

Doing & Writing

**QUALITATIVE
RESEARCH**

SAGE was founded in 1965 by Sara Miller McCune to support the dissemination of usable knowledge by publishing innovative and high-quality research and teaching content. Today, we publish over 900 journals, including those of more than 400 learned societies, more than 800 new books per year, and a growing range of library products including archives, data, case studies, reports, and video. SAGE remains majority-owned by our founder, and after Sara's lifetime will become owned by a charitable trust that secures our continued independence.

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi | Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne

Doing & Writing 3e

**QUALITATIVE
RESEARCH**

Adrian Holliday

 **SAGE**

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne

SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road
New Delhi 110 044

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

Editor: Jai Seaman
Editorial assistant: Alysha Owen
Production editor: Tom Bedford
Copyeditor: Andy Baxter
Marketing manager: Ben Griffin-Sherwood
Cover design: Shaun Mercier
Typeset by: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon, CR0 4YY

© Adrian Holliday 2016

Second edition published 2007
Reprinted 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014
This third edition first published 2016

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, only with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015954641

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4739-5326-0
ISBN 978-1-4739-5327-7 (pbk)

At SAGE we take sustainability seriously. Most of our products are printed in the UK using FSC papers and boards. When we print overseas we ensure sustainable papers are used as measured by the PREPS grading system. We undertake an annual audit to monitor our sustainability.

6

Writer voice

In Chapter 3 I described how showing the workings makes a major contribution to the rigour and validity of qualitative research. At a more micro level the rigour of qualitative research is to a large degree carried within the conventions that run throughout the discourse of academic writing. There is, however, a concern that these conventions alienate the person of the writer, and help create a distorted image of the people who are being written about. In this chapter I shall look at the first of these two issues and explore how the researcher as writer can work with the conventions and find her own voice, and use this voice as an important methodological tool. The second issue concerning the image, world and voice of the other people in the setting will be addressed in Chapter 8.

I will first contextualise the issue of writing conventions and how this relates to the social world and the individual writer. This will be followed by examples of how the researcher can write her own agendas into these conventions. The final part of the chapter will look at how the skilful use of these conventions increases the credibility of the research.

The struggle with convention

The ideological nature of qualitative research, both in its impact on the research setting and the people in it, and in the way it constructs its own realities, makes its writing a highly sensitive task. This is the case even for researchers who are fully versed and at ease with the conventions. For others, who criticise the conventions for representing current hegemonies of class and gender, of who can write and who is always written about, there is the added, political dimension. For them, 'texts become "an arena for struggle"' (Clark and Ivanič, 1997: 173–4, citing Hall). The situation is even more problematic for many novice researchers, such as undergraduate and master's students, who find the discourse itself as difficult to conceptualise as the principles of qualitative research themselves.

Reducing personal power

For novice researchers, difficulty with academic writing is indicative not necessarily of weaknesses in basic literacy, but of becoming autonomous within a new, strange discourse. A personal anecdote demonstrates the problem:

Example 6.1: Not switching discourse

Mark had a first class bachelor's degree in English literature from a well-known university in England. He then became a language teacher, and, after accruing a considerable amount of professional experience, he enrolled on a master's programme in language education. As a master's student he displayed considerable ability as a critical thinker, with a sophisticated awareness of the politics and ideology of education. However, he 'failed' as an academic writer. His assignments were articulate and elegantly written, and succeeded in communicating a profoundly critical argument; but they were in the wrong convention of writing. Mark wrote competently in the polemic style of his undergraduate literature days, not in the technical style of the social sciences. He found the latter impossible to work with and eventually left the programme.

This is a rather extreme case; but many students have problems of this type, especially when they consider English their own language, and feel it an affront to have to conform to conventions that they consider lacking in creativity and 'style'. Thus, the student who has difficulty with academic writing does not have to be someone who is not writing in their first language, or one who has difficulty in writing *per se*. In a recent study of the perceptions of PhD students, a student who was writing in her third language was surprised to find that the issues she was having with expressing her voice were shared by the whole student group including those who were writing in the first language (Holliday, 2016). In particular, students who are also experienced professionals, such as nurses, sports-people, businesspeople or teachers, who are returning to education to get a higher degree or professional qualification, will experience discomfort if not anger when their accounts of professional experience are not accepted by their tutors and assessors unless presented in, to them 'unnecessary', academic conventions. They begin to realise that as writers they cease to wield power over what they say (Clark et al., 1990: 85). They find themselves newly constructed as 'junior member[s] of an academic discourse community' which decides for them what they are allowed to say, how they are allowed to say it and who they are allowed to be as writers. They have to 'conform to the standards' required by this community (91) and can feel cornered.

Mixed messages

A major factor which makes the conventions of academic writing in English problematic for the novice is that there are conflicting signals. At first sight, a major criterion for 'acceptable' writing seems to be that there should be a huge amount of reference to other people, leaving very little room for the ideas and experience of the writer. This leads to what appears to be an overwhelming barrage of citing, referencing and bibliographical detail. What puzzles the writer about this is that when she thinks she is 'succeeding' in citing chapter and verse of what other people have said, and gets all the referencing conventions correct, her work is still not accepted because she hasn't been sufficiently critical of respected authority.

Therefore, 'good writing' becomes a complex balancing act between showing what you have read, being critical of it, but doing this by still more citing of other people. This is compounded by the fact that there is still an academic prejudice among supervisors, reviewers and examiners in some quarters against encouraging the writer to come out and say openly '*I criticise this literature because*'. Clinging to the use of the passive voice that pushes the person of the author into the background with '*this literature is criticised by X and Y, who say that ...*' might well be attributed to a postpositivist anxiety about being objective, as described in Chapter 1. This preoccupation with the passive has been associated with a 'windowpane' model in which 'discovered phenomena' are thought to be so clear to be seen that there is no need for any authorial embellishment (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1997: 3). Here, the loss of researcher voice is compounded by a much more explicit form of referencing characterised by such 'technical' devices as subheadings, numeration and diagrams, and by putting citations in the main text in brackets. To someone brought up in what they consider to be the 'higher' literary humanities, as in Example 6.1, the established conventions of social science academic writing, with the same restrictions on the use of the first person, but the creative notion of 'rhetoric' removed, seems dull, mechanical and impersonal.

Postmodern thinking

I wish to emphasise, however, that this picture of impersonal social science writing does not have to be, and that there *is* a place for powerful, personal authorship. In Chapter 1 the postmodern, critical break with the naturalist, postpositivist tradition has already been noted. This involves an acknowledgement that it is the agency of the researcher as writer that makes the research and an acceptance of creative rhetoric, which plays an important part in thick description. This creativity is demonstrated in Chapter 5 in the way in which themes, fragments of data and argument are woven to make a coherent whole, and in Chapter 4 in the way in which descriptive

data is composed. The agency of the researcher is also being acknowledged more and more as an ideological force that has impact on relations with people in the research setting and the way in which they are perceived. This has been discussed at length in Chapter 3, where I demonstrate the importance of a strong statement by the researcher about her own ideological and conceptual position. Moreover, the researcher, by using 'I', can create 'a different, more transparent relationship with her readers' as 'she tries to make it very clear what her own opinions are. In other words, she tries not to disguise 'opinion' as 'fact' (Clark and Ivanič, 1997: 169).

Miller et al. pursue this notion that postmodern qualitative research *requires* a liberation of voice and that in studies of dissertations it was found that 'the problem with interpretivist researchers trying to use to use traditional research textual patterns' merely led to the inferior postpositivist writing that has given qualitative research a bad name (1998: 401).

The outcome is a far more explicit distinction between the voice of the researcher as writer and those of others. In some cases there are especially bald-on-record statements about their identity and ideological preoccupations. A particular example is the following:

We are two Jewish white women academics, trained well in the rigours of social psychology (Michelle) and sociology (Lois), experienced in the complexities of critical ethnography, ... eager to traverse the borders of research, policy, activism, and theory ... This article may be conceptualised as an early 'coming out' about some of the methodological, theoretical, and ethical issues that percolate from our fieldwork. (Fine and Weis, 1998: 14)

(This can, though, get a bit too hyperbolic and over-indulged – as when they go on to talk about high email bills, long nights and discussions with friends and colleagues.) They also, throughout their text, use headings and subheadings to explicitly mark the structure and progression of their discussion. As with themes in data analysis, using headings also helps the researcher to place her creative stamp on the text.

Writing as investigation

A key part of a postmodern view of qualitative writing is the realisation that writing is itself part of the process of qualitative investigation. Part of the positivist vision of research has been the view that data is collected until the research is 'finished', at which point 'writing-up begins'. Postpositivist, naturalist qualitative research continues this tradition with the idea that there comes a point at which social exploration is exhausted and data complete and self-evident, and the writing-up stage is simply a matter of reporting. This is established in the British university system, where doctoral students are given a 'writing-up year' after the end of their registration, during which they do not get supervision. Golden-Biddle and Locke confirm that this does not square with the actual experience of writers:

When we sit in front of our terminals with our piles of field notes, transcripts, analytic memos, expecting to 'just write up' ... we discover all too clearly that it is not that simple. ... Contrary to the windowpane assumptions of findings as self-evident, we never yet have had a piece of data tell us its significance. (1997: 6)

Thus, contrary to the traditional view, Richardson presents writing as itself:

a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of 'telling' about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of 'knowing' - a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. (1994: 516, her emphasis)

This can be seen in the way in which the sense of argument develops throughout the whole process of data collection, analysis and organisation.

This makes qualitative writing in essence very different from quantitative writing. Qualitative writing becomes very much an unfolding story in which the writer gradually makes sense, not only of her data, but of the total experience of which it is an artefact. This is an interactive process in which she tries to untangle and make reflexive sense of her own presence and role in the research. The written study thus becomes a complex train of thought within which her voice and her image of those of others are interwoven. Therefore, 'unlike quantitative work that can carry its meaning in its tables and summaries, qualitative work carries its meaning in its entire text ... its meaning is in the reading' (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005: 959–60). The voice and person of the researcher as writer not only becomes a major ingredient of the written study, but has to be evident for the meaning to become clear.

Conventions as gateway and social exploration

Another contribution to this way of looking at qualitative writing comes from an understanding of how conventions are part and parcel of the fabric of complex society that all individuals need to understand and navigate. Learning or confronting academic conventions might have the intrinsic value of learning or confronting how society works (Lankshear et al., 1997: 26). This means that even those students of qualitative research, who are only 'passing through' the peripheries of social science for the purpose of getting qualifications or a general education, can benefit from this experience, which helps instil 'critical literacy' as they learn how social 'truths' are constructed differently within different scientific communities. Thus, struggling to achieve personal power involves coming to terms with how conventions of writing help construct the wider politics of their world. People need to know through this kind of experience that where one 'biological and medical' convention 'renders the statement "the tubercle bacillus causes tuberculosis" obviously true', another 'socio-political' convention 'renders it problematic' (Gee, 1997: xviii).

For students and novice writers who wish to join the community of qualitative researchers, the conventions of academic writing behave as a *gateway* through which they must pass, first to be allowed membership, and then to participate creatively within the community, whether from within academic departments or from within their own professional communities.

Hence, conventions must be learned before they can be manipulated. This does not mean that the writer has to minimise her presence. The discussion in the preceding pages has shown that there is indeed room in the postmodern paradigm to allow her to use the conventions while at the same time being creative and achieving personal power. I think that the degree of variety seen in Chapter 5 already illustrates this potential. Moreover, the verisimilitude of qualitative research is very much created by the way in which a representation is accepted within the culture of the community within which it works.

The author writes back

Given that these openings do exist within the postmodern qualitative research paradigm, it is necessary to identify exactly where they are – where the researcher can express her voice to claim personal power in writing. One such place has already been dealt with in Chapter 5, where I demonstrated how the whole written study is driven by the researcher's argument, marked by personal phrases such as Pierson's use of 'I interpreted these comments to mean' in her discursive commentary on nursing assistants' accounts. All the way through there is a dialogue between *your* argument and agenda, selected and organised by you, which is driven firmly by the evidence. This is illustrated by many of the statements on the centre and right of Table 3.1, which shows how this argument and agenda are placed throughout the whole written study. In the written study, literature is collected, organised under headings, selected from, and embedded in the fabric of the argument in a very similar way to data. I have already given examples of common conventions in Chapters 3 and 5. Hence, evidence includes literature as well as data; and in both cases this is set against *your* experience.

There are various ways in which the researcher can create and assert her own space. In the following examples I underline key phrases that fulfil this purpose.

Asserting agenda

Albert, in his study of risk in cycling, declares his own research and agenda clearly within his discussion of issues, where he looks at literature:

For a number of years I have been examining the process of reality construction in the subculture of serious recreational road cycling and racing (Albert, 1990, 1991, 1997). As I understand that subculture, it is a unified one, more accurately

described as a 'social world' in the sense that Crosset and Beal (1997) use the term. (1999: 159)

It is clear from the underlined phrases what *he* has been doing and what *he* thinks. This is done primarily by using the first person. Moreover, he skilfully takes ownership of the literature he cites. He takes the term 'social world' from Crosset and Beal, acknowledges that it belongs to them by placing it in inverted commas, but uses it as a resource to strengthen *his* argument. He thus places himself and his quest within a wider discussion, within which he becomes the focus. He also shows that he has his own credentials and stake in this discussion as he cites his own work – not just one but three published pieces.

Maguire and Mansfield make a similar personal statement in the first paragraph of their study of aerobics classes, again taking terminology from the literature to support their cause – 'We locate the exercise discourse within a wider network of interdependencies defined as the "exercise–body beautiful complex"' (1998: 109).

The novice reader might think that these writers can 'get away' with this because they are published researchers. After all, Albert cites his own work. However, Hayagoshi, in her first major piece of writing, her master's dissertation, writes in her introduction:

I took a general English course for about six months. ... This has given me a good basis for comparing the learning habits of the Japanese and those of others. ... I had several opportunities to talk with many Japanese students. ... To my surprise, it seemed that many teachers still have stereotypical ideas. (Hayagoshi, 1996: 2)

This shows her own presence in the work; later in the introduction she continues, but sets an open, honest mood. She shows 'where she comes from', sets the whole tone of the work and creates the impression of the sorts of claims she can make. It may seem inappropriate for a researcher to show that she is 'surprised' – but why not? After all, she is only a person like the rest of us, trying, like the rest of us, to make sense of the world. She continues to state what she intends and aims:

In this dissertation, I intend to contrast British teachers' perceptions of Japanese students ... with Japanese students' own perceptions. ... The goal of my dissertation is to find out if there is a gap. ... If there is a gap I aim to determine its nature. (1996: 2)

This is very clearly *her* dissertation. She puts forward herself and her own experience and agenda very strongly from the outset.

It is not only the use of the first person that gives the writer voice, as can be seen in this extract from the 'discussion of issues' section of Emami and Ekman's study of elderly Iranian immigrants in Sweden:

A knowledge of cultural factors plays a very important role within the health care field. ... If cultural differences are not given appropriate consideration, conflicts

and problems are sure to arise, which will potentially prevent a healthy sense of well-being, and/or delay illness recovery (Leninger, 1978; Lipson and Meleis, 1989; Lipson, 1992; Meleis et al., 1992; Ekman et al., 1993). (1998: 184)

The underlined words show that the authors use a series of assertions – *x* plays, *y* are not, *z* will – to state their view of the way things *are*. Indeed, the second two underlined phrases mark a conditional sentence which sets *their* conditions – if *x*, then *y*. Once again, literature is brought in at the end, not simply to show that they have read, but to reinforce their point of view. Literature is thus their evidence, used as a resource to support their argument. Note the technique of listing references to literature to provide maximum strength of support within a short space. Albert also uses this technique in his statement that

in sport, the propagation of these dominant values is especially prevalent in hierarchical environments like high-school and college-level athletics (Curry and Strauss, 1994; Messner, 1992; Nixon, 1994, 1996; Young and White, 1995)'. (1999: 158)

The reader might remember that Pierson also uses literature in this way to support the argument in her data analysis section.

Making personal contact

Another way of establishing the self of the researcher is by speaking as a person to the person of the reader. Pierson does this explicitly in her study of feeding demented care residents. She begins in her introduction by creating a sense of common experience with her readers:

Excluding infants, the actual work of feeding is an activity you normally perform by and for yourself. You decide about the bite size and the mix of foods. When you are fed, someone else makes those decisions for you. You are then expected to accept what the feeder gives you and how he or she delivers it. (1999: 127)

The use of 'you' distinguishes this as personal experience from what follows, which refers to 'observations in long-term care ... facilities' and the 'many studies' which catalogue them. Similar examples occur in Linehan's account of growing up in Greece and Herrera's account of hearing the noises of the school from her student hostel, both of which set the scene for their written studies and include strong personal phrases – 'I learnt', 'I wondered', as already seen in Chapter 2.

In the example above, Albert might be thought cautious because his exposure of self does not occur until the third page of this study. However, he has already set a personal tone by starting with an anecdote of how a sports commentator talks about danger – 'British sports commentator Phil Liggett articulates features of the wider sport of cycling' (1999: 157). By referring to Phil Liggett by name, he draws on a sports cultural reference that he shares with his readers.

Shaw, in her study of women's body image, uses a less personal tone throughout. However, in her introduction she makes contact with her reader's experience of 'everyday life' by referring to advertising, the press, and to personal contact with a psychiatrist, all of which are centred around a topical public concern with anorexia:

The 'Omega' watch company withdrew its advertisements from 'Vogue' magazine in protest at the use of 'distasteful' pictures of a model of 'anorexic proportions', which could influence its audience of 'young and impressionable females' (*The Times*, 31 May 1996). Following this incident, a psychiatrist working with young women with eating disorders commented:

I do feel that there is a strong relationship ... virtually all of our patients report having been influenced by the media in some way (personal correspondence, June 1996).

(1998: 7)

Note that even though this is anecdote, Shaw still makes use of academic referencing conventions – being careful to place quoted phrases in inverted commas, indenting the longer quote from the psychiatrist as though it were literature or data, placing details of the newspaper article in brackets, and using the accepted convention of 'personal ...', properly dated, for impromptu encounters.

Generally, making personal contact in this way emphasises the close connection between qualitative research and everyday experience. Qualitative researchers *are* just people, going about their daily lives and trying to make sense just like everyone else. The difference is that, like Shaw, they take care to catalogue and make clear reference to their evidence. Thus, Herrera's whole dissertation is simply an extension of her initial 'I wondered'.

Experience as evidence

The researcher's own experience of life, which technically stands outside the realm of 'data', in that it has not been systematically collected within the research setting, can also be used as evidence. In the above examples, it provides evidence for the importance of the research. It can also provide valuable evidence once the major argument is well under way in either the discussion of issues or data analysis chapters or sections. This can be seen in the following two extracts from my study of international curriculum innovation. The first is part of my chapter on methodological issues. A statement from my own experience about gaining access to research settings is sandwiched between a general, theoretical statement (underdotted) and support for this in the form of reference to literature (underlined):

One of the most crucial aspects of gaining access to a situation for both curriculum developers and ethnographers is finding local personalities who are both accurate informants and who will lead them into the *informal order*. It is common,

in my experience, to spend a considerable amount of time, on first arriving in a new host situation, working through false leads, and discovering that personalities first met are not key personalities at all. Hammersley and Atkinson, citing a range of ethnographic studies, refer to key local personalities as 'gatekeepers' (1983: 63-68). (Holliday, 1991: 141, original emphasis)

In one sense, this statement of experience is redundant in that the rest of the extract is sufficient to carry the point. However, adding the statement of experience brings personal presence and ownership to the discussion, which may indeed strike a chord with readers who have had similar experiences, also reminding them that this is a 'real world' issue. The phrase with which I begin my personal statement, 'It is common', tones down the claim I make to suit experience of this type. Thus, a statement of experience *adds* to the overall argument, but is not sufficiently interconnected with other data to stand by itself in any significant way.

Once again the conventions are used to preserve personal voice by demarcating the three types of statement in the extract. The phrase, 'in my experience', marks one. The reference to literature is marked at the beginning by the names of the authors, and at the end by the reference in brackets. The reference to literature is also strengthened by 'citing a range of ethnographic studies' – giving yet further validity to my personal experience. If these explicit markers were not there, the text would look like this:

One of the most crucial aspects of gaining access to a situation for both curriculum developers and ethnographers is finding local personalities who are both accurate informants and who will lead them into the *informal order*. It is common to spend a considerable amount of time, on first arriving in a new host situation, working through false leads, and discovering that personalities first met are not key personalities at all. Key local personalities can be referred to as '*gatekeepers*'. (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 63-68, their emphasis)

The result would be an appearance that the whole thing is attributed to the literature – which would in fact be inaccurate – and the loss of my personal statement and the overall personalisation of the text.

The second extract is from a data analysis chapter. It also shows a personal statement embedded, this time, between references to data:

When we arrived LL was not there. Another [local] lecturer, LT was there instead....
LT said that s/he had last seen LL several weeks ago, and that s/he believed that s/he was not feeling very well at that time. (Obs. 69, site 9, LT, LL)

It is not clear whether or not this type of communication problem was beneath other examples of miscommunication, or whether it was simply due to misunderstandings, which were a common occurrence in project business (personal experience). For example, on one occasion I had understood that I had been invited to give a demonstration lesson and instead found that I was expected to give a public lecture (obs. 9, site 10). (Holliday, 1991: 246)

Once again, conventions are used for explicit demarcation. The indentation marks the long fragment of data at the beginning. The underlined statement is marked as a paraphrase of data by 'for example' at one end and the bracketed reference at the other. 'This type of communication problem' marks the underdotted statement as discursive commentary on the indented data fragment; but then, the bracketed reference to 'personal experience' shows that what remains is from my own experience. Again, this adds valuable personal voice to the discussion. Note also how the phrase 'a common occurrence' once again reduces the claim to one which is appropriate for a personal observation of this nature.

The conventions of explicitness in social science writing can thus be used to *preserve* the voice of the researcher by demarcating her presence from those of others. The use of the first person and personal statement shows where the researcher is speaking for herself; the use of bracketed references shows where she is using other sources. Unlike the more traditional humanities conventions, in which the rhetoric creates a sense of seamless continuity between hidden author and an ongoing texture of literature, the social science conventions provide explicit segments within which the writer can carve a personal territory.

Creating coherence

Once the researcher has asserted her presence, she also has to make her presence worthwhile and meaningful. Within the academic community to whom she is writing, she must make herself a credible presence. Once again, the conventions of writing can be used to achieve this. The researcher has devices at her disposal within the conventions of writing. In several places I have drawn attention to the way in which researchers refer to various sources of evidence that exist elsewhere – literature, data, the press, and personal encounter sources – often with the use of brackets.

Referencing of this sort is not simply a tedious mechanical insertion into the flow of the text, it is a very useful means of *pointing*. This is not an esoteric process. There are parallels with, for example, oral presentations, which are used extensively throughout the professional world. The presenter supports, demonstrates and enriches what she *says* with extra information, diagrams, tables, on transparencies, wall displays and handouts, by referring to other work, writings, examples, and by linking different parts of the presentation. This is facilitated by pointing – often using body language, changes in intonation, etc. The qualitative writer can use similar resources. She supports, demonstrates and enriches what she *writes* with extra information, diagrams, tables, embedded near the main text or appended, by referring to other literature, data, and by linking different parts of the text. This is facilitated by reference to which date, page, part of the table or figure – often using brackets, indentation, and so on. The conventions of academic writing are thus no more than specialist representations of much broader forms of communication, using alternative means to compensate for the lack of face-to-face contact.

The following examples show how researchers *point* in this way to information elsewhere within the text in figures and tables, and longer pieces of supportive information appended at the end of the text.

Pointing to further detail

Byrd, in her study of maternal care giving in the United States, refers to a table in which she lists different types of consequences of how nurses ask questions during home visits. Placing this detail elsewhere in the text frees her to get on with her argument in the main text. However, she needs to *point* to where this information resides by stating that ‘the potentially possible negative consequences are shown in Table 1 under headings that emerged from an earlier literature analysis (Byrd, 1997b)’ (1999: 30). Furthermore, she skilfully links the information with what she has done elsewhere in the literature.

Emami and Ekman, in their study of immigrants in Sweden, use a figure to show the stages of selecting informants. This enables them to pinpoint aspects of this detail within their main text, while directing the reader to where the rest of the detail resides:

Within the list received, 123 individuals fulfilled the selection criteria and were contacted by letter to request their participation in the study (Figure 1). Only 90 people received the communication; 33 letters were returned due to outdated addresses. (1998: 186)

The statements following the bracketed reference to the figure, though not explicitly connected, clearly also refer to aspects of the figure once the figure has been seen. The underlined phrases in the next example show how Linehan, in her study of open learning, is more explicit in guiding the reader to different parts of the table:

Although the receptive skills such as reading and listening are catered for, the productive skills of speaking and writing are rather neglected. This point is illustrated in Table 2. The section on the left describes the nature of the self-access materials in the centre. ... The right hand column illustrates the nature of the productive skills. (1995: 12)

The reader will have noted how my own writing throughout this book makes full use of tables and figures in this way. Elsewhere, Linehan refers the reader to information that is placed in appendices because it is too extensive to include in the main text. She carefully indicates which appendix in the bracketed references:

This is particularly true of the vocabulary listed in the letter of complaint (see Appendix 6D). They [the students] also seem to enjoy the postcard writing possibly because they are provided with postcards on Canterbury at the end of the pack to send to friends (see Appendix 7C). (39)

Talbot, in her study of how gender is constructed in a teenage magazine, places her major data source in the appendix. As with Linehan's table, she guides the reader around what she considers the important features of the appended material. She has just introduced the idea that the magazines promote the idea of sisterliness:

I will look for evidence of this sisterliness in the sample of data in the Appendix for this chapter (pp.197-9). The sample I have chosen is a consumer feature. ... The two page feature contains various elements: a column of text covering an assortment of topics relating to lipstick (reproduced on p.197 and the first paragraph of p.198, and referred to below as 'the column'). (1992: 181)

She is careful to make very specific reference to the pages on which the appended material appears; and in the last line she sets up a form of language with which she will continue referring to the appendix.

Especially in short articles and chapters like this, the researcher is not normally expected to append data. This is an exception because she is doing discourse analysis of the written text, which therefore needs to be seen by her reader. Furthermore, the data is small and *can* be appended in two pages. Nevertheless, she is unable to reproduce its full pictorial quality, presumably because of lack of space and publishing cost. Talbot also explains this to the reader – 'The article is reproduced ... without photographs and the proliferation of "kissprints" which adorned the segments of the written text' (1992: 181). This is a good example of how material outside the main text still needs comment within the main text. Many novice writers fail to do this, appending material and inserting figures and diagrams without making any explicit reference to them, and are then surprised when their readers do not know how to make use of them, or even ignore them.

Pointing to other parts

Another example of providing commentary is from my thesis, where I include, as a figure, two sketches of how students sit in the classroom. As well as explaining how the sketches relate to specific fragments of observation data, I also summarise what they show (underlined), in one case enriching this with an extract from the data:

The sketches, in Figure 5.4, made during observation, of the seating arrangements in two classes, show a tendency for blocks of seating according to gender. Sketch A shows the local lecturer's class in observation 30 in which: 'The men were mainly at the back of the room and the women at the front, with two small colonies of women in the men's section' (obs. 30, site 11, LN). ... Sketch B shows the expatriate lecturer's crowded class of 450 in observation 39 in which the division corresponded with the central aisle of the room. (Holliday, 1991: 276)

In longer pieces of writing, it is also sometimes necessary to refer to different parts of the text itself. This extract is from the implications chapter of my thesis where

I draw together the major points from my data analysis chapters. The bracketed page references show where the discussion of these points can be found:

That standards were falling was partly due to the increasing numbers of students per lecturer in university English departments, created by increased enrolment, a relaxation of entry standards, and local staff working abroad (pp.185-6, 283). This resulted in class sizes of up to 450, with the majority between 100 and 200, which was compounded by ill-designed rooms with poor acoustics and difficult institutional conditions (pp.186, 223-8). These conditions both underlined the need for change and for innovation specially tailored to the local situation, as expressed in hypothesis 1 (p.235): *Hypothesis 1: Difficult and unchangeable classroom conditions require the adaptation of imported curriculum innovation.* (Holliday, 1991: 400)

The extract also shows how I took the decision to reproduce the hypothesis from page 235, thinking that it was too much to expect the reader to keep referring back to something which I was also going to make use of in this part of the text. One can also see the concentrated quality of a piece of writing designed to collect points from other places. The first sentence thus contains a list of points; and each bracketed reference contains a list of page numbers. (See my earlier comments on listing literature references.)

Personal orientation, history and narrative

In this last part of the chapter I am going to look at how the researcher's voice can also make a major contribution to the data itself and how it is understood. I have already referred in Chapter 2 to the contribution of the researcher's personal history in the overall orientation of the research. There are a variety of other ways in which it can contribute.

Personal narrative

Personal narrative can be defined as any form of narrative which recalls past experience. In a research setting this past experience can often help to give a greater insight and a fresh perspective to the data. By seeing this as a form of data which can be embedded, like other types of data, within a broader discussion, I am taking a different line here to one where an entire ethnography may take the self as the subject (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Jones, 2005). Personal narrative at first seems problematic, especially in postpositivist terms, because it is so subjectively personal that it cannot be validated. Because of its autobiographical nature it will inevitably comprise one's own images, interpretations and indeed imaginations of past events, which may be so far in the past that there is no way they can be attested to by anyone else. It can appear to do no more than tell a novelistic

story that has no scientific value. Nevertheless, in a more liberated postmodern mode, Ovenden, in her (2003) study of young children's perceptions of touching museum objects, recalled her own experience, as a museum curator, of touching an ancient Egyptian doll for the first time, and produced the text in Table 4.1 (f). In recalling this experience she was able better to understand how the children in her study felt, and to see more deeply the interviews and descriptions of behaviour in her data. The ability to reconstruct, as discussed at the end of Chapter 5, is an important skill here too.

In my own study of cultural chauvinism in international English language education, I found personal narrative very useful to enable me to excavate aspects of this chauvinism in my own professional past. The following recollection of an event early in my career demonstrates this in the way I perceived one of my students as in need of cultural improvement:

I was 24 years old and beginning my career as a teacher at the British Council in Tehran. In the middle of one of my lessons, an Iranian man who must have been in his 40s or 50s stood up at the back of the classroom, apologised for interrupting in this way and asked me if I could explain the grammar underlying the language structure I was asking him to repeat. I put him down rather abruptly by saying that in 'these classes' he did not need to think about grammar and that to do so would get in the way of his learning. I thought the request was unscientific and unnecessary, and showed the lack of understanding of 'how to learn' that I expected from Iranian students. More than this, but connected, I thought his whole manner was ridiculous because he translated directly from a Farsi expression of politeness and had not even realised that this was inappropriate in English. (Holliday, 2005b: 64)

The value of this description becomes evident as I connect it with other forms of data and begin to see residues from this earlier time in current practice. Learning about my own narrative also enabled me to understand the voice I was able to project in the study as a whole. Much of my other data came from the accounts of colleagues and students who might be constructed as recipients of this chauvinism. My own privileged position on the 'other side' made it inappropriate for me to presume in any way to represent or 'speak for them'. I could therefore only speak only *for myself*, as someone who has worked with and learnt from them – turning the entire study into a larger personal narrative that incorporates the voices of others as I have interpreted them (Holliday, 2005a).

Coffey contrasts this emphasis on the 'autobiographical practices of the researcher-self' with the more 'conventional' view, which I would attribute to postpositivism, that 'has emphasised the *other* lives that are being observed, analysed and produced' with the researcher 'as a biographer of others' (1999: 7, her emphasis). I would like to argue that in the written form of research, the *only* narrative is that of the researcher. The accounts and talk produced by the people in the research setting are done so in response to the elicitations of the researcher and then incorporated into her own narrative.

→→ Accumulates through the research experience →→				
Voice 1	Voice 2	Voice 3	Voice 4	Voice 5
<p>Personal narrative of the rationale for the research</p> <p>What happened to stimulate the research or to help the researcher get into the data</p> <p>Also data</p>	<p>The data</p> <p>Descriptions, artefacts, transcripts, recordings, documents, etc.</p> <p>Depicted on the left of Figure 5.3</p> <p>Separated pieces of personal narrative are also data about the self and take on the same status as an interview transcript</p>	<p>Comments on the data at the time of collection</p> <p>Also becomes data in Voice 4</p> <p>about how the researcher felt when she was collecting the data</p> <p>Depicted on the right of Figure 5.3</p> <p>Can in itself appear as another personal narrative about the experience of doing the research</p> <p>Commentary and argument</p>	<p>Comments on Voices 1–3 at the time of writing</p> <p>Has the critical role of directing the reader to the specific aspects of the data which is extracted from the corpus into the written study</p> <p>Commentary and argument</p>	<p>The final overarching argument</p> <p>Connects and pulls together all the other voices</p> <p>Speaks about the whole research process</p> <p>Takes the final responsibility</p> <p>The overall personal narrative</p>

Figure 6.1 Research voices

A complex of voices

I find it useful to articulate the role of personal narrative as one of a collection of interconnected voices in the written text of the research. These voices are described in Figure 6.1. It is not easy to be too specific about these voices, which can overlap and swirl around each other. They can be present in different parts of the written study; and how they relate to the three main areas of data, commentary and argument will also be a matter of how the study is finally rationalised and designed. This would therefore need to be established within Voice 5.

It is easy however for writers of research to become stuck in any one of them. Studies which become rambling, formless personal statements are stuck in the first voice; and those which find it difficult to stand back and give interpretive space to their data may be stuck in the second voice. Written studies which are not clear in how they are dealing with the research and the data have not succeeded in getting into Voice 5. Thick description is built from all the data in Voices 1 through 3; and it is the Voice 4 that speaks the description. Although the claims which can be made are largely subjective because they are based on fragments of interview, artefact, experience, and so on, it is the rigorous way in which these fragments are interconnected as thick description which will provide the validity for these claims. This picture of a researcher-led text that includes a complexity of other texts can be expressed as follows:

By incorporating, fragmenting and mingling these texts, and by reinforcing the intertextuality of ethnography, the claims to authenticity may be strengthened

rather than weakened. Writing the self into ethnography can be viewed as part of a movement toward greater authenticity, and as part of a biographical project. (Coffey, 1999: 118)

An example of how Voice 5, speaking about the whole research process, can be employed to explain how other voices fit together can be seen in Barnes' auto-ethnographic study of his own professional life. Here he explains how he employs as data a range of autobiographies he collected from different stages of his life:

My first task was to read the autobiographies thoroughly. Using a simple grounded approach, I noted themes like values and beliefs dominated even the diaries written when I was sixteen. I highlighted what appeared to be values and then isolated references to beliefs, attitudes, and lifelong interests. When the category of key stories emerged from the data, I found that properties like people, places and objects occurred in each of them. Remembered autobiographical detail was cross-referenced with people who shared events with me, matched against and contrasted with the evidence of diaries, letters and art works contemporary with events. Each autobiography was re-read several times in the light of the biographical conversations I held during the research. (2012: 51)

After meticulously describing the nature, origins, and how he makes use of letters and diaries, he goes on to tell us how he uses 'biographical conversations':

Interactions with friends can be more informal than a semi-structured interview, we had conversations. These were special conversations however, in which I tried to say as little as possible, so I coined the term, *semi-structured conversations* to express their directional nature and referred to Denzin (1989) for a suitable framework to guide them. Our conversations took place on car journeys, in the sitting room of my house in front of the fire, in friend's chosen rooms or in one case the deserted lounge of a quiet hotel. These conversations were recorded with permission, later transcribed and shared with the friend concerned. The same happened with first drafts of chapters 6 and 7. (52)

It is important to note here how he coins his own variation of an approach he finds in the literature. So far this Voice 5 is employed to show the workings of the research as discussed in Chapter 3 and throughout, setting the written study as an interwoven narrative apart from literary fiction. Finally, at the beginning of the final chapter, Voice 5 begins to provide the overall argument by pulling all the other voices together:

This chapter focuses on the implications of *interdisciplinary, praxis-focussed auto-ethnography*. It shows how research itself and the emergent findings from previous chapters concerning resilience, have resulted in my action in education. (296)

Reconstructing Other through understanding Self

Barnes' autoethnography employs a personal history to help make sense of a professional world – 'What implications does the exploration of the values and beliefs of myself and others have for my present action in education?' (ii). Honarbin-Holliday similarly uses her own art as a means for both understanding and interacting with the Iranian art students in her study. The exhibition of her ceramic sculptures and video at a major venue at the location of her study is at the same time: a series of texts informed simultaneously by the students and her own struggles as an artist; a means whereby she can simultaneously communicate with the students about how she is an artist like them and how she has understood them; and an integration of the life histories of the students and herself. She thus explains that:

The sculptures, individually and collectively, deconstruct my engagement with clay, speculating, projecting, and reflecting on aspects of my multi-cultural visual identity in my particular spatio-temporal context in Canterbury. Simultaneously, they have been my tools for understanding myself, and the participants' rigour and strife for expression and articulation of aspects of their identities through their art. They thus externalise the chain of my inner thoughts as the participant researching-artist, and the way I perceive the female participants in Tehran. (2005: 53-4)

Rooted in the fine art academic tradition, and inspired by Derrida's notion of *la différance*, she decides to present the multimedia thesis in the following way:

Using a selection of ethnographic data as an installation of ideas in a constructed abstract space. This is a collaborative space, a forum, where considered and selected ethnographic texts are housed in spatially oriented clusters, positioned and juxtapositioned in relation to one another. Texts and Spaces are thus my systematic management, combination of descriptions and analysis, and the synthesis of what I have actually seen and heard in the field. (64)

Within this context, the way in which she presents her oral and descriptive data mirrors the way in which she constructs her art. As her ceramic sculptures are worked and crafted deconstructions of her dialogue with herself, her data is presented 'as worked and crafted reconstructions' in which she remains as faithful as she can to the students' accounts and generally 'the tone and the spirit' of the data (Honarbin-Holliday, interview), similarly to her written reconstructions of interviews cited in Chapter 5. Exhibiting her own work for the art students and faculty to see is also a means whereby the researcher opens herself up to being observed and thus resetting the balance of scrutiny, especially where they interpret her work in parallel to her interpreting them.

A layering of voices can also be seen in the way she becomes present in her descriptive data. The following extract from a description of a drawing class in someone's home shows how she interacts with the setting, using an unexpected artefact to draw out more data:

I am sitting behind the group and really wish that I had a video camera. I notice a book near the model's chair, Toktam placed it there a few moments ago. I leave my post and take a few steps and pick it up. Everyone is drawing. I look at the book, it is 'Fra Angelico, Phaidon 1992' with a stamp from Honar University Library. ... Toktam and I speak about Fra Angelico. I ask her what she might say to people who believe Western art must be understood in a certain way. She laughs and says 'People can say what they wish. But look at it' she shows me 'The Virgin and Child Enthroned with Four Angels' and says 'I look at the similarities of the organisation, the content, it is not dissimilar to some Persian paintings'. (2005: 129).

This use of the first person to lay bare the strategy that the researcher is employing to make sense of her data, to choose it and to interact with it can also be seen in draft material in D'Costa's (forthcoming) study of student experience of higher education in England. These three extracts are both responses to what her interviewees have told her and also to how she has spoken to them:

However, on hearing her affirmative response, a note of scepticism crept into my voice as I interrogated her whether everything about her experience was positive, to which she conceded that she did experience some amount of stress.

Although Wilma talked about the wider influence of her education, I seemed to have adopted a line of questioning informed by a utilitarian perspective, as shown by the next question I put to her: ...

When I tried to pin Penny down to her words, ...

This recognition of the researcher role in the interview process, in effect as a character within the overall narrative of the interview, resonates with my discussion of researcher intervention in Chapter 4. The researcher acknowledging how her own thoughts, behaviour and response, can only add validity to the research process. Both Honarbin-Holliday and D'Costa here are enacting Voice 3 in Figure 6.1, as their responses to the settings in which they find themselves also become data.

Conclusion and activities

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the researcher as writer can be firmly in control of the conventions of writing qualitative research. Although they are very technical in the way in which multifaceted aspects of evidence and arguments are pulled together, she can take a central position in guiding the reader to the places where *she* wishes. I have shown how one aspect of the conventions, that of referring as pointing, has parallels in other professional areas. The same parallels can be found for all aspects of the conventions referred to in this book, across several aspects of social life. Therefore, learning academic writing should contribute to developing broader skills in precise communication. The proponents and specialist

users of academic communities need to be aware of and communicate their own position within the wider world to achieve the sociological imagination I refer to at the end of Chapter 1. They must not, however, take themselves too seriously, nor exude an image of privileged power in what they do.

Activities

1. Find examples of academic writing in which the first person is *not* used, and in which the first person *is* used, and consider the discussion on mixed messages near the beginning of the chapter and the examples of using the first person throughout.
 - a) How successful are the different examples in showing the researcher's opinion and position about the literature and data being cited? How far do they seem to represent either postpositivist 'windowpane' or postmodern approaches?
 - b) What is the policy of your department, profession or discipline on the use of the first person? How does this compare with expectations in your earlier educational background? How do you now feel about this? What impact does this have?
 - c) Are there nevertheless limits on how the first person should be used? Are there dangers of a gratuitous and counter-productive use? Can you evaluate the examples in terms of how effectively, or gratuitously and ineffectively the first person is being used.
 - d) How exactly do the 'successful' users of the first person do this; and is the rigour of their approach compromised in any way?
2. Look at a written study and work out how many of the five voices are present, and the success with which they are demarcated and used.
3. Taking examples from across the chapter, which of them relate most to your own writing and the writing of a colleague or friend? How successful are you in managing the various voices in your writing? What do you need to do to improve this?
4. How does the content of this chapter relate to the importance of showing your workings, and making your core argument clear, in Chapter 3? How might not sufficiently bringing out the various voices in your writing impact on your success in getting grades or getting published?