

John Creswell and Johanna Creswell Báez. (2020). *30 Essential Skills for the Qualitative Researcher*, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. eBook, 338 pages. (ISBN 978-1-5443-5570-2)

Reviewed by M. Elizabeth Snow

This book is intended for beginners in qualitative research—whether they be students or those doing work outside of academia, such as evaluation—who want to learn more about how to do qualitative research. What makes this book different than other introductory qualitative research books is its focus on the practical, which might make this book appealing to those who are looking to try out qualitative methods for the first time as it gives a good sense of concrete steps in the process. Structured around “30 essential skills for the qualitative researcher,” the book includes not just the usual skills you would expect, like collecting and analyzing data or submitting applications to research ethics boards, but also other skills I have not seen discussed in research methods textbooks, like managing difficult emotions that can arise during qualitative research and writing reflexively. Each chapter contains examples from research projects the authors have conducted to highlight what the skills look like in practice, as well as activities to encourage the reader to try out the skills as they go through the book.

The book is structured in seven parts:

- *Part I: Understanding the Landscape of Qualitative Research* lays the foundation for the beginner, including how to think like a qualitative researcher, differentiate between qualitative and quantitative research, establish a rigorous and conceptually interesting qualitative inquiry, and manage emotions that arise during qualitative research. For students, there is also a chapter on working with research advisors and committees.
- *Part II: Considering Preliminary Elements* covers concepts such as philosophy, theory, ethics, and literature reviews. For students, there is a chapter on structuring a thesis or dissertation.
- *Part III: Introducing a Qualitative Study* gets into some detailed specifics of writing a qualitative research proposal, covering how to write a title, abstract, introduction, purpose statement, and research questions.
- *Part IV: Collecting Qualitative Data* contains the topics one would expect in a qualitative methods book, including how to design and set up for a qualitative data collection strategy and conduct observations and interviews, as well as chapters focused specifically on cultural awareness and collecting data from marginalized populations.

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- *Part V: Analyzing and Validating Data* discusses techniques for coding data and developing themes, as well as logistical aspects of analysis, such as the use of qualitative analysis software and techniques for quality control of qualitative data analysis.
- *Part VI: Writing and Publishing Qualitative Research* talks about how to write in scholarly, qualitative, and reflexive ways and includes an entire chapter on writing a conclusion, as well as a chapter on publishing qualitative journal articles.
- *Part VII: Evaluating a Study and Using Qualitative Designs* presents the debate about whether there should be standards applied across qualitative research, with the authors proposing their own set of standards for judging the quality of qualitative studies. The book ends with an introduction to qualitative research designs, noting that if readers were to use one of these designs, they would do well to consult more advanced books on a specific design.

What I liked most about this book was the clear writing style, with chapters that were short and to the point, as well as the focus on the practical aspects of how to do qualitative research. For example, the chapters on analyzing and validating data include step-by-step instructions for coding and creating themes from codes, and the authors provide examples of coding and themes from their own research. In addition, checklists are provided to help ensure completeness of a data collection plan, as well as for conducting interviews and observations and for data analysis. The tone of the book gives the reader the feeling of having a conversation with an experienced qualitative researcher offering advice to a novice colleague. Often methods texts use a great deal of jargon the reader has to slog through and then, at the end of the book, the reader stops and asks, “But how do I *do* any of these things?” The authors provide many specific tips throughout book that would be quite helpful to novices, such as the use of explicitly qualitative words instead of quantitative ones in your writing, a checklist for a qualitative data collection plan, concrete steps for qualitative coding, and even templates for writing qualitative titles and abstracts. I commend the authors in particular for including a chapter on managing the difficult emotions that come up during research, including a reminder of the importance of self-care. As an evaluator whose work sometimes includes emotionally challenging subject areas, I appreciated the discussion of why this type of work can be emotionally draining and that it is normal to experience this.

What I liked least about the book was the notion of the “essential skills.” Each chapter starts with the skill(s) the reader is supposed to learn, but the skills were really just the title of the chapter prefaced by “develop the skill of [chapter title].” From my perspective, this did not add any value to the text and came across as gimmicky. It was also odd that the book is called *30 Essential Skills for the Qualitative Researcher* but some of the book’s 30 chapters identified more than one skill; by my count, there were 35 “skills” discussed in the book.

Overall, this book meets its aim of providing a text that speaks to the practical aspects of qualitative research and establishes a foundation for students or others who are new to qualitative research. It would be a good place to start for someone interested in using qualitative methods in their work thanks to its accessible writing style and useful practical tips. The caveat here is that since the book is aimed at researchers rather than evaluators, some of the chapters may be less than helpful to evaluators. For example, Part III and Chapters 27 and 28 provide guidance on writing in ways that are appropriate for research proposals, theses, and journal articles but that could be counterproductive for writing evaluation proposals and reports. Chapter 6 discusses using theory, but does not touch on how to use it evaluatively, and Chapter 27 talks about writing a good conclusion, but none of the types of conclusions shared are evaluative conclusions. While reading those parts of the book, I kept thinking about Davidson's classic paper "Unlearning Some of Our Social Scientist Habits" (2007). Similarly, several chapters were aimed at students (e.g., working with research advisors and structuring a dissertation), which would not be of interest for practicing evaluators outside of academia. I think it would be easy enough for nonstudents to just skip those chapters without missing anything critical. For any evaluators interested in adding qualitative methods to their work, they may want to (re)visit Davidson's paper before checking out this book.

REFERENCE

Davidson, E. J. (2007). Unlearning some of our social scientist habits. *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation*, 4(8), iii–vi.