

**EXERCISE 5.1**

**OBJECTIVE:** To apply narrative analysis to understanding how personal stories are constructed.

**DESCRIPTION:** Write a one-page essay about how to be a good student or a 'good \_\_\_\_' (you can fill in the blank with a social position of your choice, like 'friend,' 'son,' or 'daughter'). Exchange your essay with a classmate who has written a similar piece. Ask her or him to analyze your work in terms of its narrative composition (see Gubrium and Holstein's research in this chapter). Do the same with your partner's paper. Compare the two analyses. Do you see any similarities or differences between the findings from the two analyses? Do they vary in terms of their footings or linkages?

**EXERCISE 5.2**

**OBJECTIVE:** To apply conversation analysis techniques to understanding how media accounts are constructed.

**DESCRIPTION:** Watch an interview with a politician on a TV news program (you may wish to tape the program on your VCR or record it on an audio-cassette). Pay attention to the interviewer's 'footing' or the position from which he or she asks questions (see Clayman's research discussed earlier in this chapter). Does he or she attribute controversial statements to a third party (e.g., 'It has been said by the critics that...')? Also, consider the interviewee's responses. Does the interviewee answer every question or refuse to address some? Are there many pauses in the give-and-take and do these pauses encourage the other person to elaborate on what they are saying? Who is more likely to interrupt the other speaker?

After answering these questions, consider how the conversation could have proceeded differently. For example, what if the interviewer asked questions in the first person (e.g., 'I think you ...')? Or what if the interviewee did not wait for questions and simply made statements of his or her own choosing? You could write your own script of such an interview and compare it with the original to explore the different types of social order that they reflect.

**EXERCISE 5.3**

**OBJECTIVE:** To encourage students' to evaluate the pros and cons of various methods of data analysis.

**DESCRIPTION:** Ask a couple if they are willing to participate in an interview about their relationship. Ask them to tell you the story of how they first met. With the couple's permission, tape-record and transcribe the interview. Analyze the results using one of the orientations discussed in this chapter. Explain your rationale for choosing a particular method and compare its relative weaknesses and strengths with the others discussed in this chapter.

**6****Writing**

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Arguably, we are all writers. Letters or emails to friends, memos for our work colleagues, or even grocery lists are all forms of writing. The act of writing, then, is something that all literate people engage in almost daily. However, when it comes to writing research reports, we tend to become afraid and uncomfortable. We put off assignments for weeks and reluctantly turn our attention to the task of writing hours before the work is due. I hope this chapter will help reduce this fear of writing by offering concrete strategies for thinking about and producing qualitative research papers. The chapter begins with a general discussion of writing. I then review the similarities and differences between producing qualitative and quantitative research reports. Most of the chapter is devoted to the different ways in which qualitative data and findings can be represented.

### The basics of writing

Writing is typically thought of as a unique, creative form of self-expression, but even in its most self-consciously creative manifestations, writing is a craft that involves endless practice and the mastery of techniques. For example, poets spend hours, if not months, writing and rewriting a short verse to perfect its meaning and impact on their readers. Creativity and technical know-how are not mutually exclusive dimensions of the craft of writing. Without technical skills the full depth of one's creative potential cannot be realized. The most frustrating writing experience is to have ideas that appear profound in one's mind but lack the necessary skills to convey them to others. To overcome this problem, we could begin by learning about the basics of writing. For the purpose of the present discussion, this means learning about the challenges that all qualitative researchers face, regardless of their topic of analysis or individual writing style. In the following pages, I address a number of common issues that you may encounter in the course of writing qualitative research projects.

#### Audience

Perhaps the simplest point about writing is to remember who your audience is. In its worst form, losing sight of the audience causes you to assume that your readers know the subject matter as well as you do. We cannot expect the sentences we write to make sense to the readers simply because they are meaningful to us. We do well to remember that writing is a form of communication not unlike speaking. In everyday talk, we attend to our face-to-face audience by maintaining eye contact and speaking clearly. Similarly, when you write, try to visualize your audience. Depending on who this imaginary audience is (an average reader or a learned scholar in your field), ask yourself if your sentences will make sense to them. As a general rule, you might want to try writing for the widest audience possible. If the average person could read and understand your work, it is very likely that experts in your field will also appreciate your work.

#### Momentum

My advisor in graduate school was fond of saying 'Writing has a momentum of its own' (personal communication with author from Gubrium, 1994). I didn't fully understand what he meant until I began writing my qualitative dissertation. As I put into writing my many ideas and organized my observation into different chapters, I quickly learned that in the process of moving from vague insights to a coherently articulated text many new leads are generated. At the same time, what I had previously thought were groundbreaking ideas turned out to be platitudes. Once I put them in writing, they were much less profound than I originally thought them to be.

For example, at the beginning of my project, I wanted to organize my dissertation around the notion that the homeless are 'postmodern heroes of our time.' The idea was inspired by interviews with homeless men who had said things like 'It sucks to be a citizen' or 'I feel sorry for the poor bastards who are enslaved by their work. I am free to sleep where I want and go where I want.' I interpreted such statements as clear rejections of the modern, capitalist premise of productive labor. Chatting in coffee shops with fellow students, I championed the cause of the homeless by quoting their anti-work statements, translating my field notes into political slogans.

Of course, eventually I had to write all of this down into a coherent document. In doing so I was presented with a serious problem. I found it impossible to transform a number of catchy statements into a full-length dissertation. Aside from a few banal declarations like 'It appears that some homeless people reject conventional notions of work,' I had nothing else to write. Given my data and level of expertise, the notion of the homeless as postmodern heroes was a dead end. On the other hand, as my writing and analysis progressed, I came across another idea that seemed more in synch with the empirical evidence. In particular, I noticed that the very concept of 'the homeless' was problematic. The men and women on the streets and in shelters viewed their circumstances from many different standpoints. Some thought of their situation as a type of personal freedom, others said they were 'miserable.' This way of analyzing and writing about my fieldwork became the foundation of my research and was further polished as the writing went on. The otherwise unmanageable mass of data started to fit into an orderly framework. In the previous chapter, it was suggested that in qualitative research data analysis and collection proceed in union. Here I would add that writing in a sense becomes a way of thinking about and analyzing the data.

#### Writing as an ongoing practice

The phrase 'writing as an ongoing practice' has a double meaning. On the one hand, it means that the final product of your writing efforts matures over time. Similar to the above argument about momentum, the ongoing nature of writing implies that the substance and form of a research report is not entirely predictable from the start. As you put down your thoughts on paper or type them into your computer, your writing will move in unexpected directions (though, as I caution in the next section, the challenge is to rein in your intellect; otherwise, your text could rapidly expand beyond the boundaries of the average readers' comprehension). In this sense, to say that writing is an ongoing practice is to acknowledge that this form of communication could be revised and expanded indefinitely.

Another sense of the phrase 'writing as an ongoing practice' has to do with how one could become a better writer with practice. I find it somewhat puzzling that in the social sciences the skill of writing is not taught the same

way as other academic subjects are. For example, in math courses, it is understood that repeated practice is an essential part of learning the principles of this discipline. In contrast, when it comes to writing, especially in the social sciences, we assume that one either knows how to write or doesn't; writing is approached as a talent that cannot be improved. On the contrary, writing is a skill that could be bettered with practice. Don't expect your first draft to be your final one. Think of your paper as an inspiration for a sculpture that begins with a rough piece of marble and gradually becomes a recognizable figure with each strike of the chisel. To say that writing is a practice is to say that it is work. Good qualitative research papers are not written overnight no matter how insightful your research question or how interesting your data.

### Knowing what not to write

Ironically, an important part of writing a qualitative research paper is knowing what not to write. A good research project will generate an enormous number of ideas. In my own research, among the many topics I became interested in were: how the homeless tell their stories, what kind of stories they tell, how the organizational context affects the storytelling, how charity work is performed in an institutional setting, the effect of inter-organizational communication on the storytelling, the survival strategies of the homeless, and friendship and family networks. Admittedly, any one of these topics could be the subject of a book. As one of my advisors reminded me, the challenge is to resist the urge to 'throw in everything but the kitchen sink,' as the saying goes. Not every good idea has to be used in the same paper. Decide what you need to make one project work and save the rest for another paper.

### Proofreading

When it comes to improving your writing, nothing works better for catching typos and refining your arguments than proofreading. Without it, relatively minor problems, like a missing or a misspelled word here and there, could frustrate your reader and cause them to assume a much less favorable attitude toward your work. Don't be shy about asking others to read your work and comment on it. You should especially solicit the input of readers who have expertise in the area about which you are writing. If you don't have this luxury, try reading your paper aloud. If you have a hard time verbalizing what you wrote, the chances are people will have difficulty reading it.

In recent years, we have become more dependent on computer word-processors (e.g., WordPerfect or MS Word) for catching our writing errors. While extremely useful and convenient, these programs are not foolproof. The spell-check feature can be particularly unreliable and lead to very embarrassing mistakes. For example, several years ago, I submitted a paper for publication to a journal. In the abstract of this paper, I inserted the following sentence, 'The

data for this paper was gathered at a pubic conference.' You may have noticed that the word 'pubic,' although correctly spelled, does not fit the sentence. What I meant to say was 'a public conference.' (I am sure the journal reviewers had a good laugh at my expense.) Don't rely on computer software to catch all your errors. Unfortunately, the technology is not that fully developed yet. A correctly spelled word could be semantically incorrect, and the existing computer programs have no way of detecting errors that involve the meaning of a word in a given sentence.

As a whole, attention to these general features of writing could improve any paper. In the next section, I discuss some of the basic differences and similarities between writing quantitative and qualitative papers.

### Writing a research paper

In its most basic form a sociology research paper answers a question posed about society using empirical data. For example, you could write a paper about *why* some teenagers abuse drugs, or *why* some young college students cheat on their exams. You can also ask *how* questions like: How is mental illness represented in Hollywood films? Some research papers are based on *what* questions, such as: What is the rate of unemployment in a given country? In practice, however, there is a good deal of overlap between *why*, *how*, and *what* questions. Your inquiry about the rate of employment, for example, leads to *why* it might be low or high. Similarly, looking into why teenagers do drugs may not be possible without understanding *what* drugs they abuse and *how*.

Regardless of the type of question that is posed in a research paper, the answer is going to involve empirical evidence. For example, in showing how mental illness is represented in cinema, we need to cite specific movies that portray this topic in one form or another. Similarly, when writing about teen drug abuse, we have to demonstrate cases of abuse and provide theoretical interpretations for them. As discussed in Chapter 1, the empirical data for sociological research could be placed into two broad categories: qualitative and quantitative. The significance of this distinction for writing research papers is that procedures for presenting your findings and arguments could vary depending on the type of data you are working with. Let us briefly consider some of these differences.

### The quantitative approach

The numerical nature of the quantitative research paves the way for a standardized approach to data analysis and writing. Typically, the analysis is based on statistical techniques and the data are listed in tables. The accompanying written text summarizes and highlights the content of the tables. Table 6.1 is an example of a numerical table and the writing format that accompanies it.

TABLE 6.1 Frequency distribution of race

Racial category	Frequency	'HO'	Percentage
Black	120		15
White	700		78
Other	115		7
Totals	1000		100

Source: A sub-sample from the General Social Survey 1998

The accompanying text would read:

Table 6.1 shows the frequency distribution of the respondents' race. The majority of respondents (78%) are white with blacks forming the next largest category (15%) followed by other racial groups (7%).

As seen in this example, the words in a quantitative paper describe the numbers. In a more sophisticated research paper, where several variables are compared, the written text relates the numbers to the arguments stated in the introduction of the paper. These arguments, or educated guesses, about potential relationships between variables are referred to as *hypotheses*. In short, in quantitative research, the writing is organized as follows:

- 1 introduction of the problem and research hypotheses;
- 2 description of the methods by which the data was collected and the variables measured;
- 3 presentation of the numerical findings in the form of tables; and
- 4 concluding remarks that both summarize and point to future possibilities for research on the same or a related topic.

#### The qualitative approach

Qualitative and quantitative papers are similar in that they both try to answer research questions using empirical data. The difference is that instead of numerical information, qualitative research is mostly based on descriptive data. This means rather than words elaborating on the meaning of numbers, in qualitative research we have used words to explain other words. It should be noted that for some qualitative researchers, such as content analysts (see Chapter 5), respondents' descriptions are transformed into numbers; therefore, their written reports follow the same format as quantitative studies (words elaborate on the significance of numerical information). However, for most other qualitative researchers, the quality of social life is linked with descriptions offered by the researcher. Consider, for example, the following analysis and related data, which are from a qualitative study of court proceedings to determine who is in need of involuntary commitment to a mental institution.

Descriptions like one's gender can be made consequential, as in the case of Kathleen Wells, who became a candidate for commitment when she was found living in a large cardboard carton beneath a railroad overpass. . . . In presenting her arguments for commitment, the County Attorney . . . invoked the candidate patient's gender as a framework for seeing this arrangement as especially untenable [the data follows]:

Now I know Miss Wells claims that this [the cardboard box] is as good as the subsidized public housing programs. . . , but we have to consider more than its construction aspects. . . . You can't allow a woman to be exposed to all the other things that go on out there under the [railroad] tracks. Many of those men have lived like that for years, but we're talking about a woman here. A sick and troubled woman who doesn't realize the trouble she's asking for. She simply cannot live like that. . .

In this case, the County Attorney explicitly argued that the proposed living arrangement, while perhaps being tolerable for men, was inappropriate for a woman. (Adapted from Holstein 1992: 30)

As shown in this example, in qualitative texts, the analysis typically begins with a background description that sets the stage for the introduction of the data. After presenting the data, more analysis and explanatory remarks follow. This is not fundamentally different from the way quantitative analysis is written. Again, the key difference is that in most qualitative texts words are used to explain other words, whereas in quantitative research this relationship is between words and numbers.

In the next section, we explore a number of formats for organizing a qualitative research paper from start to finish.

#### Styles of presenting qualitative research papers

There are many styles for writing a qualitative research paper. Some researchers opt for thematically organized style, with each section representing a different concept. Others, especially ethnographers, write their reports as stories with a set of characters, a plot, and a setting. For the novice writer this kind of freedom and flexibility can be overwhelming. The obvious question for many beginners is: Where do I begin and end a qualitative paper?

The best way to reduce your anxiety about writing is to begin with a good research question. As the saying about computers goes: 'garbage in, garbage out.' It is hard to transform a loosely stated or illogical research question into a good paper. How does one judge a 'good research question?' Begin by making sure that you can actually collect data about your research topic. If you already have the data, ask a question that is relevant to the information at hand. Recently, a student in my research methods class asked if he could conduct a qualitative research project on the effect of race on criminal behavior. He indicated that he found the in-depth interview approach 'interesting' and thought that race and crime would be 'exciting' topics for a research project. I agreed that the topic was indeed very important, but I had to remind the student of a number of potential problems. First, I asked him to explain why he thought his study should be done qualitatively. There are many large numerical data sets and statistical techniques that could be used to answer a question of this kind, so why do it qualitatively? I also asked him if he had given any thought to where and how he would recruit respondents for his project, and if he saw any ethical problems with asking people about their possible involvement in crime.



Finally, I wanted to know if he had enough time to collect and analyze the data and write up the findings all in the course of one semester (roughly four months). After our discussion, the student decided to take on a more manageable project.

The point of this story is that important topics don't necessarily make for good research questions. You should also consider other factors such as:

- the suitability of the method
- the length of time available for the project
- the expected length and purpose of the paper
- ethical problems

It is likely that the focus of your study might be refined as the project goes on, but if you are not at all clear on how your data will inform potential readers about a given issue, then writing a coherent paper will be next to impossible.

With a sound research question in mind and after collecting and analyzing your data, you are ready to report your findings. The following discussion provides three possible ways for writing a typical research paper.

#### **Standard model**

The most widely used mode of writing a qualitative research paper organizes the text into four elements: *introduction, methods, analysis and conclusion*. Think of each section as answering a different set of questions about your project. Accordingly, the introduction addresses the following:

- 1 What is the topic of your paper?
- 2 Have there been previous studies on this topic? If so, offer a short summary of the most recent ones in terms of their research questions, data, and findings.

The goal of the introduction section is to let your readers know what you are researching and what other researchers have said about your topic.

The second part of a standard research paper discusses the methods. This part tells the readers how you did your study. Specifically, it provides detailed answers to these questions:

- 1 What was the size of the sample for the study?
- 2 How did you collect this sample?
- 3 Where did you collect this sample?
- 4 How did you analyze your data?

The specific content of this section varies depending on the data collection technique and type of analysis. For example, in writing their methods section, ethnographers describe the setting or the research site in great length. They want their readers to know how they gained entry to the site, how they established relationships with their respondents, and what questions they asked from

them and under what circumstances. On the other hand, a researcher who does survey-style, closed-ended interviews is unlikely to put as much emphasis on the setting. For this kind of researcher, the discussion of methods will be mostly about what questions were asked from how many people. A general guide for writing the methods section is to provide enough detail for other researchers to replicate your study if they so choose.

The analysis follows next. Also referred to as the results or the findings, this section presents your data and its interpretation with the goal of providing answers to these questions:

- 1 What is the empirical evidence for this study?
- 2 What social processes are revealed by the data?
- 3 How does it support the researcher's claims about a particular sociological topic or process?

As discussed in Chapter 5, in qualitative research, there are many ways of analyzing data. Irrespective of the type of analysis you conduct, in reporting your findings you should draw clear, logical connections between the empirical data and your interpretations. Do not assume that your readers share your point of view. Take them by the hand, so to speak, and walk them through the data. Refer to the data as much as possible to support your arguments without overwhelming your readers with large, under-analyzed excerpts.

The last part of a typical research paper is the conclusion or the discussion. This section should include the following:

- 1 A brief summary of your project (the research question, methods, and findings)
- 2 The social or political implications of your findings (i.e., how will your study be of interest to ordinary people or policymakers?)
- 3 Ways in which you would improve your study if you had more time and money.

To put it simply, the conclusion states: 'This is what I said I was going to do, this is how I did it, and these were the findings. If I had the time and the resources to do it over, these are the changes I would make to my research design.'

Most other styles of writing research papers are variations of this standard theme. What changes is the style of writing and the degree of emphasis placed on each of the four components (i.e., introduction, methods, analysis, and conclusion). Next we look at how a paper could be organized around concepts or themes.

#### **Thematically organized model**

Another way of writing a qualitative paper is to use themes or concepts from your research as headings for the paper. A good example of this style of presentation is found in Loseke and Fawcett's article 'Appealing Appeals: Constructing Moral Worthiness, 1912-1927.' In their analysis of *New York*

Times stories about candidate charity recipients, the authors organize their work along the following headings:

Appealing Appeals: Constructing Moral Worthiness, 1912–1917  
[This is the title of the paper and is followed by an introductory discussion.]

#### READING THE CAMPAIGNS

[The methods section is inserted here.]

#### THE TRUTH OF THE NEEDIEST

[This is where the analysis of data begins in relation to the concepts of 'need' and 'morality']

Producing Need

Producing Morality

[Subheadings are used to further elaborate on the concept.]

*Morality of Biography*

*Morality of Activity*

*Morality of Motivation*

#### MORALITY AND THE INSTITUTIONAL ORDER

[More data analysis about the institutional context of constructing morality]

#### MORALITY PRODUCTION AND THE APPARATUS OF RULING

[This is where the authors summarize and conclude their findings]

(Adapted from Loseke and Fawcett 1995: 61–67)

Writing your paper this way does not mean you can skip the core elements of a standard research paper (i.e., introduction, methods, analysis, and conclusion). As my bracketed comments suggest, a thematically organized paper still contains these essential components under differently named headings. The main advantage of this style of presentation is that it enables you to give priority to your chosen concepts. The headings provide substantive information about the research, signaling to the reader what topical issue will be discussed next. The challenge of this approach is that it requires some creativity and a good command of your data and analysis. Comparatively, it is easier to simply use generic headings like 'Introduction' or 'Methods.' In practice, most qualitative papers in sociology, especially those published in research journals, use hybrids of the standard and the thematic models. So you might see a heading like 'Analysis' followed by more conceptually driven subheadings. Let us now consider a less traditional model of writing.

#### Story-driven models

Some qualitative sociologists see writing as a type of storytelling, and in presenting their research, they emphasize descriptions of characters, the different

'scenes' in which the data was collected, the author's reflections and the roles she or he enacted in the story. In some forms of this method of writing, the authors themselves become the center of the research narrative. For example, Ellis and Bochner narrate their personal experience with abortion in this way:

#### Telling and Performing Personal Stories: The Constraints of Choice in Abortion

[Title followed by an introduction to the research topic and procedures]

#### The Story

Scene 1: The Pregnancy Test and the Test of Pregnancy

Scene 2: Making the Decision

Scene 3: Dealing with the Decision

Scene 4: The Preabortion Procedure

Scene 5: The Abortion

Epilogue

(Adapted from Ellis and Bochner 1992: 70–101)

As seen in this example, this model does not adhere to the writing conventions of a standard research paper. This has led to some controversy about whether this way of representing social experience passes the litmus test of scientific writing, and more important, if it should be considered sociology at all (see Flaherty et al. 2002, Gubrium and Holstein 1997b, and Marvasti and Faircloth 2002 for a review of the debates surrounding the question of representation in qualitative research).

Nonetheless, the idea of storytelling through sociological research is not entirely new. In fact, most ethnographies are narratives of sort about a person entering a site and reporting their experiences, as in the case of Whyte's classic ethnography *Street Corner Society* (1949). To some degree, the decision to write your paper in a narrative style should depend on how you collected your data and what kind of data you collected. For example, ethnographic methods are better suited for storied research reports (for a discussion of ethnographic techniques see Chapter 3). The research procedures readily lend themselves to the mainstays of storytelling (e.g., characters and settings). The story could begin with the researcher entering the field and end with her or his departure. By contrast, it is more difficult to write a survey research project as a story.

#### Three points about writing research papers

There are three things you should keep in mind when writing a qualitative research paper. First, ask a workable research question. In theory, just about anything could be studied qualitatively, but in practice, some topics are better suited for this method of research than others. If you are interested in the rate of alcoholism among college students on your campus, a survey-based

quantitative project might be the answer. On the other hand, if you want to know about the social processes through which students come to see themselves as 'alcoholics,' in-depth interviews or an ethnography of life on a college campus might produce more fruitful results.

Second, do not approach writing and data collection as separate parts of your research paper. Write everything down as you collect your data. This means everything from conversations with teachers and friends, to your personal feelings about the project, to circumstances under which the data was collected. Much of this material may not be included in the final draft of your paper, but at the very least, the continuous recording of all this information will hone your writing skills. If you don't begin writing until the data collection is complete, your original research question might seem like a needle in a haystack of data. Continuous writing helps you stay on track and focused. Also if you like to talk about your work with friends, make the conversations more productive by tape-recording them, or take notes as you are talking. This might seem pretentious but unless recorded, the useful ideas that are generated in the flow of a stimulating conversation could be lost forever.

Third, learn how to balance your time between writing and data collection: For many students, collecting and talking about their data is more enjoyable than writing. It is more fun to chat with fellow students about your ideas and tell anecdotes from your field experiences than it is to put these thoughts into writing. Force yourself to write as the project moves on. When you have many pages of notes and data, it may be time to devote more effort to piecing together the first draft of the paper.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter began by exploring general aspects of writing (e.g., momentum, writing as an ongoing practice, and the importance of proofreading). Next, some basic distinctions between writing quantitative and qualitative research papers were discussed. I suggested that the two share an emphasis on reporting findings from empirical research. The main difference between them is that with quantitative research the written text references numerical information, whereas in qualitative research words are often used to elaborate on the sociological significance of other words. Also, quantitative research papers tend to be more standardized or formulaic in their presentations than their qualitative counterparts. Three styles of writing qualitative research papers were discussed: the traditional, the conceptually organized, and the story-driven models. The traditional model contains the following components: introduction, methods, analysis, and conclusion. The conceptual model gives priority to themes and concepts in the organization of the paper. Finally, the story-driven model is written in a narrative form, with special attention to the story's characters and settings. The chapter ended with the following recommendations:

- 1 consider the suitability of your research question for a qualitative project;
- 2 write as you collect data; and
- 3 balance your time between writing and data collection.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

For those interested in the more theoretical dimensions of writing, Richardson's book *Writing Strategies: Researching Diverse Audiences* (1990b) offers an assessment of qualitative research as a mode of representing reality. Alternatively, Wolcott's *Writing Up Qualitative Research* (2001) and Silverman's chapters on writing and publishing in *Doing Qualitative Research* (2000) offer reader-friendly and comprehensive advice.

## EXERCISE 6.1

**OBJECTIVE:** To develop a research proposal based on the steps outlined in this chapter.

**DESCRIPTION:** Write a two-page proposal for a qualitative research paper consisting of the following four sections, each about a page long.

*Part one:* Describe your topic and research question. Be specific about what dimensions of a particular topic you are interested in investigating. For example, if you are interested in researching crime, explain what kind of crime (e.g., drug abuse, violent crime, or property crime). Be equally clear about your question. In the example of crime, the question could be something like: How do shoplifters justify their actions?

*Part two:* Explain what research techniques will be used for this study. If you are planning to do interviews, discuss where and how you will recruit subjects and how many will be included in the study. Also include samples of the questions you plan to ask your respondents. Similarly, if you are considering an ethnographic project, describe your research site, how you will gain entry, how long your project will last, and other relevant information. Be sure to include a discussion on why your topic could best be studied using the method you have chosen and what type of analysis will be applied to the data (you may choose one of the approaches discussed in Chapter 5).

*Part three:* Briefly discuss the expected results of your project. What do you think your project will reveal about your topic of interest?

*Part four:* Discuss the practical implications or usefulness of your project. For example, if your study is about shoplifting, how can it be used by police officers or storeowners to deal with this problem?