

Research Proseminar, 16:450:603:01

Guidelines for Methodology Statement

27 March 2002

The purpose of a methodology statement is to give the reader a clear sense of the specific steps that will be used in your research. In contrast to the meso-level approach used in the research design, here you are concerned with the details -- the specific steps, tests, techniques, that you will use on a daily basis when you're in the midst of your work.

A good methodology statement does not simply list the techniques that will be used in the study; rather, it provides a clear and logical justification for why these methods are necessary, how they will provide the information that will accomplish the goals laid out in the problem statement, and how they are similar to (or better than) techniques used by others cited in the literature review. This means that your methodology statement needs to be consistent with the other parts of your proposal; by implication, it also means that if you happen to be wedded to a particular methodology, such a commitment will have a strong influence on the development of the problem statement, literature review, and other parts of your proposal. That's not usually the best way of going about research, but in reality many scholars do have methodological commitments (experience, detailed understanding, or stylistic preference) that play a role in the kinds of research questions they pursue; it is absolutely crucial, however, to ensure that these implicit commitments to methodology are properly and honestly integrated into the problem statement, research design, and literature review.

Make your methodology statement succinct, and dive right into the specifics. Your research design laid out the justifications for the general family of approaches you will use; here, get right into the specifics, after only a short, one- or two-sentence introduction. Carefully consider the often-unspoken assumptions that appear in the research design. Explicitly justify your choices. If you propose to study a particular region or a particular time period, explain why. If you set up a comparison between two places or two processes, justify how this comparison will shed light on the theoretical questions laid out in your problem statement and research design. If you are planning interviews, explain who will be chosen, why, and how they will be located and contacted.

The main task, in short, is to be as explicit as possible in explaining what you will be doing in your research, and how it will help accomplish the goals laid out in your problem statement.

Specifics: Your statement of methodology should be no more than two pages, double-spaced. Bring eleven copies to class on April 10.