



Nicholas Walliman

**Research
Methods**
the basics

ROUTLEDGE


RESEARCH METHODS

THE BASICS

Research Methods: The Basics is an accessible, user-friendly introduction to the different aspects of research theory, methods and practice. Structured in two parts, the first covering the nature of knowledge and the reasons for research, and the second the specific methods used to carry out effective research, this book covers:

- structuring and planning a research project
- the ethical issues involved in research
- different types of data and how they are measured
- collecting and analysing data in order to draw sound conclusions
- devising a research proposal and writing up the research.

Complete with a glossary of key terms and guides to further reading, this book is an essential text for anyone coming to research for the first time, and is widely relevant across the social sciences and humanities.

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The Basics

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Nicholas Walliman

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2011

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2011.

To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Walliman, Nicholas S. R.

Research methods: the basics / Nicholas Walliman.

p. cm.—(The basics)

Includes bibliographical references and index. [etc.]

1. Social sciences—Research—Methodology. 2. Humanities—Research—Methodology. I. Title.

H62.W254 2010

001.4—dc22

2010022880

ISBN 0-203-83607-3 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN13: 978-0-415-48991-1 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-48994-2 (pbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-83607-1 (ebk)

To Ursula

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My grateful thanks go to Alma Clavin for allowing me to use an extract from her PhD thesis, and Marina Muenchenbach for allowing me to use her Masters research proposal to demonstrate aspects of research writing. Also thanks to Kirkegaard Associates for permission to use their photographs of the Festival Hall acoustic model and Jane Stiles for permission to use her photographs of the hospital waiting areas. I would also like to thank Katherine Ong and Sophie Thompson from Routledge for their patience and encouragement. My Masters and Doctorate students have also been an inspiration to me and gave me many insights into the practical problems of engaging in research and demonstrated ways to overcome them.

My greatest appreciation goes to my wife, Ursula, for her support and tolerance during the writing of this book.

INTRODUCTION

Research Methods are the tools and techniques for doing research. Research is a term used liberally for any kind of investigation that is intended to uncover interesting or new facts. As with all activities, the rigour with which this activity is carried out will be reflected in the quality of the results. This book presents a basic review of the nature of research and the methods which are used to undertake a variety of investigations relevant to a wide range of subjects, such as the natural sciences, social science, social anthropology, psychology, politics, leisure studies and sport, hospitality, healthcare and nursing studies, the environment, business, education and the humanities.

Just about every university course includes an element of research that students must carry out independently, in the form of projects, dissertations and theses, and the more advanced the degree, the greater the research content. In the workplace there is frequently a need to do research in order to develop or improve the business or service, while some types of businesses rely on doing research projects for their very existence.

Research methods are a range of tools that are used for different types of enquiry, just as a variety of tools are used for doing different practical jobs, for example, a pick for breaking up the ground or a rake for clearing leaves. In all cases, it is necessary to know what the correct tools are for doing the job, and how to use them to best effect. This book provides you with the basic information about the tools used in research, the situations in which they are applied and indicates briefly how they are used by giving practical examples.

I have also included chapters that describe the theoretical background to research and the ways of thinking that lead to the different ways of carrying out investigations and coming to conclusions. Therefore, the book is divided into two basic parts. Part I consists of Chapters 1–5 and provides an introduction to research theory and general practice. Part II contains Chapters 6–11 and explains the main research methods used for collecting and analysing data and gives advice on the practical issues of presenting your research in a clear and attractive manner.

As this book acts as an introduction to the basics of research methods, you will probably want to find out more about many of the issues mentioned, so I have made suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter ('Where to find out more'). You will notice that research is riddled with technical terms, or what some people would call jargon. The first time any of the terms are used they are highlighted in **bold** and then I normally provide an explanation of the meaning. In order to provide a useful way to remind you of the definitions of the main technical terms used in this book (and for that matter elsewhere too), I have included a glossary at the end which includes all those terms highlighted in bold in the main text plus a few extra ones you may come across in your other reading. You can easily refer to the glossary from anywhere in the book.

Not only will reading this book give you an insight into the different aspects of research theory and practice and help you to understand what is involved in carrying out a research project, it will also help you to evaluate the claims made by academics, experts of all kinds, politicians, advertisers, etc. by judging the quality of the evidence provided by the research on which they base their arguments.

You don't have to read the book from the beginning to the end, like a novel. It can be used as a reference for finding out about the characteristics of a particular research method, the meaning of a certain term or about aspects of theory. However, the chapters are arranged in the approximate sequence of the activities required for carrying out a research project, so it can be used as a step-by-step guide to doing your own research.

Finding out about things and trying to understand events and situations are activities that symbolize the very essence of humanity. At a time when we are bombarded with information, when pressing problems are ever present, when the opportunities for discovery

are all around us, it is really useful, if not essential, to be familiar with the methods for doing research – any research. This book will help you to think clearly, to structure your enquiries and to come to conclusions based on appropriate evidence and sound argument. It will enable you to consolidate your knowledge and understanding of your surroundings, and will also help you to hold your own in a discussion and to critically analyse the claims and arguments made by others.

PART I

RESEARCH THEORY AND PRACTICE

One reviewer of my first draft of this book suggested that these first five chapters did not deal with research methods at all. Strictly speaking, if you take a purist's view of what research methods are, he was correct. If you consider that research methods are only specific techniques for collecting and analysing data in such a way that you can come to reliable conclusions, then Part I of this book does not deal with these. However, I believe that unless you know what research is about, and understand the context in which these research methods are used, you will not know which to use and why. Therefore, in Part I of this book, I have provided an overview of the nature of research, its theoretical foundations, what is involved in the process, what you can do with it, and what makes good research.

In order to place research within its context, in Chapter 2 I have provided you with a brief review of the theoretical basis of research as an activity. I consider different ideas about what we can know and how we can know it, and how we can get an understanding of the world around us. You will see that this type of thinking has a long history, probably ever since humans became aware of themselves as being special within nature. The ability to reflect and use abstract ideas set them apart from the animal and plant kingdom. The debate revolves around to what extent humans can be autonomous from their environment and society.