Do's and Don'ts of Social Research:
How to Do a Social Research Project

DO:

- Start thinking about your research interests and possible focus early on
- Devise one or a few specific research questions that you would like to answer (see Chapter 1 and FAQ.3)
- Decide on a research strategy—quantitative or qualitative? (see Chapter 1 and FAQ.7)
- Decide on a research design (see Chapter 2)
- Keep a research diary to document your ideas and the research process
- See your supervisor regularly, and listen to their advice
- Create a timetable to avoid last minute panics (see FAQ.12.)
- Conduct a thorough literature search, and keep updating it (see Appendix to Part I and Chapter 16, as well as FAQ.4 and FAQ.5)
- Make a note of bibliographic references as you go along
- Prepare for your research by getting ethical approval, negotiating access, doing a pilot study, etc.
- Choose an appropriate sampling technique (see Chapter 7)
- Make sure that participants are aware of their ethical rights and give informed consent (see Chapter 3)
- Be aware of the interaction dynamics involved in face-to-face interviewing (or any research design that involves direct contact with participants)—how might a lack of rapport affect the validity of the data? (see Chapter 11)
- Be a sensitive and reflexive researcher—think about the ethics and politics of social research (see Chapters 1 and 3)
- Maintain a focus on your research questions (see FAQ.3)
- Allow plenty of time for transcription of interviews or field notes
- Store your data in a safe place to which only you have access (and keep backup copies of documents, etc.)
- Start analyzing your data shortly after you collect them
- Familiarize yourself with technical equipment and computer packages if you intend to use them (see Appendix A of your textbook)
- Start writing drafts of your project report early, and show them to your supervisor (see FAQ.11)
- Structure your written report by including all the relevant sections (see FAQ.14)
- Be realistic and honest about the limitations of your methodology (see Chapter 4 on quantitative research, or Chapter 9 on qualitative research)
- If appropriate, write to thank your research participants and give them a summary of the findings

DON'T:

- Leave it all to the last minute

- Expect everything to go as you have planned; instead, be flexible and prepared for unexpected issues, such as ethical dilemmas, technology malfunctions, or delays in the research process

- Ignore your supervisor's advice, or neglect to see them (see FAQ.11)

- Rely on vague, unfocused, or overly narrow research questions

- Overestimate how much time and money you have, or forget about important deadlines

- Assume there is no existing literature about your topic

- Expect a high response rate for a survey/questionnaire

- Forget to keep a record of what you did and when

- Neglect to follow the professional code of ethics for your discipline (see Chapter 3 or the Statement of Professional Ethics developed by the Canadian Sociological Association https://www.csa-scs.ca/code-of-ethics)

- Proceed with your research without having negotiated access and gained ethical approval (necessary if you will be collecting data from people)

- Get sidetracked by irrelevant questions or peripheral issues when collecting data (unless you are doing completely open-ended, inductive research)

- Put your own safety at risk when conducting research "in the field"

- Store your data in a place to which other people have access

- Underestimate how long it takes to transcribe interview or focus group data

- Assume that you must collect all of your qualitative data before beginning to analyze them

- Believe that you have to use a computer package to analyze your data

- Ignore your institution's specifications for course work or theses (word length, format, presentation, reference style, etc.)

- Use an "unconventional" style of analysis and/or writing (e.g., postmodernist) without consulting your supervisor

- Use sexist, racist, or disablist language in your written work (see FAQ.14)

- Think you can write a good report or thesis the night before your deadline (see FAQ.12);

- Forget to acknowledge the help of your research participants, supervisor, funding body, and anyone else who supported you