

**EDRS 812**  
**QUALITATIVE METHODS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**

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**Course Goals**

1. Understand the essential characteristics of qualitative research and the key ways in which this approach differs from other research strategies.
2. Understand the assumptions embodied in the major approaches to qualitative research, and the implications of these for doing and evaluating qualitative studies.
3. Design and carry out a small-scale qualitative study.
4. Communicate (both verbally and in writing) the design, process, and results of such a study.

**Course Structure**

There are three main components of the course:

1. A **class meeting** once a week. The first part of each class will be devoted to mini-lectures on key topics, demonstrations, class exercises, and general discussion. Each class will encourage **discussion** of qualitative research theory and practice. We will use this time to explore the readings more deeply and critically, and we will consider alternative applications. I encourage you to participate thoughtfully and deliberately to this process.
2. **Assigned readings.** These readings are an essential part of the course; they provide necessary preparation for class lectures, activities, and discussions, and in addition they cover important aspects of qualitative research which there simply isn't time to discuss in detail in class.
3. An individual (or collaborative) qualitative **research project**. General guidelines for this project are provided below; specific guidelines for the project assignments are posted on Blackboard.

### **General Information**

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the fundamental concepts and techniques of qualitative research. Although the emphasis of this course is on qualitative research methods and methodology, there is considerable attention to the philosophy and theory of qualitative inquiry.

This class will be collaborative and interactive—be prepared for discussion! Questions are encouraged and expected, and alternative viewpoints are welcome. I value contributions to our discussions and ask you to speak up. However, I do expect you to support your assertions. Also, I expect all of us to create an educational climate of open debate that is **respectful and democratic**. Further, be familiar with the [GMU Honor System and Code](#). **Your participation as a class member will be evaluated, not by the *quantity* of your contribution, but by the *quality and integrity* of your contribution.**

I suggest that you keep a **journal** throughout this course to document questions and ideas about the process of qualitative research. Notes about class discussion should be included, but personal memos about methodology and questions for group-work are encouraged. This journal is for personal reflection only and will not be turned in or graded.

Reading assignments are listed for the day on which they will be discussed. Also note assignment due dates. Contact me if you have questions or concerns about this material. I am available via e-mail for scheduled appointments.

NOTE: When printing **non-graded assignments and general course materials**, I encourage you to print front and back and/or use recycled paper. Otherwise, please use APA standards for all papers.

FYI: The GMU administration suggests all University community members be familiar with campus emergency procedures. (An emergency response poster is available in each classroom.) For more information or to register with the Emergency Alert System, visit the following link: <https://alert.gmu.edu/>.

### **Course Objectives**

- Develop and critique a personal philosophy of qualitative research in relation to general perspectives of inquiry.
- Identify appropriate research designs for various forms of qualitative research.
- Identify appropriate methods of data collection and analysis, depending on purpose and design of a research project.
- Develop a pilot study to practice data collection and analysis techniques.
- Situate your study in an appropriate literature base and field of study.
- Identify appropriate avenues for dissemination of your research.
- Critique your research project and suggest areas for improvement.

## Assignments

- ✓ **Research Project** You will develop and conduct a pilot study of your methods based on your research interests and program of study. This project results in a comprehensive paper that may be used toward your dissertation. The range of possible projects that you can conduct is extremely broad. The main requirement is that the project has to be genuinely qualitative in nature. (We will discuss in detail what this means in the first class.) Almost any setting, or set of participants, is a potential source of data for your research, including a setting or topic with which you have a prior role or involvement. There are five additional specific requirements for your research project:
1. **No covert research.** This is 1) ethically problematic, 2) too difficult to manage for someone just beginning to learn qualitative research, 3) restricts your research options, and 4) doesn't allow you to learn the key skill of negotiation with those you study. You must have the informed consent of the participants in your research. We will discuss this in more detail in connection with one of the assignments, developing a proposal for Human Subjects approval for your study (in most cases you will not need actual HSRB approval for your course project, unless you are collecting personally-identifiable data from minors or plan to publish the results).
  2. **No primarily comparative studies.** Your main research question can't focus on a difference between two groups or settings or between two categories of people; if your main interest is in such a question, I will usually recommend limiting your study to one of these settings or categories. (Differences that emerge from your study may be a legitimate focus; check with me.) While explicitly comparative studies are a valid and important form of qualitative research, they are not a good way to learn how to do qualitative research. Comparison is likely to 1) push you toward more quantitative questions and modes of thinking, 2) reduce the depth of understanding you can gain of one group, setting, or category, and 3) make it more difficult for you to learn what is essential in qualitative research. In most cases, a course project based primarily on observation should be limited to a single setting.
  3. A minimum of 1) **3 hours of interviews**, or 2) **3 hours of observations of a single setting, plus at least one hour of interview data with one or more participants in that setting.** For an interview study, you will need to record your interviews (using either audiotape or videotape), and to transcribe at least 3 hours of interview material. Normally, this will involve interviewing at least 3 different participants. In special circumstances, it may be possible to work with a single participant; check with me. For an observational study, you will need to do at least 3 hours of observations of your setting, taking written notes, and to reorganize, rewrite, and expand your rough notes to make them usable for analysis. Normally, this will involve at least 3 separate observations. The difference in the amount of material required for interview and observational studies is because interviews require more time to transcribe, and because they usually provide more material to work with for analysis. (Videotaped observations are a special case; if you plan to videotape some activity, talk to me about the amount of material required, which depends on the kind of analysis you'll be doing.) Copies of your transcripts or rewritten observational notes must be handed in with your final report.

4. **Data collection must take place across the semester.** You can't rely mainly on previously collected data, or conduct all of your observations or interviews in a brief period (one week or less). You need to be able to learn from your experiences, and to make corrections to your study design and techniques as you proceed.
5. **You will need to share your work for feedback.** Any arrangements that you make with participants in your study must not prevent discussing your fieldnotes and interview transcripts (with names deleted if necessary) in class. (Class members will be required to respect the confidentiality of this information.) Sharing your work in class is the only way that I can really assess the actual process of your research, and is also an important part of that process. You can't do the work of this class in isolation.

If you are studying a setting where you have a prior role, or are interviewing people with whom you have a prior relationship, you need to **discuss with me the special issues that this raises**, and will need to address these issues in your final report. You are free to use as a setting for your research project the same site that you are using in work for another course or for an internship. However, if you do this, the amount of work involved must be appropriate for the total amount of credit--normally, you can't use the same work (e.g., turning in the same report) to get credit for two courses. In any case, if you are using the work to satisfy two different courses or requirements, you **must submit, both to me and to the other instructor or supervisor, a written description of how you will use your work in this setting to satisfy the requirements of both courses**, and get our signatures indicating our approval of your plans.

- ✓ **Other Assignments** Other non-graded assignments serve as drafts that—with revision—can be incorporated into your final project report. If you don't complete the assignments on time, you won't be able to participate adequately in class discussions, and I will not be able to give you timely feedback that will help you with revising your project.

## Readings

- ✓ **Required Texts**

American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication style manual* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: APA.

Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (4th ed.). New York: Allyn & Bacon/Longman.

Maxwell, J. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

*Other readings as assigned! Some required readings are in supplemental texts; please check Blackboard for additional readings not included in the required texts.*

**Supplemental Texts (We'll preview these in class.)**

- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2007). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Emerson, R., R. Fretz, & L. Shaw (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schram, T. H. (2006). *Conceptualizing and proposing qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle Rive, NJ: Pearson.
- Wolcott, H. F. (2009). *Writing up qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

✓ **Websites and Resources (These are FYI only.)**

- <http://www.icqi.org/>
- <http://www.qualitative-research.net/QualPage/>
- <http://www.coe.uga.edu/quig/resources.html>
- [http://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Opportunities/StandardsforReportingEmpiricalSocial Science\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Opportunities/StandardsforReportingEmpiricalSocialScience_PDF.pdf)
- <http://www.aera.net/aboutaera/?id=717>
- <http://www.slu.edu/organizations/qrc/QRjournals.html>
- <http://www.slu.edu/organizations/qrc/QRweblinks.html>
- <http://www.pbs.org/saf/1507/video/watchonline.htm> (Hidden Motives Series)
- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/beautiful/> (PBS Nova Documentary: A Walk to Beautiful)

✓ **Blackboard Materials**

The course syllabus, discussion guides, and support materials are available on the GMU Blackboard website. We will review the website the first night of class, but you will need to familiarize yourself with the layout of the website.

The course syllabus is a “contract” between the instructor and students, and no changes will be made, except in extreme circumstances. Discussion guides include PowerPoint and other documents that inform our class dialogue; most of these guides are supplemental and will not take the place of in-class material. These materials generally will be uploaded every week before class. Support materials include required items such as listed readings and assignment guidelines. These materials also include supplemental readings (for those of you who might be interested in specific topics), examples of qualitative research studies, samples of student work (including feedback), and samples of my own research publications. Most of these items are FYI (for your information), but many students have noted they are helpful. I appreciate your feedback about the utility of the materials.

**Assessment**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Points</b>
Participation	10
Research Proposal	20
Researcher Identity Memo	20
Research Paper	50
<b>Total 100</b>	

Grades on assignments turned in late will be reduced 10%, and assignments more than one week late will not be accepted. Attendance is very important to class participation; one point will be deducted per class-hour absence. Other non-graded (NG) assignments are required for completion of the research paper. While they are not graded, they are foundational to your project and provide opportunity for feedback.

✓ **Evaluation Criteria**

40% **Reflective Depth and Critical Assessment:** avoids surface presentation and summary of topic; identifies and meets need relevant to discipline; provides neutral presentation of strengths and weaknesses of topic; evaluates strengths and weaknesses; states and supports position.

40% **Integration and Support:** provides comprehensive connections across course material (i.e., readings, discussions, previous learning, and personal experiences); balances theory and practice; provides appropriate and adequate support for ideas, facts, and propositions.

20% **Technical Soundness:** characterizes professionalism and scholarship; attends to audience composition and needs; exhibits drafting and editing appropriate for graduate-level work. Research proposal and final paper should conform to APA 5<sup>th</sup> edition.

✓ **Participation Criteria** Participation is not equivalent to attendance! The following criteria are expected in a professional program planning setting:

- Prepared for discussion and tasks. This includes reading material and attending any team meetings.
- Maintains balance between speaking and listening roles. I do not expect you to ‘time’ yourself; be aware, though, ‘strong’ personalities overpower a discussion. Monitor your team and classroom interactions!
- Listens attentively and offers constructive feedback. All contributions should be considered and negotiated.
- Accepts diversity in viewpoints and negotiates differences. You are not expected to agree with one another at all times! However, we will be respectful and professional.
- Shares leadership roles. While it is comfortable to let ‘managers’ and ‘organizers’ plan strategy, this will result in a vision defined by one person or group.

## Course Outline

### Date Topic and assignments

#### **08/31 Introduction to the Course and to Qualitative Research**

We will overview the syllabus and course requirements and discuss general philosophical and conceptual components of qualitative inquiry.

#### **09/07 The Nature of Qualitative Research**

Assigned:

Glesne (2006) Introduction and Chpts. 1 & 2

Maxwell (2005) Chpts. 1 & 2

Strauss & Corbin (1990) Getting started and Theoretical sensitivity (Blackboard)

Recommended:

Schram (2006) Chapters 1-3

Smith & Pell (2003) Parachute science (Blackboard) ☺

#### **09/14 Choosing a Design Framework**

*Project Idea Memo due (suggested length: 2-3pp.) (non-graded)*

Assigned:

Agee (2010) Developing qualitative research questions (Blackboard)

Maxwell (2005) Chpts. 3 & 4

Reinharz (1997) Who am I? (Blackboard)

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995) Chpt. 4

Schram (2006) Chpts. 4-6

#### **09/21 Site and Participant Selection**

Assigned:

Bogden & Biklen (2007) Fieldwork (Blackboard)

LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch (1993) Selecting and sampling in qualitative research (Blackboard)

Maxwell (2005) Chpt. 5

Patton (2002) Purposeful sampling (Blackboard)

**09/28 Research Relationships and Ethics**

Assigned:

Fine (1998). Working the hyphens (Blackboard)  
Glesne (2006) Chpts. 5 & 6  
Reybold (2003-2004) Faculty socialization and the emergence of research ethos  
in Education (Blackboard)

Recommended:

Eckert (1989) Field work in the high school (Blackboard)  
Reybold (2008) Structuring faculty ethicality (Blackboard)

**10/05 Discussion and Review (Research Design/Proposal)**

**10/12 No Class (I will be at the AAACE Conference all week.)**

**10/19 Interviewing**

***Research Proposal (including HSRB Approval Form) due (maximum length for proposal narrative: 5 pp.)***

Assigned:

Fontana & Frey (1998). Interviewing (Blackboard)  
Glesne (2006) Chpt. 4  
Maxwell (2005) Chpt. 5

Recommended:

Eder & Fingerson (2001) Interviewing children (Blackboard)  
Johnson (2001) In-depth interviewing (Blackboard)  
Seidman (1998) Transcribing interviews (Blackboard)

**10/26 Observations and Documents**

Assigned:

Adler & Adler (1998) Observational techniques (Blackboard)  
Glesne (2006) Chpt. 3  
Hodder, Chpt. 4 (Blackboard)

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1985) Chpts. 1-3



## **11/02 Initial Analysis and Interpretation**

### ***Researcher Identity Memo due (maximum length: 5pp.)***

Assigned:

Becker (1998) Strange talk (Blackboard)  
Corbin & Strauss (1990) Grounded theory research (Blackboard)  
Glesne (2006) Chpt. 7  
Maxwell (2005) Chpt. 5

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995) Chpt. 6

## **11/09 Interpretive, Narrative, and Case Analysis**

Assigned:

Alexander (2003) Interpretive ethnography of Black Barbershop (Blackboard, see QR Articles)  
Maxwell & Miller (2008) Categorizing and connecting strategies (Blackboard)  
Wolcott (1994) Interpretation (Blackboard)

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995) Chpt. 5

## **11/16 Discussion and Review (Data Collection/Analysis)**

We will continue our discussion of data collection and analysis techniques and applications, particularly in relation to your questions and projects.

## **11/23 Validity, Generalizability, and Quality**

### ***Data Collection and Analysis Memo due (suggested length: 5-7 pp.) (non-graded)***

Assigned:

Flyvberg (2006) Five misunderstandings (Blackboard)  
Glesne (2006) Chpt. 7  
Maxwell (2005) Chpt. 6

Recommended:

Polkinghorne (2007) (Blackboard)

**11/30 Writing Up a Qualitative Study**

*Deliver draft project report to your partner (non-graded)*

Assigned:

Glesne (2006) Chpts. 8-10

Phelan, Davidson, & Yu (1998) Donna Carlyle (Blackboard)

Phelan, Yu, & Davidson (1998) Navigating the psychosocial pressures of adolescence (Blackboard)

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995) Chpt. 7

Wolcott (2001) *Writing up qualitative research*

**12/07 Evaluating and Revising a Qualitative Study**

*Return draft project report to your partner with feedback (non-graded)*

Assigned:

Reybold et al. (2008) Student affairs ethics (Blackboard)

Reybold & Alamia (2008) Academic transitions (Blackboard)

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995) Conclusion

Schram (2006) Chpt. 9

*All previous original papers--with my comments--due*

**12/14 Research Project Debriefing**

*Final paper due*

### **Guidelines for Statement of Research Interest/ Research Project “Idea Memo”**

This assignment is a brief memo on what you are thinking of doing for your course research project. It will not be graded, but has two other purposes. First, it is an exercise in thinking systematically about your plans for the project, for your own benefit; it is a "memo" in the sense in which qualitative researchers use this term (Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design*, Chapter 1). Second, it is a way of communicating with me about your intentions for your project. It will be the starting point for an ongoing dialogue about your project. The memo should give a good sense of what you want to do and why, and indicate what you think are the advantages and potential disadvantages of this plan.

I want to emphasize that this assignment, like the other memo assignments for this course, is a “come as you are” party. You do not have to have a fully developed plan for your course project in order to do this assignment. Nor is its purpose for you to justify your study to me or to yourself. Instead, you should use it to write about, and reflect on, your current thinking about your project. I will return the memo to you with questions and suggestions by the next class. You will have an opportunity to reflect on some of these issues in more depth in subsequent memos on your researcher identity, and on your research relationships with your participants.

You should read Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*, Chapters 1-2, before writing this memo, since these chapters raise some important issues for selecting a topic and setting for your project. Although the memo does not commit you to anything, it will be to your advantage to have thought through your plans as much as you can at this point before getting feedback.

There are three main points that you should address in the memo:

1. What is the topic (problem, issue, question, situation) that you want to investigate? What do you want to learn about this topic by doing this study? If you are thinking of doing an observational study, what sort of setting would you want to observe; for an interview study, what sort of people would you want to interview? Do you have an actual site or set of interviewees in mind?
2. Why have you selected this particular topic, and this setting or category of interviewees? What will you gain from studying this topic? Be explicit (but brief) about any important personal or practical reasons you have, as well as your professional and scholarly interests; if we don't know what these are, we can't give you good feedback on their possible consequences.
3. What potential difficulties (personal, practical, conceptual, or methodological) do you foresee in doing this project? How do you think you could deal with these?

### **Guidelines for Research Proposal**

Your research proposal should describe in detail the design and methods you plan to use to conduct your pilot study. A revised version of this project will be included in your final research paper, so many of the same guidelines for that paper apply to this assignment, as well. Consider this a draft of the rationale for your design and methods.

A *standard* format begins with a problem statement and conceptual framework, purpose of study, and research questions. (For your dissertation, you will conduct a review of literature, but this is not necessary for this assignment). The methods section will cover researcher identity, design, and methods. Explain these elements in detail and provide a solid rationale for each choice. Identify relevant readings to support your decisions. Concept maps or matrices may help you think more deeply about your design elements. I encourage you to consult with your advisor if this project will contribute to your dissertation development.

You are not required to follow a standard format; in fact, certain designs would not fit this format! If you plan to use a non-standard format, though, I suggest you discuss this with me.

The proposal text should be no longer than five typed pages, double-spaced, 12pt font (standard APA guidelines).

Please see <http://www.gmu.edu/research/ORSP/HumanSubjects.html> for HSRB forms and application.

### **Guidelines for Statement of Researcher Identity/Research Questions Memo**

The purpose of this memo is to help you examine your background, experience, assumptions, feelings, and values as they relate to the topics, people, or settings you plan to study, and to discover what resources and potential concerns your identity and experience may create.

Researchers frequently make a sharp separation between their research and the rest of their lives. This practice is harmful to good research in two main ways. First, it creates the illusion that research takes place in a sterile, "objective" environment, subject only to rational and impersonal motives and decisions. This obscures the actual motives, assumptions, and agendas that researchers have, and leads them to ignore the influence of these on their research process and conclusions. It also leads researchers to hide their actual motives and practices when they don't conform to this ideal, feeling that only they are failing to live up to the goal of scientific neutrality and disinterest. Second, this separation cuts the researcher off from a major source of insights, questions, and practical guidance in conducting their research.

The purpose of this assignment is *not* to write a *general* account of your background and experiences. Instead, *describe specifically* those experiences, and the beliefs, emotions, and motives that emerged from them, that have most directly influenced your planned research project, and specifically discuss *how* these have informed and influenced your research. See Glesne, pp. 105-112, *illustrations* of the kind of thinking that this memo requires. For additional discussion and examples of ways to think about this assignment, see Maxwell's book, particularly the exercises.

The memo is intended to be mainly for *your* benefit, not for communicating to someone else; try to avoid substituting presentation for reflection and analysis. I suggest that you begin working on this memo by "brainstorming" whatever comes to mind when you think about your prior experiences that may relate to your site or topic, and jot these down without immediately trying to organize or analyze them. Then, try to identify the issues most likely to be important in your research, think about the implications of these, and organize your reflections. Your memo should address the following points. Try to be as specific as you can.

- a. What prior experiences have you had that are relevant to your topic or setting? What beliefs and assumptions do you have about this topic or setting as a result of these experiences? How have these influenced the way you are approaching this project?
- b. What questions do you want to answer by doing this study? What do you already believe or expect about the answers to your questions, and why? How have your experiences shaped these questions, beliefs, and expectations?
- c. What potential advantages do you think the assumptions and experiences that you described create for your study? What potential disadvantages do you think these may create for you, and how might you deal with these?

### **Guidelines for Data Collection & Analysis Memo**

The purpose of this assignment is for you to think about both the process and results of your data collection and analysis so far. To do this assignment, you should have started your analysis, including developing an initial list of coding categories and beginning the coding process.

1. How and why did you choose your research setting and/or the people you have selected to interview or observe? (Focus on how your selection relates to these goals.) What would you do differently if you were to redo the study? Why?
2. What relationships have you established with the participants in your study (including key individuals in your setting, if relevant)? How did you negotiate these relationships and explain your study? How were these relationships influenced by any prior connections that you had with this setting or participants? What impact have they had on your project? Are there changes in these relationships that you want to try to make in the remainder of the study?
3. What, specifically, have you done so far to collect data for your study? (This includes interviews, observations, informal conversations, “hanging out”, collecting documents, discussions with key informants, and any other source of information about the people or setting you are studying. *Describe* these, don’t just evaluate them.) How well has this worked? How has it changed your thinking about your topic or setting? What could you do in the rest of the study to improve your data collection strategies and techniques?
4. Describe and reflect on the way you are analyzing the data you have collected. What are you actually doing, concretely, to make sense of your data? If someone were watching you do this analysis, what would they see you doing? Include all of the types of analytic strategies discussed in class that you’ve actually used, including memos, coding and thematic analysis, connecting or narrative analysis, and displays (matrices and networks). How are you using these strategies to answer your research questions? Short exhibits, such as a list of the most important coding categories you've used, examples of analytic memos you've written, or a concept map of links between categories, can be attached as appendices to illustrate and clarify your analysis strategies.
5. Briefly present the most important tentative conclusions you have come to so far about your participants, topic, and setting, giving examples of the most important supporting data. What have you learned about your topic/participants/setting so far? Be specific about how your analysis methods have enabled you to generate these conclusions. How do these conclusions address your research questions? How have these questions changed over the course of your project? What additional data collection or analysis do you feel that you need to do to develop these conclusions more fully?

Remember, this is a rough draft for your final project. I suggest you allow 5-7 pages for this assignment, though it is NOT GRADED and is for FEEDBACK purposes only. However, if you do not complete this assignment on time, you might not have time to make suggested changes.

## CHECKLIST FOR READING PROJECT REPORTS

This is a checklist of important issues that you should think about in reading and giving feedback on a draft qualitative report. (They are also appropriate for evaluating any qualitative paper or report.) For each of the questions below, ask yourself 1) Is the answer to this question clear in the report? 2) Is the process by which the author addressed this clearly described? 3) Are the process and answer appropriate to the circumstances, and consistent with the rest of the study's design? Keep in mind that the answers to the questions below may not be in this particular order, or may be found in several places in the report.

### I. Research Process

#### A. Topic and goals

- What is the main topic or issue addressed in this report? What are the author's reasons for choosing this?

#### B. Conceptual framework and experiential knowledge

- What prior knowledge (experience, literature, other sources) does the author draw on in conceptualizing the study?
- What theories and assumptions (explicit or implicit) does the author have about the issue or topic studied?
- How did this knowledge, theories, and assumptions inform and influence the study?

#### C. Research questions and focus

- What does the author want to learn by doing this study?
- Does the research have a clear focus?

#### D. Research methods

- What setting or participants were included in the study?
- What relationships did the author already have or establish with participants and other stakeholders? What consequences did these have for the research?
- What ethical issues (privacy, confidentiality, truthfulness, sensitivity to participant concerns, possible harm, etc.) did the study involve, and how were these addressed?

- How were the data for the study collected?
- How were these data analyzed?

## **II. Results**

- A. What are the main conclusions or findings that the author draws from this study? How do these address the research questions? How are these conclusions or findings related to one another—how do they form a coherent story or picture?
- Is the perspective of the participants in the study on the issues studied clearly presented?
  - Is the influence of the specific context of the study addressed?
- B. How are the conclusions or findings supported and illustrated with data? How persuasive is this support?

## **III. Reflection, revision, and validity**

- A. What important validity threats or alternative interpretations to the research results do you see? How did the author address these?
- B. How reflective is the author about all of the issues raised above, and how did this reflection inform the report?
- C. How did the researcher respond to feedback from the participants, the data collected, other students in the section, or the instructor, when this feedback implied the need to make changes in the research?



## Guidelines for Giving and Receiving Feedback on Draft Reports

There are three types of reactions that you should try to convey in giving feedback to your partner on their draft report:

1. What did you like about the report? What did you see as its strengths or positive features?
2. What questions did you have about the report? What places were confusing or unclear? What did you want to know that seemed to be missing? Where did the decisions or conclusions seem to need a clearer explanation or justification?
3. What suggestions do you have for making the report clearer or to help it communicate better what the author meant? What thoughts do you have on how the process or conclusions of the research could be improved?

You should reread chapter 1 in Howard Becker's Writing for Social Scientists, which presents some important issues in giving and receiving feedback on written work. In general, try to put yourself in the author's position and think about what sort of feedback would be helpful to you. **Authors:** when you give your draft report to your partner, you should also provide some guidance on what sort of feedback you are most interested in, and indicate the points on which you would particularly like feedback.

Substantively, the Guidelines for the final project report provide you with a checklist of the most important issues that you should be paying attention to in reading your partner's report. Basically, these fall into two categories:

1. Was the description of the process clear to you? Could you visualize what the author was doing in conducting this research? Did the rationale for this make sense to you? Were there significant omissions, or places where the account was vague or confusing?
2. Were the results of the study understandable and convincing? Did the author's claims seem plausible and well-supported by evidence? Did they hang together as a whole—could you grasp the relationships among the key points, so that it gave you a coherent picture of what the author learned, rather than simply being presented as disconnected “results” or insights?

You can use the assigned example reports as models for what constitutes (in my opinion) a “good” report according to these criteria.

You will need to arrange with your partner for how you will get your reports to one another and how you will provide the feedback. You should provide written as well as verbal feedback, including specific comments (written on the draft manuscript or indexed by page) and overall reactions, and an opportunity for discussion. This is more work than simply giving verbal or written feedback, but in my experience it's a lot more valuable.

### **Guidelines and Checklist for Final Project Report**

Your final report should describe both the process and the results of your research. In contrast to most academic publications, your description of your methods (points 1-5, below) is a major part of the report. However, the results are also important; the (point 6, below) should clearly present your conclusions. Support these with quotes or observations. The following is a checklist of issues that should be discussed at some point in your report. However, the report should also provide a clear and coherent account of how you did the research and what you learned from it, rather than consisting simply of answers to the questions.

1. What topic or issue did you choose for your study? Why did you choose this—what were your goals in using this topic for your course project? How did your own background and experience (including your knowledge of the literature on your topic) influence this decision?
2. What questions about your topic, setting, or participants have you decided to focused on? What theories, beliefs, or expectations did you have about the answers to these? Where did these questions and expectations come from? How did they change during your study?
3. How did you choose a setting and/or participants for your study? What prior connections did you have with this setting or the participants? How did you negotiate a research relationship with these participants? How do you think you were perceived by them? How did these relationships (including prior relationships) influence your study? What ethical issues did you encounter in doing your study, and how did you deal with these?
4. How did you collect the data for your study? For observations, what did you focus on, and how did you record your observations? For interviews, what did you ask about, and how did you follow up on responses? Include both a description of your methods, and a table giving the dates and length of your observations and/or interviews.
5. How did you analyze your data? What methods did you use, and why? What did each of these methods contribute to your understanding of your data?
6. What are the key conclusions or findings about your topic, setting, or participants that emerged from your study? How are the things you learned related to one another—how do they form a coherent story or picture of what you found?
7. What did you do to assess the validity of your conclusions? What limitations on your conclusions, or plausible alternative interpretations of your data, do you see?
8. Knowing what you now know about qualitative research, if you were to do this study over again, what would you do differently? Why? What were the most important things that you learned about qualitative research by doing this study? How has your research influenced your thinking about your topic?

The report should be no longer than 20 typed pages, double-spaced, 12pt font – standard APA guidelines. Please attach copies of all transcripts and field notes.