

10

Making Notes, Organizing Data, and Constructing Bibliographies

Chapter Summary

Before worthwhile data collection can be done, the researcher must:

- Focus the problem
- Identify and define the basic concepts involved
- Select variables that relate to each of the concepts under study
- Devise ways of measuring each of the variables
- Select a research design that will provide the desired information about the relation between variables
- Decide on a sampling procedure
- Draw the sample
- Be knowledgeable of all ethical considerations involved in the research

There are a number of things that will aid you in keeping your research organized and on track: paying attention to detail, keeping a research journal, maintaining a bibliography, recording notes, and compiling data collection sheets.

Collecting and recording data requires careful attention to detail. Records must be kept, and they must be kept clearly and in such a way that they can easily be retrieved. Most people keep records electronically—it is important to keep this information safe and backed up frequently. Keeping a research journal is especially helpful because ideas and observations tend to be forgotten easily. A research journal also helps keep track of the research decisions made throughout the research process. It is best to keep bibliographies and note cards separately.

All research uses literature to contextualize the topic and support the results. There is specific information that needs to be recorded for every source:

- The basic bibliographic information required for a book is author(s), date, title, place of publication, and publisher.
- The information required for a journal article is author(s), date, title, journal, volume number, issue number, and page range.
- The information required for a chapter in an edited book is author(s), date, title of chapter, name of book editor, title of book, page span of the chapter, place of publication, and publisher.

It is important to ensure this information is recorded for every source so it doesn't need to be located later. This also ensures you will have a complete bibliography in one place. The general rule is that bibliographic reference must include all the information someone else would need to find the reference quickly and easily.

There is no single universally accepted format for in-text and bibliographic referencing. Each discipline and many publishers have their own preferences. APA format is common in the social sciences, including sociology.

Note cards (electronic or paper) are useful for keeping track of ideas and information about sources throughout the research process. When it comes time to write your report, you merely need to consult your notes and you will have all the information you need for a proper quotation and reference. Data collected for each unit of analysis should be recorded separately (see Chapter 7 for more details). By keeping separate records of each unit of analysis, it is possible to manage data effectively for both later analysis and review. In summary, keep careful notes as you collect your data. Be careful and considerate with those you study. Be careful and meticulous in carrying out your research with precision and in recording your findings.

Key Terms

Bibliography A list of books, journal articles, chapters from edited collections, Internet sites, etc. used in the research project. It is of particular relevance to the review of literature. The bibliography is its own section at the end of the project. Each discipline and every publisher has its own preferences regarding the format of the bibliography. A common format used in the social sciences is that of the American Psychological Association (APA). At the very least, a bibliography generally includes information about the author(s), the date of publication, and the title of the works cited in the body of the project. (pp. 212–215)

Data collection sheet (data file) Used for recording information from questionnaires and other primary sources (e.g., content analysis). Data collected for each unit of analysis should be organized and recorded separately. (pp. 217–218)

Note card Note cards can be electronic or paper. They are useful for keeping track of ideas and information from the secondary sources that have been consulted during the process of carrying out the research project. Each bibliographic item is recorded separately and consists of bibliographic and substantive information. Note cards are kept in alphabetical order. (p. 215)

Research journal A research journal is useful for writing the final report. It consists of a record of ideas of the entire research process. It includes the following basic features: decisions regarding the focus of the research question or research objective and the reasons for the decisions; decisions regarding the selection of the hypothesis; reasons for the selection of variables or themes; the development of measures for the variables; and sampling procedures. (p. 212)

Study Questions

Scroll down for answers.

1. Why is it helpful to keep a research journal?
2. Why is it useful to maintain a bibliography?
3. What type of information is normally required in a bibliographical reference?
4. For what three reasons is it essential to keep separate records of each unit of analysis in the data collection sheets?
5. What preparatory steps must a researcher complete before collecting qualitative data?

Video Resources

In 2016, the anthropologist Alice Goffman found herself in the middle of a controversy over the legitimacy of ethnographic research. Much of the story revolved around the accuracy of her record-keeping while in the field. The story, which instructors can piece together using the *New York Times* article and Ted Talk below, is a good starting point for discussing the importance of recordkeeping, particularly as it may conflict with ethical requirements to destroy or anonymize certain pieces of information during the research process.

Lewis-Kraus, G. (2016, 12 January). The Trials of Alice Goffman. *The New York Times*. Accessed December 6, 2018 at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/magazine/the-trials-of-alice-goffman.html>

Goffman, Alice. (2015). How we're priming some kids for college—and other kids for prison. *TED Talk*. Accessed December 6, 2018 at: https://www.ted.com/talks/alice_goffman_college_or_prison_two_destinies_one_blatant_injustice?language=en

Answers to Study Questions

1. A research journal is useful for writing the final report because it consists of a record of ideas of the entire research process such as the decisions that were made regarding the focus of the research question or research objective and the reasons for why those decisions were made. (p. 212)
2. It is useful to maintain a bibliography because it saves time down the road when this information is required, especially when it comes to compiling the items that make up the bibliography as well as when it comes time to write up the literature review. (pp. 212–215)
3. At the very least, a bibliography generally includes information about the author(s), the date of publication, and the title of the works cited in the body of the project. (pp. 213–214)
4. It is essential to keep separate records of each unit of analysis in the data collection sheets for the following reasons:
 - It permits the researcher to manage the data effectively for later analysis and review.
 - It allows the researcher to distinguish between cases that follow trends and those that do not.
 - If the data are incorrect, a separate record makes it easier to find and fix the problematic case. (pp. 217–218)
5. The preparatory steps to be completed by the researcher before collecting qualitative data are as follows:
 - Focus the problem
 - Identify and define the basic concepts involved
 - Select variables that relate to each of the concepts under study
 - Devise ways of measuring each of the variables
 - Select a research design that will provide the desired information about the relation between variables
 - Decide on a sampling procedure
 - Draw the sample
 - Be knowledgeable of all ethical considerations involved in the research (p. 211)