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Doing Research in the Real World

by David E. Gray

Publisher: SAGE, London, 4th Ed, 2017

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STATEMENT ABOUT THE BOOK'S PURPOSE

David E. Gray has produced a 4th edition of his successful textbook *Doing Research in the Real World*. This useful handbook for social science researchers includes the addition of entirely new chapters on *Visual Research Methods*, *Digital Research Methods* and *Getting Started Using NVIVO*, along with other chapters updated to reflect developments in digital research tools. This has been done whilst also retaining a comprehensive overview of research methods in the social sciences. The purpose of this book remains to assist researchers and their supervisors in navigating the complex decisions involved in the design and execution of research projects and does this in a clear and approachable way.

Introduction: *Doing Research in the Real World* was first published in 2004 and soon gained popularity as a result of the breadth of its reach and skilful approach to the subject which makes it an accessible text. It can be used as a handbook by dipping into Chapters and sections which are both well-indexed and described in the contents or simply read from start to finish as a course in research methods, such is the strength of the narrative. This readability reflects Gray's skill not just as an academic, supervisor and teacher, but also an expert in coaching and mentoring. As if the book was not comprehensive enough it is backed by a wide range of resources in the form of a companion website, with videos from the author, case studies, selected journal articles, multiple choice and more discursive questions, data sets for practise, links to other websites and video links, and flash cards of key terms linked to the glossary.

Context: Research, particularly in the social sciences, presents unique challenges and the text addresses this complexity by using the term "*real world*" in its title and in the selection of case studies within the text.

The book is divided into four sections:

A Principles and Planning for Research

B Research Methodology;

C Data Collection Methods;

D Analysis and Report Writing.

In the first of these, Gray introduces the theories underpinning research and goes on to show how these are important in project planning. This includes the preparation of a research proposal along with helpful chapters on ethics, literature searching and review.

The section on research methodology provides the reader with useful background on qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research. It also explains the methodologies involved in sampling surveys, case study, evaluation and action research.

The nine chapters comprising the section on data collection methods include useful new material, an example being a section on making use of validation scales in chapter 14. Throughout this section there is helpful material which can be adapted for research use, these include exemplar content for questionnaires, a detailed section on the ethical issues of using digital technology and an extremely valuable table on sources of large-scale survey data in chapter 22. Although the last item is geared towards the UK, international readers could use it to guide them to sources within their own jurisdictions. This section also has two important new chapters *viz. Visual Research Methods* (chapter 20) and *Digital Research Methods* (chapter 21) which reflect the latest developments in research into digital sources, including social media and the use of digital images as data.

The final section on analysis and report writing brings everything together and has invaluable chapters on how to get started using SPSS (chapter 23) and getting started using NVIVO (chapter 24). These represent the two most popular analysis packages for quantitative and qualitative analysis respectively. The chapter on NVIVO is new to the 4th edition and follows a similar format to that dealing with SPSS with the use of helpful screenshots that walk the reader through the analytical process. Users of this section will also find the material on the companion website a useful adjunct to the book. The final chapters deal with the process of writing up research, along with preparation for presentations and *viva voce* examination. This includes writing for publication in academic journals, detailing the processes, procedures and conventions involved. Once again there are useful and thought-provoking tables, especially table 27.4, which seeks to promote succinct writing and tables 28.3 and 4 which illustrate the vices, and virtues of visual aids. There is also emphasis on self and peer review and the importance of reflection in practice, an invaluable process which promotes a thoughtful and professional approach to research.

Evaluation: The publication of the 4th edition is evidence that Gray has successfully developed a format in which the intricacies of social science research can be explored and explained. Whenever a book has a series of editions the inevitable question is not simply what has been added but what has been retained or lost. A comparison of the previous editions is revealing. Material has been retained intact or improved through revised material or better presentation (particularly in the visual appeal of images and tables) with little being lost. Analysis of the page counts of the previous editions evidences this *i.e.* 1st edition: 422 pp., 2nd edition: 624 pages, 3rd edition: 729 pages and the 4th edition: 813 pages. Here, we see a book which has continued to grow without losing its comprehensibility.

The book has not been afraid to address the fast-moving area of digital media. It will be interesting to observe how this changes with future editions as they respond to changes in digital technology and their research applications as a means of studying the development of research techniques in the social sciences.

Throughout the book Gray offers helpful, practical advice to the researcher, one recurring theme is the advice to maintain a contemporaneous log during the research period. This is an important, if often overlooked, activity which permits the researcher to reflect and review the research process.

Summary: The publication of the 4th edition is evidence that Gray has successfully developed a format in which the intricacies of social science research can be explored and explained. Whenever a book has a series of editions the inevitable question is not simply what has been added but what has been retained or lost. A comparison of the previous editions is revealing. Material has been retained intact or improved through revised material or better presentation (particularly in the visual appeal of images and tables) with little being lost. Analysis of the page counts of the previous editions evidences this *i.e.* 1st edition: 422 pp., 2nd edition: 624 pages, 3rd edition: 729 pages and the 4th edition: 813 pages. Here, we see a book which has continued to grow without losing its comprehensibility.

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