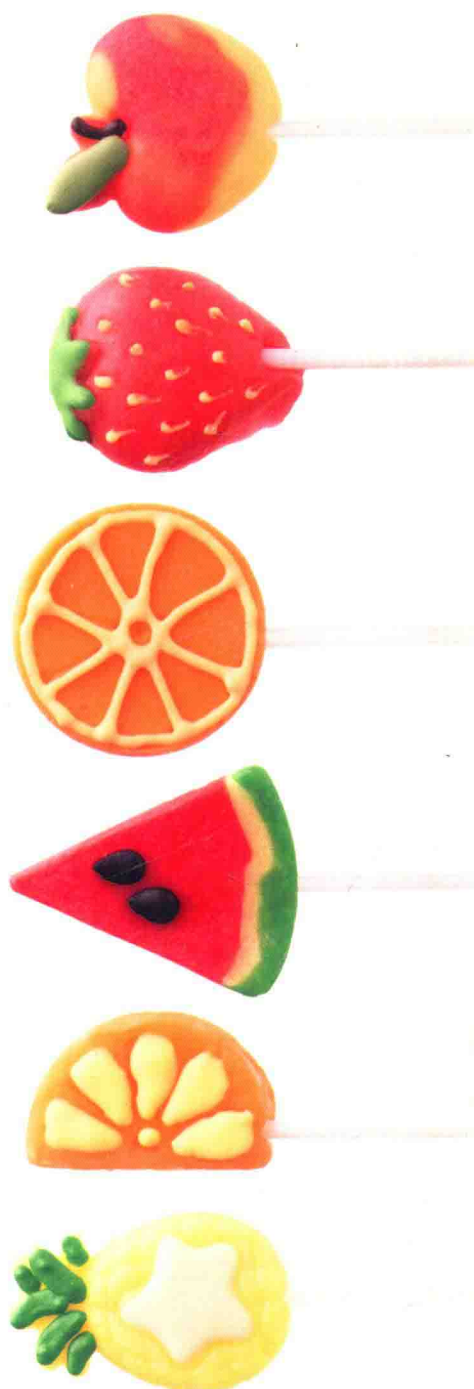


# SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS

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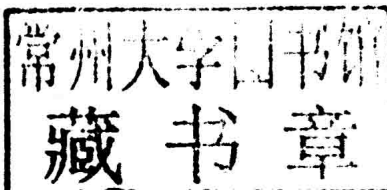


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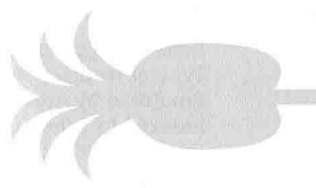
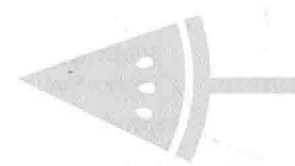
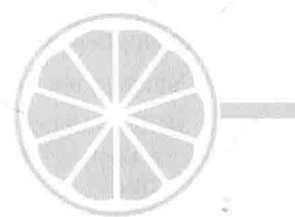
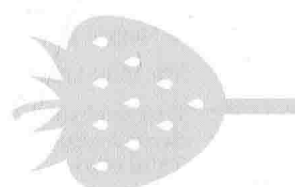
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Keith Jacobs is based at the School of Social Sciences at the University of Tasmania. His most recent publications include *Experience and Representation: Contemporary Perspectives on Australian Migration* (Ashgate Press 2011) and an edited collection (with Jeff Malpas), *Between the Ocean and the Outback: Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Australia* (UWA Press 2011). Keith has recently been awarded an Australian Research Council Future Fellowship to investigate key housing problems in contemporary Australia.

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Kristin Natalier is a qualitative researcher who works within an interpretive frame to discover how people make sense of the challenges they face in their day-to-day lives. In particular, she studies how people experience family and intimate relationships in times of social and personal change. Her current research centers the gendered and emotional dimensions of child support. She also writes on young people's experiences of out-of-home state care.

**TIM PHILLIPS**

Tim Phillips' research interests include Australian society, research methods, culture and identity, and deviance. His most recent publication (with Philip Smith and Ryan D. King) is *Incivility: The Rude Stranger in Everyday Life* (Cambridge University Press 2010).

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Max Travers teaches qualitative research and sociological theory. He has published in the areas of sociology of law, criminology, and qualitative research methods. Previous publications include *Qualitative Research Through Case Studies* (Sage 2001). His current projects include the impact of quality assurance on public sector work and sentencing in children's courts.

**MAGGIE WALTER**

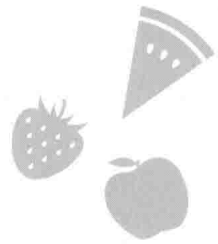
Maggie Walter teaches units on social research methods and on the family, as well as race and ethnicity units. Her key research interests are the discourse and impact of social policy, and the terrain of race relations in Australia. She also has a strong interest in methods and methodology, and has recently published (with Chris Andersen) *Indigenous Statistics: An Indigenous Quantitative Methodology* (Left Coast Press 2013).

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Rob White has research and scholarly interests in criminology and youth studies, with a special interest in green criminology. Among his recent publications are *Working with Offenders* (with Hannah Graham; Willan 2010), *Transnational Environmental Crime* (Routledge 2011), *Youth and Society* (with Johanna Wyn; Oxford University Press 2013), *Youth Gangs, Violence and Social Respect* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013), and *Harm: An Eco-Justice Perspective* (Policy Press 2013).

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## PREFACE

This text is designed for students at the beginning of their journey in social research. Our aim is to provide an accessible, practically oriented, and Australian-focused introduction to social research methods. Within this, the authors seek to develop students' awareness and appreciation of the very wide range of research methods and practices available, and the unique value and limitations of each. Essentially, each chapter presents a succinct 'what is' introduction, followed by practical 'how to' instruction, and a concise explanation of the topic's major strengths or weaknesses. Each 'From method to practice' section—there is one in each chapter—provides an example of how each method works in an actual research project. Each chapter also has the critical added benefit of being written by an active research practitioner, experienced in the particular social science method or practice.

In developing the text, the intention is not to be tied too rigidly to the traditional offerings of social research methods texts. Without losing the essential base of the social research process, the research methods included in this book are selected on the basis of their relevance to contemporary Australian social research practice and their representation of commonly used methods. Recent Australian case studies are used liberally in the text to provide direct examples of how the methods are employed within the social sciences.

As an introductory undergraduate social research text, it is not the goal of this book to fully equip students as social researchers in any specific method or technique. Rather, its aim is to inspire students to continue their engagement with social research by presenting the requisite introductory skills within a framework of exciting, up-to-date, relevant, Australian research. A broad and comparative understanding of the major contemporary Australian social research methods is a vital prerequisite for beginner social scientists. This text aims to provide that prerequisite.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Even though this third edition is marked by the revision and update of several of the chapters, and the addition of one new chapter, Chapter 15, the logic of how the book is structured remains basically the same. Learning in social research methods is a sequential process.

Part 1 of the book sets the social science research context for the method chapters. Chapter 1 describes the nature of social research; that is, what social research is, the central elements of social research methodologies. Chapter 2 builds on this foundation by focusing on the key aspects of designing a social research project, including the centrality of the research question, theoretical and conceptual elements, and the research proposal. Chapter 3 develops the pragmatic elements of research design into the larger picture of the research process, emphasising the interconnectedness of each phase of this process

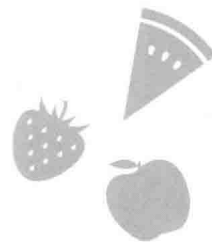
and how they fit together. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive discussion of the place and purpose of ethics within social research and its place as a fundamental determinant in the design, development, and implementation of all social research projects. The discussion also covers the practical aspect of ethics within the research process in Australia. In Chapter 5, the last chapter in Part 1, the core facets of sampling and measurement, probability and non-probability are explained and demonstrated.

Part 2 concentrates on research methods and analysis associated with quantitative research. The reason the quantitative chapters are placed before the qualitative chapters is to engage students in what they often consider to be the more difficult methods early in the book, hopefully, when they are fresher. Teaching bivariate analysis in week 11 of a semester can be an unrewarding task. The quantitative section begins in Chapter 6, with a concise but thorough overview of the key aspects of survey research. In Chapter 7, the use of quantitative methods is expanded into the increasingly influential field of demographic research. This chapter provides a practical, hands-on introduction to population data and population-level analysis. Chapters 8 deals with the analysis and interpretation of quantitative data, and Chapter 9 with how to conduct quantitative data analyses using SPSS. Basic univariate and bivariate quantitative techniques are explored and explained using case studies, and practical examples and exercises.

Part 3, Chapters 10 to 15 contain the more qualitative research methods. In Chapter 10 the basic imperatives of in-depth qualitative interviewing are developed, along with an outline of focus group processes and practice. In Chapter 11, analysing the different stages of content analysis develops the basics skills required for this research method. The importance of language and meaning to social enquiry is expanded in the next chapter on discourse analysis. In Chapter 12 the variety of approaches to discourse analysis are discussed, along with the key practices and a worked example of a critical discourse analysis approach. Evaluation research, where the methods used do not fall neatly into the qualitative or quantitative camp, and an area of rising prominence within social research, is the subject of Chapter 13. Chapter 14 provides a functional introduction to analysing qualitative social research data by focusing on the thematic or narrative analysis of interview transcripts, and includes details of how to analyse focus group sessions. With its focus on the observation, recording, and writing up and through social and cultural practices, the new chapter, Chapter 15, which is on ethnography, rounds out the qualitative methods section. Chapter 16 is a user-friendly and practical guide to the essential—but in other social research texts, often neglected—skills needed for the effective writing of social science research.

While the text has been divided into succinct chapters, each addressing a different facet of social research and a different social research method, the skills and understanding included in each of them form a coherent whole, applicable across the general field of social science research.





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This text has come a long way since an inhouse social research methods guide for our undergraduate and honours students informed the 2006 first edition. As previously, I want to praise the chapter contributors to this book. Again, I am extremely grateful for their professionalism and collegiality. Each of them updated their chapters competently and creatively, without complaint, and on time. Thanks also to the new authors in this edition who delivered chapters of new content within the same, relatively short period. From around Australia, the continuing generous contribution of social researchers of vignettes, their overviews of their research projects, and their enthusiasms also invaluable strengthen the real research context of the chapters.

My appreciation also continues for the students of our HGA 203/303 Social and Political Research unit, who provided irreplaceable—often fearless and frank—users' feedback on different aspects and features of the text, especially the inclass exercises. A number of them went the extra mile; they were prepared to participate in the example interviews to provide the transcripts that are now available online for analysis.

Thank you also to the terrific team at OUP, especially Victoria Kerr and Katie Ridsdale. Thanks, too, to our amazing editor, Sandra Goldboom Zurbo. I am also grateful to those publishers and authors who kindly gave permission for us to reproduce their copyright material. The targeted use of their work in the various chapters contributes strongly to the research practice orientation of the text.

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Maggie Walter  
2013

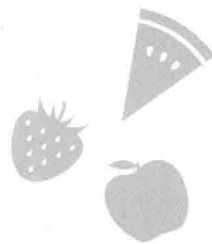
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*in Share Households*. PhD thesis, Brisbane: School of Social Science, University of Queensland; The Australian for Hartwich, O. and Brown, J. (2012). *Make population Growth Work*, August 22nd 2012

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# A NOTE FOR LECTURERS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS

## THE RATIONALE FOR THE TEXT

This is the third edition of *Social Research Methods*, and while it has been significantly updated and added to since 2006, the impetus for the original text remains valid. The primary motivation was the frustration that I, and colleagues, as lecturers in undergraduate and postgraduate social research methods units, felt at the dearth of well-written, concise, practically orientated, and, most importantly, Australian, introductory social research texts. We continued, as did many other Australian tertiary institutions, to make do with US- or British-based texts, trying to overcome their deficits by supplying an Australian context and Australian examples through our lectures. Our students continually questioned why we were not using an Australian book.

The second impetus was the feeling that while the books we were currently using, most of them one-author texts, tended to do well in some areas of social research methods, in others, the author's lack of practical experience and expertise was obvious. Given that a major aim of our introductory social research unit is to develop students' awareness and appreciation of the very wide range of methods available to social researchers, and the unique value of each, this deficit was particularly problematic. As a result we were only selectively using the prescribed texts as core reading and substituting our own material for the chapters we deemed lacking.

The third source for this book was the realisation that our own school contained a highly skilled social research methods resource. Whether by good luck or good management we had assembled as colleagues a group of social researchers with skills and experience across a diverse and comprehensive range of the major social research methods. Why not, we thought, bring these skills and expertise together in our own social research methods, Australian-orientated text? Since the first edition in 2006, new colleagues have arrived and others have departed to further their careers at other universities in Australia and New Zealand. This edition, therefore, spreads its boundaries well beyond its original home at the University of Tasmania. Our continued inclusion of the 'Voices in the field' vignettes in this edition furthers our deliberate inclusion of the research voices and stories of social science researchers across Australia from a variety of disciplines.

The unit for which this text was originally designed contains students from a wide variety of disciplines. The class is strongly encouraged—in some cases mandated—as a central part of a variety of undergraduate courses. We are aware, therefore, of the need to not be too discipline-specific in either examples or instruction. While, a majority of the chapter contributors are sociologists, we also include criminologists, demographers, and urban studies scholars among our number. To increase the usefulness of our chapters all authors have purposely written material that is generic to a broad social sciences student readership.

Our key rationale for and determinant of the book's shape and direction is our desire to provide students with the skills and knowledge base needed to select the most appropriate social research methods for their own future research projects. To this end, we have done our best to incorporate improvements and additions suggested by users of the book, students and lecturers alike. Again, we are always open to more suggestions for improvements, additions, or changes.

## ORIGINAL AND NEW FEATURES

As lecturers in social science research methods our role is to bring social research alive for our students and to engage them in the thrill of the research process. As we know, this can be a formidable task. Not only are social science students often wary of anything that includes terms such as 'statistics' or 'analysis', but our classes are also often very large. We must also somehow manage to fit the basics of the huge topic of social research into a thirteen-week semester.

With the first edition in 2006 we began the design process by specifying the key dimensions of the sort of text we would like to use. The results of this process were that we agreed that the text should be user friendly (for students and lecturers), it should have Australian contexts and examples as its focus, a strong practical orientation, and be accessible in its language and presentation. In the second edition we added the 'Voices in the field' vignettes, presentations from prominent Australian social science researchers on work currently being done by them in the field. These vignettes add vibrant detail to what social science looks and feels like outside of a textbook. We also added a section on the direct practice of the method and intext definitions of key social science research terms and concepts. We have retained these features in this, our third edition. Our text chapters each include

- numerous Australian and some New Zealand examples and case studies
- boxes that summarise key points
- highlighting of key terms and intext definitions
- explicit, concise, how to instructions on different research techniques
- a combined glossary of all terms and definitions, which appears at the end the book
- topic exercises specific to each chapter
- Voices in the field vignettes from leading researchers
- a main points summary at the end of each chapter.

Once again, many of the exercises, which are a special feature of the design, have been updated for this edition. Each is developed to enable students to gain hands-on practice in different elements of the social research process. These exercises can be used in a number of ways: as a material resource for tutorials, as within-lecture exercises to directly engage students in important aspects of social research methods and process, or as take-home exercises to reinforce classroom learning. They have all been successfully trialled within our own units over the last few years. Their placement within the text also saves having to reproduce multiple copies and enables students to pre-prepare for tutorial sessions.

All our chapters have been revised and updated for this edition. All include new examples, new exercises, and many have other additions designed to enhance their appeal to students and their usability by lecturers. For example, Chapter 1 has extended its articulation of the differences between method and methodology, Chapter 10 now includes an example of interviewing through photo elicitation, and Chapter 12 contains new concrete examples of how to conduct a critical discourse analysis. Additionally,

Chapter 11 on Content Analysis and Chapter 9 on using SPSS for statistical analysis have been rewritten with new content by new authors.

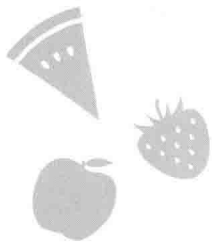
The major change in this addition is the inclusion of an extra chapter, on ethnography. Our decision to expand the text to include a chapter on ethnography was influenced by the high number of people accessing the online chapter and the feedback suggesting such an inclusion from some of our users. For the intext chapter the content has been expanded with examples and exercises to fit with the shape and structure of the book's other chapters. The inclusion of the ethnography chapter broadens the text's scope. Its addition brings to sixteen the number of chapters in our book. We could, of course, add more. We know that there are many more methods being used by social scientists than those currently covered. However, we have consciously resisted the addition of more chapters because we want the book to remain a useable, semester-size style. We will continue to trial new method content through a continual updating of our online mini chapters.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

The other big change in this addition is the expansion of our online materials and resources to aid lecturers and their students. Our online resources have been substantially updated for this edition, but as before, they are designed to enhance and expand intext material and exercises. These now include the following.

- Instructor resources
  - lecture guide
  - PowerPoint guide
  - student revision guide
  - a set of frequently asked questions (and their answers).
- A growing list of mini chapters. Current chapters include
  - conversational analysis
  - participatory action research
  - case study methods
  - memory work
  - life histories
  - two extension chapters on quantitative analysis
- A quantitative dataset.
  - A subset of fifty variables from the 2011 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA) is included for use with the chapters on quantitative methods and analysis, including SPSS. The datasets from AuSSA are password protected for users of the text. To access the data files please go to [www.oup.com.au/orc/walter](http://www.oup.com.au/orc/walter) and use the password: Lollypops.
- Qualitative interview transcripts.
  - A set of transcripts of indepth interviews are included for use in the qualitative analysis and interviewing methods chapters.
- A bibliographic outline of key resources.

We formally express our thanks here to the researchers on the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA) for again making available a subset of variables from their 2011 survey. Also thanks to those students who volunteered to be respondents in our qualitative example indepth interviews and transcripts. Online resources are available at [www.oup.com.au/orc/walter](http://www.oup.com.au/orc/walter).



# A NOTE FOR STUDENTS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS

## THE THRILL OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Students beginning their study of social science research methods tend to have two basic expectations: that the unit will be hard or it will be boring. Or possibly both. As a former social science research beginner, I understand completely how students feel. But, as an enthusiastic social science research practitioner, I can assure students reading this text that learning about social research need be neither hard nor boring.

Let's deal with the boring bit first. Social science research is what makes social science come alive. While learning some of the theory and practices associated with research can sometimes be a hard slog, it is the skills and understandings you acquire here that allow you to move from being a social science student to a social science practitioner. Research skills are the bridge between passive study of what others have done and active participation in finding social answers. Essentially, research is the creative part of being a social scientist, the adventurous part, and the part where what you do can actually make a difference. Gaining a grasp of basic social science research skills is like moving from a student learner status to your social science researcher P plates. While you still need guidance and support, you are able to head out in a research direction of your choice, under your own steam—and that is exciting.

More pragmatically, your social research abilities will prove an ongoing, highly regarded, marketable set of skills across your academic and professional life. A core understanding of social research methods gives you practical, hands-on research skills. Whether you plan to enter the workforce after your undergraduate degree or go on to postgraduate studies, these skills provide a base for you to

- undertake your own research projects
- interpret and apply the social research findings of others
- critically analyse contemporary social research literature and findings.

Social research methods skills, which are increasingly required and valued by business and by government agencies, can be directly marketed to your future employers. Past students have used their social science research skills to support their employment aims and are now working across a wide variety of realms, including as a policy officer with a state department of economic development, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, with community welfare agencies as research officers, as graduate trainees with the Commonwealth and state public service, and with market research companies.

Now let's turn to hard. Learning about social research methods is no harder than other social science units, but it does differ in the construction of the task and the way it needs to be undertaken. Here, I am reminded of my own undergraduate experience of vainly trying to master introductory quantitative statistics. My study partner, with a background

in physics and no doubt tired of my grumbling, picked up my text and turned it back to page 1. 'Its simple,' he said, 'read page 1 and when you understand it, read page 2. When you understand page 2, read page 3, and so on.' This is a lesson I have never forgotten—to gain a clear understanding of social research skills, you need to take a sequential approach, mastering one aspect of the subject before you move on to the next. So, as opposed to, say, studying the sociology of crime, where you concentrate on understanding the links between core concepts, empirical data, and theoretical arguments, often dipping in and out of the reading at different points, the study of research skills requires a more structured approach.

Additionally, you are likely to find that social research is both simpler and more complex than you imagined. Simpler, in that many of the methods or analysis techniques you might perceive as difficult are actually straightforward when examined closely. More complex, in that the amount of planning, preparation, and awareness of the nature of social research processes and practices needed to undertake a social research project are likely to be significantly more than you anticipated. Good research relies on rigorous theoretical, conceptual, and practical preparation. Although good research results can be obtained from using straightforward research processes and methods, good research cannot be done on the run. The results of research directly reflect the level of planning, preparation, and attention to the process of research steps. Research undertaken without adequate preparation leads to unreliable results; poor research is worse than no research at all.

Most importantly of all, social research is a thrilling endeavour. The power to ask your own social questions, explore social phenomena from your own perspective, and seek the social answers for yourself rather than always relying on the work of 'expert' others, cannot be underestimated.

The excitement of social discovery is also addictive. Once you begin the process of active research, it is hard to stop. Be warned: you are likely to start seeing social questions and potential social research projects everywhere. Moreover, the skills acquired and the social research perspective have almost unlimited applications. You can use them formally within the academy as well as in other aspects of daily life. I hope your study of this subject will impart to you some of the thrill of the research process and the enthusiasm for social research that so engages me and the other contributors to this text.

## USING THIS BOOK TO BEGIN THE JOURNEY

This text does not expect students to have an existing knowledge set of social research methods or techniques. Rather, the key objectives are to enable you to develop a clear understanding of the nature and processes of social science research, to gain an appreciation of the wide range of methods available to social researchers, and to develop a set of basic practical research skills. While the methods included are limited by what can feasibly be covered within a one-semester unit, these sixteen chapters provide a broad coverage of the major qualitative and quantitative social research methods currently used in Australian. Their presentation is organised along categorical lines, moving from the backbone of social science research practice to quantitative methods, and then qualitative methods from data collection to data analysis. While the chapters are practically orientated, each also stresses that social research is fundamentally a dedicated curiosity about our social world rather than just the application of techniques and processes. In addition, each chapter is written

by a social scientist with broad experience in the research process, method, or type of analysis detailed in their chapter.

While each chapter presents a different method or analysis process, a core message of this text is that all established social research methods have value. There is no such thing as a better method. Rather, some research methods are better for investigating particular types of social research questions. Your selection of a research method should depend on the research question your project seeks to investigate, not the other way around. This text also does not seek to make you an expert in any of the methods discussed. Our aim is to provide you with a key understanding of a range of social science research methods to a level where you can knowledgeably select an appropriate research method for your particular research project. The further reading and reference lists at the end of each chapter are included to enable new researchers to further develop their knowledge in those methods or topics.



# **SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS**