

An aerial photograph of a snowy mountain slope with several skiers. The skiers are silhouetted against the bright white snow, and their long shadows are cast across the surface. The skiers are scattered across the frame, some in the upper half and some in the lower half, separated by a red horizontal band.

# THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

FOURTEENTH EDITION

EARL BABBIE

FOURTEENTH EDITION

# The Practice of Social Research

Earl Babbie

*Chapman University*



Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

***The Practice of Social Research,***  
**Fourteenth Edition**  
Earl Babbie

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# The Practice of Social Research

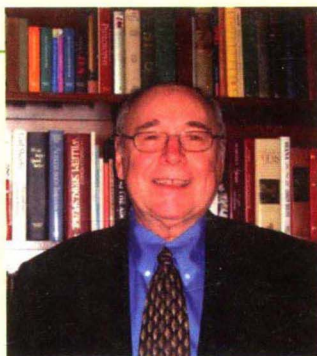


## A Note from the Author

Writing is my joy, sociology my passion. I delight in putting words together in a way that makes people learn or laugh or both. Sociology shows up as a set of words, also. It represents our last, best hope for planet-training our race and finding ways for us to live together. I feel a special excitement at being present when sociology, at last, comes into focus as an idea whose time has come.

I grew up in small-town Vermont and New Hampshire. When I announced I wanted to be an auto-body mechanic, like my dad, my teacher told me I should go to college instead. When Malcolm X announced he wanted to be a lawyer, his teacher told him a colored boy should be something more like a carpenter. The difference in our experiences says something powerful about the idea of a level playing field. The inequalities among ethnic groups run deep.

I ventured into the outer world by way of Harvard, the USMC, U.C. Berkeley, and twelve



Earl Babbie

years teaching at the University of Hawaii. I resigned from teaching in 1980 and wrote full-time for seven years, until the call of the classroom became too loud to ignore. For me, teaching is like playing jazz. Even if you perform the same number over and over, it never comes out the same twice and you don't know exactly what it'll sound like until you hear it. Teaching is like writing with your voice.

In 2006, I retired from teaching once more, and can now devote myself more fully to writing. I've been writing textbooks for over half my life, and it keeps becoming more exciting, rather than less. I can't wait to see what happens next.

## Dedication

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*Suzanne Babbie*

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# Preface

A “few” years ago (I hate to tell you how many), I began teaching my first course in social research methods. The course focused specifically on survey research methods, and I had only six students in the class. As the semester progressed, I became more relaxed as a teacher. Before long, my students and I began meeting in my office, where I could grab and lend books from my own library as their relevance occurred to me during class meetings.

One nagging problem I faced then was the lack of a good textbook on survey research. The available books fell into one of two groups. Some books presented the theoretical logic of research methods in such abstract terms that I didn’t think students would be able to apply any of the general principles to the practical world of “doing” research. The other books were just the opposite. Often termed “cookbooks,” they presented detailed, step-by-step instructions on how to conduct a survey. Unfortunately, this approach only prepared students to conduct surveys very much like the ones described by the authors. Neither the abstract nor the “cookbook” approach seemed truly useful to students or their instructors.

One day I found myself jotting down the table of contents for my ideal research methods textbook. It was organized around three themes:

1. Understanding the theoretical principles on which scientific research is based;
2. Seeing how those principles are reflected in the established techniques for doing research;
3. Being prepared to make appropriate compromises whenever field conditions do not

permit the routine application of established techniques.

The next day, unexpectedly, Wadsworth called and asked me to write a methods text!

*Survey Research Methods* was published in 1973. My editors and I immediately received some good news, some bad news, and some additional good news. The first good news was that all survey research instructors seemed to love the book, and it was being used in virtually every survey research course in the country. The bad news was that there weren’t all that many survey research courses.

The final good news, however, was that many instructors who taught general social research courses—covering survey research alongside other research methods—were inclined to use our book and supplement it with other books dealing with field research, experiments, and so on. While adjusting to our specialized book, however, many instructors suggested that Wadsworth have “that same guy” write a more general social research text.

The preface of the first edition of *The Practice of Social Research* (1975) acknowledged the assistance of a dozen social research instructors from California to Florida. The book was a collaboration in a very real sense, even though only my name was on the cover and I was ultimately responsible for it.

*The Practice of Social Research* was an immediate success. Although it was initially written for sociology courses, subsequent editions have been increasingly used in fields such as psychology, public administration, urban studies, education, communications, social sciences, and political

science—in some 30 different disciplines, I’m told. Moreover, it’s being used by teachers and researchers in numerous countries around the world, and in 2000 a Beijing publisher released a two-volume Chinese edition.

I’ve laid out this lengthy history of the book for a couple of reasons. First, when I was a student, I suppose I thought of textbooks the same way that I thought about government buildings: They were just there. I never really thought about them as being written by human beings. I certainly never thought about textbooks as evolving: being updated, getting better, having errors corrected. As a student, I would have been horrified by the thought that any of my textbooks might contain mistakes!

Second, pointing out the evolution of the book sets the stage for a preview of the changes that have gone into this 14th edition. As with previous revisions, several factors have prompted changes. For example, because social research technology and practices are continually changing, the book must be updated to remain current and useful. In my own teaching, I frequently find improved ways to present standard materials. Colleagues also often share their ideas for ways to teach specific topics. Some of these appear as boxed inserts in the book. Both students and instructors often suggest that various topics be reorganized, expanded, clarified, shrunk, or—gasp—deleted.

## New to the 14th Edition

In an earlier edition of this book, I said, “Revising a textbook such as this is a humbling experience. No matter how good it seems to be, there is no end of ideas about how it could be improved.” That observation still holds true. When we asked instructors what could be improved, they once again thought of things, and I’ve considered all their suggestions, followed many of them, and chosen to “think some more” about others. I’ve also received numerous comments and suggestions from students who have been assigned the book; many of the changes come from them.

### General Changes

- Revised the use of *gender* and *sex* for rigor and consistency
- Dropped the box series, “Keeping Humanity in Focus,” although I worked most of the

examples into the text

- Updated GSS and other data where available and appropriate
- C-O-L-O-R!

## Specific Changes

### Chapter One

- Discussed the distinction between *sex* and *gender*, explaining how the terms will be used throughout this book
- Added a discussion of the Arbesman’s Half-Life of Facts
- Added a discussion of probabilistic causation in the section on determinism and agency

### Chapter Two

- Have added bibliographic citations for classic works, such as Comte and Darwin
- Revised the introduction to the section, Traditional Model of Science
- Removed references to Chapter 1 discussion of postmodernism
- Added a discussion of big data
- Added discussion of Karl Popper’s principle of falsifiability
- Expanded the discussion of feminist paradigms

### Chapter Three

- Updated the AAPOR Code of Ethics to 2010
- Expanded discussion of National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research
- Added a comment on the need for special care when dealing with vulnerable populations
- Discussed an article about British RECs (aka IRBs) and the special problems faced by qualitative researchers
- Added discussion of confidentiality with visual images
- Added a discussion of fraudulent “research”

### Chapter Four

- Referenced Peter Lynn volume on longitudinal studies



- New Research in Real Life box reporting a graduate student's research in North Africa
- New diagram comparing several study types
- Discussion of how social research can combat environmental problems
- Introduced "panel mortality" and cited study using Facebook to track down missing subjects
- More explanation for Figure 4-1
- Updated dates in Figure 4-5
- Added a link from cohort to panel studies
- New section on mixed modes

### Chapter Five

- Revised the introduction to sections on Levels of Measurement and Nominal measures
- Augmented discussion of measuring quality of life at colleges
- Deleted discussion of *sex* and *gender*—discussed earlier
- Dropped the Patricia Fisher box on variable names
- Shortened the examples of operationalization
- Added an example of "Cornish" as an ethnic group in some studies

### Chapter Six

- Revised the discussion of Public Health ratings of U.S. states
- Added a Research in Real Life box, "Indexing the World"
- Updated GSS data on abortion attitudes
- Expanded the explanation of Guttman scaling

### Chapter Seven

- Moved discussion of cell phones and sampling from Chapter 9
- Augmented discussion of cell phones and sampling with Pew Center results
- Updated GSS data to 2012 for Guttman scale example
- Added a discussion of "credibility intervals"
- Introduced the term *chain referral*
- Cited Michael Brick's suggestion of a rebirth of quota sampling
- Revised Tips and Tools box on Using a Table of Random Numbers

- Revised Figure 7-11, referring to new random number appendix
- Streamlined the discussion of sampling frames
- Added discussion of difficulty of sampling for Internet surveys
- Added a section on Factorial Designs
- Added explanation of FCC rules on calling cell phones

### Chapter Eight

- Added suggestions by Horne and Lovaglia for using experiments in criminology
- Added suggestions by Schumann for using experiments to pretest survey-question wording

### Chapter Nine

- Moved discussion of cell phones and sampling to Chapter 7
- Introduced Mick Couper's Designing Effective Web Surveys
- Added example of qualitative secondary analysis involving gay and lesbian child rearing
- Expanded and updated section on online surveys
- Moved discussion of RDD sampling to Chapter 7
- Added examples for ways of increasing response rates
- Added a section on mixed-mode surveys
- Expanded on the advantages of online surveys

### Chapter Ten

- Added discussion of the American/European cultural roots of interviewing
- Discussion of the distinctions between journalistic and social research
- Added a fuller discussion of the role of the literature review in connection with the Grounded Theory Method
- Added caution of picking biased sample of cases

### Chapter Eleven

- Added example of climate change and population growth



- Updated census data on education/gender/income
- Discussed Wordscores for analyzing manifest content
- Study analyzing gendered toys offered on Disney website
- Added more-recent study of suicide rates
- Created a new section on Online Unobtrusive Research with a great many examples
- Introduced the Census Bureau's American Community Survey and Census Explorer
- Expanded on the concept of big data

### Chapter Twelve

- New Tips and Tools box introducing the concept of Positive Deviance
- New Research in Real Life box discussing social research in China with a special focus on the Canton Public Opinion Research Center
- Expanded the text explanation of Figure 12-2

### Chapter Thirteen

- Completely revamped the QDA example, introducing NVivo 9 and Qualrus
- Added another example of understanding quantitative data in a qualitative format (2012 election returns)

### Chapter Fourteen

- Clarified the discussion of measures of central tendency
- Added to the discussion of interpreting relationships between two variables
- Moved Sociological Diagnostics to Chapter 15

### Chapter Fifteen

- Deleted the tables from *The American Soldier*
- Moved Sociological Diagnostics from Chapter 14
- Related attitudes toward Medicare to attitudes toward Obamacare
- Added new and updated variables to gender/income analysis

### Chapter Sixteen

- Introduced Logit and Probit regression models
- Expanded section on GIS, including a graphic example

- Added a discussion of computer packages commonly used for statistical analyses

### Chapter Seventeen

- Expanded the discussion of the peer-review process
- Introduced the Digital Object Identifier as an attempt to make web materials available in the long run

As always, I've updated materials throughout the book. As an instructor, I'm constantly searching for new and more-effective ways of explaining social research to my own students; many of those new explanations take the form of diagrams. You'll find several new graphical illustrations in this edition. Once again, I've sought to replace aging research examples (except for the classics) with more-recent ones. I've also dropped some sections that I don't think do much for students anymore.

As with each new edition, I would appreciate any comments you have about how the book can be improved. Its evolution over the past years has reflected countless comments from students and others.

## Pedagogical Features

Although students and instructors both have told me that the past editions of this book were effective tools for learning research methods, I have used this revision as an opportunity to review the book from a pedagogical standpoint, fine-tuning some elements, adding others. Here's the package we assembled for the 14th edition.

**Chapter Overview** Each chapter is preceded with a pithy focus paragraph that highlights the principal content of the chapter.

**Chapter Introduction** Each chapter opens with an introduction that lays out the main ideas in that chapter and, importantly, relates them to the content of other chapters in the book.

**Clear and provocative examples** Students often tell me they find the research examples help to clarify difficult and/or abstract ideas, and this edition has many new examples as well as some that have proven particularly valuable in earlier editions.