

ANT 363

Qualitative Research Methods

Problem Statement - Due Tuesday September 25

This is the first stage in writing your research proposal. The challenge here is to go from a broad topic to a clearly defined research problem. This will be a preliminary statement, and I expect that you'll want to revise it as you do your literature search and think more about specific research methods later in the term.

Your paper should be 2-3 pages long, but the short length may make the assignment sound easier than it is. The challenge here is the thought process.

For this exercise, you should use the following approach and structure.

1. Define your topic of interest in a few sentences.
2. Rewrite these sentences as a set of questions about your topic. You might want to do this in a separate file or sheet of paper: brainstorm and write down as many questions as you can think of. Then select the ones that seem the most interesting, appealing, and closely related to the topic. Keep the others somewhere -- you might want to rethink your research questions later.
3. Take this set of questions (there might be only two or three, there might be many more, depending on your topic) and ask yourself, what would I need to know in order to answer this question? Identify a set of **variables** that you would want to know about in order to answer the questions you've defined.
4. Look at these variables -- what **indicators** could you measure in order to measure these variables? (In some cases, e.g. age, the variable and the indicator will be the same; in others, e.g. social class, you'd need to come up with a more specific set of indicators to measure the variable). As you identify your indicators, ask yourself whether they would stand up to the tests of **validity** described in ch. 2 of Bernard.
5. Pick some or all of these indicators, and explain how you could **operationalize** them - specify exactly how you could go about measuring them.
6. What **correlations** (covariations, associations) would you expect to find between these variables? What **causal** relationships would you expect? Restate some of these as hypotheses or predictions.
7. Go do something else for a few hours (at least).
8. Look back at what you've written and thought through so far. Write a concise 1-2 paragraph abstract of your proposed research, clearly defining your research problem and the questions you will investigate.

You don't need to address research ethics in this assignment, but you should keep in mind potential ethical issues and human subjects concerns that might arise in the course of the project you describe.