



This is “Preface”, article 3 from the book Sociological Inquiry Principles: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods (index.html) (v. 1.0).

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Preface

This textbook has been on my mind since 1994, when I sat in my own undergraduate sociology research methods class, enjoying the material but also wondering about its relevance to my everyday life and future plans (the idea that one day I would be teaching such a class hadn't yet occurred to me). While the importance of understanding research methods is usually clear to students who intend to pursue an advanced degree, I've long thought that we research methods teachers could do a better job of demonstrating to *all* of our students the relevance of what it is that we're teaching.

Today, as an active researcher who uses both qualitative and quantitative methods, I appreciate the need not only for students to understand the relevance of research methods for themselves but also for them to understand the relevance of both qualitative and quantitative techniques for sociological inquiry. Also, as a teacher I have learned that students will simply not read what they perceive to be boring, full of jargon, or overly technical. Together, my experiences as a student, researcher, and teacher shape the three overriding objectives of this text: relevance, balance, and accessibility.

Relevance, Balance, and Accessibility

This text emphasizes the relevance of research methods for the everyday lives of its readers: undergraduate students. The book describes how research methodology is useful for students in the multiple roles they fill: (1) as consumers of popular and public information; (2) as citizens in a society where findings from social research shape our laws, policies, and public life; and (3) as current and future employees. You will find connections to these roles throughout and directly within the main text of the book rather than their being relegated to boxes. This material is important, so why discuss it only as a sidenote?

Using a variety of examples from published sociological research, this text also aims to provide balanced coverage of qualitative and quantitative approaches. We'll also cover some of the debates among sociologists on the values and purposes of qualitative and quantitative research. In addition, we'll discuss the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches.

Finally, one of the most important goals of this text is to introduce you to the core principles of social research in a way that is straightforward and keeps you

engaged. As such, the text reflects public sociology's emphasis on making sociological research accessible and readable.