The goal of research is not just to discover something but to communicate that discovery to a larger audience—other social scientists, government officials, your teachers, the general public—perhaps several of these audiences. Whatever the study’s particular outcome, if the research report enables the intended audience to comprehend the results and learn from them, the research can be judged a success. If the intended audience is not able to learn about the study’s results, the research should be judged a failure no matter how expensive the research, how sophisticated its design, or how much of yourself you invested in it.

This conclusion may seem obvious, and perhaps a bit unnecessary. After all, you may think that all researchers write up their results for other people to read. But the fact is that many research projects fail to produce a research report. Sometimes the problem is that the research is poorly designed to begin with and cannot be carried out in a satisfactory manner; sometimes unanticipated difficulties derail a viable project. But too often the researcher just never gets around to writing a report. And then there are many research reports that are very incomplete or poorly written or that speak to only
one of several interested audiences. The failure may not be complete, but the project’s full potential is not achieved.

The stage of reporting research results is also the point at which the need for new research is identified. It is the time when, so to speak, “the rubber hits the road”—when we have to make our research make sense to others. To whom will our research be addressed? How should we present our results to them? Should we seek to influence how our research report is used?

The primary goals of this chapter are to guide you in comparing writing worthwhile reports of your own, and communicating with the public about research. This chapter also gives particular attention to the writing process itself and points out how that process can differ when writing up qualitative versus quantitative research. We will conclude by considering some of the ethical issues unique to the reporting process, with special attention to the problem of plagiarism.

**RESEARCH REPORT GOALS**

The research report will present research findings and interpretations in a way that reflects some combination of the researcher’s goals, the research sponsor’s goals, the concerns of the research subjects, and perhaps the concerns of a wider anticipated readership. Understanding the goals of these different groups will help the researcher begin to shape the final report even at the start of the research. In designing a proposal and in negotiating access to a setting for the research, commitments often must be made to produce a particular type of report, or at least cover certain issues in the final report. As the research progresses, feedback about the research from its participants, sponsoring agencies, collaborators, or other interested parties may suggest the importance of focusing on particular issues in the final report. Social researchers traditionally have tried to distance themselves from the concerns of such interested parties, paying attention only to what is needed to advance scientific knowledge. But in recent years, some social scientists have recommended bringing these interested parties into the research and reporting process itself.

**Advance Scientific Knowledge**

Most social science research reports are directed to other social scientists working in the area of study, so they reflect orientations and concerns that are shared within this community of interest. The traditional scientific approach encourages a research goal to advance scientific knowledge by providing reports to other scientists. This approach also treats value considerations as beyond the scope of science: “An empirical science cannot tell anyone what he should do but rather what he can do and under certain circumstances what he wishes to do” (Weber 1949:54).

The idea is that developing valid knowledge about how society is organized or how we live our lives does not tell us how society should be organized or how we should live our lives. There should, as a result, be a strict separation between the determination of empirical facts and the evaluation of these facts as satisfactory or unsatisfactory (Weber 1949). Social scientists must not ignore value considerations, which are viewed as a legitimate basis for selecting a research problem to study. After the research is over and a report has been written, many scientists also consider it acceptable to encourage government officials or private organizations to implement the findings. During a research project, however, value considerations are to be held in abeyance.
Shape Social Policy

As we highlighted in our discussion of applied research in Chapter 11, many social scientists seek to influence social policy through their writing. By now, you have been exposed to several such examples in this text, including all the evaluation research (Chapter 11). These particular studies, like much policy-oriented social science research, are similar to those that aim strictly to increase knowledge. In fact, these studies might even be considered contributions to knowledge first and to social policy debate second. What distinguishes the reports of these studies from strictly academic reports is their attention to policy implications.

Other social scientists who seek to influence social policy explicitly reject the traditional scientific, rigid distinction between facts and values (Sjoberg and Nett 1968). Bellah et al. (1985) have instead proposed a model of “social science as public philosophy,” in which social scientists focus explicit attention on achieving a more just society:

Social science makes assumptions about the nature of persons, the nature of society, and the relation between persons and society. It also, whether it admits it or not, makes assumptions about good persons and a good society and considers how far these conceptions are embodied in our actual society.

Social science as public philosophy, by breaking through the iron curtain between the social sciences and the humanities, becomes a form of social self-understanding or self-interpretation. . . . By probing the past as well as the present, by looking at “values” as much as at “facts,” such a social science is able to make connections that are not obvious and to ask difficult questions. (P. 301)

This perspective suggests more explicit concern with public policy implications when reporting research results. But it is important to remember that we all are capable of distorting our research and our interpretations of research results to correspond to our own value preferences. The temptation to see what we want to see is enormous, and research reports cannot be deemed acceptable unless they avoid this temptation.

Organize Social Action—Participatory Action Research

For the same reasons that value questions are traditionally set apart from the research process, many social scientists consider the application of research a nonscientific concern. William Foote Whyte, whose Street Corner Society (1943) study you encountered in Chapter 9, has criticized this belief and proposed an alternative research and reporting strategy he calls participatory action research (PAR). Whyte (1991:285) argues that social scientists must get “out of the academic rut” and engage in applied research to develop better understanding of social phenomena.

In PAR, the researcher involves as active participants some members of the setting studied. Both the organizational members and the researcher are assumed to want to develop valid conclusions, to bring unique insights, and to desire change, but Whyte (1991) believed that these objectives were more likely to be obtained if the researcher collaborated actively with the persons he studied. PAR can bring researchers into closer contact with participants in the research setting through groups that discuss and plan research steps and then take steps to implement research findings. Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (2005:563–68) summarize the key features of PAR research as “a spiral of self-reflecting cycles” involving

- planning a change,
- acting and observing the process and consequences of the change,
• reflecting on these processes and consequences,
• replanning, and
• acting and observing again.

In contrast with the formal reporting of results at the end of a research project, these “cycles” make research reporting an ongoing part of the research process.

Case Study: Seeking Higher Education for Inmates

While prison populations in the United States have been significantly increasing, access to college programs within prisons has been essentially eliminated. Primarily because of the “tough on crime” policies of the 1990s, by 1995, only 8 of the existing 350 college programs in prisons remained open nationwide (Torre and Fine 2005). To remedy this situation, Torre and Fine became involved in participatory action research to facilitate a college and college-bound program at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (BHCF), a maximum-security women’s prison in New York. To conduct a study of the effects of the program, Michelle Fine was the principal investigator along with four prisoner-researchers and four researchers from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. This “participatory research team” asked several questions: (a) Who are the women in the college program? (b) What is the impact of the college experience on inmate students and their children? (c) What is the impact of the college experience on the prison environment? (d) What is the impact of the college experience beyond college on recidivism? and (e) What is the cost of such a program to taxpayers? The researchers used a triangulated methodology employing quantitative analysis of recidivism rates and costs of the program along with in-depth interviews with the participants; focus groups with inmates, faculty, children, and college presidents; and surveys of faculty who taught in the program. Although not using a randomized experimental design, Torre and Fine along with their co-investigators tracked participants in the college program after release and found that women who had not participated in the program were four times more likely to be returned to custody than women who participated.

The narratives from the interviews with college inmates also illuminated the positive benefits of the education. One inmate college student said, “Because when you take somebody that feels that they’re not gonna amount to anything, and you put them in an environment, like, when you’re in college it takes you away from the prison, . . . it’s like you’re opening your mind to a whole different experience” (Torre and Fine 2005:582). The positive impact of college on the inmates was also transferred to their children. The cost-benefit analysis of the program indicated that the savings based on decreased recidivism rates for those who attended the college far outweighed the initial cost of the program itself. In sum, with just a small grant from a private foundation, the participatory action research team brought together universities, prisoners, churches, community organizations, and prison administrators to resurrect a college at BHCF. The authors concluded, “Key elements of this program include broad-based community involvement, strong prisoner participation in design and governance, and the support of the prison administration” (p. 591). A full report of this research can be found at http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/changingminds.html. As you can see, participatory action research has the potential to be life changing for all involved!

Dialogue With Research Subjects

Guba and Lincoln (1989) have carried the notion of involving research subjects and others in the design and reporting of research one step further. What they call the constructivist paradigm is a methodology that emphasizes the importance of exploring how different stakeholders in a social setting construct their beliefs. This approach rejects the assumption that there is a reality around us to be studied and
reported on. Instead, social scientists operating in the constructivist paradigm try to develop a consensus among participants in some social process about how to understand the focus of inquiry. A program that is often evaluated. A research report will then highlight different views of the social program and explain how a consensus can be reached.

The constructivist approach provides a useful way of thinking about how to best make sense of the complexity and subjectivity of the social world. Other researchers write reports intended to influence public policy, and often their findings are ignored. Such neglect would be less common if social researchers gave more attention to the different meanings attached by participants to the same events, in the spirit of constructivist case reports. The philosophy of this approach is also similar to the utilization-based evaluation research approach advanced by Patton (1997; see Chapter 11) that involves all stakeholders in the research process.

ON WRITING RESEARCH

The goal of research is not just to discover something but also to communicate that discovery to a larger audience: other social scientists, government officials, your teachers, the general public—perhaps several of these audiences. Whatever the study’s particular outcome, if the intended audience for the research comprehends the results and learns from them, the research can be judged a success. If the intended audience does not learn about the study’s results, the research should be judged a failure—no matter how expensive the research, how sophisticated its design, or how much you (or others) invested in it.

Successful research reporting requires both good writing and a proper publication outlet. We will first review guidelines for successful writing before we look at particular types of research publications.

Consider the following principles formulated by experienced writers (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 1995):

- Respect the complexity of the task and don’t expect to write a polished draft in a linear fashion. Your thinking will develop as you write, causing you to reorganize and rewrite.
- Leave enough time for dead ends, restarts, revisions, and so on, and accept the fact that you will discard much of what you write.
- Write as fast as you comfortably can. Don’t worry about spelling, grammar, and so on until you are polishing things up.
- Ask anyone whom you trust for reactions to what you have written.
- Write as you go along, so you have notes and report segments drafted even before you focus on writing the report.

It is important to outline a report before writing it, but neither the report’s organization nor the first written draft should be considered fixed. As you write, you will get new ideas about how to organize the report. Try them out. As you review the first draft, you will see many ways to improve your writing. Focus particularly on how to shorten and clarify your statements. Make sure that each paragraph concerns only one topic. Remember the golden rule of good writing: Writing is revising!

You can ease the burden of report writing in several ways:

- Draw on the research proposal and on project notes.
- Use a word processing program on a computer to facilitate reorganizing and editing.
- Seek criticism from friends, teachers, and other research consumers before turning in the final product.
We often find it helpful to use what is called **reverse outlining**: After you have written a first complete draft, outline it on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis, ignoring the actual section headings you used. See if the paper you wrote actually fits the outline you planned. How could the organization be improved? Most important, leave yourself enough time so that you can revise, several times if possible, before turning in the final draft. Revision is essential until complete clarity is achieved.

For more suggestions about writing, see Becker (1986), Booth et al. (1995), Cuba (2002), Strunk and White (2000), and Turabian (1996). And we don’t need to point out that students (and professional researchers) often leave final papers (and reports) until the last possible minute (often for understandable reasons, including other coursework and job or family responsibilities). But be forewarned: *The last-minute approach does not work for research reports.*

**RESEARCH REPORT TYPES**

Research projects designed to produce student papers and theses, applied research reports, and academic articles all have unique features that will influence the final research report. For example, student papers are written for a particular professor or for a thesis committee and often are undertaken with almost no financial resources and in the face of severe time constraints. Applied research reports are written for an organization or agency that usually also has funded the research and has expectations for a particular type of report. Journal articles are written for the larger academic community and will not be published until they are judged acceptable by some representatives of that community (e.g., after the article has gone through extensive peer review).

These unique features do not really match up so neatly with the specific types of research products. For example, a student paper that is based on a research project conducted in collaboration with a work organization may face some constraints for a project designed to produce an applied research report. An academic article may stem from an applied research project conducted for a government agency. An applied research report often can be followed by an academic article on the same topic. In fact, one research study may lead to all three types of research reports, as students write course papers or theses for professors who write both academic articles and applied research reports.

**Student Papers and Theses**

What is most distinctive about a student research paper or thesis is the audience for the final product: a professor or, for a thesis, a committee of professors. In light of this, it is important for you to seek feedback early and often about the progress of your research and about your professor’s expectations for the final paper. Securing approval of a research proposal is usually the first step, but it should not be the last occasion for seeking advice prior to writing the final paper. Do not become too anxious for guidance, however. Professors require research projects in part so that their students can work through, at least somewhat independently, the many issues they confront. A great deal of insight into the research process can be gained this way. So balance your requests for advice with some independent decision making.

Most student research projects can draw on few resources beyond the student’s own time and effort, so it is important that the research plan not be overly ambitious. Keep the paper deadline in mind when planning the project, and remember that almost every researcher tends to underestimate the time required to carry out a project.
Group Projects
Pooling your resources with those of several students in a group project can make it possible to collect much more data but can lead to other problems. Each student’s role should be clarified at the outset and written into the research proposal as a formal commitment. Group members should try to help each other out, rather than competing to do the least work possible or to receive the most recognition. Complaints about other group members should be made to the professor when things just cannot be worked out among group members. Each group member should have a clear area of responsibility in the final report, and one may want to serve as the final editor.

The Thesis Committee
Students who are preparing a paper for a committee, usually during the senior year of a B.A. or at the M.A. or Ph.D. level, must be prepared to integrate the multiple perspectives and comments of committee members into a plan for a coherent final report. (The thesis committee chair should be the primary guide in this process; careful selection of faculty to serve on the committee is also important.) As much as possible, committee members should have complementary areas of expertise that are each important for the research project: perhaps one methodologist, one specialist in the primary substantive area of the thesis, and one specialist in a secondary area. Theses using data collected by service agencies or other organizations often benefit if an organizational representative is on the committee.

It is very important that you work with your committee members in an ongoing manner, both individually and collectively. In fact, it is vitally important to have a group meeting with all committee members at the beginning of the project to ensure everyone on the committee supports the research plan. Doing this will avoid obstacles that arise due to miscommunication later in the research process.

Journal Articles
It is the peer review process that makes preparation of an academic journal article most unique. Similar to a grant review, the journal’s editor sends submitted articles to two or three experts, peers, who are asked whether the paper should be accepted more or less as is, revised and then resubmitted, or rejected. Reviewers also provide comments, sometimes quite lengthy, to explain their decision and to guide any required revisions. The process is an anonymous one at most journals; reviewers are not told the author’s name, and the author is not told the reviewers’ names. Although the journal editor has the final say, editors’ decisions are normally based on the reviewers’ comments.

This peer review process must be anticipated in designing the final report. Peer reviewers are not pulled out of a hat. They are expert in the field or fields represented in the paper and usually have published articles themselves in that field. It is critical that the author be familiar with the research literature and be able to present the research findings as a unique contribution to that literature. In most cases, this hurdle is much harder to jump with journal articles than with student papers or applied research reports. In fact, most leading journals have a rejection rate of over 90%, so that hurdle is quite high indeed. Of course, there is also a certain luck of the draw in peer review. One set of two or three reviewers may be inclined to reject an article that another set of reviewers would accept (see the next case study). But in general, the anonymous peer review process results in higher-quality research reports because articles are revised prior to publication in response to the suggestions and criticisms of the experts.

Criminological and criminal justice research is published in a myriad of journals within several disciplines, including criminology, law, sociology, psychology, and economics. As a result, there is no one formatting style that all criminological literature abides by. If, for example, you are submitting your paper to a psychology-related journal, you must abide by the formatting style dictated by the Publication Manual
of the American Psychological Association (2009). The easiest way to determine how to format a paper for a particular journal is to examine recent volumes of the journal and format your paper accordingly. To give you a general idea of what a journal article looks like, an article in its entirety has been reprinted in Appendix C, along with an illustration of how to read a journal article. There are also numerous articles available on the Student Study Site for this text.

Despite the slight variations in style across journals, there are typically seven standard sections within a journal article in addition to the title page (see Exhibit 13.1).

**EXHIBIT 13.1 General Sections of a Journal Article**

1. **Abstract.** This should be a concise and nonevaluative summary of your research paper (no more than 120 words) that describes the research problem, the sample, the method, and the findings.

2. **Introduction.** The body of a paper should open with an introduction that presents the specific problem under study and describes the research strategy. Before writing this section, you should consider the following questions: What is the point of the study? How do the hypotheses and the research design relate to the problem? What are the theoretical implications of the study, and how does the study relate to previous work in the area? What are the theoretical propositions tested, and how were they derived? A good introduction answers these questions in a few paragraphs by summarizing the relevant argument and the data, giving the reader a sense of what was done and why.

3. **Literature Review.** Discuss the relevant literature in a way that relates each previous study cited to your research, not in an exhaustive historical review. Citation of and specific credit to relevant earlier works is part of the researchers’ scientific and scholarly responsibility. It is essential for the growth of cumulative science. This section should demonstrate the logical continuity between previous research and the research at hand. At the end of this section, you are ready to conceptually define your variables and formally state your hypotheses.

4. **Method.** Describe in detail how the study was conducted. Such a description enables the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of your methods and the reliability and validity of your results. It also permits experienced investigators to replicate the study if they so desire. In this section, you can include subsections that describe the sample, the independent and dependent variables, and the analytical or statistical procedure you will use to analyze the data.

5. **Results.** Summarize the results of the statistical or qualitative analyses performed on the data. This can include tables and figures that summarize findings. If statistical analyses are performed, tests of significance should also be highlighted.

6. **Discussion.** Take the opportunity to evaluate and interpret your results, particularly with respect to your original hypotheses and previous research. Here, you are free to examine and interpret your results as well as draw inferences from them. In general, this section should answer the following questions: What have I contributed to the literature here? How has my study helped resolve the original problem? What conclusions and theoretical implications can I draw from my study? What are the limitations of my study? What are the implications for future research?

7. **References.** All citations in the manuscript must appear in the reference list, and all references must be cited in the text.
Applied Reports

Unlike journal articles, applied reports are usually commissioned by a particular government agency, corporation, or nonprofit organization. As such, the most important problem that applied researchers confront is the need to produce a final report that meets the funding organization’s expectations. This is called the hired gun problem. Of course, the extent to which being a hired gun is a problem varies greatly with the research orientation of the funding organization and with the nature of the research problem posed. The ideal situation is to have few constraints on the nature of the final report, but sometimes research reports are suppressed or distorted because the researcher comes to conclusions that the funding organization does not like.

Applied reports that are written in a less highly charged environment can face another problem—even when they are favorably received by the funding organization, their conclusions are often ignored. This problem can be more a matter of the organization not really knowing how to use research findings than a matter of not wanting to use them. And this is not just a problem of the funding organization; many researchers are prepared only to present their findings, without giving any thought to how research findings can be translated into organizational policies or programs.

An Advisory Committee

An advisory committee can help the applied researcher avoid the problems of incompatible expectations for the final report and insufficient understanding of how to use the research results, without adopting the more engaged strategy of Whyte’s (1991) participatory action research or Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) constructivist inquiry. An advisory committee should be formed before the start of the project to represent the various organizational segments with stakes in the outcomes of the research. The researcher can use the committee as a source of intelligence about how particular findings may be received and as a sounding board for ideas about how the organization or agency can use research findings. Perhaps most important, an advisory committee can help the researcher work out many problems in research design, implementation, and data collection. Because an advisory committee is meant to comprise all stakeholders, it is inevitable that conflicts will arise between advisory group members. In our experience, however, these conflicts almost invariably can be used to strategize more effectively about the research design and the final product.

Advisory committees are particularly necessary for research investigating controversial issues. For example, after a study conducted in 1999 found that several death row inmates had been wrongly convicted of their crimes, the governor of Illinois placed a moratorium on all death sentences in the state. Other results of the study suggested that the death penalty was handed down unfairly; it found proportionally more minority and poor offenders were sentenced to death than whites and those who could afford hired legal counsel. This caused a great deal of media attention and calls for other states that practice the death penalty to institute similar moratoriums. As a consequence of this attention, other states have begun to examine their implementation of the death penalty as well. Maryland is one such state. In 2001, the state legislature in Maryland commissioned Raymond Paternoster (Paternoster et al. 2004) at the University of Maryland to conduct a study of its practice of the death penalty. The primary goal of the study was to determine whether the administration of the death penalty in the state was affected by the race of the defendant or victim.

As you can imagine, when the study was released, it was controversial. To make sure all interests were represented, Paternoster et al. (2004) set up an advisory committee before undertaking the study. The advisory committee consisted of a group of prosecutors and defense counsel who had experience in capital cases. They advised Professor Paternoster on several critical issues, including the years that the study should cover, the sources where information can be found, and the particularly important variables related to sentencing outcomes. Not only did the advisory committee provide substantive input into the research, but by having a broad spectrum of the legal community “on board,” it also provided credibility to the study’s findings.
You learned in Chapter 12 about some of the statistics that are useful in analyzing and reporting data, but there are some additional methods of presenting statistical results that can improve research reports. Combined and compressed displays are used most often in applied research reports and government documents, but they can also help communicate findings more effectively in student papers and journal articles.

In a **combined frequency display**, the distributions for a set of conceptually similar variables with the same response categories are presented together, with common headings for the responses. For example, you could identify the variables in the leftmost column and the value labels along the top. Exhibit 13.2 is a combined display reporting the frequency distributions in percentage form for five variables that indicate the responses of high school seniors to questions about their delinquent behavior. From this table you can infer several pieces of information besides the basic distribution of self-reported delinquency. You can determine the variation in the cohort’s involvement in specific types of delinquent behavior, and you can also determine whether this behavior increased or decreased over time (1982–1994). For example, although the majority of seniors reported having an argument or a fight with their parents, only a small percentage of students (around 20% on average) reported getting into a fight where a group of their friends was against another group or getting into trouble with police (around 25% on average). You can also see that the rate of fighting behavior did not change much over the 13-year time period examined; however, the percentage of youth getting into trouble with the police actually decreased.

**Compressed frequency displays** can also be used to present cross-tabular data and summary statistics more efficiently, by eliminating unnecessary percentages (such as those corresponding to the second value of a dichotomous variable) and by reducing the need for repetitive labels. Exhibit 13.3 presents a compressed display used to highlight the results of a survey on attitudes toward problems facing the country by several demographic characteristics. For several problem areas, respondents were asked to tell interviewers if they believed the country was “about the same today,” “making progress in this area,” or “losing ground” on this area. The percentages displayed are for those respondents who said that they believed the country was “losing ground” on a particular problem area.

Combined and compressed statistical displays present a large amount of data in a relatively small space. To the experienced reader of statistical reports, such displays can convey much important information. They should be used with caution, however, because people who are not used to them may be baffled by the rows of numbers. Graphs can also provide an efficient tool for summarizing relationships among variables. Exhibit 13.4 is from the evaluation report of the Children at Risk (CAR) program performed by Harrell, Cavanagh, and Sridharan (1999). It presents the percentage of youth who used drugs at different times during the course of the evaluation for both treatment (youth who participated in the program) and control (youth who did not) groups. As you can readily see, compared to youth who did not receive the CAR program, fewer youth who participated in the CAR program used drugs at all times that were measured.

Another good example of the use of graphs to show relationships is provided by a Bureau of Justice Statistics report on age patterns of victims of violent crime (Perkins 1997). Exhibit 13.5, taken from that report, shows how the rates of violent crimes have varied by particular age groups over time. You can see that whereas violent crime victimization rates have remained relatively stable over time for older age cohorts, younger age cohorts, particularly those under the age of 19, experienced increases in their rate of victimization during the late 1980s and early 1990s.
### EXHIBIT 13.2
Combined Frequency Display of High School Seniors Reporting Involvement in Selected Delinquent Activities in the Past 12 Months, United States (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argued or had a fight with either of your parents?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or 4 times</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more times</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken part in a fight where a group of your friends was against another group?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or 4 times</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more times</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gotten into trouble with police because of something you did?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>90.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or 4 times</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more times</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXHIBIT 13.3 Compressed Display of Attitudes Toward Problems Affecting the Country Today by Demographic Characteristics

Question: “Next, as I read you some problem areas, please tell me how you think each is affecting the country today. First, do you think the problem of . . . is about the same today, is the country making progress in this area, or is the country losing ground?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Crime (in %)</th>
<th>Families Split Up (in %)</th>
<th>Drugs (in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 30 years</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 49 years</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 64 years</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and older</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school graduate</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ETHICS AND REPORTING

It is at the time of reporting research results that the researcher’s ethical duty to be honest becomes paramount. Here are some guidelines:

- **Provide an honest accounting of how the research was carried out and where the initial research design had to be changed.** Readers do not have to know about every change you made in your plans and each new idea you had, but they should be informed about major changes in hypotheses or research design.
- **Maintain a full record of the research project so that questions can be answered if they arise.** Many details will have to be omitted from all but the most comprehensive reports, but these omissions should not make it impossible to track down answers to specific questions about research procedures that may arise in the course of data analysis or presentation.
- **Avoid “lying with statistics” or using graphs to mislead.** (See Chapter 12.)

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**EXHIBIT 13.4** Percentage of Children at Risk and Control Youths Reporting Drug Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Treatment (n = 264)</th>
<th>Control (n = 236)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stronger drug use (past month)</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gateway drug use (past month)</strong></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drug use (past month)</strong></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stronger drug use (year following end of program)</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gateway drug use (year following end of program)</strong></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drug use (year following end of program)</strong></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• **Acknowledge the sponsors of the research.** In part, this is so others can consider whether this sponsorship may have tempted you to bias your results in some way; and thank staff who made major contributions.

• **Be sure that the order of authorship for coauthored reports is discussed in advance and reflects agreed-upon principles.** Be sensitive to coauthors’ needs and concerns.

### Communicating With the Public

Even following appropriate guidelines such as these, however, will not prevent controversy and conflict over research on sensitive issues. Does this mean that ethical researchers should avoid political controversy by sidestepping media outlets for their work? Many social scientists argue that the media offer one of the best ways to communicate the practical application of sociological knowledge and that when we avoid these opportunities, “some of the best sociological insights never reach policy makers because sociologists seldom take advantage of useful mechanisms to get their ideas out” (Wilson 1998:435).

The sociologist William Julius Wilson (1998) urges the following principles for engaging the public through the media:

1. Focus on issues of national concern, issues that are high on the public agenda.
2. Develop creative and thoughtful arguments that are clearly presented and devoid of technical language.

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**EXHIBIT 13.5** **Violent Crime Rates by Age**

![Graph showing violent crime rates by age from 1973 to 1994 for different age groups.](source://graph.png)

3. Present the big picture whereby the arguments are organized and presented so that the readers can see how the various parts are interrelated.

Ethical research reporting should not mean ineffective reporting. You need to tell a coherent story in the report and to avoid losing track of the story in a thicket of minuscule details. You do not need to report every twist and turn in the conceptualization of the research problem or the conduct of the research, but be suspicious of reports that do not seem to admit to the possibility of any room for improvement. Social science is an ongoing enterprise in which one research report makes its most valuable contribution by laying the groundwork for another, more sophisticated research project. Highlight important findings in the research report, but use the research report also to point out what are likely to be the most productive directions for future researchers.

Plagiarism

It may seem depressing to end a book on research methods with a section on plagiarism, but it would be irresponsible to avoid the topic. Of course, you may have a course syllabus detailing instructor or university policies about plagiarism and specifying the penalties for violating that policy, so we’re not simply going to repeat that kind of warning. You probably realize that the practice of selling term papers is revoltingly widespread (our search of “term papers” on Google returned 5,920,000 Web sites on June 3, 2008); so we’re not going to just repeat that academic dishonesty is widespread. Instead, we will use this section to review the concept of plagiarism and to show how that problem connects to the larger issue of the integrity of social research. When you understand the dimensions of the problem and the way it affects research, you should be better able to detect plagiarism in other work and avoid it in your own.

You learned in Chapter 3 that maintaining professional integrity—honesty and openness in research procedures and results—is the foundation for ethical research practice. When it comes to research publications and reports, being honest and open means avoiding plagiarism—that is, presenting as one’s own the ideas or words of another person or persons for academic evaluation without proper acknowledgment (Hard, Conway, and Moran 2006).

An increasing body of research suggests that plagiarism is a growing problem on college campuses. Jason Stephens and his colleagues (2007) found in a Web-based survey of self-selected students at two universities that one quarter acknowledged having plagiarized a few sentences (24.7%) or a complete paper (.3%) in coursework within the past year (many others admitted to other forms of academic dishonesty, such as copying homework). Hard et al. (2006) conducted an anonymous survey in selected classes in one university, with almost all students participating, and found much higher plagiarism rates: 60.6% reported that they had copied “sentences, phrases, paragraphs, tables, figures or data directly or in slightly modified form from a book, article, or other academic source without using quotation marks or giving proper acknowledgment to the original author or source” (p. 1069) and 39.4% reported that they had “copied information from Internet Web sites and submitted it as [their] work” (p. 1069).

So the plagiarism problem is not just about purchasing term papers—although that is really about as bad as it gets (Broskoske 2005); plagiarism is also about what you do with the information you obtain from a literature review or an inspection of research reports. And rest assured that this is not only about student papers; it also is about the work of established scholars and social researchers who publish reports that you want to rely on for accurate information. Several noted historians have been accused of plagiarizing passages that they used in popular books; some have admitted to not checking the work of their research assistants, to not keeping track of their sources, or to being unable to retrieve the data they claimed they had analyzed. Whether the cause is cutting corners to meet deadlines or consciously fudging facts, the effect is to undermine the trustworthiness of social research.
Now that you are completing this course in research methods, it’s time to think about how to do your part to reduce the prevalence of plagiarism. Of course, the first step is to maintain careful procedures for documenting the sources that you rely on for your own research and papers, but you should also think about how best to reduce temptations among others. After all, what people believe about what others do is a strong influence on their own behavior (Hard et al. 2006).

Reviewing the definition of plagiarism and how it is enforced by your discipline’s professional association is an important first step. These definitions and procedures reflect a collective effort to help social scientists maintain standards throughout the discipline. Awareness is the first step (American Sociological Association [ASA] 1999). In addition, your college or university also has rules that delineate its definition of and consequences for plagiarism.

Researchers have an obligation to be familiar with their code of ethics, other applicable ethics codes, and their application to sociologists’ work. Lack of awareness or misunderstanding of an ethical standard is not, in itself, a defense to a charge of unethical conduct.

ASA’s (1999) Code of Ethics, which is used by the American Society of Criminology, includes an explicit prohibition of plagiarism:

14. Plagiarism

(a) In publications, presentations, teaching, practice, and service, sociologists explicitly identify, credit, and reference the author when they take data or material verbatim from another person’s written work, whether it is published, unpublished, or electronically available.

(b) In their publications, presentations, teaching, practice, and service, sociologists provide acknowledgment of and reference to the use of others’ work, even if the work is not quoted verbatim or paraphrased, and they do not present others’ work as their own whether it is published, unpublished, or electronically available. (P. 16)

The next step toward combating the problem and temptation of plagiarism is to keep focused on the goal of social research methods: investigating the social world. If researchers are motivated by a desire to learn about social relations, to understand how people understand society, and to discover why conflicts arise and how they can be prevented, they will be as concerned with the integrity of their research methods as are those, like yourself, who read and use the results of their research. Throughout this text, you have been learning how to use research processes and practices that yield valid findings and trustworthy conclusions. Failing to report honestly and openly on the methods used or sources consulted derails progress toward that goal.

It works the same as with cheating in school. When students are motivated only by the desire to “ace” their tests and receive better grades than others, they are more likely to plagiarize and use other illicit means to achieve that goal. Students who seek first to improve their understanding of the subject matter and to engage in the process of learning are less likely to plagiarize sources or cheat on exams (Kohn 2008). They are also building the foundation for becoming successful social researchers who help others understand our world.

CONCLUSION

Good critical skills are essential when evaluating research reports, whether your own or those produced by others. There are always weak points in any research, even published research. It is an indication of
strength, not weakness, to recognize areas where one’s own research needs to be, or could have been, improved. And it is really not just a question of sharpening our knives and going for the jugular. You need to be able to weigh the strengths and weaknesses of particular research results and to evaluate a study in terms of its contribution to understanding its particular research question, not whether it gives a definitive answer for all time.

But this is not to say that anything goes. Much research lacks one or more of the three legs of validity—measurement validity, causal validity, and generalizability—and sometimes contributes more confusion than understanding about particular issues. Top journals generally maintain very high standards, partly because they have good critics in the review process and distinguished editors who make the final acceptance decisions. But some daily newspapers do a poor job of screening, and research reporting standards in many popular magazines, TV shows, and books are often abysmally poor. Keep your standards high and your view critical when reading research reports, but not so high or so critical that you turn away from studies that make tangible contributions to the literature, even if they do not provide definitive answers. And don’t be so intimidated by the need to maintain high standards that you shrink from taking advantage of opportunities to conduct research yourself.

The growth of social science methods from infancy to adolescence, perhaps to young adulthood, ranks as a key intellectual accomplishment of the 20th century. Opinions about the causes and consequences of crime no longer need depend on the scattered impressions of individuals, and criminal justice policies can be shaped by systematic evidence of their effectiveness.

Of course, social research methods are no more useful than the commitment of the researchers to their proper application. Research methods, like all knowledge, can be used poorly or well, for good purposes or bad, when appropriate or not. A claim that a belief is based on social science research in itself provides no extra credibility. As you have learned throughout this book, we must first learn which methods were used, how they were applied, and whether interpretations square with the evidence. To investigate the social world, we must keep in mind the lessons of research methods.

**Key Terms**

- Combined frequency display
- Constructivist paradigm
- Peer review
- Compressed frequency display
- Participatory action research
- Reverse outlining

**Highlights**

- Proposal writing should be a time for clarifying the research problem, reviewing the literature, and thinking ahead about the report that will be required.
- Relations with research subjects and consumers should be developed in a manner that achieves key research goals and preparation of an effective research report. The traditional scientific approach of minimizing the involvement of research subjects and consumers in research decisions has been challenged by proponents of participatory action research and adherents of the constructivist paradigm.
- Different types of reports typically pose different problems. Authors of student papers must be guided in part by the expectations of their professor. Thesis writers have to meet the requirements of different committee members but can benefit greatly from the areas of expertise represented on a typical thesis committee. Applied researchers are constrained by the expectations...
of the research sponsor; an advisory committee from the applied setting can help avoid problems. Journal articles must pass a peer review by other social scientists and often are much improved in the process.

- **Research reports should include an introductory statement of the research problem, a literature review, a methodology section, a findings section with pertinent data displays, and a conclusions section that identifies any weaknesses in the research design and points out implications for future research and theorizing. This basic report format should be modified according to the needs of a particular audience.**

- **All reports should be revised several times and critiqued by others before they are presented in final form.**

- **Some of the data in many reports can be displayed more efficiently by using combined and compressed statistical displays.**

- **The central ethical concern in research reporting is to be honest. This honesty should include providing a truthful accounting of how the research was carried out, maintaining a full record about the project, using appropriate statistics and graphs, acknowledging the research sponsors, and being sensitive to the perspectives of coauthors.**

- **Plagiarism is a grievous violation of scholarly ethics. All direct quotes or paraphrased material from another author’s work must be appropriately cited.**

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**EXERCISES**

1. Select a recent article published in a peer-reviewed criminological journal and answer the following questions: How effective is the article in conveying the design and findings of the research? Could the article’s organization be improved at all? Are there bases for disagreement about the interpretation of the findings?

2. Call a local criminal justice official and arrange for an interview. Ask the official about his or her experience with applied research reports and his or her conclusions about the value of social research and the best techniques for reporting to practitioners.

3. Rate four criminological journal articles for overall quality of the research and for effectiveness of the writing and data displays. Discuss how each could have been improved.

4. How firm a foundation do social research methods provide for understanding the social world? Stage an in-class debate, with the pro and con arguments focusing on the variability of social research findings across different social contexts and the difficulty of understanding human subjectivity.

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**DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

Now, it is time to bring all the elements of your proposal together.

1. Organize the proposal material you wrote for previous chapters in a logical order. Based on your research question, select the most appropriate research method as your primary method (see Chapters 5–10).

2. To add a multiple component to your research design, select another research method that could add knowledge about your research question.

3. Rewrite the entire proposal, adding an introduction. Also add sections that outline a budget and state the limitations of your study.
1. Go to the National Science Foundation’s Law and Social Sciences Program Web site at www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5422. What are the components that this program looks for in a proposed piece of research? Write a detailed outline for a research proposal to study a subject of your choice to be submitted to the National Science Foundation for funding.

2. Using the Web, find five different examples of criminological research projects that have been completed. Briefly describe each. How does each differ in its approach to reporting the research results? To whom do you think the author(s) of each is “reporting” (i.e., who is the “audience”)? How do you think the predicted audience has helped shape the author’s approach to reporting the results? Be sure to note the Web sites at which you located each of your five examples.

1. Plagiarism is not a joke. What are the regulations on plagiarism in class papers at your school? What do you think the ideal policy would be? Should this policy take into account cultural differences in teaching practices and learning styles? Do you think this ideal policy is likely to be implemented? Why or why not? Based on your experiences, do you believe that most student plagiarism is the result of misunderstanding about proper citation practices, or is it the result of dishonesty? Do you think that students who plagiarize while in school are less likely to be honest as social researchers?

2. Full disclosure of sources of research as well as of other medically related funding has become a major concern for medical journals. Should researchers publishing in criminology and criminal justice journals also be required to fully disclose all sources of funding? Should full disclosure of all previous funds received by criminal justice agencies be required in each published article? What about disclosure of any previous jobs or paid consultations with criminal justice agencies? Write a short justification of the regulations you propose.

1. How do friends’ opinions and support for delinquent activities influence levels of delinquency among youth? A combined frequency display of the distributions of a series of YOUTH.POR variables will help you answer this question.

   a. Obtain a frequency distribution and descriptive statistics for the index of friends’ attitudes toward delinquent acts (FPROPION), the index of friends’ engagement in delinquent acts (FRBEHAVE), and the delinquency index at time 11 (DELINQ1).

   b. Using the mean as the measure of center, recode the three indexes to measure low and high levels of each variable (e.g., all values below the mean represent low levels of a given variable, and all values
above the mean represent high levels of the given variable).

c. Use the percentages in these distributions to prepare a combined frequency display.

d. Discuss what you have learned about the influence of friends’ delinquent tendencies on delinquency levels among youth.

2. Repeat Exercise 1 using the parental index (PARNT2), the certainty of punishment index (CERTAIN), and the morality index (MORAL). Note: The scale for the variables of interest in this exercise is measured opposite the delinquency scale. For example, high scores on the parental index indicate high parental supervision, which in theory should correspond with low levels of delinquency. Be sure to place the percentages for DELINQ1 accordingly (make note of the placement of the percentiles for this variable or create more intuitive column labels).

3. Write a short report based on the analyses you conducted for the SPSS exercises throughout this book, including the data displays you have just prepared. Include in your report a brief introduction and literature review. In a short methods section, review the basic methods used and list the variables you have used for the analysis. In your conclusions section, include some suggestions for additional research on support for capital punishment.