Chapter 4 Writing Strategies and Ethical Considerations

Before designing a proposal, it is important to have an idea of the general structure or outline of the topics and their order. The structure will differ depending on whether you write a quantitative, qualitative, or a mixed methods project. Another general consideration is to be aware of good writing practices that will help to ensure a consistent and highly readable proposal (or research project). Throughout the project, it is important to engage in ethical practices and to anticipate the ethical issues prior to the study that will likely arise. This chapter provides guidance for the overall structure of proposals or projects, writing practices that make projects easy to read, and ethical issues that need to be anticipated in research studies.

Writing the Proposal

Arguments Presented in a Proposal

It is helpful to consider early in planning the study the major points that need to be addressed in a proposal. These points—or topics—all need to be interconnected to provide a cohesive picture of the entire project. For us, these topics seem to span all proposals, whether the project is qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. We think that a good place to start is by examining Maxwell's (2013) list of the core arguments that need to be advanced in any proposal. We will summarize them in our own words:

1. What do readers need to better understand your topic?
2. What do readers need to know about your topic?
3. What do you propose to study?
4. What is the setting, and who are the people you will study?
5. What methods do you plan to use to collect data?
6. How will you analyze the data?
7. How will you validate your findings?
8. What ethical issues will your study present?
9. What do preliminary results show about the practicability and value of the proposed study?

These nine questions, if adequately addressed in one section for each question, constitute the foundation of good research, and they could provide the overall structure for a proposal. The inclusion of validating findings, ethical considerations (to be addressed shortly), the need for preliminary results, and early evidence of practical significance focus a reader's attention on key elements often overlooked in discussions about proposed projects.

Format for a Qualitative Proposal

Beyond these nine questions, it is also helpful to have an overall outline or general structure for topics that will be included in a proposal for a study. Unquestionably, in qualitative research, no one structure for a qualitative proposal prevails. We do think, however, that a couple of general outlines would be helpful, especially for the student who has never written a thesis or dissertation project. Here we propose two alternative models. Example 4.1 is drawn from a constructivist/interpretivist perspective whereas Example 4.2 is based more on a participatory–social justice model of qualitative research.

Example 4.1 A Qualitative Constructivist/Interpretivist Format

Introduction

Statement of the problem (including existing literature about the problem, deficiencies in the literature, and relevance of study for audiences)

Purpose of the study

The research questions

Procedures

Philosophical assumptions or worldview of qualitative research

Qualitative design (e.g., ethnography, case study)

Role of the researcher

Data collection procedures

Data analysis procedures

Strategies for validating findings

Proposed narrative structure of the study

Anticipated ethical issues

Preliminary pilot findings (if available)

Expected impact and significance of study

References

Appendixes: Interview questions, observational forms, timeline, proposed budget, a summary of the proposed content of each chapter in the final study

In this example, the writer includes introduction, procedures, ethical issues, preliminary findings and expected impact of the study. A separate section reviewing the literature may be included, but it is optional, as discussed in Chapter 3. Several appendixes may seem unusual. Developing a timeline for the study and presenting a

proposed budget provide useful information to committees, although these sections would be highly recommended, but optional in proposals. Also, because the number and type of chapters in qualitative research is highly variable, a summary of the proposed content of each chapter in the final study would be useful.

Example 4.2 A Qualitative Participatory–Social Justice Format

Introduction

Statement of the problem (including power, oppression, discrimination, need to develop rapport with community, etc.; issue addressed; existing literature about the problem; deficiencies in the literature; and relevance of the study for audiences)

Purpose of the study

The research questions

Procedures

Philosophical assumptions or worldview

Qualitative research strategy

Role of the researcher

Data collection procedures (including the collaborative approaches used with participants)

Data analysis procedures

Strategies for validating findings

Proposed narrative structure

Anticipated ethical issues

Preliminary pilot findings (if available)

Significance of the study and transformative changes likely to occur

References

Appendixes: Interview questions, observational forms, timeline, proposed budget, and a summary of proposed chapters for the final study

This format is similar to the constructivist/interpretivist format except that the inquirer identifies a specific participatory–social justice issue being explored in the study (e.g., oppression, discrimination, community involvement), advances a collaborative form of data collection, and mentions the anticipated changes that the research study will likely bring.

Format for a Quantitative Proposal

For a quantitative study, the format conforms to sections typically found in quantitative studies reported in journal articles. The form generally follows the model of an introduction, a literature review, methods, results, and discussion. In planning a quantitative study and designing a dissertation proposal, consider the following format to sketch the overall plan (see Example 4.3).

Example 4.3 A Quantitative Format

Introduction

Statement of the problem (issue, existing literature about problem, deficiencies in literature, relevance of study for audiences)

Purpose of the study

Research questions or hypotheses

Theoretical perspective

Review of the literature (theory may be included in this section instead of the introduction)

Methods

Type of research design (e.g., experimental, survey)

Population, sample, and participants

Data collection instruments, variables, and materials

Data analysis procedures

Anticipated ethical issues in the study

Preliminary studies or pilot tests

Appendixes: Instruments, timeline, and proposed budget

Example 4.3 is a standard format for a social science study (see Miller & Salkind, 2002), although the order of the sections, especially in the use of theory and the literature may vary from study to study (see, for example, Rudestam & Newton, 2014). This format, however, represents a typical order of topics for a quantitative proposal.

Format for a Mixed Methods Proposal

In a mixed methods design format, the researcher brings together approaches that are included in both the quantitative and qualitative formats. An example of such a format appears in Example 4.4 (adapted from Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, 2018). Similar elements are found in a set of standards for publishing a mixed methods journal article being advanced by the American Psychological Association (Levitt et al., in press).

Example 4.4 A Mixed Methods Format

Introduction

The research problem (existing research on the problem, deficiencies in the literature that point to the need for both quantitative and qualitative data, relevance of study for audiences)

The purpose or study aim of the project and reasons or rationale for a mixed methods study

The research questions and hypotheses (quantitative questions or hypotheses, qualitative questions, mixed methods questions)

Philosophical foundations for using mixed methods research (if needed)

Literature review (typically review quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies)

Methods

A definition of mixed methods research

The type of design used and its definition

Challenges (validity) in using this design and how they will be addressed; also validity approaches in both quantitative and qualitative research

Examples of use of the type of design in your field of study

A diagram of procedures

Quantitative data collection (ordered to fit the mixed methods design steps)

Quantitative data analysis

Qualitative data collection

Qualitative data analysis

Mixed methods or integration data analysis procedures

Researcher's resources and skills to conduct mixed methods research

Potential ethical issues

References

Appendixes: Instruments, protocols, diagrams, timeline, budget, summary of major content for each chapter

This format shows that the researcher poses both a purpose statement and research questions for quantitative and qualitative components, as well as mixed components. It is important to specify early in the proposal the reasons (rationale) for the mixed methods approach and to identify key elements of the design, such as the type of mixed methods study, a visual diagram of the procedures, and both the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis steps. All of these parts could make the mixed methods proposal lengthier than either the qualitative or quantitative proposal.

Designing the Sections of a Proposal

Here are several **research tips** that we give to students about designing the overall structure of a proposal:

- Specify the sections early in the design of a proposal. Work on one section will often prompt ideas for other sections. First develop an outline, and then write something for each section rapidly to get ideas down on paper. Then refine the sections as you consider in more detail the information that should go into each one.
- Find proposals that other students have authored under your adviser, and look at them closely. Ask your adviser for copies of proposals that he or she especially liked and felt were scholarly products to take to committees. Study the topics addressed and their order as well as the level of detail used in composing the proposal.
- Determine whether your program or institution offers a course on proposal development or some similar topic. Often such a class will be helpful as a support system for your project as well as providing individuals that can react to your proposal ideas as they develop.
- Sit down with your adviser, and go over his or her preferred format for a proposal. Ask this adviser for a copy of a proposal that might serve as a guide. Be cautious about using published journal articles as a model for the proposal: they may not provide the information desired by your adviser or graduate committee.

Writing Ideas

Over the years, John has collected books on how to write, and he typically is reading a new one during production of his research projects. In more recent years, he has bought fewer and fewer books about writing per se and instead has purchased good novels and nonfiction works from which to draw thoughts about writing tips. He routinely reads books on the *New York Times* top 10 list and popular books of fiction and nonfiction (for fiction, see Harding, 2009). He brings into his research methods classes segments from books to share to illustrate writing points. This is not to impress others with his literary acumen, but to encourage researchers, as writers, to reach out to their audience; to not wax eloquently in words, but to be concise, and to-the-point; and to practice writing rather than simply talk about it. This chapter, then, represents a collage of John's favorite books on writing and the tips both of us have found useful for our scholarship writing.

Writing as Thinking

One sign of inexperienced writers is that they prefer to discuss their proposed study rather than write about it. As Stephen King (2000) recommended, it is helpful to write it out quickly as rough as it may be in the first rendering. We recommend the following:

- *Early in the process of research, write ideas down rather than talk about them*. One author has talked directly about this concept of writing as thinking (Bailey, 1984). Zinsser (1983) also discussed the need to get words out of our heads and onto paper. Advisers react better when they read the ideas on paper than when they hear and discuss a research topic with a student or colleague. When a researcher renders ideas on paper, a reader can visualize the final product, actually see how it looks, and begin to clarify ideas. The concept of working ideas out on paper has served many experienced writers well. Before designing a proposal, draft a one- to two-page overview of your project and have your adviser approve the direction of your proposed study. This draft might contain the essential information: the research problem being addressed, the purpose of the study, the central questions being asked, the source of data, and the significance of the project for different audiences. It might also be useful to draft several one- to two-page statements on different topics and see which one your adviser likes best and feels would make the best contribution to your field.
- *Work through several drafts of a proposal rather than trying to polish the first draft*. It is illuminating to see how people think on paper. Zinsser (1983) identified two types of writers: (a) the "bricklayer," who makes every paragraph just right before going on to the next paragraph, and (b) the "let-it-all-hang-out-on-the-first-draft" writer, who writes an entire first draft not caring how sloppy it looks or how badly it is written. In between would be someone like Peter Elbow (1973), who recommended that one should go through the iterative process of writing, reviewing, and rewriting. He cited this exercise: With only 1 hour to write a passage, write four drafts (one every 15 minutes) rather than one draft (typically in the last 15 minutes) during the hour. Most experienced researchers write the first draft carefully but do not work for a polished draft; the polish comes relatively late in the writing process.
- *Do not edit your proposal at the early-draft stage*. Instead, consider Franklin's (1986) three-stage model, which we have found useful in developing proposals and in our scholarly writing:
    1. First, develop an outline; it could be a sentence or word outline or a visual map.
    2. Write out a draft and then shift and sort ideas, moving around entire paragraphs in the manuscript.
    3. Finally, edit and polish each sentence.

The Habit of Writing

Establish the discipline or **habit of writing** in a regular and continuous way on your proposal. Although setting aside a completed draft of the proposal for a time may provide some perspective to review your work before final polishing. A start-and-stop process of writing often disrupts the flow of work. It may turn a well-meaning researcher into what we call a "weekend writer," an individual who has time for working on research only on weekends after all the *important* work of the week has been accomplished. Continual work on the proposal is writing something each day or at least being engaged daily in the processes of thinking, collecting information, and reviewing that goes into manuscript and proposal production. We do feel that some people have a stronger urge to write than others. Perhaps this comes from a need to express oneself or a comfort level with self-expression or simply with training.

Select a time of day to work that is best for you, and then discipline yourself to write at this time each day. Choose a place free of distractions. Boice (1990, pp. 77–78) offered ideas about establishing good writing habits:

- With the aid of the priority principle, make writing a daily activity, regardless of mood, regardless of readiness to write.
- If you feel you do not have time for regular writing, begin by charting your daily activities for a week or two in half-hour blocks. It is likely you'll find a time to write.
- Write while you are fresh.
- Avoid writing in binges.
- Write in small, regular amounts.
- Schedule writing tasks so that you plan to work on specific, manageable units of writing in each session.
- Keep daily charts. Graph at least three things: (a) time spent writing, (b) page equivalents finished, and (c) percentage of planned task completed.
- Plan beyond daily goals.
- Share your writing with supportive, constructive friends until you feel ready to go public.
- Try to work on two or three writing projects concurrently so that you do not become overloaded with any one project.

It is also important to acknowledge that writing moves along slowly and that a writer must ease into the process. Like the runner who stretches before a road race, the writer needs warm-up exercises for both the mind and the fingers. We are reminded of the piano player who engages in finger-stretching exercises before practicing a difficult piece that will put the hands into difficult positions. For your research, some leisurely writing activity, such as writing a letter to a friend, brainstorming on the computer, reading some good writing, or studying a favorite poem, can make the actual task of writing easier. We are reminded of John Steinbeck's (1969) "warm-up period" (p. 42) described in detail in *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters.* Steinbeck began each writing day by writing a letter to his editor and close friend, Pascal Covici, in a large notebook supplied by Covici.

Other exercises may prove useful as warm-ups. Carroll (1990) provided examples of exercises to improve a writer's control over descriptive and emotive passages:

- Describe an object by its parts and dimensions, without first telling the reader its name.
- Write a conversation between two people on any dramatic or intriguing subject.
- Write a set of directions for a complicated task.
- Take a subject and write about it three different ways. (pp. 113–116)

This last exercise seems appropriate for qualitative researchers who analyze their data for multiple codes and themes (see Chapter 9 for qualitative data analysis).

Consider also the writing implements and the physical location that aid the process of disciplined writing. The implements—an online dictionary and a thesaurus, a tablet for jotting down thoughts, a cup of coffee, and a handful of Triscuits (Wolcott, 2009)—offer the writer options for ways to be comfortable when writing. The physical setting can also help. Annie Dillard (1989), the Pulitzer Prize–winning novelist, avoided appealing workplaces:

> One wants a room with no view, so imagination can meet memory in the dark. When I furnished this study seven years ago, I pushed the long desk against a blank wall, so I could not see from either window. Once, fifteen years ago, I wrote in a cinder-block cell over a parking lot. It overlooked a tar-and-gravel roof. This pine shed under trees is not quite so good as the cinder-block study was, but it will do. (pp. 26–27)

Readability of the Manuscript

Before beginning the writing of a proposal, consider how you will enhance the readability of it for other people. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010) discusses an orderly presentation by showing the relationships between ideas and through the use of transitional words. In addition, it is important to use consistent terms, a staging and foreshadowing of ideas, and coherence built into the plan.

- Use *consistent terms* throughout the proposal. Use the same term for each variable in a quantitative study and the same central phenomenon in a qualitative study. Refrain from using synonyms for these terms, a problem that causes the reader to work at understanding the meaning of ideas and to monitor subtle shifts in meaning. When terms shift, ever so slightly, it throws the reader off and causes them to question your ideas.
- Consider how narrative thoughts of different types guide a reader. Tarshis (1982) advanced the idea that writers should have in mind the purpose of different-sized narrative thoughts and purposes for segments of text. He said there were four types:
    1. Umbrella thoughts: the general or core ideas one is trying to get across
    2. **Big thoughts in writing**: specific ideas or images that fall within the realm of umbrella thoughts and serve to reinforce, clarify, or elaborate upon the umbrella thoughts
    3. Little thoughts: ideas or images whose chief function is to reinforce big thoughts
    4. **Attention or interest thoughts**: ideas whose purposes are to keep the reader on track, organize ideas, and keep an individual's attention

Beginning researchers seem to struggle most with umbrella and attention thoughts. A proposal may include too many umbrella ideas—with the content not sufficiently detailed to support large ideas. This might occur in a literature review in which the researcher needs to provide fewer small sections and more larger sections that tie together large bodies of literature. A clear mark of this problem is a continual shift of ideas from one major idea to another in a manuscript. Often, one will see short paragraphs in introductions to proposals, like those written by journalists in newspaper articles. Thinking in terms of a detailed narrative to support umbrella ideas may help this problem.

Attention thoughts—those that provide organizational statements to guide the reader—are also needed. Readers need road signs to guide them from one major idea to the next (Chapters 6 and 7 of this book discuss major road signs in research, such as purpose statements and research questions and hypotheses). An organizing paragraph is often useful at the beginning and end of literature reviews. Readers need to see the overall organization of the ideas through introductory paragraphs and to be told the most salient points they should remember in a summary.

- Use *coherence* to add to the readability of the manuscript. **Coherence in writing** means that the ideas tie

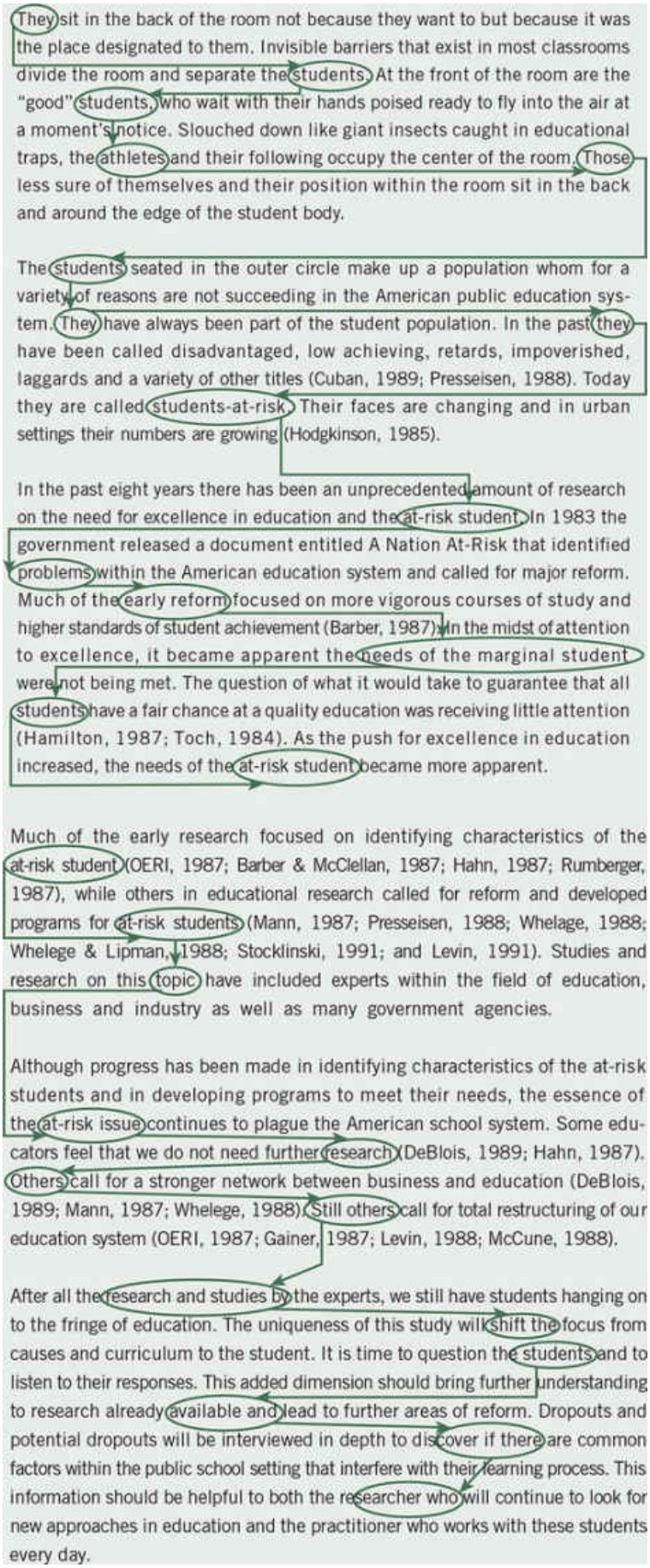
together and logically flow from one sentence to another and from one paragraph to another. For example, the repetition of the same variable names in the title, the purpose statement, the research questions, and the review of the literature headings in a quantitative project illustrate this thinking. This approach builds coherence into the study. Emphasizing a consistent order whenever independent and dependent variables are mentioned also reinforces this idea.

On a more detailed level, coherence builds through connecting sentences and paragraphs in the manuscript. Zinsser (1983) suggested that every sentence should be a logical sequel to the one that preceded it. The hook-and-eye exercise (Wilkinson, 1991) is useful for connecting thoughts from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. The basic idea here is that one sentence builds on the next and sentences in a paragraph build into the next paragraph. The way this occurs is by specific words that provide a linkage.

The passage in Example 4.5, from a draft of a student's proposal, shows a high level of coherence. It comes from the introductory section of a qualitative dissertation project about at-risk students. In this passage, we have taken the liberty of drawing hooks and eyes to connect the words from sentence to another sentence and from paragraph to paragraph. As mentioned, the objective of the hook-and-eye exercise (Wilkinson, 1991) is to connect major thoughts (and words) of each sentence and paragraph. If such a connection cannot easily be made, the written passage lacks coherence; the ideas and topics shift; and the reader needs to add transitional words, phrases, or sentences to establish a clear connection. The reader also does not get a sense of how the ideas build in a study.

In John's proposal development classes, he has provided a passage from an introduction to a proposal and asks students to connect the words and sentences using circles for key ideas and lines to connect these key words from sentence to sentence. It is important for a reader to find coherence in a proposal starting with the first page. He first gives his students an unmarked passage and then, after the exercise, provides a marked passage. Since the key idea of one sentence should connect to a key idea in the next sentence, they need to mark this relationship in the passage. If the sentences do not connect, then transition words are missing that need to be inserted. He also asks students to make sure that the paragraphs are connected with hooks and eyes as well as individual sentences.

Example 4.5 An Illustration of the Hook-and-Eye Technique



They sit in the back of the room not because they want to but because it was the place designated to them. Invisible barriers that exist in most classrooms divide the room and separate the students. At the front of the room are the "good" students, who wait with their hands poised ready to fly into the air at a moment's notice. Slouched down like giant insects caught in educational traps, the athletes and their following occupy the center of the room. Those less sure of themselves and their position within the room sit in the back and around the edge of the student body.

The students seated in the outer circle make up a population whom for a variety of reasons are not succeeding in the American public education system. They have always been part of the student population. In the past they have been called disadvantaged, low achieving, retards, impoverished, laggards and a variety of other titles (Cuban, 1989; Presseisen, 1988). Today they are called students-at-risk. Their faces are changing and in urban settings their numbers are growing (Hodgkinson, 1985).

In the past eight years there has been an unprecedented amount of research on the need for excellence in education and the at-risk student. In 1983 the government released a document entitled A Nation At-Risk that identified problems within the American education system and called for major reform. Much of the early reform focused on more vigorous courses of study and higher standards of student achievement (Barber, 1987). In the midst of attention to excellence, it became apparent the needs of the marginal student were not being met. The question of what it would take to guarantee that all students have a fair chance at a quality education was receiving little attention (Hamilton, 1987; Toch, 1984). As the push for excellence in education increased, the needs of the at-risk student became more apparent.

Much of the early research focused on identifying characteristics of the at-risk student (OERI, 1987; Barber & McClellan, 1987; Hahn, 1987; Rumberger, 1987), while others in educational research called for reform and developed programs for at-risk students (Mann, 1987; Presseisen, 1988; Whelage, 1988; Whelege & Lipman, 1988; Stocklinski, 1991; and Levin, 1991). Studies and research on this topic have included experts within the field of education, business and industry as well as many government agencies.

Although progress has been made in identifying characteristics of the at-risk students and in developing programs to meet their needs, the essence of the at-risk issue continues to plague the American school system. Some educators feel that we do not need further research (DeBlois, 1989; Hahn, 1987). Others call for a stronger network between business and education (DeBlois, 1989; Mann, 1987; Whelege, 1988). Still others call for total restructuring of our education system (OERI, 1987; Gainer, 1987; Levin, 1988; McCune, 1988).

After all the research and studies by the experts, we still have students hanging on to the fringe of education. The uniqueness of this study will shift the focus from causes and curriculum to the student. It is time to question the students and to listen to their responses. This added dimension should bring further understanding to research already available and lead to further areas of reform. Dropouts and potential dropouts will be interviewed in depth to discover if there are common factors within the public school setting that interfere with their learning process. This information should be helpful to both the researcher who will continue to look for new approaches in education and the practitioner who works with these students every day.

Voice, Tense, and "Fat"

From working with broad thoughts and paragraphs, we recommend moving on to the level of writing sentences and words. Similar grammar and sentence construction issues are addressed in the APA *Publication Manual* (APA, 2010), but we include this section to highlight some common grammar issues that we have seen in student proposals and in my own writing.

Our thoughts are directed toward the "polish" level of writing, to use Franklin's (1986) term. It is a stage addressed late in the writing process. One can find an abundance of writing books about research writing and literary writing with rules and principles to follow concerning good sentence construction and word choice. Wolcott (2009), a qualitative ethnographer, for example, talks about honing editorial skills to eliminate unnecessary words (keeping the essential words); deleting the passive voice (using the active voice); scaling down qualifiers (keeping only one qualifier at best); eliminating overused phrases (completing striking these out); and reducing excessive quotations, use of italics, and parenthetical comments (all elements of good scholarly writing). The following additional ideas about active voice, verb tense, and reduced **fat** can strengthen and invigorate scholarly writing for dissertation and thesis proposals.

- Use the *active voice* as much as possible in scholarly writing (APA, 2010). According to the literary writer Ross-Larson (1982), "If the subject acts, the voice is active. If the subject is acted on, the voice is passive" (p. 29). In addition, a sign of passive construction is some variation of an auxiliary verb, such as *was*. Examples include *will be, have been*, and *is being*. Writers can use the passive construction when the person acting can logically be left out of the sentence and when what is acted on is the subject of the rest of the paragraph (Ross-Larson, 1982).
- Use *strong active verbs* appropriate for the passage. Lazy verbs are those that lack action, commonly called "to be" verbs, such as *is* or *was*, or verbs turned into adjectives or adverbs.
- Pay close attention to the *tense* of your verbs. A common practice exists in using the past tense to review the literature and report results of past studies. The past tense represents a commonly used form in quantitative research. The future tense appropriately indicates that the study will be conducted in the future, a key verb-use for proposals. Use the present tense to add vigor to a study, especially in the introduction, as this tense-form frequently occurs in qualitative studies. In mixed methods studies, researchers employ either the present or past tense and the appropriate tense often reflects whether the major orientation of the study will be quantitative or qualitative research (thus emphasizing one or the other in a study). The APA *Publication Manual* (APA, 2010) recommends the past tense (e.g., "Jones reported") or the present perfect tense (e.g., "Researchers have reported") for the literature review and procedures based on past events, the past tense to describe results (e.g., "stress lowered self-esteem"), and the present tense (e.g., "the qualitative findings show") to discuss the results and to present the conclusions. We see this not as a hard and fast rule but as a useful guideline.
- Expect to edit and revise drafts of a manuscript to trim the fat. Fat refers to additional words that are unnecessary to convey the meaning of ideas and need to be edited out. Writing multiple drafts of a manuscript is standard practice for most writers. The process typically consists of writing, reviewing, and

editing. In the editing process, trim excess words from sentences, such as piled-up modifiers, excessive prepositions, and "the-of" constructions—for example, "the study of"—that add unnecessary verbiage (Ross-Larson, 1982). We were reminded of the unnecessary prose that comes into writing by the example mentioned by Bunge (1985):

> Nowadays you can almost see bright people struggling to reinvent the complex sentence before your eyes. A friend of mine who is a college administrator every now and then has to say a complex sentence, and he will get into one of those morasses that begins, "I would hope that we would be able . . ." He never talked that way when I first met him, but even at his age, at his distance from the crisis in the lives of younger people, he's been to some extent alienated from easy speech. (p. 172)

Begin studying good writing about research using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs. In good writing, the eye does not pause and the mind does not stumble on a passage. In this present book, we have attempted to draw examples of good research from human and social science journals, such as *Administrative Science Quarterly, American Educational Research Journal, American Journal of Sociology, Image, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Mixed Methods Research, Journal of Nursing Scholarship,* and *Sociology of Education.* In the qualitative area, good literature serves to illustrate clear prose and detailed passages. Individuals who teach qualitative research assign well-known books from literature, such as *Moby Dick, The Scarlet Letter,* and *The Bonfire of the Vanities,* as reading assignments (Webb & Glesne, 1992). *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, Qualitative Family Research, Qualitative Health Research, Qualitative Inquiry,* and *Qualitative Research* represent good, scholarly journals in qualitative research to examine. When using mixed methods research, examine journals that report studies with combined qualitative and quantitative research and data, including many social science journals, such as the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, The International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches, Field Methods, Quality and Quantity,* and the *International Journal of Social Research Methodology.* Examine the numerous articles cited in the *SAGE Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research* (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) and in *The Mixed Methods Reader* (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008).

Ethical Issues to Anticipate

In addition to conceptualizing the writing process for a proposal, researchers need to anticipate the ethical issues that may arise during their studies (Berg, 2001; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Punch, 2005; Sieber, 1998). Research involves collecting data from people, about people (Punch, 2014). Writing about these anticipated ethical issues is required in making an argument for a study as well as being an important topic in the format for proposals. Researchers need to protect their research participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research; guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions; and cope with new, challenging problems (Israel & Hay, 2006). Ethical questions are apparent today in such issues as personal disclosure, authenticity, and credibility of the research report; the role of researchers in cross-cultural contexts; and issues of personal privacy through forms of Internet data collection (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Table 4.1 Ethical Issues in Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Research

Where in the Process of Research the Ethical Issue Occurs	Type of Ethical Issue	How to Address the Issue
Prior to conducting the study	• Examine professional association standards. • Seek college/university approval on campus through an institutional review board (IRB). • Gain local permission from site and participants. • Select a site without a vested interest in outcome of study. • Negotiate authorship for publication.	• Consult the code of ethics for professional association in your area. • Submit proposal for IRB approval. • Identify and go through local approvals; find gatekeepers or key personnel to help. • Select sites that will not raise power issues with researchers. • Give credit for work done on the project; decide on author order in future publication.
Beginning the study	• Identify a research problem that will benefit participants. • Disclose purpose of the study. • Do not pressure participants into signing consent forms. • Respect norms and charters of indigenous societies. • Be sensitive to needs of vulnerable populations (e.g., children).	• Conduct a needs assessment or informal conversation with participants about their needs. • Contact participants, and inform them of the general purpose of the study. • Tell participants that they do not have to sign form. • Find out about cultural, religious, gender, and other differences that need to be respected. • Obtain appropriate consent (e.g., parents, as well as children).
Collecting data	• Respect the site, and disrupt as little as possible. • Make certain that all participants receive the same treatment. • Avoid deceiving participants. • Respect potential power imbalances and exploitation of participants (e.g., interviewing, observing). • Do not "use" participants by gathering data and leaving site. • Avoid collecting harmful information.	• Build trust, and convey extent of anticipated disruption in gaining access. • Put into place wait list provisions for treatment for controls. • Discuss purpose of the study and how data will be used. • Avoid leading questions. Withhold sharing personal impressions. Avoid disclosing sensitive information. Involve participants as collaborators. • Provide rewards for participating. • Stick to questions stated in an interview protocol.
Analyzing data	• Avoid siding with participants (going native). • Avoid disclosing only positive results. • Respect the privacy and anonymity of participants.	• Report multiple perspectives. • Report contrary findings. • Assign fictitious names or aliases; develop composite profiles of participants.
Reporting, sharing, and storing data	• Avoid falsifying authorship, evidence, data, findings, and conclusions. • Do not plagiarize. • Avoid disclosing information that would harm participants. • Communicate in clear, straightforward, appropriate language. • Share data with others. • Keep raw data and other materials (e.g., details of procedures, instruments). • Do not duplicate or piecemeal publications. • Provide complete proof of compliance with ethical issues and lack of conflict of interest, if requested. • State who owns the data from a study.	• Report honestly. • See APA (2010) guidelines for permissions needed to reprint or adapt work of others. • Use composite stories so that individuals cannot be identified. • Use unbiased language appropriate for audiences of the research. • Provide copies of report to participants and stakeholders. Share results with other researchers. Consider website distribution. Consider publishing in different languages. • Store data and materials for 5 years (APA, 2010). • Refrain from using the same material for more than one publication. • Disclose funders for research. Disclose who will profit from the research. • Give credit for ownership to researcher, participants, and advisers.

Sources: Adapted from APA (2010); Creswell (2013); Lincoln (2009); Mertens and Ginsberg (2009); and Salmons (2010).

Ethical issues in research command increased attention today. The ethical considerations that need to be anticipated are extensive, and they are reflected through the research process. These issues apply to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research and to all stages of research. Proposal writers need to anticipate them and actively address them in their research plans. Accordingly, it is helpful to address them as they relate to different phases of inquiry. As shown in Table 4.1, attention needs to be directed toward ethical issues prior to conducting the study; beginning a study; during data collection and data analysis; and in reporting, sharing, and storing the data.

Prior to Beginning the Study

- *Consider codes of ethics.* Consult early in the development of your proposal the **code of ethics** for your professional association. In the literature, ethical issues arise in discussions about codes of professional conduct for researchers and in commentaries about ethical dilemmas and their potential solutions (Punch, 2014). Many national professional associations have published standards or codes of ethics on their websites. For example, see the following websites:
    - The American Psychological Association Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, Including 2010 Amendments (www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx)
    - The American Sociological Association Code of Ethics, adopted in 1997 (www.asanet.org/membership/code-ethics)
    - The American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics, February 2009 (ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/)
    - The American Educational Research Association Ethical Standards of the American Educational Research Association, 2011 (www.aera.net/AboutAERA/AERA-Rules-Policies/Professional-Ethics)
    - The American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses—Provisions, approved in June 2001 (www.nursingworld.org/codeofethics)
    - The American Medical Association Code of Ethics (www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/ama-code-medicalethics)
- *Apply to the institutional review board.* Researchers need to have their research plans reviewed by an **institutional review board (IRB)** on their college and university campuses. IRB committees exist on campuses because of federal regulations that provide protection against human rights violations. The IRB committee requires the researcher to assess the potential for risk to participants in a study, such as physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal harm (Sieber, 1998). Also, the researcher needs to consider the special needs of vulnerable populations, such as minors (under the age of 19), mentally incompetent participants, victims, persons with neurological impairments, pregnant women or fetuses, prisoners, and individuals with AIDS. As a researcher, you will need to file an application with the IRB that contains procedures and information about participants so that the committee can review the extent to which you place participants at risk in your study. In addition to this application, you need to have participants sign **informed consent forms** agreeing to the provisions of your study before they provide data. This form contains a standard set of elements that acknowledges protection of human rights. They include the following (Sarantakos, 2005):
    - Identification of the researcher
    - Identification of the sponsoring institution
    - Identification of the purpose of the study
    - Identification of the benefits for participating
    - Identification of the level and type of participant involvement
    - Notation of risks to the participant

    - Guarantee of confidentiality to the participant
    - Assurance that the participant can withdraw at any time
    - Provision of names of persons to contact if questions arise
- *Obtain necessary permissions.* Prior to the study, researchers need to obtain approval of individuals in authority (e.g., gatekeepers) to gain access to sites and to study participants. This often involves writing a letter that specifies the extent of time, the potential impact, and the outcomes of the research. Use of Internet responses gained through electronic interviews or surveys needs permission from participants. This can be obtained through first obtaining permission and then sending out the interview or survey.
- *Select a site without vested interests.* Selecting a site to study in which you have an interest in outcomes is not a good idea. It does not allow for the objectivity required for quantitative research or for the full expression of multiple perspectives needed in qualitative research. Select sites that will now raise these questions of power and influence in your study.
- *Negotiate authorship for publication.* If you plan to publish your study (often the case for a dissertation project), an important issue to negotiate before beginning the study is the question of authorship for individuals who contribute to the study. Order of authorship is important to state at the beginning so that individuals who contribute to a research study receive their due contribution. Israel and Hay (2006) discussed the unethical practice of so-called "gift authorship" to individuals who do not contribute to a manuscript and ghost authorship, in which junior staff who made significant contributions have been omitted from the list of authors. The inclusion of authors and the order of authorship may change during a study, but a preliminary understanding early in the project helps address this issue when publication is imminent.

Beginning the Study

- *Identify a beneficial research problem.* During the identification of the research problem, it is important to identify a problem that will benefit individuals being studied, one that will be meaningful for others besides the researcher (Punch, 2014). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) asked, "How do ethical issues enter into your selection of a research problem?" (p. 86). To guard against this, proposal developers can conduct pilot projects, needs assessments, or hold informal conversations to establish trust and respect with the participants so that inquirers can detect any potential marginalization of participants as the study begins.
- *Disclose purpose of the study.* In developing the purpose statement or the central intent and questions for a study, proposal developers need to convey the purpose of the study that will be described to the participants (Sarantakos, 2005). Deception occurs when participants understand one purpose but the researcher has a different purpose in mind. It is also important for researchers to specify the sponsorship of their study. For example, in designing cover letters for survey research, sponsorship is an important element in establishing trust and credibility for a mailed survey instrument.
- *Do not pressure participants into signing consent forms.* When collecting consent for a study, the researcher should not force participants to sign the informed consent form. Participation in a study should be seen as voluntary, and the researcher should explain in the instructions for the consent form that participants can decide not to participate in the study.
- *Respect norms and charters of indigenous cultures.* The researcher needs to anticipate any cultural, religious, gender, or other differences in the participants and sites that need to be respected. Recent discussions about the norms and charters of indigenous populations, such as American Indian tribes, need to be observed (LaFrance & Crazy Bull, 2009). As American Indian tribes take over the delivery of services to members, they have reclaimed their right to determine what research will be done and how it will be reported in a sensitive way to tribal culture and charters.

Collecting the Data

- *Respect the site, and disrupt as little as possible*. Researchers need to respect research sites so that they are left undisturbed after a research study. This requires that inquirers, especially in qualitative studies involving prolonged observation or interviewing at a site, be cognizant of their impact and minimize their disruption of the physical setting. For example, they might time visits so that they intrude little on the flow of activities of participants. Also, organizations often have guidelines that provide guidance for conducting research without disturbing their settings.
- *Make sure that all participants receive the benefits.* In experimental studies, investigators need to collect data so that all participants, not only an experimental group, benefit from the treatments. This may require providing *some* treatment to all groups or staging the treatment so that ultimately all groups receive the beneficial treatment (e.g., a wait list). Further, both the researcher and the participants should benefit from the research. In some situations, power can easily be abused and participants can be coerced into a project. Involving individuals collaboratively in the research may provide reciprocity. Highly collaborative studies, popular in qualitative research, may engage participants as coresearchers throughout the research process, such as the design, data collection and analysis, report writing, and dissemination of the findings (Patton, 2002).
- *Avoid deceiving participants.* Participants need to know that they are actively participating in a research study. To counteract this problem, provide instructions that remind the participants about the purpose of the study.
- *Respect potential power imbalances*. Interviewing in qualitative research is increasingly being seen as a moral inquiry (Kvale, 2007). It could equally be seen as such for quantitative and mixed methods research. As such, interviewers need to consider how the interview will improve the human situation (as well as enhance scientific knowledge), how a sensitive interview interaction may be stressful for the participants, whether participants have a say in how their statements are interpreted, how critically the interviewees might be questioned, and what the consequences of the interview for the interviewees and the groups to which they belong might be. Interviews (and observations) should begin from the premise that a power imbalance exists between the data collector and the participants.
- *Avoid exploitation of participants.* There needs to be some reciprocity back to the participants for their involvement in your study. This might be a small reward for participating, sharing the final research report, or involving them as collaborators. Traditionally, some researchers have "used" the participants for data collection and then abruptly left the scene. This results in exploitation of the participants and rewards and appreciation can provide respect and reciprocity for those who provide value data in a study.
- *Avoid collecting harmful information.* Researchers also need to anticipate the possibility of harmful, intimate information being disclosed during the data collection process. It is difficult to anticipate and try to plan for the impact of this information during or after an interview (Patton, 2002). For example, a student may discuss parental abuse or prisoners may talk about an escape. Typically in these situations, the ethical code for researchers (which may be different for schools and prisons) is to protect the privacy of the participants and to convey this protection to all individuals involved in a study.

Analyzing the Data

- *Avoid going native.* It is easy to support and embrace the perspectives of participants in a study. In qualitative studies, this means "taking sides" and only discussing the results that place the participants in a favorable light. In quantitative research, it means disregarding data that proves or disproves personal hypotheses that the researcher may hold.
- *Avoid disclosing only positive results.* In research, it is academically dishonest to withhold important results or to cast the results in a favorable light to the participants' or researchers' inclinations. In qualitative research, this means that the inquirer needs to report the full range of findings, including findings that may be contrary to the themes. A hallmark of good qualitative research is the report of the diversity of perspectives about the topic. In quantitative research, the data analysis should reflect the statistical tests and not be underreported.
- *Respect the privacy of participants.* How will the study protect the anonymity of individuals, roles, and incidents in the project? For example, in survey research, investigators disassociate names from responses during the coding and recording process. In qualitative research, inquirers use aliases or pseudonyms for individuals and places, to protect the identities of participants.

Reporting, Sharing, and Storing Data

- *Falsifying authorship, evidence, data, findings, or conclusions.* In the interpretation of data, researchers need to provide an accurate account of the information. This accuracy may require debriefing between the researcher and participants in quantitative research (Berg, 2001). It may include, in qualitative research, using one or more of the strategies to check the accuracy of the data with participants or across different data sources, through strategies of validation. Other ethical issues in reporting the research will involve the potential of suppressing, falsifying, or inventing findings to meet a researcher's or an audience's needs. These fraudulent practices are not accepted in professional research communities, and they constitute scientific misconduct (Neuman, 2009). A proposal might contain a proactive stance by the researcher to not engage in these practices.
- *Do not plagiarize.* Copying extensive material from others is an ethical issue. Researchers should give credit for the work of others and quotation marks should indicate the exact words claimed from others. The key idea is to not present the work of another as your own (APA, 2010). Even when material is paraphrased, credit must be given to the original source. Journals typically have guidelines about how much material can be quoted from another source without the author having to pay a permission fee for the use of the material.
- *Avoid disclosing information that would harm participants.* One issue to anticipate about confidentiality is that some participants may not want to have their identity remain confidential. By permitting this, the researcher allows the participants to retain ownership of their voices and exert their independence in making decisions. They do, however, need to be well informed about the possible risks of non-confidentiality, such as the inclusion of data in the final report that they may not have expected, information that infringes on the rights of others that should remain concealed, and so forth (Giordano, O'Reilly, Taylor, & Dogra, 2007). In planning a study, it is important to anticipate the repercussions of conducting the research on certain audiences and not to misuse the results to the advantage of one group or another.
- *Communicate in clear straightforward, appropriate language.* Discuss how the research will not use language or words that are biased against persons because of gender, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic group, disability, or age. Review the three guidelines for biased language in the APA *Publication Manual* (APA, 2010). Present unbiased language at an appropriate level of specificity (e.g., rather than say, "The client's behavior was typically male," state, "The client's behavior was _____ [specify]"). Use language that is sensitive to labels (e.g., rather than "400 Hispanics," indicate "400 Mexicans, Spaniards, and Puerto Ricans"). Acknowledge participants in a study (e.g., rather than "subject," use the word *participant,* and rather than "woman doctor" use "doctor" or "physician").
- *Share data with others.* It is important to release the details of the research with the study design so that readers can determine for themselves the credibility of the study (Neuman, 2009). Detailed procedures for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research will be emphasized in the chapters to follow. Some strategies for sharing include providing copies of reports to participants and stakeholders, making distributions of reports available on websites, and publishing studies in multiple languages when needed.

- *Keep raw data and other materials (e.g., details of procedures, instruments).* Data, once analyzed, need to be kept for a reasonable period of time (e.g., Sieber, 1998, recommends 5 to 10 years; the APA, 5 years). After this period, investigators should discard the data so that it does not fall into the hands of other researchers who might misappropriate it.
- *Do not duplicate or piecemeal publications.* Also, researchers should not engage in duplicate or redundant publication in which authors publish papers that present exactly the same data, discussions, and conclusions and do not offer new material. Some biomedical journals now require authors to declare whether they have published or are preparing to publish papers that are closely related to the manuscript that has been submitted (Israel & Hay, 2006).
- *Complete proof of compliance with ethical issues and a lack of conflict of interest.* Some academic campuses now require authors to file statements indicating that they do not have a conflict of interest in publishing the research. Such conflict might arise from payment for their research, a vested interest in the outcome of the data, or the intent to appropriate the use of the research for personal reasons. As a researcher, you need to comply with requests for disclosure about potential conflicts of interests that surround your research.
- *Understand who owns the data.* The question of who owns the data once it is collected and analyzed also can be an issue that splits research teams and divides individuals against each other. A proposal might mention this issue of ownership and discuss how it will be resolved, such as through the development of a clear understanding between the researcher, the participants, and possibly the faculty advisers (Punch, 2014). Berg (2001) recommended the use of personal agreements to designate ownership of research data.

Summary

It is helpful to consider how to write a research proposal before actually engaging in the process. Consider the nine arguments advanced by Maxwell (2005) as the key elements to include, and then use one of the four topical outlines provided to craft a thorough qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods proposal.

In proposal or project development, begin putting words down on paper early to think through ideas; establish the habit of writing on a regular basis; and use strategies such as applying consistent terms, different levels of narrative thoughts, and coherence to strengthen writing. Writing in the active voice, using strong verbs, and revising and editing will help as well.

Before writing the proposal, it is useful to consider the ethical issues that can be anticipated and described in the proposal. These issues relate to all phases of the research process. With consideration for participants, research sites, and potential readers, studies can be designed that contain good ethical practices.

Writing Exercises

1. Develop a topical outline for a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods proposal. Include the major topics in the examples in this chapter.
2. Locate a journal article that reports qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research. Examine the introduction to the article and, using the hook-and-eye method illustrated in this chapter, identify the flow of ideas from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph and any deficiencies.
3. Consider one of the following ethical dilemmas that may face a researcher. Describe ways you might anticipate the problem and actively address it in your research proposal.
    1. A prisoner you are interviewing tells you about a potential breakout at the prison that night. What do you do?
    2. A researcher on your team copies sentences from another study and incorporates them into the final written report for your project. What do you do?
    3. A student collects data for a project from several individuals interviewed in families in your city. After the fourth interview, the student tells you that approval has not been received for the project from the IRB. What will you do?

Additional Readings

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

This style manual is an essential tool to have as a researcher. In terms of writing qualitative research, it reviews ethical issues and legal standards in publishing. It covers writing clearly and concisely, addressing such topics as continuity, tone, precision and clarity, and strategies to improve writing style. It gives ample illustrations about how to reduce bias in a scholarly research report. It includes sections on the mechanics of style, such as punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and abbreviations. These are a few of the tips for writing that scholars need.

Israel, M., & Hay, I. (2006). *Research ethics for social scientists: Between ethical conduct and regulatory compliance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mark Israel and Iain Hay provide a thoughtful analysis of the practical value of thinking seriously and systematically about what constitutes ethical conduct in the social sciences. They review the different theories of ethics, such as the consequentialist and the nonconsequentialist approaches, virtue ethics, and normative and care-oriented approaches to ethical conduct. They also offer an international perspective, drawing on the history of ethical practices in countries around the world. Throughout the book, they offer practical case examples and ways researchers might treat the cases ethically. In the appendix, they provide three case examples and then call upon leading scholars to comment about how they would approach the ethical issue.

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

Joe Maxwell provides a good overview of the proposal development process for qualitative research that is applicable in many ways to quantitative and mixed methods research as well. He states that a proposal is an argument to conduct a study and presents an example that describes nine necessary steps. Moreover, he includes a complete qualitative proposal and analyzes it as an illustration of a good model to follow.

Sieber, J. E. (1998). Planning ethically responsible research. In L. Bickman & D. J. Rog (Eds.), *Handbook of applied social research methods* (pp. 127–156). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Joan Sieber discusses the importance of ethical planning as integral to the process of research design. In this chapter, she provides a

comprehensive review of many topics related to ethical issues, such as IRBs, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity, as well as elements of research risk and vulnerable populations. Her coverage is extensive, and her recommendations for strategies are numerous.

Wolcott, H. F. (2009). *Writing up qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Harry Wolcott, a distinguished educational ethnographer, has compiled an excellent resource guide addressing numerous aspects of the writing process in qualitative research. He surveys techniques useful in getting started in writing; developing details; linking with the literature, theory, and method; tightening up with revising and editing; and finishing the process by attending to such aspects as the title and appendixes. For all aspiring writers, this is an essential book, regardless of whether a study is qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.

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