Drafting a Methods Section

In scholarly publications, the methods section explains <u>how</u> an author has gathered/analyzed data in particular ways and <u>why</u> an author has gathered/analyzed data in particular ways. The goal of this section to explain how a specific methodology can explore, answer, or expand an author's initial research question.

A methods section comes after an introduction section. From a structural perspective, a methods section should clarify how you plan to explore and (hopefully) answer your underlying research question in productive or unique ways. Having a well-crafted methods section will make it easier for your audience to understand the scope, focus, and significance of your research. Conversely, a poorly-written methods section can make it difficult to understand how you are exploring a specific research question or how your findings can contribute to an on-going scholarly conversation.

This worksheet will help you draft a methods section for a journal article, academic essay, or book chapter. To clarify, this worksheet is not an "instruction set" that will help you write a perfect methods section every time. Rather, the questions below are designed to foster a critical awareness of how you plan to narrate the rationale guiding your data-gathering and data-analyzing procedures. Lastly, please be as specific as possible when answering the following questions. The more specific you are, the easier it will be to write and revise.

Questions for Explaining the "How" Aspect of a Methods Section:

1. What methodology are you using in your research? In other words, what processes are you using to gather, organized, and analyze your data?

When answering this question, you are allowed to cite and/or paraphrase specific research sources that are representative of the methodology or framework you are using in your research. Please summarize your methodology/theoretical framework as if you are speaking to an audience with no background knowledge on this topic.

2. If you had to choose the single most important key term or idea within this methodology, what would it be? Select this term and define in 3-5 sentences.

Remember, a key term can be a specific a process used to organize or code data, a specific variable that will be observed throughout a dataset, a parameter that will be used the measure the success of an experiment, or a system used to train researchers and/or participants.

3. Identify 1-3 secondary key terms within your methodology and define them.

Everyone's research will be different and, consequently, your secondary terms will vary. In some cases, your secondary terms will focus on measuring the outcome of an experiment. In other cases, your secondary terms will be variables that you need to account for in order to avoid biases in your research.

4. What is the relationship between these secondary terms and the primary term you identified in the previous questions?

For example, perhaps your primary term talked about the processes used to gather and code interview responses. Perhaps your secondary term is a variable that is used to measure the success of your experiment. In this case, you would explain how your secondary term can be used to measure the efficacy or impact of your primary term.

Questions for Explaining the "Why" Aspect of a Methods Section:

1. Simply speaking, what specific research question do you want to explore, expand, or answer in your manuscript?

In many cases, a research question is multi-faceted and complex. If you need to break up your research question into 2 or 3 smaller questions, feel free to do so.

2. What do you hope to accomplish by asking and answering your research question?

Put differently, how can asking/answering your research question benefit researchers in your field? What new ideas can emerge from asking/answering your research question?

3. What is the relationship between your research question and your methodology? That is to say, how can your methodology help achieve the goals you identified in Question Two above?

For example, let's say your research question is attempting to account for biases and shortcomings in previous research. In this case, you would explain why your methodology or theoretical framework can overcome or account for these previous biases.