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Doing Research in the Real World
by David E. Gray
Publisher: SAGE, London, 4th Ed, 2017

The book introduces a 4th edition of the successful textbook “Doing Research in the Real World” by David E. Gray. This handbook is useful for social science researchers as it includes new chapters on Visual Research Methods, Digital Research Methods, and Getting Started Using NVIVO, along with updated sections to reflect developments in digital research tools. The book retains a comprehensive overview of research methods in the social sciences and remains an essential resource for researchers and their supervisors, guiding them through the complex decisions involved in research project design and execution in a clear and accessible manner.

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. 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.

Introduction: “Doing Research in the Real World” was first published in 2004 and quickly gained popularity due to its broad reach and skillful approach to the subject, making it an accessible text. It can be used as a handbook by dipping into Chapters and sections that are well-indexed and described in the contents, or simply read from start to finish as a research methods course, reflecting the narrative’s strength. This readability is a result of Gray’s expertise as an academic, supervisor, and teacher, as well as his skills in coaching and mentoring.

As if the book was not comprehensive enough, it is supported by a wide range of resources in the form of a companion website, which includes 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, as well as flashcards of key terms linked to the glossary.
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. 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.

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