necessarily better or worse. Like all research methods, each approach provides different data and different opportunities for analysis. It just depends on what you want to know.

Surveys, interviews—these might be methods with which you're familiar, but there are lots of other useful methods for working with people. You might want to understand student writing processes by looking at all of a particular student's writing for a given project. Instead of asking the student about her habits and working with **reported data**, or information that someone has told you, you might use a kind of **textual analysis** (we'll detail some varieties of this in Chapter 4) to read all of her notes and drafts for a particular project to better understand not just what she reports about her writing practices but how and what and when she *actually* writes in the lead up to a due date. Sometimes our perceptions of our actions differ than what we actually do, particularly in regard to writing habits, so collecting data that's not reported can be helpful. Or you might want to **observe** that student while she writes to notice how often

### **Try This: Plan Your Own Writing Research Project (30 minutes)**

What are your research questions about writing? Consider the examples we've given and develop your own questions on the topic, then think about possible methods you can use to investigate those questions:

1. List your interests in and questions about writing and the research process.
2. Identify one area of interest on your list and develop it into an effective research question (a question that does not have a yes/no answer, one that requires primary research to answer).
3. Consider what methods might be appropriate to help you answer the question you have identified.

she takes breaks, if she texts while she writes, or if she listens to music. You might ask her to take pictures of herself or her writing environment at different points during the writing process, and you might develop a comparative **visual analysis** of the images (see Chapter 7).

## Research Example: Access to Clean Water

Here's an example of how to develop a research plan. Imagine you're interested in developing a project about water, a topic that has been in the news quite a bit as of late. Depending on your specific interest and the kind of data you are interested in collecting and working with, you can design very different research proposals:

- **If you want to work with sources**, maybe you'll select developing a "worknet" as a research method (see Chapter 3). Your work with sources would find a focal article to generate a radial diagram as you select and highlight connections. One emerging connection, such as a linkage between long-term health outcomes and access to water filtration systems, can begin to crystalize as a research question that guides you in seeking and finding further sources or in choosing other methods appropriate to pairing with the question.
- **If you want to work with words** (see Chapter 4), maybe you'll select content analysis as a research method to make sense of the discourse you find on your local water treatment plant's website. You might find that there is specialized or technical language, such as multiple mentions of contamination of which you were not aware, or terms with which you are unfamiliar (e.g., acidity, PPM, or pH). Gathering these terms and beginning to investigate their meanings can serve as the genesis of an emerging research focus.
- **If you want to work with people** (see Chapter 5), maybe you'll select survey as a research method, and you'll distribute a survey about drinking water to everyone in your classes, perhaps asking questions about

their uses of water fountains and bottle refill stations or their knowledge about where their water comes from. You may learn that folks in your community have not had consistent access to potable water.

- **If you want to work with places and things** (see Chapter 6), maybe you'll select site observation as a research method, and you'll schedule a visit to your local water treatment plant. You may discover upon visiting that the plant is adjacent to a number of factories, or that it is difficult to access, perhaps that there is no one to give you a tour, or that much of the area is off limits. All of these on-site discoveries, carefully chronicled, substantiate distinctive ways of knowing not otherwise available.
- **If you want to work with images** (see Chapter 7), maybe you'll visit a local river, stream, or lake shore and photograph scenes where litter and wildlife are in close proximity, or where signs communicate about expectations for environmental care. A selection of such images may stand as a convincing set of visual evidence and may accompany a simple map identifying locations where you found problems or where additional signage is needed.

### **Try This: Brainstorming with Methods (30 minutes)**

We've illustrated two examples, one focusing on the timing of student writing projects and another focusing on water. Now try this out on your own. Select an interest and work through how each of the methods listed would generate different data with the potential to draw different kinds of connections:

- Working with sources
- Working with words
- Working with people
- Working with places and things
- Working with images


As you consider an interest in light of each of these research methods, now would also be a good time to revisit the book's table of contents and then to turn to the chapters themselves to leaf around and begin to see the more specific and nuanced approaches to the methods under each heading.

The data you work with and the conclusions you can draw are dependent on the research method you select. Each approach provides particular insights into your topic and the world more broadly.

## ■ Research Across the Disciplines

**Research conventions**,\* or the expectations about how research is conducted and written about, differ across the disciplines—whether that is theatre, mathematics, criminal justice, anthropology, etc. Some disciplines generally value quantitative data over qualitative data and vice versa. Many disciplines gravitate to certain methods and methodologies and specific patterns of writing up and citing data. Usually these conventions can be rhetorically traced to the values of a particular discipline. For instance, many humanities disciplines (English and World Languages, for instance) favor using MLA style to cite sources, and many social science disciplines (Psychology and Sociology, for instance) generally adhere to APA style. One of the primary differences in these citation styles is that MLA generally privileges author name and page number, which can be traced to the importance of specific wording at the heart of language study. APA privileges author name and year, which can be traced to the ways that social sciences value *when* something was published.

Citation conventions are one of the most concrete, visible differences that distinguish research across disciplines. But the differences are often much deeper and more abstract. How do you decide which method is appropriate for a particular research project? How do you make data meaningful in a particular context? The way you answer these questions constitutes your **research methodology**, or your thinking about a research project—and methodology, similar to citation style, usually demonstrates disciplinary values. Whether or not you *state* your methodology, everyone has a way of thinking about the method they choose and how the data they are using matters. Articulating a methodology simply makes that approach transparent to your audience and clear to yourself. Thus, a research methodology is the approach to a method, or the understanding and thinking that organizes



Research conventions adapt and change right along with the people who do research, the problems to which the research responds, and contemporary technologies.

a particular method, as we show in Figure 1.1. Returning again to the etymology of “method” noted earlier (meta- and -hodos), consider the new part of the term, -ology. This addition assigns to method its reason for being selected. Accounting explicitly for the rationale, motives, and appropriateness of a research design, a methodology answers to justifications, underlying values, and established traditions for how knowledge is made and what kinds of knowledge matters in a given discipline.

For example, if you survey 100 people at your university about the timing of their writing projects, and you develop quantitative data as a result of your survey, you present that data as meaningful and suggest that such numbers provide a useful window into understanding student writing. However, you might not agree with this approach. You might think that to really understand student writing, you need to talk to students and ask open-ended questions. Or, you might believe that reported data about writing behaviors is *not* meaningful because we know that what people say they do and what they actually do are often very different things. You may believe that we need mixed methods to most effectively provide a portrait of student writing on campus, so you might design your study such that you

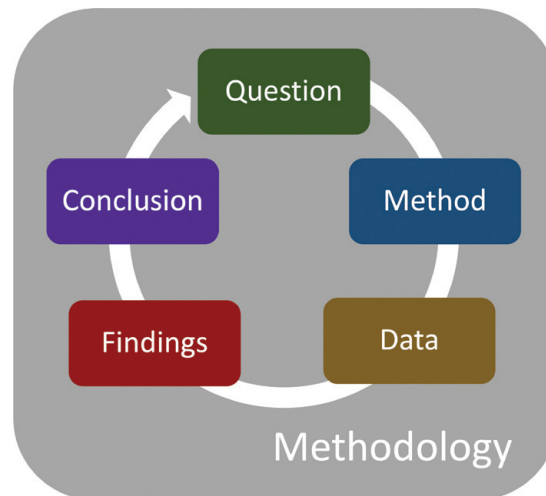


Figure 1.1. Components of methodology in research design.

incorporate both survey and interview data. Ultimately the kind of data that methodology values is related to disciplinary values, and as you select a research project, a professional focus, and a profession, you will inherit disciplinary values. For example, researchers in the humanities might especially value qualitative data, and researchers in STEM fields might especially value quantitative data. As you become a more ingrained member of a disciplinary community (for instance when the major or job you take starts to feel familiar) we encourage you to keep questioning the methodology and values you inherit.

In Figure 1.2, we show how developing more questions along the way in all parts of your research design may give way to more complexity in your project.

Critical conversations about research are both **normative**, in that they usually bring together many scholars' thinking about a particular issue, and **disruptive**, in that new findings can up-end a particular conversation. Much of these changes are attributable to developments in methodology, such as updates in how we value a particular method or how we interpret certain findings. Changes to methodologies often cause significant ruptures in research communities. We are familiar with some of these large ruptures:

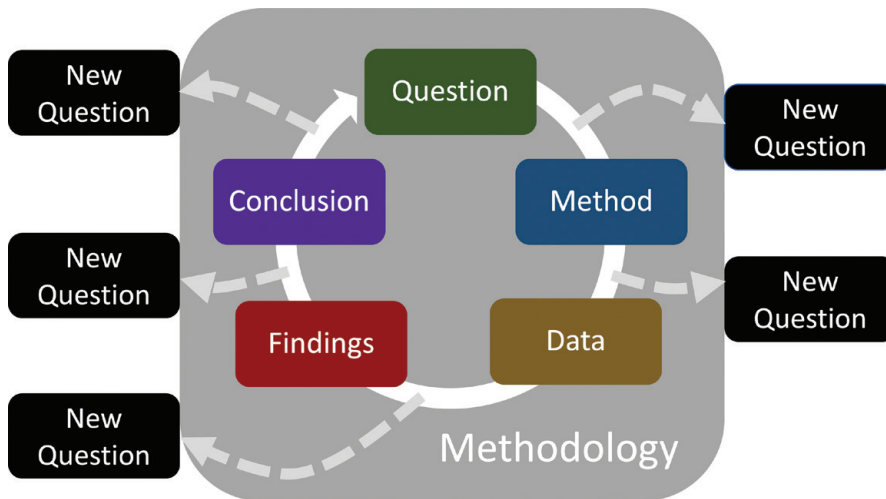


Figure 1.2. Complexity in research design.

the earth revolves around the sun instead of the reverse, bleeding a patient does not make her healthier, students learn most effectively through practice rather than listening by rote, etc. It is not always easy to come across findings that cause a rupture; however, as you examine the evolution of critical conversations over time, you might notice that they change slowly as new ruptures slowly become accepted in their associated communities.

## ■ Using Research Methods Ethically

The decisions you make in developing an effective research question, matching it to an appropriate research method, and then responsibly analyzing the implications of your findings (research design), are especially important because research is **subjective**. Subjectivity is often seen as negative and is frequently leveled as a reason to mistrust a decision or judgment, as in, “You’re just being subjective.” But: all research is subjective, all research is communication. Of course, not all scholars and fields believe this, but let us try to convince you, because it is important. This belief is central to conducting ethical research.

There is no pure objectivity when it comes to research. Research is conducted by people, all of whom have different ideas about effective research, but researchers abide by a code of ethics that holds them to standards that help them maintain safety and develop meaningful research. Even quantitative research, even computer algorithms that identify trends—all of the methods associated with developing this data are engineered by people and are, thus, subjective. And this is a good thing!

Instead of striving for **objective\*** research (an impossibility), we strive for **ethical research**. Ethical research takes into account the fact that people perform research and that their research designs are impacted by their own **subjectivities**: the thoughts, beliefs, and values that make us human. As researchers, it is essential to be reflective on our subjectivities, mitigate subjectivities that might make us conduct research unfairly, and adhere to high ethical standards for research. We will spend more time working through these ethical considerations in Chapter 2.



You may think of objectivity as being defined as “without bias.” Yet it is far more complex! Marianne Janack (2002) lists 13 different ways we might consider objectivity, from a scientific method, to disinterest, to rationality, to an attitude of “psychological distance” (275). What do you mean when you use the term “objective”?



## ■ Developing a Research Proposal

Much of what we've discussed in this chapter is about ideas and about how to approach research broadly. A tangible way to make sense of these ideas is by developing a research proposal. A proposal allows you to concretize your thinking about a project and receive feedback on your plan. This is a crucial step because an instructor, mentor, or peer might help you improve your research design and better align your question, method, and data to help you develop useful findings. A proposal is an inventional method, not a contract. As you learn more about your topic, you will most likely refine your research question, and you may even decide on a different method. In each chapter, we'll introduce further methods for invention and innovative ways to approach a research question, perhaps in ways you haven't before. One thing to keep in mind as you plan your research is how you may want to present your work (delivery) and who may be interested in your research (audience). Sometimes the research we do remains relatively private, but usually the purpose of research is to develop new knowledge and *share it*, as we discuss in Chapter 8. Spread the word, contribute to the critical conversation about the area in which you're interested so that others can test out your ideas, build on your ideas, and use the knowledge you've developed. Maintain this audience awareness throughout your research process, even from the beginning—it will impact how you design and deliver your work.

## ■ Focus on Delivery: Writing a Research Proposal

A research proposal is a stated plan for research, which may change, and some of which should change throughout the course of your project. This is a plan for your project, but as the saying goes, “the best laid plans...”

A research proposal should include the following:

- A clear articulation of your question;
- The critical conversation to which you hope your research contributes;

- Your chosen research method;
- The basic methodology that guides your choice of method;
- Plans for how you will make sense of your data.

You should not have a thesis or a conclusion. Since you haven't done the research yet, this would be impossible.

Instead, allow your proposal to be exploratory, and make sure that it is interesting to you, that you're asking a question that you actually want to know the answer to. This small step is crucial to developing an engaging, thoughtful project. If you're not interested in the question you pose, keep asking questions, keep inventing until you come upon something you care about. If you struggle with this process, reach out to an instructor, mentor, or peer; talking to someone else is one of the simplest and most generative inventional opportunities around!

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