



The Purpose Statement

Whereas introductions focus on the problem leading to the study, the purpose statement establishes the direction for the research. In fact, the purpose statement is the most important statement in an entire research study. It orients the reader to the central intent of the study, and from it, all other aspects of the research follow. In journal articles, researchers write the purpose statement into introductions; in dissertations and dissertation proposals, it often stands as a separate section. The purpose statement needs to be written as clearly and concisely as possible.

This entire chapter focuses on the purpose statement because of its significance in a study. I address the reasons for developing purpose statements, advance key principles to use in designing them, and provide examples that illustrate good models.

SIGNIFICANCE AND MEANING OF A PURPOSE STATEMENT

According to Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2000), the purpose statement indicates “why you want to do the study and what you intend to accomplish” (p. 9). Unfortunately, method- and proposal-writing texts give little attention to the purpose statement, and writers on method often incorporate the purpose statement into discussions about other topics, such as specifying research questions or hypotheses. Wilkinson (1991), for example, refers to it within the context of the research question and objective. Other authors frame it as an aspect of the research problem (Casterter & Heisler, 1977). Closely examining their discussions indicates that they both are referring to the purpose statement as the central, controlling idea in a study.

For this discussion, I will call this passage the “purpose statement” because it conveys the overall intent of a proposed study. In proposals, researchers need to distinguish clearly between the purpose, the problem in the study, and the research questions. The purpose sets forth the intent of the study and not the problem or issue leading to a need for the study (see Chapter 4). The purpose is also not the research questions—those questions that the data collection will attempt to answer—to be discussed in Chapter 6. Instead, the purpose sets the objectives, the intent, and the major idea of a proposal or a study. This idea builds on a need (the problem) and is refined into specific questions (the research questions).

Given the importance of the purpose statement, it is helpful to set it apart from other aspects of the proposal or study and to frame it as a single sentence or paragraph that readers can identify easily. Although qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods purpose statements share similar topics, each will be identified below and illustrated with “scripts” for constructing a thorough but manageable purpose statement for a proposal or study.

A QUALITATIVE PURPOSE STATEMENT

A good qualitative purpose statement contains important elements of qualitative research, uses research words drawn from the language of that inquiry (Schwandt, 2001), and employs the procedures of an emerging design based on experiences of individuals in a natural setting. Thus, one might consider several basic design features for writing this statement:

- Use words such as “purpose,” “intent,” or “objective” to signal attention to this statement as the central controlling idea in a study. Set the statement off as a separate sentence or paragraph and use the language of research by employing words such as “The purpose (or intent or objective) of this study is (was) (will be). . . .” Researchers often use the present or past verb tense in journal articles and dissertations, and the future tense in proposals because researchers are presenting a plan for a study.
- Focus on a single phenomenon (or concept or idea). Narrow the study to one idea to be explored or understood. This focus means that a purpose does not convey “relating” two or more variables or

“comparing” two or more groups, as is typically found in quantitative research. Instead, advance a single phenomenon to study, recognizing that the study may evolve into an exploration of relationships or comparisons among ideas. None of these related explorations can be anticipated at the beginning of a qualitative study. For example, a project might begin by exploring “chairperson roles” in enhancing faculty development (Creswell & Brown, 1992). Other qualitative studies might start by exploring “teacher identity” and the marginalization of this identity for a teacher in her school (Huber & Whelan, 1999) or the meaning of “baseball culture” in a study of the work and talk of stadium employees (Trujillo, 1992). These examples all illustrate the focus on a single idea.

- Use action verbs to convey how learning will take place. Action verbs and phrases, such as “describe,” “understand,” “develop,” “examine the meaning of,” or “discover,” keep the inquiry open and convey an emerging design.
- An emerging design is also enhanced by nondirectional language rather than predetermined outcomes. Use neutral words and phrases, such as exploring the “experiences of individuals” rather than the “successful experiences of individuals.” Other words and phrases that may be problematic include “useful,” “positive,” and “informing”—all words that suggest an outcome that may or may not occur. McCracken (1988) refers to the need in qualitative interviews to let the respondent describe his or her experience. Interviewers (or purpose statement writers) violate the “law of nondirection” in qualitative research (McCracken, 1988, p. 21) by using words that suggest a directional orientation.
- Provide a general working definition of the central phenomenon or idea. Consistent with the rhetoric of qualitative research, this definition is not rigid and set, but tentative and evolving throughout a study based on information from participants. Hence, a writer might use the words, “A tentative definition at this time for _____ (central phenomenon) is. . . .” It should also be noted that this definition is not to be confused with the detailed “definition of terms” section found later in some qualitative proposals. The intent here is to convey to readers at an early stage in a proposal or research study a general sense of the central phenomenon so that they can better understand information that will unfold in the study.

- Include words denoting the strategy of inquiry to be used in data collection, analysis, and the process of research, such as whether the study will use an ethnographic, grounded theory, case study, phenomenological, or narrative approach.
- Mention the participants in the study, such as whether the participants might be one or more individuals, a group of people, or an entire organization.
- Identify the site for the research, such as homes, classrooms, organizations, programs, or events. Describe this site in enough detail so that the reader will know exactly where a study will take place.

Although considerable variation exists in the inclusion of these points in purpose statements, a good dissertation or thesis proposal should mention all of them.

To assist in designing a purpose statement, I include here a “script” that should be helpful in drafting a complete statement. A “script,” as used in this book, contains the major words and ideas of a statement and provides space for the researcher to insert information that relates to a project. The “script” for a qualitative purpose statement is this:

The purpose of this _____ (strategy of inquiry, such as ethnography, case study, or other type) study is (was? will be?) to _____ (understand? describe? develop? discover?) the _____ (central phenomenon being studied) for _____ (the participants, such as the individual, groups, organization) at _____ (research site). At this stage in the research, the _____ (central phenomenon being studied) will be generally defined as _____ (provide a general definition).

The following examples may not illustrate perfectly all elements of this “script,” but they represent adequate models to study and emulate.

Example 5.1 *A Purpose Statement in a Qualitative Phenomenology Study*

Lauterbach (1993) studied five women who had lost a baby in late pregnancy and their memories and experiences of this loss. Her purpose statement was as follows.

The phenomenological inquiry, as part of uncovering meaning, articulated “essences” of meaning in mothers’ lived experiences when their wished-for babies died. Using the lens of the feminist perspective, the focus was on mothers’ memories and their “living through” experience. This perspective facilitated breaking through the silence surrounding mothers’ experiences; it assisted in articulating and amplifying mothers’ memories and their stories of loss. Methods of inquiry included phenomenological reflection on data elicited by existential investigation of mothers’ experiences, and investigation of the phenomenon in the creative arts. (Lauterbach, 1993, p. 134)

I found Lauterbach’s purpose statement in the opening section of the journal article under the heading “Aim of Study.” Thus, the heading calls attention to this statement. “Mothers’ lived experiences” would be the central phenomenon, and the author uses the action word “portray” to discuss the “meaning” (a neutral word) of these experiences. The author further defines what experiences will be examined when she identifies “memories” and “lived through” experiences. Throughout this passage, it is clear that Lauterbach will use the strategy of phenomenology. Also, the passage conveys that the participants will be mothers, but later in the article the reader learns that the author interviewed a convenience sample of five mothers, each of whom had experienced a perinatal death of a child in her home.

Example 5.2 *A Purpose Statement in a Case Study*

Kos (1991) conducted a multiple case study of perceptions of reading-disabled middle-school students concerning factors that prevented these students from progressing in their reading development. Her purpose statement read as follows.

The purpose of this study was to explore affective, social, and educational factors that may have contributed to the development of reading disabilities in four adolescents. The study also sought explanation as to why students’ reading disabilities persisted despite years of instruction. This was not an intervention study and, although some students may have improved their reading, reading improvement was not the focus of the study. (Kos, 1991, pp. 876-877)

Notice Kos's disclaimer that this study was not a quantitative study measuring of the magnitude of reading changes in the students. Instead, Kos clearly placed this study within the qualitative approach by using words such as "explore." She focused attention on the central phenomenon of "factors" and provided a tentative definition of this phenomenon by mentioning examples, such as "affective, social, and educational." She included this statement under a heading called "Purpose of the Study" to call attention to the statement, and she mentioned the participants who participated in the study. In the abstract and the methodology section, a reader finds out that the study used the inquiry strategy of case study research and that the study took place in a classroom.

Example 5.3 *A Purpose Statement in an
Ethnographic Study*

Rhoads (1997) conducted a 2-year ethnographic study exploring how the campus climate can be improved for gay and bisexual males at a large university. His purpose statement, included in the opening section, was as follows.

The article contributes to the literature addressing the needs of gay and bisexual students by identifying several areas where progress can be made in improving the campus climate for them. This paper derives from a two-year ethnographic study of a student subculture composed of gay and bisexual males at a large research university; the focus on men reflects the fact that lesbian and bisexual women constitute a separate student subculture at the university under study. (Rhoads, 1997, p. 276)

With intent to improve the campus, this qualitative study falls into the genre of advocacy research as mentioned in Chapter 1. Also, these sentences occur at the beginning of the article to signal the reader about the purpose of the study. The "needs" of these students become the central phenomenon under study, and the author seeks to "identify" areas that can improve the climate for gays and bisexual males. The author also mentioned that the strategy of inquiry will be ethnographic and that the study will involve males (participants) at a large university (site). At this point, the author does not provide additional information about the exact nature of these "needs" or a working definition to begin

the article. However, he does refer to “identity” and probes a tentative meaning for that term in the next section of the study.

Example 5.4 *A Purpose Statement in a Grounded Theory Study*

Richie et al. (1997) conducted a qualitative study to develop a theory of the career development of 18 prominent, highly achieving African American Black and White women in the United States working in different occupational fields. In the second paragraph of this study, they stated the purpose statement:

The present article describes a qualitative study of the career development of 18 prominent, highly achieving African-American Black and White women in the United States across eight occupational fields. Our overall aim in the study was to explore critical influences on the career development of these women, particularly those related to their attainment of professional success. (Richie et al., 1997, p. 133)

In this statement, the central phenomenon is “career development,” and the reader learns that the phenomenon will be defined as “critical influences” in the “professional success” of the women. In this study, “success,” a directional word, serves to define the sample of individuals to be studied more than to limit the inquiry about the central phenomenon. The authors plan to “explore” this phenomenon, and the reader learns that the participants are all women, in different occupational groups. Grounded theory as a strategy of inquiry is mentioned in the abstract and later in the procedure discussion.

A QUANTITATIVE PURPOSE STATEMENT

Quantitative purpose statements differ considerably from the qualitative models in terms of the language and a focus on relating or comparing variables or constructs. A variable refers to a characteristic or attribute of an individual or an organization that can be measured or observed and that varies among the people or organization being studied (Creswell, 2002). A variable typically will “vary” in two or more categories

or on a continuum of scores. Psychologists prefer to use the term *construct* (rather than *variable*), which carries the connotation of more of an abstract idea than a specifically defined term. However, social scientists typically use the term *variable*, and it will be employed in this discussion. Variables often measured in studies include gender, age, socioeconomic status (SES), and attitudes or behaviors such as racism, social control, political power, or leadership. Several texts provide detailed discussions about the types of variables one can use and their scale of measurement (e.g., Isaac & Michael, 1981; Keppel, 1991; Kerlinger, 1979; Thorndike, 1997). Variables are distinguished by two characteristics: temporal order and their measurement (or observation).

Temporal order means that one variable precedes another in time. Because of this time ordering, it is said that one variable affects or “causes” another variable, though a more accurate statement would indicate “probable causation.” When dealing with studies in the natural setting and with humans, researchers cannot absolutely “prove” cause and effect (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). This time ordering causes researchers in quantitative approaches to think “left to right” (Punch, 1998) and order the variables in purpose statements, research questions, and visual models into left-to-right, cause and effect, presentations. Thus,

- *Independent variables* are variables that (probably) cause, influence, or affect outcomes. They are also called treatment, manipulated, antecedent, or predictor variables.
- *Dependent variables* are variables that depend on the independent variables; they are the outcomes or results of the influence of the independent variables. Other names for dependent variables are criterion, outcome, and effect variables.
- *Intervening or mediating variables* “stand between” the independent and dependent variables, and they mediate the effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable. For example, if students do well on a research methods test (dependent variable), that result may be due to (a) their study preparation (independent variable) and/or (b) their organization of study ideas into a framework (intervening variable) that influenced their grade on the test. The mediating variable, “organization of study,” stands between the independent and dependent variables.
- Two other types of variables are control variables and confounding variables. *Control variables* play an active role in quantitative studies. These variables are a special type of independent variable

that are measured in a study because they potentially influence the dependent variable. Researchers use statistical procedures (e.g., analysis of covariance) to control for these variables. They may be demographic or personal variables that need to be “controlled” so that the true influence of the independent variable on the dependent can be determined. Another type of variable, a *confounding* (or *spurious*) *variable*, is not actually measured or observed in a study. It exists, but its influence cannot be directly detected in a study. Researchers comment on the influence of confounding variables, after the study has been completed, because these variables may have operated to explain the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable, but they were not or could not be easily assessed.

The design of a quantitative purpose statement, therefore, begins with identifying the proposed variables for a study (independent, intervening, dependent, control), drawing a visual model to clearly identify this sequence, and locating and specifying how the variables will be measured or observed. Finally, the intent of using the variables quantitatively will be either to relate variables (as one typically finds in a survey) or to compare samples or groups in terms of an outcome (as commonly found in experiments).

This knowledge helps in the design of the quantitative purpose statement. The major components of a good quantitative purpose statement include a brief paragraph that contains the following:

- Words to signal the major intent of the study, such as “purpose,” “intent,” or “objective.” Start with “The purpose (or objective or intent) of this study is (was) (will be). . . .”
- Identification of the theory, model, or conceptual framework to test in the proposal or study. At this point one does not need to describe it in detail; in Chapter 7 I suggest a separate “Theoretical Perspective” section for this purpose. Mentioning it in the purpose statement provides emphasis on the importance of the theory and foreshadows its use in the study.
- Identification of the independent and dependent variables, as well as any mediating or control variables used in the study.
- Words that connect the independent and dependent variables to indicate that they are being related. Use “the relationship between” two or more variables or a “comparison of” two or more groups.

Most quantitative studies fall into one of these two options for connecting variables in the purpose statement. A combination of comparing and relating might also exist, for example, a two-factor experiment in which the researcher has two or more treatment groups as well as a continuous variable as an independent variable in the study. Although one typically finds studies about comparing two or more groups in experiments, it is also possible to compare groups in a survey study.

- A position or ordering of the variables from left to right in the purpose statement, beginning with the independent variable, followed by the dependent variable. Place intervening variables between the independent and dependent variables. Researchers also place the control variables between the independent and dependent variables. Alternatively, control variables might be placed immediately following the dependent variable, in a phrase such as “controlling for. . .” In experiments, the independent variable will always be the “manipulated” variable.
- Mention the specific type of strategy of inquiry used in the study. By incorporating this information, the researcher will anticipate the methods discussion and enable a reader to associate the relationship of variables to the inquiry approach.
- Reference to the participants (or the unit of analysis) in the study and mention of the research site for the study.
- A general definition for each key variable in the study, preferably using established definitions. In quantitative research, investigators use set and accepted definitions for variables. The definitions included here are intended to provide a general definition of variables to help the reader best understand the purpose statement. They do not replace specific, operational definitions (details about how variables will be measured) found later in a “Definition of Terms” section in proposals (see Chapter 8).

Based on these points, a quantitative purpose statement “script” can include these ideas:

The purpose of this _____ (experiment? survey?) study is (was? will be?) to test the theory of _____ that _____ (compares? relates?) the _____ (independent variable) to _____ (dependent variable),

controlling for _____ (control variables) for _____ (participants) at _____ (the research site). The independent variable(s) _____ will be generally defined as _____ (provide a general definition). The dependent variable(s) will be generally defined as _____ (provide a general definition), and the control and intervening variable(s), _____, (identify the control and intervening variables) will be statistically controlled in the study.

The examples to follow illustrate many of the elements in the “script.” The first two studies are surveys; the last one is an experiment.

Example 5.5 *A Purpose Statement in a Published Survey Study*

Kalof (2000) conducted a 2-year longitudinal study of 54 college women about their attitudes and experiences with sexual coercion. These women responded to two identical mail surveys administered 2 years apart. The author combined the purpose statement, introduced in the opening section, with the research questions.

This study is an attempt to elaborate on and clarify the link between women’s sex role attitudes and experiences with sexual victimization. I used two years of data from 54 college women to answer these questions: (1) Do women’s attitudes influence vulnerability to sexual coercion over a two-year period? (2) Are attitudes changed after experiences with sexual victimization? (3) Does prior victimization reduce or increase the risk of later victimization? (Kalof, 2000, p. 48)

Although Kalof does not mention a theory that she seeks to test, she identifies both her independent variable (sex role attitudes) and the dependent variable (sexual victimization). She positioned these variables from independent to dependent. She also discussed “linking” rather than “relating” the variables to establish a connection between them. This passage also identifies the participants (women) and the research site (a college setting). Later, in the method section, she mentioned that the study was a mailed survey. Although she does not define the major variables, she provides specific measures of the variables in the research questions.

Example 5.6 *A Purpose Statement in a Dissertation Survey Study*

DeGraw (1984) completed a doctoral dissertation in the field of education on the topic of educators working in adult correctional institutions. Under a section titled "Statement of the Problem," he advanced the purpose of the study.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between personal characteristics and the job motivation of certified educators who taught in selected state adult correctional institutions in the United States. Personal characteristics were divided into background information about the respondent (i.e., institutional information, education level, prior training, etc.) and information about the respondents' thoughts of changing jobs. The examination of background information was important to this study because it was hoped it would be possible to identify characteristics and factors contributing to significant differences in mobility and motivation. The second part of the study asked the respondents to identify those motivational factors of concern to them. Job motivation was defined by six general factors identified in the educational work components study (EWCS) questionnaire (Miskel & Heller, 1973). These six factors are: potential for personal challenge and development; competitiveness; desirability and reward of success; tolerance for work pressures; conservative security; and willingness to seek reward in spite of uncertainty vs. avoidance. (DeGraw, 1984, pp. 4, 5)

This statement included several components of a good purpose statement. It was presented in a separate section, it used the word "relationship," terms were defined, and the population was mentioned. Further, from the order of the variables in the statement, one can clearly identify the independent variable and the dependent variable.

Example 5.7 *A Purpose Statement in an Experimental Study*

Booth-Kewley, Edwards, and Rosenfeld (1992) undertook a study comparing the social desirability of responding to a computer version of an attitude and personality questionnaire to the desirability of completing a pencil-and-paper version. They replicated a study completed on college

students that used an inventory, called “Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding” (BIDR), composed of two scales, impression management (IM) and self-deception (SD). In the final paragraph of the introduction, they advance the purpose of the study.

(We designed the present study to compare the responses of Navy recruits on the IM and SD scales, collected under three conditions— with paper-and-pencil, on a computer with backtracking allowed, and on a computer with no backtracking allowed. Approximately half of the recruits answered the questionnaire anonymously and the other half identified themselves. (Booth-Kewley et al., 1992, p. 563)

This statement also reflected many properties of a good purpose statement. The statement was separated from other ideas in the introduction as a separate paragraph, it mentioned that a comparison would be made, and it identified the participants in the experiment (i.e., the unit of analysis). In terms of the order of the variables, the authors advanced them with the dependent variable first, contrary to my suggestion (still, the groups are clearly identified). Although the theory-base is not mentioned, the paragraphs preceding the purpose statement reviewed the findings of prior theory. The authors also do not tell us about the strategy of inquiry, but other passages, especially those related to procedures, discuss the study as an experiment.

A MIXED METHODS PURPOSE STATEMENT

A mixed methods proposal or study needs to convey both quantitative and qualitative purpose statements. These statements need to be identified early in the study in an introduction, and they provide a major signpost for the reader to understand the quantitative and qualitative parts of a study. Several guidelines might direct the organization and presentation of the mixed methods purpose statement:

- Begin with signaling words, such as “The purpose of” or “The intent of.”
- Indicate the type of mixed methods design, such as sequential, concurrent, or transformational.

- Discuss a rationale for combining both quantitative and qualitative data in the proposed study. This rationale could be
 - to better understand a research problem by converging (or triangulating) both broad numeric trends from quantitative research and the detail of qualitative research;
 - to explore participant views with the intent of using these views to develop and test an instrument with a sample from a population;
 - to obtain statistical, quantitative results from a sample and then follow up with a few individuals to probe or explore those results in more depth;
 - to best convey the needs of a marginalized group or individuals.
- Include the characteristics of a good qualitative purpose statement, such as focusing on a single phenomenon, using action words and nondirectional language, mentioning the strategy of inquiry, and identifying the participants and the research site
- Include the characteristics of a good quantitative purpose statement, such as identifying a theory and the variables, relating variables or comparing groups in terms of variables, placing these variables in order from independent to dependent, mentioning the strategy of inquiry, and specifying the participants and research site for the research
- Consider adding information about the specific types of both qualitative and quantitative data collection

Based on these elements, three mixed methods purpose statement “scripts” are as follows. The first two are sequential studies, and the third is a concurrent study.

The purpose of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study will be to explore participant views with the intent of using this information to develop and test an instrument with a sample from a population. The first phase will be a qualitative exploration of a _____ (central phenomenon) by collecting _____ (data) from _____ (participants) at _____ (research site). Themes from this qualitative data will then be developed into an instrument so that _____ (theory, research questions, or hypotheses) can be tested that _____ (relate, compare)

_____ (independent variable) with _____
 (dependent variable) for _____ (sample of population) at
 _____ (research site).

The purpose of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study will be to obtain statistical, quantitative results from a sample and then follow up with a few individuals to probe or explore those results in more depth. In the first phase, quantitative research questions or hypotheses will address the _____ relationship or comparison of _____ (independent) and _____ (dependent) variables with _____ (participants) at _____ (the research site). In the second phase, qualitative interviews or observations will be used to probe significant _____ (quantitative results) by exploring aspects of the _____ (central phenomenon) with _____ (a few participants) at _____ (research site).

The purpose of this concurrent mixed methods study is to better understand a research problem by converging both quantitative (broad numeric trends) and qualitative (detailed views) data. In the study, _____ (quantitative instruments) will be used to measure the relationship between _____ (independent variable) and _____ (dependent variable). At the same time, the _____ (central phenomenon) will be explored using _____ (qualitative interviews or observations) with _____ (participants) at _____ (the research site).

Example 5.8 *A Mixed Methods Purpose Statement,
 Convergent Strategy of Inquiry*

Hossler and Vesper (1993) studied student and parent attitudes toward parental savings for the postsecondary education of their children. In this 3-year study, they identified the factors most strongly associated with parental savings and collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Their purpose statement was as follows.

In an effort to shed light on parental saving, this article examines parental saving behaviors. Using student and parent data from a longitudinal study employing multiple surveys over a three-year period, logistic regression was used to identify the factors most strongly associated with parental savings for postsecondary

education. In addition, insights gained from the interviews of a small subsample of students and parents who were interviewed five times during the three-year period are used to further examine parental savings. (Hossler & Vesper, 1993, p. 141)

This section was contained under the heading "Purpose," and it indicated that both quantitative data (i.e., surveys) and qualitative data (i.e., interviews) were included in the study. Both forms of data were collected during the 3-year period, and the authors might have identified their study as a triangulation or convergence design. Although the rationale for the study is not included in this passage, it is articulated later, in the methods discussion about "Surveys and Interviews." Here we find that "the interviews were also used to explore variables under investigation in greater detail and triangulate findings using quantitative and qualitative data" (Hossler & Vesper, 1993, p. 146).

Example 5.9 *A Mixed Methods Purpose Statement, Sequential Strategy of Inquiry*

Ansorge, Creswell, Swidler, and Gutmann (2001) studied the use of wireless iBook laptop computers in three teacher education methods courses. These laptop computers enabled students to work at their desks and use a laptop to log directly onto Web sites recommended by the instructors. The purpose statement was as follows.

The purpose of this sequential, mixed methods study was to first explore and generate themes about student use of iBook laptops in three teacher education classes using field observations and face-to-face interviews. Then, based on these themes, the second phase was to develop an instrument and to survey students about the laptop use on several dimensions. The rationale for using both qualitative and quantitative data was that a useful survey of student experience could best be developed only after a preliminary exploration of student use.

In this example, the statement begins with the signal words "the purpose of." It then mentions the type of mixed methods design and contains the basic elements of both an initial qualitative phase and a follow-up quantitative phase. It includes information about both the qualitative data and the quantitative data collection and ends with a rationale for the incorporation of the two forms of data in a sequential design.



SUMMARY

This chapter emphasizes the importance of a purpose statement in a scholarly study. This statement advances the central idea in a study, and as such it is the most important statement in a research proposal or study. In writing a qualitative purpose statement, a researcher needs to identify a single central phenomenon and to pose a tentative definition for it. Also, the researcher employs action words such as “discover,” “develop,” or “understand.” In the process, nondirectional language is used, and the inquirer mentions the strategy of inquiry, the participants, and the research site for the study. In a quantitative purpose statement, the researcher mentions the theory being tested as well as the variables and their relationship or comparison. It is important to position the independent variable first and the dependent variable second. The researcher mentions the strategy of inquiry as well as the participants and the research site for the investigation. In some purpose statements, the researcher also defines the key variables used in the study. In a mixed methods study, the type of strategy is mentioned as well as a rationale for the type of strategy, such as whether the data are collected concurrently or sequentially. Further, many elements of both good qualitative and quantitative purpose statements are included in the statement.

Writing Exercises

1. Using the “script” for a qualitative purpose statement, write the statement by completing the blanks. Make this statement short; write no more than approximately three-quarters of a typed page.
2. Using the “script” for a quantitative purpose statement, write the statement. Also make this statement short, no longer than three-quarters of a typed page.
3. Using the “script” for a mixed methods purpose statement, write a purpose statement. Be sure to include the rationale for mixing quantitative and qualitative data, and incorporate the elements of both a good qualitative and a good quantitative purpose statement.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Pearson.

In this methods text, I devote a section of one chapter to the topic of writing a purpose statement. The text includes a “script” for both quantitative and qualitative purpose statements. For identifying types of quantitative variables, the discussion provides a conceptual framework called the “family” of variables. The book provides several examples of both quantitative and qualitative purpose statements from the literature of education.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman call attention to the major intent of the study, the “purpose of the study.” This section is generally embedded in the discussion of the topic, and it is mentioned in a sentence or two. It tells the reader what the results of the research are likely to accomplish. The authors characterize purposes as exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, and emancipatory. They also mention that the purpose statement includes the unit of analysis (e.g., individuals, dyads, or groups).

Wilkinson, A. M. (1991). *The scientist's handbook for writing papers and dissertations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Antoinette Wilkinson calls the purpose statement the “immediate objective” of the research study. She states that the purpose of the “objective” is to answer the research question. Further, the “objective” of the study needs to be presented in the introduction to a study, although it may be implicitly stated as the subject of the research, the paper, or the method. If stated explicitly, the “objective” is found at the end of the argument in the introduction; it might also be found near the beginning or in the middle, depending on the structure of the introduction.