CHAPTER 2

Getting Ready to Do Qualitative Research

Certain personal attributes will help a researcher get ready to do qualitative research. Because the research is highly field-based, the desired attributes include being able to "listen" in a multimodal manner and knowing how to ask good questions. This chapter reviews these and four other attributes.

Beyond the personal attributes, "getting ready" includes preparing to manage field-based research. The chapter discusses this topic, also reviewing ways of practicing research procedures before they might be used in an actual study. The chapter then introduces a topic central to all qualitative research—the need for researchers to acknowledge their own research lens and its potential effect when making research choices. In qualitative research, such a lens plays an extremely important role because the researcher, not some mechanical device, is in effect the main instrument for collecting the data in a field-based study.

As a related topic, researchers must conduct research in an ethical manner. Social science professional associations have established specific codes of ethics, directed at the desired research integrity, and the present chapter summarizes these codes. Finally, an essential preparatory step is to anticipate the requirements for making submissions to an institutional review board (IRB), whose role is to approve study plans. The chapter concludes by describing the approval procedure and some of the challenges it poses.

The field-based nature of qualitative research creates a distinctive challenge. Your research will take place in real-world settings, and you will be collecting data by conversing with people in their everyday roles. The topics of inquiry will not fall within neat or well-established boundaries, and there always will be surprises. As a result, people need to get ready to do qualitative research, even before planning for any specific study.

The readiness conditions call for you to look both inward and outward. Inwardly, you need to anticipate the strengths and weaknesses of your own personal attributes as a qualitative researcher and to know how to do research with the highest ethical standards. Outwardly, you should expose yourself to the expectations of IRBs in approving new studies. Both the self-analysis and

the environmental analysis will give you a strong grounding before you even attempt to start designing a specific qualitative study.

A. Personal Attributes in Doing Field-Based Research

PREVIEW–*What you should learn from this section:*

1. **Six general attributes, transcending the needed technical skills, to do qualitative research well.**
2. **The research situations leading to the need for these attributes.**

To use the research procedures described in the remainder of this book demands that you have certain technical skills. However, these are *not* the competencies covered by the present section. Rather, the section covers six general attributes that need to be part of your persona as a researcher: "listening," asking good questions, knowing your topic of study, caring about your data, doing parallel tasks, and persevering. These attributes transcend your specific technical skills and in this sense may be more fundamental than any specific technical skills.

To some degree, you already will exhibit most or all of the six attributes. Your goal is to set a high bar and to practice the attributes to an exemplary degree. Training, self-training, and emulating esteemed researchers who can serve as mentors or models all are ways of boosting your capabilities.

"Listening"

This attribute takes many forms. It goes beyond your sense of hearing and calls upon all your senses, including your intuitions. For instance, **"listening"** can begin when you size up a group of people, such as their mood and expected friendliness or aloofness as you start to meet with them. Similarly, when you converse with other people, noticing their body language and intonations may be as important as hearing the words they speak. Finally, listening to people's spoken words, as opposed to dominating conversations with your own words, can produce helpful insights into people's thoughts about what is going on.

The desired competence here is actually a silent one. Analogous to an "internal cognitive process" like reading comprehension (Berkeley & Barber, 2014, p. 1), your goal is to take in large amounts of information about your environment, especially about the people in your environment. The intake can be explicit or inferential. Everyday phrases, such as "reading between the lines" (of a document) or "listening between the lines" (of someone's conversation), are relevant to this type of listening. Thus, fieldworkers in qualitative research always need to suspect the existence of something between the lines that may reveal participants' motives, intentions, or deeper meanings. The more you are able to listen for these signals, the better will be your fieldwork.

"Listening" also has a specific visual mode. It takes the form of **being observant**. The competence starts with some sheer physical attributes. For

instance, you should know the narrowness or breadth of your peripheral vision, and whether, without turning your head, you notice something going on across the street as readily as would a companion who is walking next to you. You also should know how efficiently you are able to scan a crowd in order to find a particular person or object. These physical attributes then combine with your attentiveness to visual signals—especially those taking the form of other people's gestures, body language, and physical demeanor—and help to build your ability to be observant.

Being observant includes having a skill in scanning your physical, not just social, environment. The status symbols in a doctor's office, the display of students' work in a school, and the physical well-being or deterioration of a neighborhood all may convey significant information if your study covers one or more of these environments.

For instance, a field-based study of reading literacy found that the public environments of low-income neighborhoods had fewer public signs and written displays than those in middle-income neighborhoods (Neuman & Celano, 2001).

The study claimed that, along with the absence of public libraries and the impoverished reading curricula offered in the schools of the low-income neighborhoods, the paucity of such visual information on the streets and in other public places reinforced an undesirable low-literacy environment.

You also can listen for other features of the social environment that are not entirely based on visual cues. These include the "time" or "pace" of an environment, the commotions, the pitch and tone of conversations, and the general stress that seems to be in the air. You may not be able to measure these features with any degree of precision, but ignoring them might not be a good idea, either.

Asking Good Questions

Although much research data will come from listening, a lot also will come as a result of asking good questions. Without good questions, you risk collecting a lot of extraneous information while simultaneously missing some critical information. Thus, even though you want to be a good listener, this does not mean presenting yourself as a completely passive person in any given setting. It also does not mean that you should expect to say nothing but a repeated "uh-huh" in an interview. You need to ask good questions, too.

If you have a talent for asking good questions, you will note a difficulty in turning the talent off. For instance, when you are interviewing participants in the conversational mode common to qualitative research—and you also want to remain a courteous conversant—you will find yourself suppressing your urge to ask too many questions, for fear of interrupting participants or, worse, steering their remarks. However, after the interview has ended, the talent reappears

when you suffer the frustration of now having recalled another line of questions that you neglected to ask earlier.

In a like manner, imagine reading a document related to your topic of study. The talent for asking good questions will be reflected by your tendency to ask yourself questions while still reading the document. The questions may pertain to the substance of the document but also may direct your attention to the accuracy and credibility of the document. As you read it, you also may conjure questions about its relationship to the other sources of information you have been consulting as part of your data collection. All these questions will lead to two kinds of note taking when you are reading: notes about the reading and notes reflecting your questions.

A **querying mind** shows itself among those people who ask a continuous series of questions. The responses to one set of questions quickly lead to yet other questions. In contrast, you may notice that some people spend a lot of their time talking about their own experiences and expressing their own opinions rather than asking questions. If you tend to be this latter type of person, you may have difficulty doing good qualitative research.

Knowing Your Topic of Study

High among the expected preparations is knowledge of your own topic of research. Many people think that, in doing qualitative research, such knowledge revolves around having a sense of the field setting and participants in their study. Such persons ignore the fact that their chosen topic of study will likely already have been a topic of previous studies. In this sense, knowing about your topic of study requires you to know about the findings from previous research on the topic, not just the anticipated field setting and participants.

Having sufficient knowledge calls for you to chase down these other studies and learn about them, including their methods. Your goal is to avoid inadvertent repetition or reinvention. You also may learn about some research procedures that, properly credited, are worth emulating in your own study. Similarly, insights from the previous research will help to reduce the possibility of your misinterpreting your own data.

Doing a selective, if not comprehensive, review of the literature (see Chapter 3, Section C) would be one way of learning about the most relevant previous research. You need to retrieve the studies, read them, and become comfortable with the substantive issues related to your topic. You can bring the review closer to home by retrieving recent papers, theses, dissertations, and professional presentations made by colleagues at your own university or research organization. For instance, you would want to know quickly whether a colleague in your own academic department or organization had completed a study bearing on yours just a few years earlier.

If, for fear of adopting categories and concepts prematurely, you choose not to review any literature but opt for a "fieldwork first" sequence (see Chapter 3, Section D), you can still make some preparation by gaining an initial

familiarity with your anticipated field setting and its participants. Use the Internet and Google the names of places, organizations, and people. Read about a broad variety of topics in Wikipedia. Talk to people about the field setting. Although this information may not be research-based, it still can acquaint you with your topic in a general way, as long as you are prepared to being misled as well as becoming informed by these sources.

Caring about Your Data

Everyone has probably suffered at least once from inconveniently losing some precious personal belonging. As valued as such belongings are, your research data assume a priceless status when you are doing a research study. The relevant preparation involves creating a supersensitivity for recognizing your data and taking care of them. You will want to be protective and not casual about your notes, electronic files, and hardcopy files. You will want to handle carefully any documents or artifacts that are part of your data.

Research data, but especially field data in a qualitative study, demand special attention and security. For instance, you should not tolerate any disorganized or sloppy management of your field notes. To take such notes, you might have used different-sized paper or even had to write on both sides of the same piece of paper, which normally would be frowned upon. As soon as possible, you should put these notes in order or otherwise refine them, as discussed in Chapter 7. You even might consider photocopying any irregularly sized materials, so that everything is of the same size and one-sided. Then, you should duplicate these notes and keep the copy apart from the original in case one set gets lost or misplaced. Similarly, every time you save notes to an electronic file, you should create a backup file. Ideally, the file should be external to any computer (e.g., by using a jumpstick or an external hard drive), so that the records are not jeopardized should your computer subsequently suffer from some hardware or software failure. When you do any audio or video recording, you need again to make duplicate records as soon as you can and store them apart from the original ones.

In **handling your data**, no amount of care is too much care. Some items when lost, even personal belongings, can be replaced. However, field notes cannot be replaced. You will not be able to replicate the exact conditions that produced the original set of notes. For instance, imagine trying to hold the same conversation over again with a participant. The conversation will not be the same, and the participant may think less of you after you have admitted misplacing the notes that contained the original conversation.

A similar situation arises with documentary data. You should determine at the outset whether you are going to be able to duplicate any documents. If not, or if you do not wish to have the burden of carrying a lot of papers around, you will have to take notes on the spot. These notes also should receive your greatest care. You may not gain access to the same documents again. Similarly, old or deteriorating documents might be best protected by putting them into their own properly labeled outer envelopes or file folders.

Doing Parallel Tasks

The activities involved in doing qualitative research do not come in a neatly tied bundle. You will be continually challenged by having to do or attend to multiple tasks, not all within your direct control, at the same time. This multifaceted environment differs from the work of the stereotypic "bench" scientist, whose challenge (and talent) might be to concentrate intensely on a single display or set of data, trying to unlock some technical puzzle.

Some of the multiple tasks are readily evident. For instance, you will have to know how to make field observations and to take field notes at the same time. The dual task may sound no different from taking notes at a meeting or in a classroom. However, you may have to do these tasks over a prolonged length of time, sometimes moving from place to place. Fatigue and the need for rest can become an issue. Sometimes, just as you have started a break and put down your notes, some unexpected field event then occurs, demanding your renewed attention. When doing fieldwork, you may find that the only real break or rest occurs when you have left the field completely and are in a totally private environment.

Other kinds of multiple tasks in doing qualitative research can be equally demanding. For instance, the recursive rather than linear relationships among your study design, data collection, and data analysis are discussed fully in Chapters 4 through 9 of this book. Such relationships mean that, while you are collecting data, you will simultaneously need to be thinking about their analytic implications, in part to determine whether you need to collect additional data to confirm or augment the collected data.

Here's one final example. At the simplest level of having to attend to multiple tasks in qualitative research, think about the following situation: listening to a participant's rendition of an important event, with all of its critical details and nuances reflecting a cultural environment possibly different from yours—while maintaining an attentive social bearing to let the participant know you are caring about what is being said—while also taking notes—and while also thinking about the best follow-on question(s). Rest assured that you indeed will have developed a special competency after you have mastered such a situation.

Persevering

The word "persevering" is meant to cover a variety of personal attributes—all somehow related to a dedication to stick to your quest in the face of the inevitable frustrations, uncertainties, and even unpleasantries you can confront in doing qualitative research. Because you are studying real-world events, they assume their own natural course and may present unanticipated resistances and challenges. You also may have to deal with embarrassing or difficult interpersonal situations.

Persevering means being able to move forward with your research in spite of all these encounters. Naturally, you may reach a point when you are best advised to cease doing your study, and if you get to such a point you should

consult with other people, such as colleagues and advisers, before throwing in the towel. However, such a fate is not likely to occur in the vast majority of cases. In these cases, persevering and figuring out how to handle difficult situations can lead to exemplary studies, such as a study of family life completed by Annette Lareau (2011) and her research team (see "Overcoming the Challenges of Doing Intensive, Field-Based Research," Vignette 2.1).

VIGNETTE 2.1. Overcoming the Challenges of Doing Intensive, Field-Based Research

A study of 12 families focused on the "largely invisible but powerful ways that parents' social class impacts children's life experiences" (Lareau, 2011, p. 3). The study examined how parents get children through the day, especially during the time they are out of school.

A researcher visited each family's home about 20 times over a year's time, at different times of the day. Gaining access to the families only came after researchers had obtained schools' permission to observe third-grade classrooms, become acquainted with the students, and interviewed many parents. Only after this phase did the author attempt to recruit families for the fieldwork—a process reported to be "very stressful" (Lareau, 2011, p. 351).

The home observations had their own challenges, such as overcoming the awkwardness of the first few visits (Lareau, 2011, p. 355). Fieldworkers also had to learn to be comfortable and to resist intervening in families "where there was yelling, drinking, emotional turmoil, and disciplining by hitting" (p. 353). The fieldwork included eating meals with the families, which occasionally meant pretending to enjoy all the food, even items "intensely disliked" (p. 354). The study describes these and other methodological topics in detail. Along with its substantive findings, the study not surprisingly has received prestigious awards and accolades in the field of sociology.

B. Managing Field-Based Research

PREVIEW–*What you should learn from this section:*

1. **The extended nature of fieldwork and the resulting need to consider it as a management, not just a technical challenge.**
2. **The ways of preserving enough time to plan and anticipate your next steps as you do your fieldwork.**
3. **The different patterns and relationships when fieldwork is conducted by more than a single person.**
4. **Three ways of practicing field procedures before starting an actual study.**

Beyond the preceding personal attributes, the preparation to do qualitative research includes equipping yourself to manage field-based research.

The kinds of field-based research vary. You may serve as a participant-observer in a real-world setting (see Chapter 5, Section E). Doing such research requires recognizing that, inherent in the nature of the "field," events are not within a researcher's control, nor would anyone wish them to be. Thus, the challenge of managing field-based research is to attain some degree of methodic-ness—but to avoid intruding into what is going on and to be able to tolerate occasionally high levels of uncertainty.

Alternatively, you may conduct a qualitative study that largely, if not solely, depends on conducting a series of open-ended interviews (see "A Qualitative

Study Based Solely on Open-Ended Interviews," Vignette 2.2). Note that such interviews are likely to differ from the open-ended portions of survey studies.

VIGNETTE 2.2. A Qualitative Study Based Solely on Open-Ended Interviews

The "field" in qualitative research need not always be the subject of a researcher's observations or personal interactions. Many qualitative studies can be based solely on a set of open-ended interviews. What makes the studies qualitative is that they are interested in the interviewees' words and ideas, not in arraying the responses numerically.

Such a study was done by Kathleen Bogle (2008), who studied "hooking up" on campus by interviewing 76 people (students and alumni) from two colleges. Each interview took from 1 to 1½ hours and was audio recorded, with appropriate assurances regarding anonymity (p. 188).

The study presents numerous brief and selected dialogues (fashioned like movie scripts) between Bogle and the interviewees. Each dialogue illustrates an important topic, revealing both the interviewee's information and perspective about the topic. The dialogues thus form the data for the entire study.

See also Vignette 11.5.

In qualitative research, the interviews usually assume a conversational mode (explained in more detail in Chapter 6, Section C). In a single interview, this mode can continue for an extended period, such as 2 hours. The goal is to encourage participants to have the time and opportunity to reconstruct their own experiences and reality in their own words. Thus, the interview cannot be based on a questionnaire created by the researcher. For many studies, the same person might be interviewed in such a manner on three separate occasions: The first interview might cover the participant's life history; the second might cover the events involved in the topic of study; and the third might cover the participant's reflections on the meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 2006, pp. 15–19).

Managing the fieldwork in such an interview study will involve your recruiting the participants and finding places to do the interviews. The desired locations are venues readily convenient to each participant (e.g., typically, a participant's home, depending on the nature of the study). Less desirable is to have the participant journey to a venue convenient to the researcher (e.g., the researcher's office).

These managerial challenges are then compounded in many qualitative studies, which can consist of doing both participant-observation and extended interviewing, not just one or the other.

Making Time to Think Ahead

To be organized under these circumstances may suggest another multifaceted situation. You will want to be able to follow the natural flow of events in the field, but you should also be sure that you are prepared to follow that flow.

In this regard, a noted management adviser and best-selling author, Stephen Covey (1989), long ago defined a two-by-two matrix covering all kinds

of work, not just fieldwork. However, the matrix presents insights that seem in fact to be especially helpful in understanding how to manage fieldwork. Along one dimension of the two-by-two matrix, work tasks may be considered *urgent* or *not urgent*; along the other dimension, the tasks may be considered *important* or *not important* (see Exhibit 2.1). The four resulting cells are labeled **Cells I, II, III, and IV**.

EXHIBIT 2.1. Stephen Covey's (1989) Time Management Matrix (slightly abbreviated)

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	**I** Crises, pressing problems, deadline-driven projects	**II** Prevention, planning, recognizing new opportunities, relationship building
Not important	**III** Interruptions; some calls, e-mails, and meetings; some reports	**IV** Trivia, busywork, time wasters, pleasant activities

Source: Covey (1989). Copyright 1989 by Stephen R. Covey. Reprinted with permission from Franklin Covey Co.

The matrix helps to understand what might happen in high-pressure jobs. Many tasks are unavoidably both urgent and important (Cell I). People can then aggravate their own situations by letting unimportant tasks become urgent, such as by ignoring known deadlines and then having to scramble to complete the unimportant tasks (Cell III).

Covey notes that the more a workday is filled with important and urgent tasks (Cell I), the greater will be the need to refresh psychic, if not physical, energies by taking breaks and doing leisure activities that would then fall under Cell IV. You can imagine how such a break in the field might be reflected by having a leisurely (and private) meal and deliberately not thinking about your work.

One upshot of this Cell I–Cell IV diagonal pattern is to minimize and perhaps eliminate the time needed to do important but not urgent tasks (Cell II). In other words, if you permit your time in the field to be consumed by the tasks in Cells I and IV, not to speak of having let some unimportant tasks become urgent in Cell III, you may have lost the opportunity to plan, reassess your situation, build better relationships, or do the important tasks in Cell II. Thus, your preoccupation with the urgency of the events immediately confronting you may lead to your inability to anticipate new events or to take advantage of unexpected opportunities.

The matrix illustrates how you may have to struggle to preserve sufficient time in the field to think about your next steps and to consider optional choices—in other words, to plan. Without such planning, and as in your own

personal life, you will not be able to get slightly ahead of events by anticipating your next move. Instead, you will be constantly one or more steps behind, continually trying to catch up.

Managing Field Teams

In most qualitative studies, fieldwork, whether of the participant-observer or interview variety, is conducted by solo researchers, as in a 6-month study of a single kindergarten classroom (e.g., Stribling, 2014). Under such conditions, the main challenge in managing the fieldwork involves self-management and self-control.

However, some qualitative studies deliberately engage additional persons to assist with the fieldwork. The roles of these persons differ.

In the least demanding role, another person may be called upon to serve as a companion to the primary researcher—accompanying the primary researcher but not performing any formal research function. Sometimes, the need may be for personal security—as when a female researcher is to visit the homes of young adult males in order to conduct evening interviews (e.g., Royster, 2003). In other situations, the need may be culturally based—as when holding a private interview between a researcher of one gender and a person of the other gender would appear to be socially inappropriate and jeopardize the researcher's standing in the community being studied (e.g., Menjívar, 2000, pp. 246–247).

A more demanding role requires that the colleague be trained to perform research functions. Such a colleague might be engaged in order to address reflexivity threats. For instance, the primary researcher may worry that a gender, age, or race and ethnicity difference can lead to distorted interview results. Having a portion of the interviews conducted by a colleague who differs in some critical demographic dimension would then help to address such a concern (see "Desirable Teamwork for a Study Based on Open-Ended Interviews," Vignette 2.3).

VIGNETTE 2.3. Desirable Teamwork for a Study Based on Open-Ended Interviews

Pamela Stone (2007) conducted a study about why working women later disrupt their careers to stay at home and care for their families. The study was based on 54 interviews. In addition to describing the selection of the 54 interviewees, the interview settings, the interview protocol, and other procedures, the study also contains a three-page list, enumerating each of the interviewees (with pseudonyms) and providing key demographic data about each one.

Because the author herself was a working mother, and the study respondents were about mothers who had stopped working, the procedures also had to deal with reflexivity threats. While the author did 46 of the 54 interviews, a capable graduate assistant (younger, but *not* a working mother) was deliberately assigned to do the other eight. As a result, the author could compare the findings from two different types of interviewers. Stone's close examination subsequently revealed "few differences between the themes that emerged from my own interviews and those conducted by my research assistant" (2007, p. 251).

An altogether different motivation for having additional team members arises when the scope of study is too broad to be covered by a single researcher. The typical situation would be where a study has multiple field settings. To eliminate temporal or seasonal differences in collecting the data in these settings, the fieldwork might need to be conducted over the same period of time at several sites. In this situation, the primary researcher would need to fully train one or more co-investigators, each one covering a different setting (see "Doing Fieldwork with Multiple Persons Working in Multiple Settings," Vignette 2.4).

VIGNETTE 2.4. Doing Fieldwork with Multiple Persons Working in Multiple Settings

In the classic fieldwork study, a single investigator works at a single site. This arrangement still dominates the bulk of qualitative research studies.

An alternative arrangement calls for multiple investigators to work at multiple sites, all part of the same study. This alternative was followed in a study that covered seven neighborhoods in New York City (Yin, 1982b). Different fieldworkers each spent 3 months in a different neighborhood, participating in and observing street life and its relation to urban services (e.g., fire and police protection, sanitation, and code enforcement).

The design's major benefit was the ability to cover a variety of neighborhoods, compare them, and reach conclusions about urban services from a street perspective. A major challenge of the design was the need to coordinate the fieldworkers and to train them on common procedures but also to exchange information about the conditions in each neighborhood that contextualized its distinctive street life and urban services. For example, a neighborhood with a plethora of abandoned houses produces a different environment from one with too many automobiles and chronic double-parking problems, but the significance of such conditions may be less evident if a study is limited to only a single neighborhood.

See also Vignette 11.2.

The need for such fully trained colleagues also can exist even when a study does not take place in multiple settings. Instead, the study may call for collecting an intensive amount of data about the same setting. In the most elaborate situation, an entire study team may establish a field office and locate there for a year or two (e.g., Lynd & Lynd, 1929). The relevant data may not be limited to field observations and interviews but can involve surveys as well as the retrieval and examination of archival and documentary information.

In a less elaborate situation, an entire team might still have to work together for a prolonged period of time but not necessarily work out of a single office. The data collection would be varied as in the preceding example but also could be extensive, such as collecting life histories of 150 people (e.g., see "Organizing a Research Team to Collect Extensive Field Data," Vignette 2.5).

In any of these latter situations, where colleagues are collecting data in a coordinated fashion, either at multiple sites or at the same site, critical team management procedures emerge. First, the team will probably want to develop and use a common research protocol, to reduce unwanted variability

VIGNETTE 2.5. Organizing a Research Team to Collect Extensive Field Data

Newman (1999) organized "a large group of doctoral students" (p. xvi) to undertake a 2-year study in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. The study focused on the working poor—200 persons employed in "four large, successful fast food restaurants" (p. 36) as well as 100 "unsuccessful job-seekers who had come knocking on the door at two of those establishments during the same period" (p. 36).

All told, the research team amassed the following field data: surveys and interviews of all 300 persons plus the managers and owners of the four restaurants; life histories of 150 of these people, taking 3–4 hours to complete; and intensive data collected about 12 fast-food workers who were "shadowed . . . at close range" (1999, p. 37) for nearly a year, covering their personal and not just working lives. Finally, the team's graduate students also worked behind the counters of the fast-food restaurants for 4 months.

As noted by Newman, "the rich, detailed data that poured in from all sides are the basis for this portrait of minimum-wage workers employed in the fast food industry in the historical capital of Black America" (1999, p. 37).

in collecting the data (see Chapter 4, Choice 7, for a discussion of research protocols). Second, the team will need to convene regular meetings during the fieldwork period, conscientiously coordinating and collaborating its work (e.g., Lareau, 2011, p. 354). Leadership by the primary investigator(s) in assuring that these practices take place properly becomes essential.

Practicing

Research may be considered a form of scholarship. At an earlier time, "doing research" might have meant sitting in a library, accessing primary documents from some cherished archive, and reading and studying them. Esteemed scholarship might have resulted from such desk work. Today, doing research also means actively collecting fresh data, whether in a laboratory or in a real-world setting. To this extent, research is not just a form of scholarship. Research also is a *practice* (and the practice has a craft, as discussed in Chapter 1). Practices can be "practiced," and the more they are practiced, the better the results are likely to be. Preparing yourself by practicing qualitative research by practicing is therefore the topic of this section.

Unfortunately, the best preparation for doing a qualitative study is to have done one already. However, such logic does not help in understanding what to do before your first qualitative study. What you can do is to practice some of the key research procedures independently and on a trial basis.

Using the Exercises in This Book to Practice

The exercises in this book present some of these procedures. Possibly the preferred ones would be those directly related to collecting field data, which include cross-checking two different sources of data (see the exercise for Chapter 6).

In this situation, although the exercise only calls for you to complete a single example such as comparing a single document with an interview of a single person, you can do more. You could easily examine several documents, paired with interviewing several persons. To get the most out of practicing, you should assess your own work after each pairing and decide what changes or improvements you might make in the subsequent pairing. For interviews, for instance, you should with practice eventually become accustomed to listening, asking questions, and taking notes at the same time. Ideally, you will have developed a routine procedure that makes you comfortable.

Beyond self-assessment, having another person observe your work can provide feedback and be of great assistance.

Doing a Pilot Study

Pilot studies help to test and refine one or more aspects of a final study—for example, its design, fieldwork procedures, data collection instruments, or analysis plans. In this sense, the pilot study provides another opportunity to practice.

The information from a pilot study can range from logistical topics (e.g., learning about the field time needed to cover certain procedures) to more substantive ones (e.g., refining a study's research questions). Whatever the purpose of the pilot study, the participants in a pilot study need to know that they are participating in a pilot study. You may be surprised that they might be more than willing to participate because you can design some part of the pilot—and not necessarily a part that will be in the final study—to cater to their needs.

For instance, the participants might desire feedback from an outside observer regarding a pressing issue of theirs. The participants might even ask that you give them a brief written report about that issue after the pilot study has ended. Agreeing to do these tasks will make it easier to arrange the pilot study.

Getting Motivated

Increasing the motivations to do a qualitative study also can be practiced and is an important final way of equipping yourself. If you have trepidations before starting such a study, motivational boosts will help. Such boosts might come from a competitive posture, such as setting high expectations for performing your study. You might check related studies, see how other researchers have accomplished their work under similar circumstances, and aspire to do better.

If the competitive urge does not apply to you, an alternative way of increasing motivation might be to think about the satisfaction you will derive from doing qualitative research. Remember that qualitative research gives you the opportunity to study a real-world setting on its own terms, thereby putting a broad array of study topics at your disposal. Remind yourself of the knowledge to be gained by doing qualitative research. Recall the worthy experiences of

other researchers, many of them well known in their fields, who have successfully done qualitative research.

Finally, you may still want to know more about how qualitative research actually works before committing yourself to this endeavor. To help you, you might skip to Chapter 5. That chapter focuses entirely on the fieldwork experience and how you might go about doing the fieldwork in a qualitative research study. The goal is to get beneath the glitter and initial allure of qualitative research that was initially introduced in Chapter 1 (see Section A), and to gain a realistic sense of what it's like to do the fieldwork in qualitative research, including the challenges others have faced and the remedies they have found.

Beyond practicing your research procedures and motivating yourself before starting an actual study, discussed next is one more extremely important procedure related to qualitative research.

C. Acknowledging Your Research Lens

PREVIEW–*What you should learn from this section:*

1. **The sources that produce your research lens.**
2. **The significance of the researcher serving as the main instrument in doing qualitative research.**

Throughout this process of getting ready to do field-based research, your own biases, predilections, preferences, and choices will seep into the picture. Such seepage will happen while doing your study, whether or not you try to address it explicitly.

For instance, no matter how hard you work at being a good "listener" or at asking good questions, you may not "hear" everything or ask all the necessarily relevant questions. Sometimes, pure negligence is at work. Harder to recognize, people don't "hear" something because they are not predisposed to think in certain ways—what might be called "cognitive gaps." Such gaps are related not only to one's inexperience but also to one's persona (that is, gender, cultural, generation, or personality). All these features, including a tendency to be bound to the ways of thinking associated with a specific academic discipline (what might be called being "discipline-bound"), contribute to a researcher's **research lens**.

In qualitative research, the nature of your research lens plays an extremely important role because qualitative methods depend in large measure on the researcher acting as the instrument for collecting and assessing data—as in making field observations without a formal checklist or conversing with an interviewee without a rigidly structured questionnaire. No physical measuring instrument, experimental procedure, or questionnaire prevails, although all might be used within a qualitative study. In many critical situations, the **researcher unavoidably serves as a research instrument** because relevant real-world phenomena—such as the very "culture" that is a frequent topic of qualitative studies—cannot be measured by external instruments but only can be revealed by making inferences about observed behaviors and by talking to people (Spradley, 1979, p. 7).

The complexity of the lens extends to your abstract thinking and beyond your perceptual or verbal repertoire. Your worldview will likely color your overall approach to qualitative research. More subtly, how you categorize things, and your **selectivity** in focusing on some issues but not others, both typify your abstract thinking. The appeal to creating **thick description**—a term commonly associated with the work of Clifford Geertz (1973) but in fact credited by him (pp. 6–7) to Gilbert Ryle (1949)—is one way of trying to reveal or at least increase one's awareness of the selectivity and the preconceived categories (Becker, 1998). The thicker the description, the more that selectivity might be said to have been reduced, because the thickness of the description calls more detailed attention to the field happenings—in turn making it difficult for a fieldworker to stereotype them through a research lens.

Beyond producing a thick description, other desirable field practices include "confront[ing] ourselves with just those things that would jar us out of the conventional categories, the conventional statement of the problem, the conventional solution" (Becker, 1998, p. 85), and "identify[ing] the case that is likely to upset your thinking and [to] look for it" (p. 87). Nevertheless, no matter how successful these confrontations, researchers cannot in the final analysis avoid their own research lenses. The main compromise involves trying to maintain an awareness of the lens and then to account for the possible effects of the lens in the course of doing a qualitative study—for example, when interpreting a study's findings.

Because research lenses and the role of the researcher as instrument are central to the conduct of qualitative research, the topic reappears throughout this book. In addition, complementary discussions appear in Chapter 3, Section D, as part of starting up a specific new study; in Chapter 5, Section E, in relation to doing participant-observation—a fieldwork method especially sensitive to research lenses; and in Chapter 11, Section D, which discusses the presentation of your *reflexive self*.

D. Setting and Maintaining Ethical Standards of Conduct

Throughout your entire career as a researcher, much less in conducting any single research study, you will need to uphold one critical personal attribute: You will need to bring a strong sense of ethics to your research. Having such a sense is pivotal because of the numerous discretionary choices made by researchers and especially by qualitative researchers. (The ethical spirit transcends but is directly related to the specific procedures for protecting human subjects, the topic of the final section of this chapter.)

PREVIEW–*What you should learn from this section:*

1. **An illustration of how an ethical challenge can arise in analyzing research data.**
2. **The codes of ethics upheld by the social science professions.**
3. **The ways of using disclosure to demonstrate your research integrity.**

An Illustrative Ethical Challenge: Fairly Examining All of Your Data

You might at first think that ethical issues are rather abstract—or that they are likely to arise mainly in your field relationships. On both counts you might be wrong because even in doing qualitative research, one of the most important choices involves deciding what data, once collected, you should incorporate into an analysis. Although the first major objective for building transparency and methodic-ness, as discussed in Chapter 1, is to divulge your research procedures and data as fully as possible, some data will always fall outside of an analysis and not get reported.

On the surface, this occurs because it is impossible to analyze all the data that have been collected. Similarly, the full reporting of all data is confined by the space available in a journal article. Larger works, such as books or dissertations, still have their limits. Researchers should work with all of their data—but might some researchers have ignored some of their data because the data did not support their study's main propositions?

No one blatantly excludes such negative instances. As discussed later in this book (see Chapter 4, Choice 2), such negative instances are in fact to be highly cherished as ways of buttressing a study, even if leading to modifications in its original premises. However, the possibility of **data exclusion** can become a reality, even in experimental research—where a human subject appeared uncooperative or one of the experimental trials appeared irregular. Are the experimenter's data being ignored because of procedural reasons or because of contrary results?

In fact, in doing qualitative research, a similar situation can arise when the researcher ignores an interview of an incredulous participant. Is the participant really incredulous, or is she or he simply disagreeing with the researcher's established beliefs? In other words, though not blatantly ignoring a selected set of data, a researcher might find some excuse to justify their exclusion. To cite another threat, the conversational nature of qualitative research interviews and the serendipity of field observations can create a gray area whereby contrary but seemingly casual remarks or observations may be ignored because they were not considered to be part of the "formal" data collection.

To avoid this kind of bias requires a strong ethical standard. You need to start your research by setting clear rules to define the circumstances under which any data are later to be excluded. You will then need to monitor your own work and to have the willpower to follow your own rules. For instance, a decision-making framework, covering explicit criteria regarding how a particular situation sits with your intuitions, rules, principles and theory, values, and action, may be helpful (see Newman & Brown, 1996, pp. 101–113). You need to know yourself well enough to anticipate when you might be tempted to "make an exception" and to counter the temptation with an even stronger admonition regarding the dire consequences of breaking your own rules. (If anything, you should be *less* willing to make exceptions when they go *against* your preconceptions.)

Codes of Ethics

Behaving properly in this situation is considered a matter of research integrity. You can find actual guidance about such integrity from a number of sources. These sources offer formally stated *codes of ethics, ethical standards*, or *guiding principles* and are promoted by professional associations. Exhibit 2.2 contains selected illustrations from six professional associations whose members include

EXHIBIT 2.2. Illustrative Items in Codes of Ethics of Six Professional Associations (excludes items on protection of human subjects)

Association/year of publication	Illustrative items
American Anthropological Association (2009, Sec. III)	• Responsibility to people and animals being studied: e.g., avoid harm; respect well-being; reciprocate with participants • Responsibility to scholarship and science: e.g., expecting ethical dilemmas; avoiding misrepresentation and deception • Responsibility to the public: e.g., to be open and truthful
American Evaluation Association (2004)	• Systematic inquiry: e.g., to assure accuracy and credibility of findings • Competence: e.g., to possess abilities needed to undertake evaluation tasks • Integrity/honesty: e.g., in own behavior and entire evaluation process • Respect for people: e.g., their security, dignity, and self-worth • Responsibilities for public and general welfare: e.g., account for diversity of interests and values related to evaluation
American Psychological Association (2010)	• Benificence and nonmalfeasance: e.g., striving to benefit those with whom they work and taking care to do no harm • Fidelity and responsibility: e.g., establishing relationships of trust and being aware of professional and scientific responsibilities to society and the specific communities in which they work • Integrity: e.g., promoting accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness • Justice: e.g., recognizing that fairness and justice entitle all persons to access to and benefit from the contributions of psychology • Respect for people's rights and dignity: e.g., respecting the dignity and worth of all people, and the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination
American Sociological Association (2008) & American Educational Research Association (2011)	• Professional competence: e.g., maintain awareness of current scientific and professional information • Integrity: e.g., honesty, fairness, and respect • Professional and scientific responsibility: e.g., adhere to highest standards and accept responsibility for own work • Respect for people's rights, dignity, and diversity • Social responsibility
American Political Science Association (APSA Committee, 2012)	• Grievance procedures: e.g., for human rights of scholars in other countries • Professional ethics adopted by the American Association of University Professors: e.g., to seek and state the truth; to develop and improve scholarly competence • Principles of professional conduct: e.g., freedom and integrity of research

those conducting qualitative research. The guidance pertains to all types of research conducted within these professions, not just qualitative research.

These guides or codes apply whenever a person is doing research and representing a particular profession. Exhibit 2.2 only gives an overview of the associations' codes. To gain a complete picture, you should retrieve, read, and keep in mind at least one of these codes—or some similar example coming from some other profession relevant to your work—when doing your research.

The codes are not long documents. For instance, the code for the American Educational Research Association (AERA; 2011) contains six sets of guiding standards. Each set has a preamble followed by a number of standards. The preamble to the first set, dealing with "responsibilities to the field," represents a good example of what you will find in all the codes:

> To maintain the integrity of research, educational researchers should warrant their conclusions adequately in a way consistent with the standards of their own theoretical and methodological perspectives.
>
> They should keep themselves well-informed in both their own and competing paradigms where those are relevant to their research, and they should continually evaluate the criteria of adequacy by which research is judged.

Note how the preamble does not presuppose any particular type of qualitative or nonqualitative research, much less any of the specialized types or variants of qualitative research to be discussed in Chapter 3 (Section C). Rather, the preamble applies to any kind of empirical research, pointing to the need to provide some sort of methodic support ("warrant") for one's conclusions and to maintain a professional level of competence ("keep themselves well-informed . . . ").

Research Integrity

This personal quality, prominently positioned and common to the various codes, should not be taken for granted. In its rawest form, **research integrity** means that you and your data can be trusted as representing truthful positions and statements. Although research does not demand that you take an oath, as in other fields, people must know, through your actions, demeanor, and research methods, that you are striving to produce research that is truthful, including clarifying the point of view being represented. Truthful statements may include caveats or reservations, indicating uncertainties that could not be overcome. However, absent such caveats and reservations, people are entitled to think that you did in fact report truthful statements.

Research integrity carries special importance in qualitative research. Because the designs and procedures for doing qualitative research are potentially more flexible than doing most other kinds of research, people will want to know that qualitative researchers have gone to great length to conduct their research accurately and fairly. For instance, one sign of research integrity is the

willingness to be proven wrong, or even to have your earlier thinking on a matter challenged.

Disclosure as One Way of Demonstrating Research Integrity

Virtually all researchers will readily claim that they have such research integrity. How to communicate it to others may be another matter.

One helpful way is to disclose the conditions that might influence the conduct of a study. For instance, everybody agrees that researchers should disclose as much as possible about the methodological conditions that might affect a study and its outcomes—such as how a field setting or its participants were selected. However, qualitative research demands **disclosure** about a researcher's personal roles and traits that also might affect a study and its outcomes.

Most commonly, these personal conditions include the influence of a researcher's demographic profile (gender, age, race and ethnicity, and social class). The profile might affect not only the *research lens* through which the researcher interprets events but also the ways in which participants might reflexively react to the researcher's presence, including the participants' choice of topics or responses in field conversations. Marwell's (2007) study of community organizations in Brooklyn presents an excellent example of how both the methodological and personal conditions can be disclosed (see "Detailing the Methodological Choices and Personal Conditions in Doing a Qualitative Study," Vignette 2.6).

VIGNETTE 2.6. Detailing the Methodological Choices and Personal Conditions in Doing a Qualitative Study

Marwell's (2007) study of community organizations in Brooklyn, New York, exemplifies how the various methodological choices and personal conditions can be thoroughly described.

The study involved eight organizations, covering four organizational types in each of two neighborhoods. As a result, the author goes to considerable lengths to tell how she identified the candidates for these choices and how she made the final choices of both organizations and neighborhoods (pp. 239–248).

Marwell's participant-observation fieldwork took place over a 3-year period. She describes her initial access to the field and the implications of her working as a volunteer in these organizations. In a distinctive approach to keeping individuals' identities anonymous or divulging them, she let the participants decide for themselves after being shown the passages of text in which they appeared (2007, p. 253).

Finally, the author gives much attention to the potential effects of her own personal characteristics (race, class, ethnic, linguistic, gender, and age) on her fieldwork experiences, discussing the possible influence of each characteristic separately (2007, pp. 255–259).

The personal conditions also include any affiliation that a researcher might have with the participants being studied. For instance, researchers may study

their own organizations, communities, or social groups—all of which may be considered a form of **insider research**. Quite commonly, researchers may reside in the same neighborhood in which the participants live, using a local residence to establish closer ties as well as to develop greater familiarity with cultural and other contextual conditions. However, these situations do not appear to create as strong a potential conflict as when researchers are studying the same organization of which they are a member. The latter can have complicated power and supervisory implications (e.g., Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Karra & Phillips, 2008), that therefore might need to be part of a disclosure about the affiliation and some conjecture about its possible effect.

As a final personal condition, in practicing some variants of qualitative research, a researcher may assume an advocacy position in relation to the topic being studied. Whether formally recognizing an advocacy role or simply favoring certain views, such perspectives demand to be disclosed as well. The broader concept, discussed throughout this book, deals with reporting about **reflexivity**—describing as best as possible the interactive effects between researcher and participants, including the social roles as they evolve in the field but also covering advocacy positions. Bales's (2004) study of contemporary human slavery provides an example of one way of divulging such information (see "Doing Qualitative Research and Advocating a Sociopolitical Cause," Vignette 2.7).

VIGNETTE 2.7. Doing Qualitative Research and Advocating a Sociopolitical Cause

Scholars doing qualitative research can use the research to stir support for sociopolitical causes. Kevin Bales's (2004) study of slavery in five countries (Thailand, Mauritania, Brazil, Pakistan, and India) is based on extensive fieldwork. In each country, the field team visited slave sites (usually places of business relying on manual labor) and interviewed enslaved persons as well as slaveholders. The author shows how his use of an overarching conceptual framework, as well as the depth of his research, produce an academic and not merely journalistic contribution.

To combat slavery, the author, a professor of sociology, also created and leads an advocate organization, *Free the Slaves*. In his preface, the author proudly notes that the forming of the organization benefited from the first edition of the book, published in 1999. It called attention to the 27 million persons living in slavery or subjected to human trafficking, worldwide.

The preceding examples illustrate the use of disclosure as a way of conveying one's research integrity. A reader who disagrees with the disclosed positions or conditions then has the option of ignoring the reported research entirely. Reversing the roles for a moment, when you happen to be the reader, you may want to follow a common practice of perusing the preface, methodological portions, biographical statements, and even the blurbs of book jackets, before reading the substance of a research report. If some disclosed conditions appear objectionable, you may dismiss the report entirely, or you may read it with a critical eye, to offset any concern that the research might have been unduly compromised.

Overall, the issues of ethical conduct and ways of demonstrating your research integrity are part of one additional preparatory activity, covered next.

E. Protecting Human Subjects: Obtaining Approval from an Institutional Review Board

PREVIEW–*What you should learn from this section:*

1. **The role of an institutional review board.**
2. **The considerations for protecting human subjects.**

With some exceptions, studies with human participants, qualitative or nonqualitative, require prior approval from an institutional review board (IRB). Obtaining the needed approval can be an uneventful part of doing qualitative research. Obtaining approval also can be the source of much frustration, demanding more energy and attention than you might have imagined. Because the latter experience has occurred with some frequency in gaining the approval of qualitative studies, previewing the entire process and its expectations seems like a sensible preparatory step. In other words, you may be like myself and want to know what lies ahead—even though you may not yet have started to design any particular study (which is discussed in Chapter 3).

At the same time, as of the time of writing this book, the IRB procedure is still evolving. A new and important multiyear review of the IRB process started in 2011, but as of early 2015 the process still appeared to be at some intermediate stage, with no immediate action right around the corner. When and if the process does conclude, proposed rules defining a new category of "excused research" may be adopted, possibly resulting in excusing some field-based studies from IRB review (National Research Council, 2014). Such an outcome might make much of the following discussion moot. However, as of the present writing, the recent experiences with IRB review, along with their many issues, are still part of the current institutional landscape. Being sensitive about these issues will help you to navigate the process.

IRB approval is integrally related to the issues of human ethics just discussed in Section D. The relevance of such approval starts with a simple principle: All research with human participants (whether or not they are formally designated as human "subjects") needs to be reviewed and approved from ethical and safety standpoints. The necessity for such review started with developments in medicine and public health, where serious risks of harming people participating in experiments to test new drugs or other treatments, for instance, had arisen. However, risks also can arise in social and behavioral research.

For example, study participants can be exposed to psychological harm if they are deliberately misled or deceived as part of a social experiment. Such research, sometimes involving compatriots of the experimenter acting as "stooges," at one time represented nearly half of all the articles published in one of the most prominent journals in social psychology (National Research Council, 2003, p. 110).

Researchers must carefully indicate and then implement ways of protecting the people participating in their studies. Specifically, the very beginning of an authoritative book on protecting participants in social and behavioral research states well the main underlying principle (National Research Council, 2003, p. 9):

> Progress in understanding people and society and in bettering the human condition depends on people's willingness to participate in research. In turn, involving people as research participants carries ethical obligations to respect their autonomy, minimize their risks of harm, maximize their benefits, and treat them fairly.

The review and approval procedures—and especially how they pertain to social and behavioral research—have produced considerable public discussion, not to speak of highly anguished individual experiences (Schrag, 2014). The discussions have focused on the review of research that on the surface appears to pose "minimal risk" or no "serious risk of harm" to research participants because they are not part of any treatment but are acting in their everyday roles. However, if a study involves delicate questions about a participant's behavior, for instance, some risk might exist. (The conditions that might make minimal risk tolerable are some of the issues now under review as part of the effort to define the new category of "excused research," previously mentioned.)

To prepare yourself well for coping with the review and approval procedures, you will need to spend some time understanding how they are likely to apply to your own research. You can learn more about the topic from numerous websites or from prior IRB experiences at your own institution. Do not be surprised that at some institutions, reviews of planned qualitative research studies have produced a highly charged atmosphere.

Submitting Study Protocols for Review and Approval

This submission takes place before your research can start. A formally constituted review panel, usually called an IRB, will review your **study protocol** that outlines the main features of your study in relation to concerns over protecting its participants.

IRBs exist at every university and research organization. Commercial IRBs may serve multiple institutions. The IRB consists of a panel of five or more peers who volunteer on a rotating basis to conduct the needed reviews. The peers purposely represent different academic disciplines as well as community voices. Some IRBs have their own websites, listing their membership and explaining their schedules, deadlines, and procedures.

Although you will be focused on the outcome of the review of your protocol, be sensitive to the fact that IRBs can have a heavy workload. Already by 1995, the average IRB reviewed 578 protocols per year (National Research Council, 2003, p. 36). The number has undoubtedly risen substantially since then.

Each IRB will generally provide its own guidelines on the nature of the desired study protocol. Depending on the nature of the planned study, the IRB can conduct a full or expedited review, or it can exempt a submission from review. Besides approval or rejection, another common review outcome may be a request for modifications and then a resubmission. Under some circumstances, investigators may have to make multiple resubmissions, often then encountering unanticipated delays that interfere with the original schedule for the planned research (Lincoln, 2005, p. 167).

The IRBs operate under guidelines issued by the U.S. Public Health Service. Although every IRB is trying its best to exercise its responsibilities with great care, these guidelines do not represent hard-and-fast rules. IRBs at different institutions can follow slightly different procedures and may use slightly different criteria in their work. Shifts also can occur as the IRB's volunteer membership rotates. As a result, you should learn about the IRB at your institution and the most recent experiences it has had in reviewing submissions to do qualitative research in general, if not other studies using methods similar to yours.

Specific Considerations in Protecting Human Subjects

The guidelines for the IRBs cover four main procedures that submissions must address (National Research Council, 2003, pp. 23–28):

1. Obtaining **voluntary informed consent** from participants, usually by having them sign a written statement ("informed" meaning that the participants understand the purpose and nature of the research and their role in it—which can be exacerbated if an informed consent form contains too much legalistic jargon);
2. Assessing the harms, risks, and benefits of the research, and minimizing any threat of harm (physical, psychological, social, economic, legal, and dignitary harm) to the participants;
3. Selecting participants equitably, so that no groups of people are unfairly included or excluded from the research; and
4. Assuring confidentiality about participants' identities, including those appearing in computer records, audio records, and video records.

All these procedures require careful consideration when they are customized for any given study. In the first procedure, obtaining consent can be represented by a signature, but IRBs can question whether the obtained consent actually will have been either voluntary or informed. The researchers need to show that there are no implicit constraints on a participant's decision to participate and that the decision is truly voluntary. Likewise, a planned study also needs to be presented in a straightforward manner so that participants can understand what they are agreeing to do and thereby are being truly informed. Special situations, such as collecting data from children, can call for a sound but even more simplified dialogue.

> For instance, one study of 95 families included interviews of 7- to 12-year-olds, focusing on their participation in one of three activities (chess, soccer, or dance). Each child was asked to sign a form indicating that: the child was willing to talk about her or his activity as the topic of the research; the interview was not a test (and the information would not be divulged to teachers or parents); and the interview could stop whenever the child requested (Friedman, 2013, p. 236).

Equally challenging may be implementing the second procedure, whereby an IRB must judge the potential harms, risks, and benefits of individual studies. Similarly, the researchers must demonstrate to the IRBs how their participant selection will be equitable. Finally, researchers need to demonstrate an awareness of their own process for deciding how to deal with **confidentiality**—not just of people's names but also the names of organizations and places—and not just the outcome of the process (e.g., Guenther, 2009).

Given these and other difficulties, the IRB reviews can become onerous and unending (e.g., Lincoln & Tierney, 2004). No less prominent a national organization than the American Association of University Professors (AAUP; 2006) has argued that the reviews even can "constitute a serious threat to academic freedom." Qualitative research presents greater challenges because of the belief that many IRB members have unfavorable views toward "emergent" research methods (Lincoln, 2005, p. 172), or methods whose procedures have not been rigidly cast.

Equally important, qualitative researchers who wish to be successful in obtaining IRB approval cannot take a totally alien stance toward positivist or postpositivist orientations. Specialists with such orientations are likely to be among the members of the IRB. For instance, two leading scholars promote qualitative research as having an essence that includes "an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of postpositivism" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 16). Displaying such a position in the IRB submissions or during the IRB review process may lead to a contentious, if not unsuccessful, encounter. Instead, be prepared to anticipate the likely objections to your research by the IRB members (e.g., questions regarding the definition of your sample or justifications for its likely small size) and to present and explain your study's features in light of the rationale for those objections (see Chapter 4, Choice 4, for some hints regarding definitions and sizes of samples in qualitative research). By trying to understand others' points of view, you would in fact be practicing a central aspect of qualitative research, too.

Preparing for IRB Review

Some suggestions may help you to prepare for IRB review. The most important step already has been mentioned: Before starting the process, you should learn exactly how the IRB review has been working at your university or research organization. Your study is not likely to be the first of its kind to seek approval, so attend closely to earlier reviews of studies like yours. Knowing something

about the individual IRB members and their own research studies and specialties would not hurt, either. If your institution has indeed not experienced your kind of study, seek information about your kind of study when it has been the subject of review at other, comparable institutions.

Second, you should embed your study and research methods within the broader context of other similar or deliberately contrasting studies (see the "selective" review of the literature suggested in Chapter 3, Section D). Such embedding might indicate how your methods fall within the acceptable and known parameters, already published in previous studies and having either no untoward consequences or ones that can be easily anticipated. You also might describe how your study will augment the findings from other research (especially building a broad base by reaching out to nonqualitative studies if possible), thereby building a more important body of knowledge or benefit as a result of being conducted.

Third, until you have gained sufficient experience in obtaining IRB approval, make your study design modest in scope (it still can be innovative and imaginative). Set careful boundaries about how you will do your fieldwork and collect data. Have a knowledgeable colleague review your IRB submission in draft form.

The Informed Consent Dialogue (in the Field) as an Opportunity for Participants to Query You

Once you have gained IRB approval, don't be surprised by an additional dynamic. Your presentation of the provisions to obtain informed consent from a participant also creates a logical opportunity for the participant to query you. The situation may lend itself to participants questioning you about how you are planning to go about your study (not necessarily the substance of your study). Other questions may cover the purpose of your study; what you hope to accomplish by having the ensuing interview or conversation with the participant who is now querying you; how you plan to present your final study; how you will avoid embarrassing or otherwise demeaning others who are going to be the participants in the study; and similar other curiosities about your work.

As much as possible, these types of questions should have been anticipated at the time of the original IRB submission. When and if they arise in the fieldwork, the questions should be handled in a conversational and friendly manner, as opposed to a formal, legalistic, or defensive way. To avoid appearing overly defensive when you are first confronted with such questions, do some preparation. Ideally, have a colleague simulate anticipated questions, permitting you to practice your responses.

In an earlier era and possibly still relevant in many contemporary field settings, responding to these and related questions at the most concrete level may be sufficient (e.g., "I am writing a book" about the *abc* [the name of the field setting]). You will then become known as the person who is writing a book. Being able to point to some previous publications will not hurt such an identity.

Remarkably, as in the earlier era, people might still be flattered that their real world will appear as part of a book.

Recap for Chapter 2:
Terms, phrases, and concepts that you can now define

1. "Listening," sizing up a situation, and reading between the lines
2. Being observant
3. A querying mind
4. Handling your data
5. Cells I, II, III, and IV
6. Pilot studies
7. Research lens
8. Researcher as research instrument
9. Selectivity
10. Thick description
11. Data exclusion
12. Research integrity
13. Disclosure
14. Insider research
15. Protecting human subjects
16. Reflexivity
17. Study protocol
18. Voluntary informed consent
19. Confidentiality

Exercise for Chapter 2:
A Challenging Real-World Event

Describe a real-world experience involving yourself and other people in which you felt highly challenged (e.g., interacting with others at a social event; interviewing for a job or for getting into college; trying out for a sports team or performing in some competitive event; solving some problem with your colleagues at work or family at home; or producing a term paper or other product under demanding conditions).

Describe the challenge you personally faced and how you dealt with it. Indicate how your ability to respond reflected a strength or weakness in your ethical values, personal competency, social skill, familial support, serendipity, or other personal circumstances.

Compare this real-world challenge to your personally most demanding experience in doing qualitative research. If you haven't had a qualitative research experience, compare your responses to the challenging real-world event with what you think will be the most personally demanding or difficult part of doing qualitative research. Whether with regard to an actual or a projected qualitative research experience, were your responses to the real-world event similar to those you had or anticipated in doing qualitative research? Are the two situations totally different, or do they bear some similarities? Can you apply lessons from your real-world experience in ways that will improve how you do qualitative research?

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