

Logic-of-Justification
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When planning and conducting any type of inquiry, the researcher makes a great many decisions:

What will be the context of the research—e.g., a laboratory, a classroom, a school system, a community, a single site or multiple sites?

What type of “data” will be collected—e.g., numeric, linguistic, images, test scores, personal accounts, official documents, recording of events/interactions/activities, archives?

What method will be used to collect the data—e.g., interviews, participant-observation, video or audio recordings, questionnaire, document analysis?

What criteria will be used to decide what sources of data will be ruled in or ruled out—e.g., what types of individuals will be interviewed, which classroom(s) will be studied, how many questionnaires will be distributed, what events will be observed, what archives will be used and for what time period?

What protocol will guide the analysis of data?

How will the significance of the data be determined?

How will the data be used to construct a persuasive argument in relation to the issue under study?

These types of questions must be addressed in both a proposal for a research project and in the final research report. For example, in a proposal a researcher might say, “I will interview 20 teachers within the 2 elementary school buildings of the Center City School District.” In the final report, this would be changed to past tense—i.e., I interviewed...

This type of statement describes what the researcher plans to do or has done. It does not let a reader know why the researcher took these particular actions. Why 20 teachers and not 10 or 30? Why 2 elementary schools rather than one elementary school and one middle school? Why Center City School District and not multiple school districts? The reasons for these decisions are “the logic of justification” for the procedures of the study. Writing in 1986 when qualitative education research was still fairly new, Smith and Heshusius¹ argued that it is more useful to think of method as logic-of-justification than as a specific set of procedures or techniques. As Laurel Richardson pointed out in *Writing Strategies*,² readers who encounter unexpected forms and styles of writing may be confused at best or dismissive at worst of the author’s work. This mismatch often occurs when authors have not followed the conventional (and taken-for-granted) conventions of scientific research. Including the logic-of-justification for the procedures of a study does not simply alert readers that different conventions have been followed; it also informs them of

¹ Original article is available in the S-P Library.

² See description in Books Section of the S-P Library.

why. This allows readers to judge the merits of the research on the basis of relevant criteria rather than some assumed way that research is supposed to be done. One of the simplest examples of this is the use of the personal pronoun. Scientific research reports are written in the 3rd person—the researcher did “x, y, z.” Qualitative research reports are often written in the 1st person. Many readers would not think twice about the use of 3rd person in a research report, but might stop and think, “Hey, what’s going on with this use of ‘I, me, my, and mine.’? When the researcher includes a logic-of-justification, readers should be left with the thought, “I can understand why he/she did that, and it makes sense.”