
Boundaries of Research

DSC 500: Research Methods

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- Definitions
- Delimitations
- Limitations
- Significance

“Researchers use definitions, delimitations and limitations, and statements about significance to place boundaries on their study plans.” (Creswell)

- **Definitions**

- Why include definitions?

> To help individuals outside your field of study to understand terms that go beyond the common language.

example:

- CHMSL - center, high-mounted stop lamp (i.e. the third brake light)

- Definitions

- Which words to define?

- > Judgment of the researcher
- > Consider the audience

example:

- CHMSL - don't define for SAE paper; define it for Industrial Design thesis

- Definitions

- When to define terms?

- > When the terms first appear
- > Consistency!

example:

- CHMSL - don't define for SAE paper; define it for Industrial Design thesis

- **Definitions**

- Where, within a research document, might there be terms that need defining?

- > Anyplace

- > Title, Lit Review, Methods, etc.

example:

- “Highway vehicular accident reduction post-CHMS implementation”

- **Definitions**

- Where, within a research document, might the writer place definitions of terms?

approach:

- > Depends on the research approach
- > Precision of definitions

- Quantitative - very precise
- Qualitative - tentative early on in the research
- Mixed methods - depends on sequence of approaches

- Definitions

- Where, within a research document, might the writer place definitions of terms?

- > Depends on the research approach
- > Quantity of definitions

approach:

- Quantitative - many definitions included early in proposal
- Qualitative - very few in proposal, but solidify (and add) tentative definitions toward the end of research
- Mixed methods - depends on sequence of approaches

- Definitions

- Where, within a research document, might the writer place definitions of terms?

- > Depends on the research approach
- > Location of definitions

approach:

- Quantitative - usually in separate section
- Qualitative - usually defined as terms are encountered
- Mixed methods - depends on sequence of approaches

- Definitions
 - General suggestions
 - > Define terms as they first appear

- Definitions

- General suggestions

- > Write your definitions at a specific operational or applied level (Creswell)
 - > Measured: describes how a variable (the term being defined) will be measured
 - > Experimental: details the operation of the measurement

definition:

- operational definitions specify terms within the scope or context of the research

- Definitions

- General suggestions

- > Write your definitions at a specific operational or applied level (Creswell)
 - > Don't be abstract or conceptual

example:

- the term 'executive female' can be operationally defined as the female population of graduate students in a specific business program at Penn State. (Walsh)

- Definitions

- General suggestions

> Define terms using accepted language used in the literature

example:

- 'wheelchair securement' vs. 'occupant restraint' - securement is about the wheelchair; restraint is about the occupant

- Definitions

- General suggestions

> A term might use common language, but it must be paired with limitations or delimitations in order to define it operationally

example:

- the term 'executive female' can be operationally defined as the female population of graduate students in a specific business program at Penn State. (Walsh)

- **Definitions**

- General suggestions

> When using a 'definitions of terms section', consider a three-page limit

More than three pages?:

- scope too broad
- poor literature review
- condescending tone

- Delimitations

- What do they do?

- > They narrow the scope of your study
- > Known early in the study

examples:

- type of, and number of, participants
- access to sites
- budget
- methodology (ethnography, case study, survey, etc.)

- Limitations

- What do they do?

- > They identify potential weaknesses of the research

- > Difficult to do at the proposal stage (may not be known until later in the study)

examples:

- case study of ASU business students may not apply to CAED students

- study of 'highway vehicular accident reduction' may not apply to county roads or interstates

- **Significance**

- Why do the research at all?

- > Separate section in the research document
- > An argument for conducting the study
- > State why the results of the study are (or are not) important

suggestions (Creswell):

- three or four ways in which the study adds to the body of knowledge
- ways in which the study improves practice (profession or industry)
- ways in which the study will improve policy

- **Definitions**
 - Help audience understand your research
- **Delimitations**
 - Narrow the focus of your research
- **Limitations**
 - Point out strengths and weaknesses
- **Significance**
 - Rationale for research study

Thank you!