



Sociology Undergraduate Research Workshop

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Welcome

- Introductions
- Who can do research?
- Why get involved in research? What is the significance of sociological research?
- How can you get involved? What opportunities are there in the Sociology Department and on Campus?

Workshop Overview

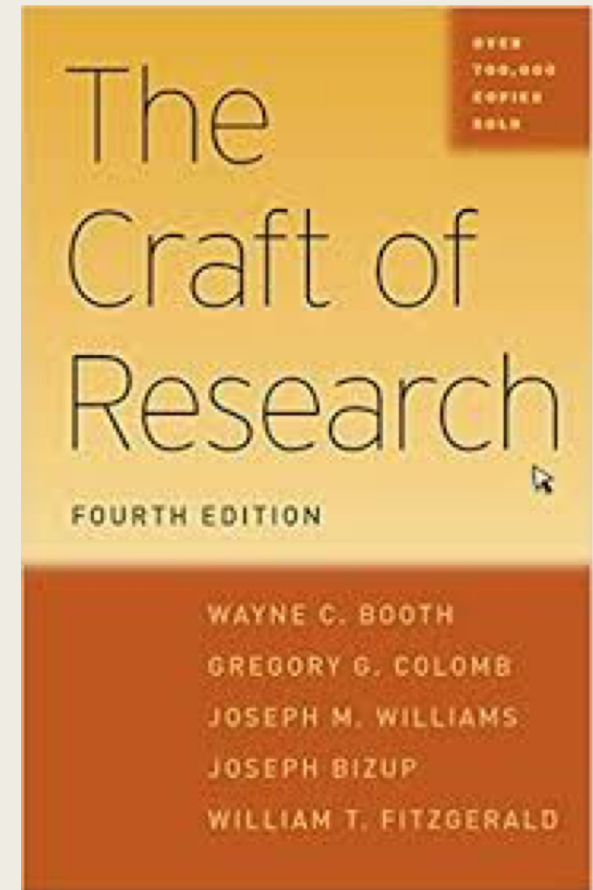
- I. Research Process
- II. Research Question
- III. Research Proposal
- IV. Mentorship
- V. Resources
- VI. Q&A

I. The Research Process

1. Choose a topic
2. Form a hypothesis
3. Review previous literature
4. Determine methodological approach
5. Collect data
6. Complete an analyses
7. Form a conclusion

II. Research Question

1. Choose a Topic
2. Narrow the Question
3. The 'Why' Factor
4. Practice



Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. (2008). *The craft of research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, (pg. 33 – 153).

Research Question: Choose a Topic

■ Inspiration is EVERYWHERE!!

■ What is a sociological Question?

- *Examines social meaning or patterns of social phenomenon*
- *Interested in groups, organizations, geolocations, rather than the individual*

■ General survey of information

- *Skim the web, journals, books, magazines, newspaper articles, class topics, data collected by mentor*

Your turn!!! Let's look at an example and develop topics of your own!

Research Question: Examples

Topic	Brainstorm Ideas/subtopics	Research Question
Neighborhoods and Health		
Black Voter Turnout		

Research Question: Examples

Topic	Brainstorm Ideas/subtopics	Research Question
Neighborhoods and Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neighborhood poverty and mental health• Neighborhood pollution and lung cancer• Neighborhood social networks and obesity	
Black Voter Turnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Factors that influence black voter turnout• Gender differences in black voter turnout• Candidates' race and black voter turnout	

A guide to writing a senior thesis in sociology. (2009). Department of Sociology, Harvard University.

Research Question: Narrow the Question

- Add action words and phrases
 - *conflict, describe, contribute, effect, impact, develop, etc.*
- Generate ‘who, what, when’ questions, **but focus on ‘how and why’ processes**
 - *What is the history of your topic? Paradigm shifts? How is it linked to contemporary issues?*
 - *How does your topic fit into the larger structure and function of society? Symbolic values? Power relations?*
 - *How can your topic be grouped into categories? How do these categories compare and contrast? ****Sociology is inherently comparative***
- Turn negative questions into positive questions, or ask ‘what if’ questions

Your turn!!! Let’s return to our example and generate questions!

Research Question: Examples

Topic	Brainstorm Ideas/Subtopics	Research Question
Neighborhoods and Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neighborhood poverty and mental health• Neighborhood pollution and lung cancer• Neighborhood social networks and obesity	How does children's depression vary with neighborhood poverty and how do parenting practices mediate this relationship?
Black Voter Turnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Factors that influence black voter turnout• Gender differences in black voter turnout• Candidates' race and black voter turnout	How does media portrayal of minority candidates affect black voter turnout?

Research Question: The 'Why' Factor

- This is the most significant question
- Why should other people/scholars care about your question?
 - *Applied/Practical – What should we do?*
 - *Pure/Theoretical – How should we think about your topic?*

Research Question: Practice

Step 1: Name your topic

I am trying to learn about/working on/studying _____

Step 2: Add an indirect Question

...because I want to find out who/what/when/where/ whether/why/how _____

Step 3: Answer ‘So What?’ by motivating your question

...in order to help my reader understand how, why, whether _____

Step 4: Practical Application

...so that the reader can [achieve an objective goal]

III. Research Proposal

1. Introduction/Create a Research Space
2. Review of Previous Literature
3. Description of Methods
4. Data Collection
5. Analyses
6. Chapter Outline

Research proposal: Introduction

The goals of your introduction section

- Introduce your topic*
- Identify your rationale: the gap, problem, trend, etc. that motivates the study*
- Announce your contribution/purpose*

Research proposal: Create a Research Space (CARS)

CARS Method:

1. *Establish a Research Territory*
2. *Establish a Niche*
3. *Occupy the Niche*



Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis : English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Research Proposal: Create a Research Space (CARS)

Step 1: Establish a Research Territory

- Provide a brief background to your research;
and/or
- Generalize prior research, methodologies, and theoretical trends that foreshadows your own contribution

Research Proposal: Create a Research Space (CARS)

Step 2: Establish a Niche

- Counter theory, argument, and/or methods used in previous research; *and/or*
- Indicate a gap in scholarship, research design, etc.; *and/or*
- Raise new questions; *and/or*
- Continue a trend and/or logical conclusion to a pattern you've noticed
 - *This step opens up space for possible solutions*

Research Proposal: Create a Research Space (CARS)

Step 3: Occupy the Niche

- Outline your purpose(s); *and/or*
- Announce present research; *and/or*
- Announce principal findings; *and/or*
- Indicate research article structure

Let's look at an example introduction!

Pager, Devah. (2003). *The Mark of a Criminal Record*. American Journal of Sociology, 108(5), 937-975.

Step 1: Establish Research Territory

While stratification researchers typically focus on schools, labor markets, and the family as primary institutions affecting inequality, a new institution has emerged as central to the sorting and stratifying of young and disadvantaged men: the criminal justice system. With over 2 million individuals currently incarcerated, and over half a million prisoners released each year, the large and growing numbers of men being processed through the criminal justice system raises important questions about the consequences of this massive institutional intervention.

Step 2: Establish a Niche

This article focuses on the consequences of incarceration for the employment outcomes of black and white men. While previous survey research has demonstrated a strong *association* between incarceration and employment, there remains little understanding of the mechanisms by which these outcomes are produced.

Step 3: Occupy the Niche

In the present study, I adopt an experimental audit approach to formally test the degree to which a criminal record affects subsequent employment opportunities. By using matched pairs of individuals to apply for real entry-level jobs, it becomes possible to directly measure the extent to which a criminal record—in the absence of other disqualifying characteristics—serves as a barrier to employment among equally qualified applicants. Further, by varying the race of the tester pairs, we can assess the ways in which the effects of race and criminal record interact to produce new forms of labor market inequalities.

Research Proposal: Review of Previous Literature

- Link literature to build a story about what has been done and what needs to be done
- Identify key debates within theoretical or empirical categories
 - *Who agrees with whom? Explanation for differences.*
- Think about the literature review as a tool to build up your hypothesis or background information for research question
 - *What does the reader need to know after reading your research question?*

Reminder: *The literature review is more than a just summary of articles, it is the backbone of your research*

Research Proposal: Review of Previous Literature

For each source you read, make note of:

- *Bibliographic information*
- *What question is the author trying to answer?*
- *What theories is he/she informed by (summarize)?*
- *What data or methods does the author(s) use?*
- *What are the key findings?*
- *What further research/limitations does the author(s) point out? How does your research fit in?*
- *How does this study differ from other studies with similar topics?*
- *Other key sources mentioned*

Research Proposal: Description of Methods

■ Qualitative

- *Interviews*
- *Surveys*
- *Historical Archives*
- *Ethnography/observational studies*

■ Quantitative

- *Descriptive*
- *Correlation*
- *Regression*

Research Proposal: Description of Methods

- Choose a sample
- Determine Data Source
 - *Contact organizations/ Get proper permissions to download datasets*
- Survey
 - *Operationalize key variables (What is stress? How do you measure stress?)*
- Interviews
 - *Avoid yes/no answers, think open-ended questions*
 - *Cue questions and “Tell me more” strategy*
- Observational
 - *Develop key elements/cues to capture in field*
- If collecting original data, important to test instruments
- Internal Review Board (IRB)

Research Proposal: Data Collection

■ Existing data

- *General Social Survey (GSS), Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), data.gov, healthdata.gov, National Institute of Justice (NIJ), etc.*
- *Newspapers*
- *Archives*
- *Law reviews*
- *Mentor Data*

■ Collect NEW data

- *Interviews*
- *surveys*
- *Observations*

****Research Tip:** *Be sure to balance the amount of time to complete study with data resource; typically qualitative approaches take more time*

Research Proposal: Analyses

■ Common Analyses Software

- ***Stata***, commonly used in sociology for statistical analysis
- *Excel*
- ***Atlas.ti***, commonly used in sociology for qualitative analysis
- *MAXQDA*

■ Representation of data

- *When possible, draw out data measurements using graphs & charts*
- *Incorporate participant responses/quotes*

■ Draw a conclusion

- *Was your hypothesis correct? What were the results?*
- *What limitations did you face?*
- *What else can be done to further research in this area?*

****Research Tip:** *If you were proven wrong, this is an important research finding too!*

Research Proposal: Chapter Outline

1. Introduction
2. Review of Previous Literature
3. Description of Methods and Analyses
4. Anticipated results
5. Bibliography
6. Progress to date and proposed timeline

IV. Mentorship

■ Sociology website

- *Search by research interest*
- *Read past work*
- *Visit office hours*
- *E-mail etiquette*

- Avoid slang, emojis, address as Dr./Professor (unless told otherwise)

- State reason for writing

- Be clear and concise

■ Graduate Student Instructors

■ Faculty from other departments/Organizations

V. Resources

- Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. (2008). *The craft of research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis : English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- [A guide to writing a senior thesis in sociology](#). (2009). Department of Sociology, Harvard University.
- [Office of Undergraduate & Scholarships](#) (Campus)
- [The Leadership Alliance](#) | Brown University
- [Research Opportunities & Funding](#) (Sociology)
- [Honors Opportunities](#) (Sociology)
- [Independent Study](#) (Sociology)

Questions?

Thank you!

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