Boundaries of Research

DSC 500: Research Methods

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

  example:

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

  • CHMSL - center, high-mounted stop lamp (i.e. the third brake light)
• Definitions
  • Which words to define?

  example:

  > Judgment of the researcher
  > Consider the audience

  • 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?

    > Depends on the research approach
    > Precision of definitions

    approach:

    • 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

• 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

  • 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

  example:

  > Define terms using accepted language used in the literature

  • ‘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.)
Boundaries of Research

Limitations

• 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
Boundaries of Research
Significance

• **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!