

Writing the Methodology Chapter

*from Patridge and Stafield
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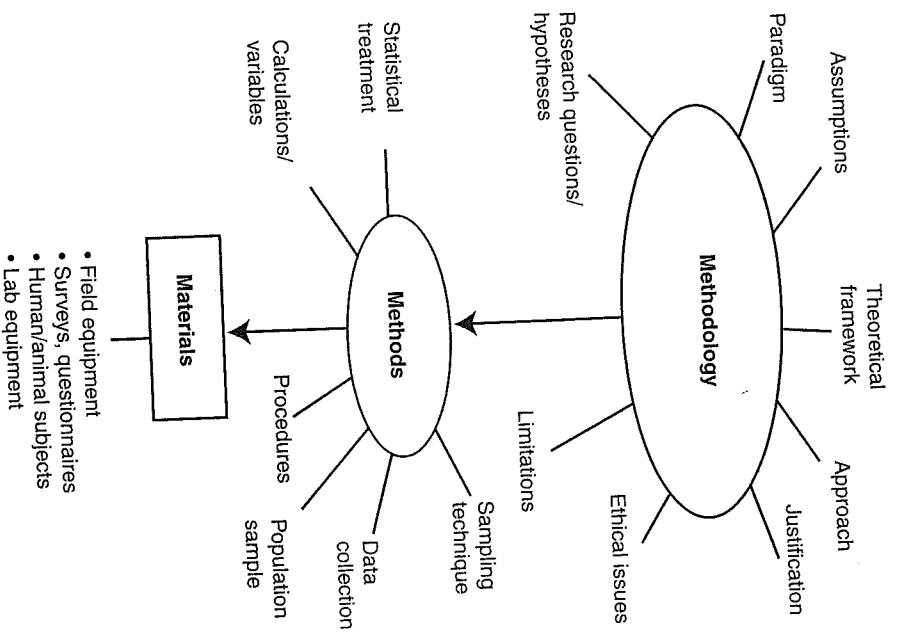


Figure 8.1 Visual map of typical components of a Methodology chapter

Alternatively, the chapter heading may be 'Research Design' (see Box 8.4). At the beginning of this chapter, the writer outlines the rationale for his choice of research paradigm.

Box 8.4 Extract from Research Design chapter of a PhD thesis in history

Note title of chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Use of first person - 'I'

Writer builds argument. Note progression of italicized verbs

used from 'describe' to 'argue'

Justification of choice of research methodologies

In this chapter, I *describe* the research strategy that I have used to study the impacts of the Mississippi 'civil rights movement. Building on the conceptualization of movement outcomes presented in Chapter 2, I *present a more detailed consideration* of the empirical dilemmas for research on outcomes. This initial methodological discussion applies generally to studies of movement outcomes. In addition, I *consider* the Mississippi movement as a case study, in terms of its strengths and limitations. The majority of the chapter focuses on the two components of the research design: the qualitative case studies and the quantitative dataset of Mississippi counties. The analysis that flows from these two distinct research strategies is complementary. In fact, I *argue* that both are essential because each answers different types of questions about the relationship of movements to outcomes.

Source: Andrews 1997:64

Application

Ask your student to examine the contents pages of three recent theses in your field and to report on:

- the location of the Methodology chapter or section;
- the chapter or section titles and sub-headings.

Ask them to reflect on why the writer has opted for the chosen format.

Methodology vs Methods

Methodology refers to the theoretical paradigm or framework in which the student is working; to the stance he or she is taking as a researcher (e.g. choosing a quantitative or qualitative paradigm) and the argument that is built in the

text to justify these assumptions, theoretical frameworks and/or approaches as well as the choice of research questions or hypotheses. The Methodology develops an explanation as to why the research method(s) under discussion have been chosen. The section will probably require a restatement of research aims/questions and involve explaining to the reader how the chosen research method(s) will help answer the research questions.

In the annotated extract in Box 8.4, taken from the beginning of the Research Design chapter, the writer starts with an overview of the chapter in which he outlines how the Research Design combines both quantitative and qualitative components. He makes it clear that the chapter contains a 'methodological discussion' which will examine 'empirical dilemmas' in the area under discussion in the thesis - dilemmas that emerge from the theoretical issues discussed in the previous chapter relating to 'conceptualization'. In other words, part of this chapter will consider theoretical issues at a fairly high level of abstraction (the Methodology) although, as the writer tells us, the bulk of the chapter will focus on the qualitative case studies and quantitative dataset (the Methods).

In Box 8.4, we have italicized the key verbs that announce what the chapter will cover. The verbs begin with a simple *describe* but quickly move to higher order activities such as *present a more detailed consideration*, and *consider* through to *argue*, emphasizing that in this chapter the writer is building a justification for his selection of research design and approach.

Methods refers to the actual research instruments and materials used. The chosen methodology informs the choice of methods and what counts as data. For example, interviews, participant observation and discourse analysis are methods commonly used in qualitative research, whereas in quantitative research the methods and materials used in a laboratory or other experimental setting will require detailed description. The writer needs to discuss why a particular method was selected and not others. The writer should refer to the literature on the method(s) under review and justify their choice using the literature. The justification should revolve around the intrinsic value of the research method chosen in terms of yielding the data that will enable the student to answer the research questions but could also address issues like limited time, the fact that it is a preliminary study, financial constraints, etc.

In Box 8.5 on p. 120, taken from the introduction to a Methodology chapter, the writer overviews her research questions and describes the methods used to collect the data as well as the rationale for the selection of what counted as data in the thesis. Her research methods include use of a questionnaire survey, interviews and a case study. We are also told that the chapter will explain the sampling procedures used, what the questionnaires and interviews consisted of, how the netball case study was developed and how the data was analysed. All the above constitute key components of a Methodology section, specifically the description and justification of the choice of research methods.

Box 8.5 Extract from Methodology chapter of a PhD thesis

Note title of chapter	CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY
Review	5.1 Introduction
Preview of this chapter	The thesis research questions were outlined in Chapter One along with an overview of the methodology used to empirically investigate the associated propositions. This chapter provides further details of the methodology and fieldwork undertaken to collect data to analyse the research questions.
Restatement of research aims	The research problem is: to investigate how sports discourses, organisations and practices have influenced the sporting experiences of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The primary data collected served two key functions. First, data were used for the macro level purpose of revealing the 'big picture' about women, sports and ethnicity. Macro level data and statistics on sports and females from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were obtained via a questionnaire survey method. Second, micro level information represents individual accounts of the situation. Individual interviews were undertaken to complement and personalise the data collected in the surveys and provide women with the opportunity to tell their own stories. The data set was further augmented by the use of an applied case study to explore application and practice in netball. This chapter provides a detailed account of the specific research methods employed, sampling procedures, questionnaire and interview content and protocol, case study methodology and data analysis techniques.
Overview of specific methods used	

Source: Taylor 2000: 144

A review of methods used by similar studies

A sophisticated Methodology chapter will review the methods used by other (seminal) studies in the student's area and comment on their limitations and strengths in terms of the methods utilized. In Box 8.6, the writer provides three major justifications for his choice of the unit of analysis. The final one is the existence of a substantial body of literature which not only gives support to the writer's choice of 'unit of analysis' but will also allow the writer to locate himself within a tradition and enable his results to be compared to the 'broader body of research'. Thus we see clearly that the description of the methods employed should never be merely a description but always link to the writer's broader rhetorical purpose – to persuade the reader that this is a serious piece of academic research, building on, while adding new knowledge to, a solid tradition, by means of reputable methods of investigation.

Box 8.6 Example of justification of unit of analysis

Justification of choice of methods. Note use of organizational pattern – first, second, finally (our italics)

For the quantitative analysis and case studies I use countries as the unit of analysis. There are three major reasons for using countries rather than municipalities. *First*, the movement mobilized at the country level in Mississippi. There was often variation in the country in terms of which areas had greater levels of participation in the movement. Fortunately, the case studies allow me to examine this variation. Nevertheless, countries were a primary organizational unit because they were the most important political unit in Mississippi containing, for example, the County Board of Supervisors, the most significant political body in local Southern politics (see Black and Black 1987 and Krane and Shaffer (1992). This leads to a *second* reason for using countries as the unit of analysis – important outcomes can be measured at the country level. *Finally*, a large body of political research uses countries as the unit of analysis dating back (at least) to Matthews and Prothro's classic study *Negroes and the New Southern Politics* (1966). Following in this tradition allows the results of this study to be compared to this broader body of research (see for example Alt 1994, 1995; Black and Black 1987; Colby 1986; Davis 1987; James 1988; Roscigno and Tomaskovic-Devey 1994; Salamon and Van Evera 1973; Stewart and Sheffield 1987; Timpone 1995 on electoral politics; Conlon and Kimenyi 1991 on schools; and Colby 1985 on poverty programs).

Anticipates results of study

Source: Andrews 1997: 72–73

that the conventions of the discipline and/or the approach chosen shape the choices available to the researcher as writer as to how they present themselves in the written text. This may be an area that the supervisor as an accomplished writer in a particular discipline may not be consciously aware of. We suggest an explicit discussion with the student on this issue as it is often of particular concern to the non-native English speaker. A quick examination of recent journal articles in your field will reveal the dominant pattern but bear in mind that in the PhD or master's the writer is still a student writing for an examiner, whereas in a journal article it is a case of a peer writing for a fellow researcher so this may have an effect on the choice of pronoun. Most importantly, encourage your student, when examining recently submitted theses, to look out for how the writer 'talks' about his or her role in the research – to what extent is the writer 'present' in the thesis? Ask them how the writer's choice makes them 'feel' – comfortable, uncomfortable and why?

In the extracts in Boxes 8.11 and 8.12, we identify some ways in which writers choose to make themselves present in their theses and talk about their role in the research process. Note that in Box 8.11, the writer, who has carried out participant observation research, refers to herself in the third person as 'the researcher', while in Box 8.12, after an extended consideration of the role of the researcher, under its own sub-heading, the writer engages in a reflection on her own background and its possible impact on the research. This elaborated discussion is a justification of the choice of qualitative research methods; of the validity of the data-gathering process and an explicit acknowledgement that research cannot be neutral and objective.

Box 8.11 Writer's representation of herself as researcher in a PhD thesis in Linguistics

Researcher refers to herself in the third person as 'the researcher'. She describes her role as participant observer in research process

The researcher worked as a TESOL in Geneva for two and a half years, spending one and a half years conducting the interviews with colleagues for the Geneva part of the study. Therefore, the researcher experienced first hand the life of a TESOL in Geneva. The researcher gradually became accepted as a participant in the field, being involved in teaching and training during the first year. As a participant observer, therefore, the researcher listened to the problems of teachers and teacher trainers and administrators. The researcher was often privy to confidential information and reports. Whilst these were not used in the study, they helped to confirm or question some of the data.

The researcher was invited to give guest talks, to train teachers in various institutions, and to become president of the professional development association of TESOLs in Geneva.

Source: Waites 1999: 62

Box 8.12 Extract from Methodology chapter of a PhD thesis in which the writer explicitly discusses role of the researcher

5.2.2 Role of the Researcher

Explicit reflection on discussion of the role of the researcher, influenced by feminist methodologies

Feminists strongly argue that methodologies that disenpower women in the research process should be contested. Some of the power-based considerations are the researcher's role, the social significance of the researcher's gender, the validity of research, which does not have emancipation of women as a starting point, and the use of creativity in the research method (Jarvie and McGuire, 1994:164). The latter two considerations have been discussed in the previous section; this section will address issues relating to the gender and role of the researcher.

Transition from 'generic' researcher to the embodied, subjective writer of the thesis. Explicit reflection on the writer's own 'positioning' in the research. Explicit disavowal of positivist objectivity of researcher

As the researcher, where was I positioned within this research framework? As a white, English-speaking woman I should acknowledge that my interpretation and construction of knowledge of 'others' might be seen as coming from a position of power. My approach to this research has been shaped by my cultural background as a third generation Polish Canadian of working class origins living in Australia since 1982. Therefore this research is located within a perspective shaped by my cultural background, class, race and gender. Additionally, as a relatively active sports participant over an extended period of time I bring to this research my personal experiences of sports and a belief that sports participation can be a positive activity.

Source: Taylor 2000: 150–151