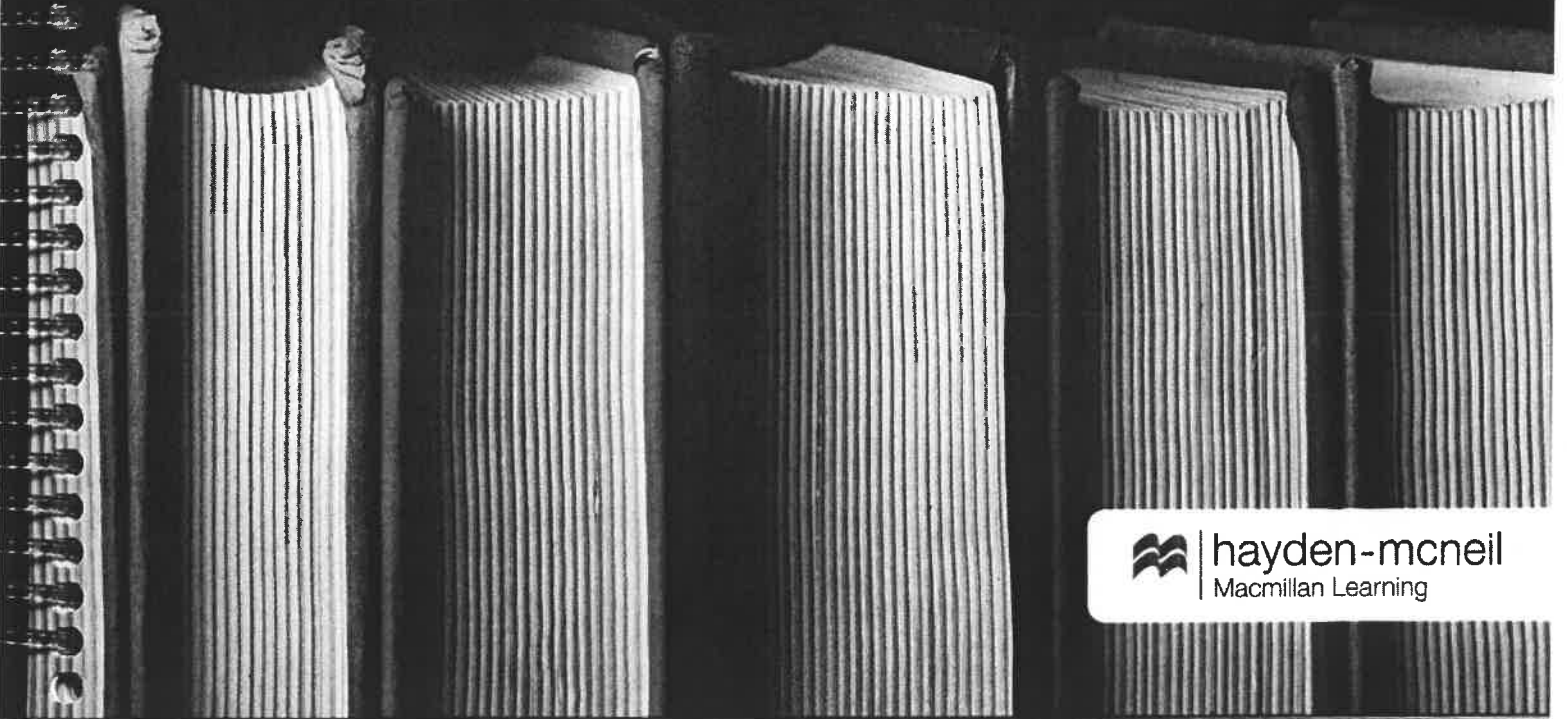


Jennifer Campbell  
Richard Colby  
Rebekah Shultz Colby

# Situating Research

Writers, Sources, and Strategies

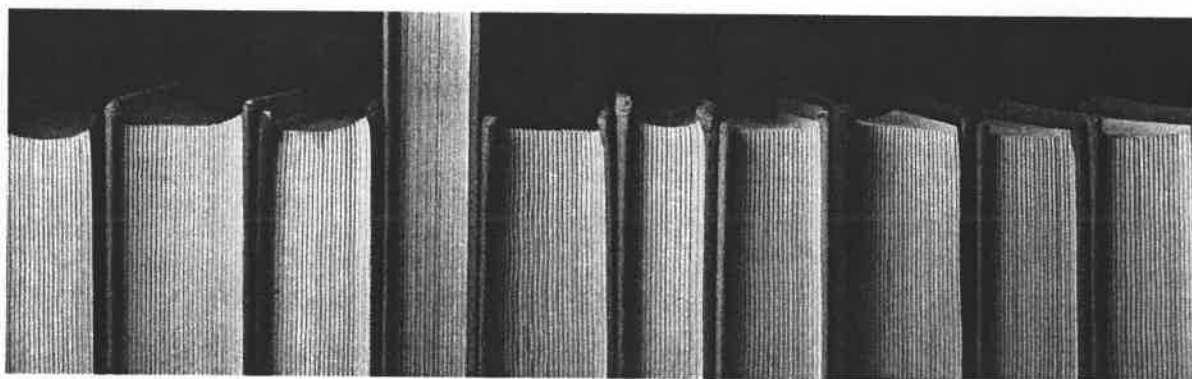


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## Writers, Sources, and Strategies

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Jennifer Campbell  
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## Chapter 1

### Researching in Context

It's a Friday night, and a new movie is premiering. You have seen the movie's previews for weeks leading up to the release, and you have also seen posters at the theater. You've read reviews online and in the newspaper. You have also seen other films by the director and starring actors in the cast. You know, based on this evidence, that the movie will probably be good. It does not disappoint. Later that weekend, you tell your friends about the movie, sharing the best parts, and you make a case that they should see it as well.

This is an example of the types of research that we engage in every day. From researching the latest cell phone to deciding where to have lunch, you accumulate a great deal of information and are able to make a decision based on the evidence. Furthermore, you will share your own experiences and evidence about these issues with your friends and family, and sometimes you will share this information with many more people through blog posts, Facebook or Myspace entries, and even reviews on websites.

### Why Do Academic Writing and Research?

#### *To Solve Problems*

Although research for work or school may not seem much like the casual research that you do every day, it really is not all that different. Imagine the movie preview is a problem of sorts. It is a topic that intrigues you, but you have been tricked by previews in the past and don't want to spend the money if it's not worth it. **To solve this problem**, you read a few reviews. It is important to read more than one review to get some corroborating evidence about the quality of the movie. Similarly, in professional and school research, you cannot always rely on one or two sources but need multiple sources to help you make a case. In the case of the movie, you know that the director has made good films in the past, so you have some faith in the quality of the picture. You also enjoy the previous work by the actors in the movie, so you feel comfortable that they will entertain. In researching professional and academic topics, it is important to find reputable sources by known scholars and authors rather than random writers who have no credentials.

#### *To Learn and Be Informed*

Sometimes you may do research only **to inform yourself** about topics of interest. First of all, you will want to know for yourself if the movie is worth watching before you ask your friends to watch it with you. Similarly, academic researchers will often have a question about something that they want to learn more about so they first do research simply to gather information.

#### *To Share New Knowledge*

Naturally, after you have informed yourself about movie's quality, you will **share the information** you gain with others, telling your friends about what you discovered. Obviously, this is not so different from school where you also write to share what you have learned

## Chapter 1: Researching in Context

through lecture, studying, and research about a certain subject. Most often you share this information with your professor, but your writing can also be used to share what you have learned with peers in your class. In writing about their scholarship, academic researchers also share what they have learned about a specific research question or problem with their peers.

### *To Persuade Others*

While sharing information with others is beneficial, it will not mean much to them unless you can persuade them that your findings are worthwhile. For example, if you want your friends to watch a movie with you, you will need to share your discoveries about the film in a way that **persuades** them to also see the movie. It's not just your opinion and experience that will convince them, but all of the different types of credible evidence and specific reasons why the movie is worth seeing. In the same way, a professor's academic research is basically meaningless unless they can persuade an audience of peers that the research is credible and useful.

### *To Learn By Communicating*

In persuading your friends to watch the movie with you, you may find yourself coming up with new ideas and reasons for watching the movie that you would not have thought of if you were only watching the movie by yourself. You may find yourself synthesizing reviews with your personal experience in unique ways. Also, in discussing the film with you, your friends may come up with reasons for not wanting to watch the film that you may not have thought of before. Believe it or not, academic writing works in exactly the same way. In writing a research paper, your professor or fellow students may come up with objections or questions about your writing, helping you to see your ideas in a new and different way and perhaps prompting you to dig even deeper with your research. Academic researchers go through the same process. In trying to persuade others of the importance of their discoveries, they might find that other researchers in their field have important questions or objections to their work. By responding to these questions and objections from their peers, the original academic researchers may discover new ideas or see their research in new ways. Thus, even the process of writing and communicating our ideas with others helps us discover new knowledge.

However, even with all your thoughtful persuasion, some of your friends probably won't want to go to the movie regardless because they don't like the type of movie or the lead actor. It would take a great deal more evidence, especially evidence that the friends valued, to persuade them to see a movie that they wouldn't normally watch. When communicating with some audiences, certain types of evidence will have more value, and in some contexts, such as in school or professional settings, certain types of evidence can even negatively impact your argument. To persuade others, it is vital to not only have lots of good evidence, but to have multiple, appropriate types of evidence for your audience as well. It is important, therefore, to remember that all research and writing is wrapped up in particular research and writing situations. In this chapter, we will discuss how all communication is shaped by specific contexts. Then, we will discuss how professionals and scholars have responded to common research and writing contexts by developing recognizable research traditions and genres. Finally, we will explore how the writing and research context influences every aspect of a research project.

**Discussion and Practice**

1. Go online to *metacritic.com* and read the reviews for a new movie, game, or album coming out that you are interested in. Then, using the reviews as evidence, write a paragraph explaining to your friends why they should also see this movie, play this game, or listen to this album.
2. Take a few minutes to write about a topic you have researched out of personal need or interest. What kinds of information did you need to find? How did you go about finding it? What did you do with or based on your research results?
3. In small groups, share your non-academic research stories. What are the similarities and differences in your topics, research strategies, and outcomes?

**What Defines a Writing Situation or Context?**

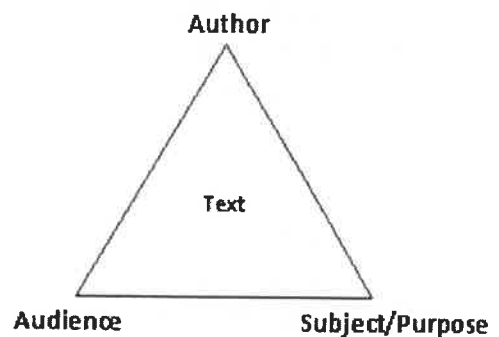
In writing about your research, it is important to keep your audience and the writing context in mind in order to most effectively persuade others with your research. The writing situation, also called context or rhetorical situation, always shapes research and writing. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, scholars have devised and debated models and terms to represent communication because it is difficult to account for all of the elements involved in speaking and writing. One common, simple model is the rhetorical triangle.

The basic elements of the rhetorical situation are:

**The Author** – Who is communicating? What is the author’s persona?

**The Audience** – Who will be receiving the text? What does the author know about them, their position, their values, etc that will influence how the text is written?

**The Subject and Purpose** – What will the communication be about? What does the author hope to accomplish with the communication?



Just as in geometry, if any point shifts, the shape of the triangle changes; the orientation of the author, audience, and subject matter all shape the text. Consider even the most basic writing tasks, such as making a grocery list. If you make a list for yourself, the contents will be a basic reminder of what you need to get. However, if you are writing a list for a friend, the contents will need to be more detailed. If you are making a pasta dish, “pasta sauce” will be sufficient as a reminder to yourself, but you’ll need to tell your friend what type, size, or name brand of sauce to buy. Obviously, professional, civic, and academic rhetorical situations become much more complicated and require thoughtful writing to meet the needs of the given case.

***Discussion and Practice***

---

1. Look at the syllabi for each of your courses this term and make an inventory of the kinds of writing assignments you will have to complete. Try to define the rhetorical situation for each assignment, especially with regard to the apparent purpose of the writing.
2. As a class or in small groups, create a list of academic writing situations you have encountered or expect to encounter based on your syllabi reviews. You might want to create a course document or wiki that you can add to throughout the term. Return to your list as you work through this textbook and discuss how the concepts covered can help you address these different writing situations.

## **What is a Discourse Community?**

Whether writing to learn, share knowledge, or create new knowledge, students and professors encounter a wide range of writing situations. Therefore, it can be problematic to discuss “academic writing” as though it were just one particular type of writing, just as one cannot lump together all public or popular writing that happens outside of the university. Instead, it is more useful to discuss how people form discourse communities that perform certain kinds of tasks and produce different genres to achieve their purposes.

While letters, personal writing, and some assignments are often addressed to a single reader, most writing is addressed to a larger audience. Groups of people who tend to communicate with one another are called **discourse communities**, and they share common concerns, content, questions, vocabulary, and ways of sharing knowledge. Participants on an NFL discussion board form a discourse community—they share content knowledge about teams, players, statistics and rules; they use specialized language when discussing players’ game strategies and scoring averages; they debate draft decisions and analyze coaching strategies; there are rules how to write and where to post messages; moderators keep threads on topic and intervene if participants become aggressive or insulting. Different professions have their own discourse communities as well. Members of the medical community are often characterized as speaking their own language; they use technical jargon and abbreviations for conditions and treatments, seemingly cryptic notations for record keeping, and follow incredibly precise rules in their publications.

***Discussion and Practice***

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1. Brainstorm a list of all of the different discourse communities you belong to. How is each defined in terms of shared content, ways of doing things, and ways of talking or writing?

## What are Research Traditions?

In the process of conducting research within specific discourse communities, scholars have developed certain ways of doing research or **research traditions** over time as they have studied similar problems and faced similar research contexts and writing situations. Each research tradition is characterized by similar kinds of questions, common ways of collecting data, and accepted means of analyzing and reporting results. Most research can be categorized as text-based, qualitative, or quantitative. Some researchers stick to one of these types of research, while many use multiple approaches to meet the needs of their studies. Let's start with a few brief definitions.

**Text-based Research** – Text-based research, often called interpretive research in the humanities, studies a variety of texts and artifacts (books, magazines, films, TV, music, advertising and propaganda of various types, etc.). While all research traditions use published sources, text-based research studies texts as the main focus, rather than as a means to an end. Text-based researchers usually examine texts within a specific context and focus. By doing so, they gain a better understanding of texts and cultures. An analysis of how Thomas King employs Native story-telling strategies in his book *The Truth about Stories* would be an example of text-based research.

**Qualitative Research** – Qualitative research is descriptive in nature, concerned with observing and interviewing people to learn as much about them and their cultures as possible. By studying people in their natural contexts, qualitative research tries to understand more about how specific cultures shape how and why people do things. A psychologist's case study of a patient would be an example of qualitative research.

**Quantitative Research** – Quantitative research is any research that involves measurement or the manipulation of numbers to make claims, provide evidence, describe phenomena, determine relationships, or determine causation. In such research, it is the frequency of a phenomenon or opinion or the results of an experiment that provide evidence for the researcher to make claims. For instance, lab experiments where you must count or measure something (temperature, mass, time, etc) are examples of quantitative research. In contrast, a lab experiment where you determine your results based solely on something's appearance would be qualitative.

We will discuss text-based, qualitative, quantitative and mixed method research more fully in Chapters 6-9, explaining more fully the research methods that each research tradition uses to conduct research.

## **What Kinds of Writing do Researchers Do?**

Just as shared content and ways of generating content form discourse communities and research traditions, recurring research and writing situations allow scholars to develop patterns and habits for responding to them. As a result, we can discuss certain **genres** and writing strategies that have arisen to meet academic needs. Genre is a complex concept, surrounded by different definitions and theories, but a simple understanding of genre as a classification or type of text characterized by recurring patterns of content, organization, or style will suffice for our purposes.

Similar to how research traditions have developed, genres have evolved in writing as people have responded to particular needs of communication in certain contexts. For example, people have always needed to communicate news and current events. The spread of print made newspapers a convenient way to do this. News writers realized that people would want to be able to read about some topics and not others, that the stories should be easy to find, and that the most important information in a story should come first because readers might not have time to finish the whole article. Thus, journalists developed the genre of the news story, marked by a clear headline, and the standard lead paragraph that provides the who, what, when, where, and why of the story became a convention. In academic writing, genres, such as lab reports, abstracts, works cited or reference pages, and even the five-paragraph essay that you may have learned in high school evolved as people responded to recurring writing situations and realized that standardized formats would make communication more efficient. When learning to write in new genres, it is important to remember that it's not about following arbitrary rules, but following certain writing strategies and patterns that will help your specific audience get your message most effectively.

However, research writing is common in many non-academic contexts as well, and other genres are common in civic and professional discourse. Business people write emails, memos, reports, business plans, proposals, and presentations to share their research with different audiences. Activists create websites and brochures to present research-based evidence to support their causes. Government aids and lobbyists write white papers to share research on complex topics with politicians. People from many professions and hobbies conduct research on topics that interest them and then write or contribute to Wikipedia entries to share information with a diverse audience. Each of the research tradition chapters in this book includes a popular example that represents how writers in non-academic contexts employ many of the same research methods as academics, though they usually write about their results in very different ways. In Chapter 2, we'll talk more about how various academic, civic, and professional discourse communities use research materials to inform and persuade audiences.

### ***Discussion and Practice***

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1. Make a list of non-academic research writings you have encountered recently. What were they about? What genres were represented? Where did you see them?

## How Do Context and Research Traditions Shape Research Writing?

Rhetorical situations and research traditions influence every stage of the research process, from what questions are asked, to what kind of research is conducted to find answers, to how results are presented and evaluated. Some considerations are practical, such as what can be done with the time and resources available. Other decisions are based on a researcher or discipline's ideas about how knowledge is made. These considerations guide researchers' decisions about all elements of their studies, including:

**Research Method** – Research method refers to how the research is done. Interviewing, conducting surveys, or gathering data from focus groups are all different types of research methods. Different research questions lend themselves to different methods. For example, we can't answer questions about historical events by observing them directly, but we may be able to interview people who were involved. If everyone who was there at the time is deceased, we would need to examine artifacts, such as material evidence or texts from the time, to answer our questions.

**Evidence** – Evidence refers to the research data that the researcher has collected in order to support a claim. Context determines what counts as valid evidence in research. For example, researchers in the social sciences value observation and interview data. Researchers in the physical sciences prefer evidence from controlled lab experiments. Evidence can also be gleaned from existing published sources to create an original argument.

**Sources** – Sources are defined here as where the evidence originated. Most academic writing situations call for academic sources—preferably sources published in peer-reviewed journals—and material from popular magazines or websites is seen as suspect. Sources can be categorized as primary or secondary. Primary sources are original texts or data collected by the person doing the research. For example, an historian might collect oral histories from Vietnam veterans. These oral histories are considered primary sources because they are the research data that the historian collected. Secondary sources are previously published syntheses, interpretations, or revisions of primary sources. When the researcher read several books by other prominent historians about Vietnam War, these books are secondary sources.

**Scope** – The extent or degree of research refers to how elaborate or extended the study needs to be. Specific research and writing situations determine the depth and breadth of research required. A student writing a research paper for an introductory political science class might only need to read and discuss four sources provided in class to meet the assignment, but a graduate student would need to locate, evaluate, and integrate a number of scholarly sources to complete a successful seminar paper.

**Presentation** – Presentation includes the forum, genre, and style in which researchers share their results. The forum is where a text is published, and research writing appears in everything from personal blogs to scholarly books. Different publication venues are appropriate for different research and writing purposes. As discussed above, research writing can be presented in multiple genres as well, from lab reports to grant proposals to articles. Writers must study examples of the genre that most meets the needs of their research and writing situation and follow the writing strategies that would most effectively persuade their intended audience. Consequently, the research and writing situation determines what counts as “good” writing. It determines what rhetorical moves you make in writing, what type of language or word choice you use, and how you format your data and sources.

The research cases below illustrate how topic, audience, and purpose determine how the research is conducted and then presented in writing to solve problems in different disciplines.

### **Text-based Research in Law**

#### *Using Research to Solve Legal Problems*

Catherine is a lawyer in Indiana whose firm has been hired to defend a blogger’s privilege to protect their confidential sources. A senior partner has asked Catherine to write a legal memorandum to present the case. In gathering evidence and opinions, she will use a variety of primary and secondary textual sources. For example, she’ll need to study the specific shield laws in the state (Indiana’s shield law does cover freelance writers associated with traditional media, but has not yet been applied to bloggers). She will need to review case law and precedent, and will study the blogger’s publication and the story in question to see if the site meets legal standards for editorial control. This work will require close reading and interpretation of specific passages. Catherine will probably also read relevant articles that analyze similar cases.

#### *Using Writing to Solve Legal Problems*

After conducting extensive research and analysis, Catherine will write an open memo to the firm that follows a standard outline. She’ll write an introduction, a statement of the legal question at issue, a statement of the facts in the case, an overview of pertinent statutes and precedents, a discussion of the issues in the case, and a conclusion that considers potential outcomes for the case and makes a recommendation about how the firm should proceed.

To write a successful legal memorandum, Catherine needs to be precise and concise. She doesn’t need to provide an exhaustive history of case law on the matter, but will cite the most important recent cases and statutes that pertain to the case. Because she is writing this memo to other legal experts, Catherine can refer to legal terms and statutes without elaborating, but she will need to revise the language and content if she uses material from this memo in a letter of opinion or trial notes in the future.

## Qualitative Research in Education

### *Using Research to Solve Problems in Education*

Mike is a high school teacher who wants to discover why a high percentage of students drop out of a certain high school. He will begin by reading what other scholars have written about the causes of high dropout rates, but the best primary research method is to conduct a type of qualitative research called ethnography. Erin will spend at least a year observing the school in as much of its context as possible—observing several classrooms, the cafeteria, etc. He will also interview many of the participants in the school—students, teachers, the principal, and possibly even some of the parents. In this way, Mike will examine the school’s culture as thoroughly and in as much detail as possible in order to discover hidden causes that even the participants might be unaware of. Because the teacher does not know what these hidden causes are before he starts his research, a multiple choice survey that lists possible causes for the high dropout rates would not be as accurate. This type of survey might miss some underlying causes that the teacher is unaware of. Even an open-ended questionnaire would not get at the underlying causes for the high dropout rates because some of these causes might be unknown to the students, too. In other words, the ethnography is the best approach because the problem of high dropout rates is too complex for other research methods. Only by seeing the entire school in its context through conducting detailed observations and interviews can the teacher get at the complex reasons for dropping out of high school.

### *Using Writing to Solve Problems in Education*

Mike wants to write about his ethnographic research in an academic journal to share his findings with other educators who may be facing similar challenges. To do this, he carefully details his research methods, letting the audience of other researchers know exactly how he conducted his study. Mike also writes a literature review where he not only shows what other researchers have already discovered about the reasons for dropping out of high school, but also establishes why his research is original or important for other educators to read about. Finally, he includes many details from his observations and interviews, which gives his findings credibility. Academic articles usually follow conventional organizational structures, and most journals require a specific style for citing sources.

On the other hand, Mike’s principal also asks him to offer the school suggestions that would help teachers and administrators motivate more students to graduate. When sharing these suggestions, Mike doesn’t write about methods, a literature review, or details from his observations and interviews. Instead, he takes findings from the ethnography and uses them to offer a short, bulleted list of practical suggestions that busy teachers and administrators can quickly read and learn from.

## Quantitative Research in Medicine

### *Using Research to Solve Problems in Medicine*

Sarah is a biological engineer who has an idea for constructing coronary stents that would better facilitate blood flow through blockages in the coronary arteries. She has read a number

of published articles in medical journals about current stent technology and has observed their effectiveness in practice, which has led to her theory for improving this medical equipment. She then tests out her theory in a lab by measuring which stent provides the best flow. This is an example of a lab experiment that relies on the quantitative research tradition, and she will record her data clearly.

*Using Writing to Solve Problems in Medicine*

Sarah would like to run even more experiments using the coronary stents in her lab, but she needs more sophisticated and expensive equipment in order to do this. To get the money, she decides to write a proposal for a research grant. Her audience for the proposal is a panel of other experts in her field of biological engineering. She first writes about the research on blood flow in coronary stents that she and others have already conducted. She does this to establish the need for further research and funding for more expensive equipment to continue the study. Then, she outlines her plan for extending this research. This will prove to her audience of experts that her research will be viable and credible.

Good scientific writing is often quite technical and detailed. Because she is writing to other experts in her field, Sarah will use terminology that would probably lose a non-expert audience but that is more precise and accurate to an expert audience. She will need to follow the specific format recommended by the agency offering the grant and document her sources using the citation style the grant agency recommends. Sarah will also provide detailed tables of data to represent her primary research and further enhance her credibility.

**Mixed Method Research in Business**

*Using Research to Solve Problems in Business*

A business major named Max wants to start a local coffee shop after graduation. To help make it successful, though, Max must first conduct several kinds of research. He will research models of other successful coffee shop businesses, compare them to see what successful coffee shops have in common, and apply these in designing his own business plan. Max could also research what other business or marketing professionals have written about coffee shops and implement their suggestions. So far, Max has primarily engaged in text-based research.

Because markets vary, however, Max needs to conduct local market research to find out what types of coffee drinks would sell the best and make him the most profit. This research problem calls for quantitative research. He decides to conduct a survey asking people in the area what types of coffee drinks they would most like to drink and what price ranges they would be most willing to pay. A survey is the most appropriate method because he can ask several multiple choice questions and quickly get responses from many people as surveys are easy to pass out and don't take more than a few minutes to complete. While it is impossible for him to survey everyone living in the area, Max still needs to poll a good percentage of the locals to get a sufficient breadth of information. However, because the information he needs is quite focused, his research doesn't need as much depth as a more open-ended, qualitative interview would

give him, for instance. Consequently, a short, multiple-choice quantitative survey will suffice for his research needs.

After conducting his survey, Max knows which types of coffee drinks and price ranges would make him the biggest profit, but he also knows that it takes more than affordable coffee to make a successful coffee shop. Therefore, Max decides to conduct qualitative research in the form of a focus group. He invites ten people who represent his target demographic to discuss possibilities for the store's décor, logo, food, and retail items.

*Using Writing to Solve Problems in Business*

When this research is completed, Max has a very good idea of how to run a successful coffee shop, but he needs more start-up money to open his business. To solve this problem, he uses his text-based, quantitative, and qualitative research to write a business plan to convince potential financial backers to invest. He chooses this genre to outline plans for the business, showing potential investors that his business is likely to be successful and make a profit.

Good business writing is clear and concise. Consequently, Max does not go into a lot of detail about the process or data from his research but only presents the most important information so that busy financial backers will be able to skim the document and glean the key points. In fact, he may present most of his data visually, using tables, charts, or graphs. He will also not include a literature review from his research of other successful business plans, but will only use this research to support the rationale for his own business plan.

Note that each of these researchers begins with a specific topic and purpose. The scholar then considers the best research strategy for solving their particular problem and how in-depth the research will need to be. Either before the project begins or in the process of conducting the research, the writer decides what audience or audiences they will need to communicate with about their findings, and the audience will further determine what counts as appropriate evidence and what counts as "good" writing. We will discuss a number of text-based, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies in the following chapters. As we do, pay special attention to how the author's topic, purpose, and audience influence the type and scope of their research and how they present their research using specific genres and writing conventions.

## Writing Projects

- 1) *Researcher Profile* - Interview a professor in your major or an academic area that interests you about what research methods they use, how they write about their research, and where they publish their research. Write a profile of this professor's research and writing practices to share with the class.
  
- 2) *Discourse Community Analysis* – Select a discussion board/group/forum about a topic that interests you. Consider professional or college sports; fan sites for bands, books, films, or TV shows; hobbies like cooking or kayaking; or groups associated with your field of study or potential careers. Follow discussion on the forum for a couple of days, browse the archives, any background about the board, FAQs, or rules posted on the site. Write an article for potential site users to describe this board's discourse community and how it works. How would you summarize the forum's main topics, concerns, and purposes? What types of language do they use? Do they use terms that people outside of the community would not understand? If so, maybe you should include a brief glossary or list of common acronyms. What are the community's writing strategies and rules for discussing topics? Are the rules of conversation presented explicitly or do members seem to have a more implicit system for managing their discussions? What do you think people get out of belonging to this discourse community?