
GORMAN, G.E. and CLAYTON, P. *Qualitative Research for the Information Professional: A Practical Handbook*. 2nd ed London: Facet Publishing, 2005. 282 pages. ISBN 978-1-85604-472-1.

This is the second edition of this text, first published in 2005, and republished last year, which in and of itself may indicate its value and popularity. I have to confess to not being familiar with it before now – much to my loss, as it would have been a very useful addition to my (and my students’) bookshelf; I shall certainly be using it with, and recommending it to, my students this year. The book is written by two highly experienced library academics, based in New Zealand (Gorman) and Australia (Clayton), and their wealth of experience as teachers and researchers shines through.

The text begins with the more ‘theoretical’ aspects in chapters 1 and 2 (the nature of qualitative research; evaluating qualitative research); the following 11 chapters cover all the stages of research, from design to writing up, taking in case studies, how to approach fieldwork, four specific methods (observation, interviewing, group discussion and historical investigation), and – again, usefully, as these aspects are sometimes not covered well in other texts – recording fieldwork data, analysing data and writing reports. The subtitle, ‘A Practical Handbook’ is very apt – unlike some research methods texts, there is an extremely good emphasis on the practical, and on communicating the ‘hows’ of doing research really clearly and in a lot of detail.

For someone like me, who is familiar with most of the techniques they describe, I found this an engaging and interesting read, which gave me many useful leads on further reading, and I enjoyed it very much. I would certainly recommend this book for anyone new – and not so new – to research, as it really does give readers the tools to implement the methods discussed, as well as providing many practical examples and illustrations. For example, I am not very familiar with the technique described in Chapter 9, a form of focus group called NGT (nominal group technique), but having read their clear and detailed account of it, I felt I would be confident to try it out, even without further reading. One of the most useful aspects is the questions at the end of each chapter, which relate either to an example used in the chapter or to the case study in Chapter 14 – these encourage readers to reflect on what they have read and understand it better.

There are many good things about this book; it is engagingly written, and highly accessible without being simplistic or undemanding of its reader. It incorporates practical and valuable examples particularly well, alongside clear linking of, for example, methods to types of research question. My criticisms are niggles really, and reflect my own personal preferences and ‘things I would have done differently if I’d written it’, rather than any major issues. Being something of a nerd about research methods, I would have liked slightly more on the debates around research paradigms, and more upfront definitions of terms such as ‘inductive’, ‘deductive’ in that first chapter. There are only 2 pages on ethics, which is perhaps a little thin, and there is no mention of working with children, or hard-to-reach/vulnerable groups, and nothing on health-related research. The section on negotiating access to a case study is helpful, but more here on researching within your own organisation would also be useful, as that is a highly

likely scenario for many information professionals. The section on historical research could, I feel, have placed more emphasis on both discourse analysis as a method, and using contemporary documents (e.g. in policy analysis). The authors have – mostly successfully – updated the text from its first publication in 1997, but there are a few places where they seem a little out of date; for example recommending tape recorders rather than digital recorders, and they could have included more e-resources. The literature review section I also found a little thin, and their list of journals misses out some I would consider key (particularly for practitioners), as well as being very library focused; we should be encouraging a wider range of literature searching, to take in sociology, education, health, for example.

However, these quibbles do nothing to stop me recommending this wholeheartedly, and a research methods text for me is no fun if I don't have something in it to disagree with! I learnt a lot from this book, and will return to it many times, I'm sure.

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