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Writing the Narrative Report

Writing and composing the narrative report brings the entire study together. Borrowing a term from Strauss and Corbin (1990), I am fascinated by the "architecture" of a study, how it is composed and organized by writers. I also like their suggestion that writers use a "spatial metaphor" (p. 231) to visualize their full reports or studies. To consider a study "spatially," they ask the following questions. Do you come away with an idea like walking slowly around a statue, studying it from a variety of interrelated views? Like walking downhill step by step? Like walking through the rooms of a house?

In this chapter, I assess the general architecture of a qualitative study, and then I invite the reader to enter specific rooms of the study to see how they are composed. In this process, I begin with four rhetorical issues in the rendering of a study regardless of tradition: audience, encoding, quotes, and authorial representation. Then I take each tradition of inquiry and assess two rhetorical structures: the overall structure (i.e., overall organization of the report or study) and the embedded structure (i.e., specific narrative devices and techniques that the writer uses in the report). I return once again to the five examples of studies in Chapter 3 to illustrate overall and embedded structures. Finally, I compare the narrative structures for the five traditions in terms of four dimensions.

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Questions for Discussion

- ▼ For what audience is the qualitative study being written?
- ▼ How does a writer encode the study for an audience?
- ▼ How are quotes used in a qualitative study?
- ▼ How does the author represent herself or himself in the narrative?
- ▼ What are the overall rhetorical structures for writing a study within each of the five traditions of inquiry?
- ▼ What are the embedded rhetorical structures for writing a study within each of the five traditions of inquiry?
- ▼ How do the narrative structures for the five traditions differ?

SEVERAL RHETORICAL ISSUES

Unquestionably, the narrative forms are extensive in qualitative research. In reviewing the forms, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) note that narratives in “storytelling” modes blur the lines between fiction, journalism, and scholarly studies. Other forms engage the reader through a chronological approach as events unfold slowly over time, whether the subject is a study of a culture-sharing group, the narrative of the life of an individual, or the evolution of a program or an organization. Another technique is to narrow and expand the focus, evoking the metaphor of a camera lens that pans out, zooms in, then zooms out again. Some reports rely heavily on description of events, whereas others advance a small number of “themes” or perspectives. A narrative might capture a “typical day in the life” of an individual or a group. Some reports are heavily oriented toward theory, whereas others, such as Stake’s (1995) “Harper School,” employ little literature and theory. Regardless of form, qualitative researchers in all these studies wrestle with rhetorical issues.

Audience

A basic axiom holds that all writers write for an audience. Thus, writers consciously think about their audience or multiple audiences for their studies (Richardson, 1990, 1994). Tierney (1995), for example, identifies four potential audiences: colleagues, those involved in the

interviews and observations, policymakers, and the general public. In short, how the findings are presented depends on the audience with whom one is communicating (Giorgi, 1985). For example, because Fischer and Wertz (1979) disseminated information about their phenomenological study at public forums, they produced several expressions of their findings, all responding to different audiences. They used a general structure, four paragraphs in length, an approach that they admitted lost its richness and concreteness. Another form consisted of case synopses, each reporting the experiences of one individual and each two and one half pages in length.

Encoding

A closely related topic is the encoding of the report for specific audiences. Earlier, in Chapter 6, I presented encoding the problem, purpose, and research questions; now I consider encoding the entire narrative report. Richardson’s (1990) study of women in affairs with married men illustrates how a writer can shape a work for a trade audience, an academic audience, or a moral/political audience. For a trade audience, she encoded her work with literary devices such as

jazzy titles, attractive covers, lack of specialized jargon, marginalization of methodology, common-world metaphors and images, and book blurbs and prefatory material about the “lay” interest in the material. (p. 32)

For the moral/political audience, she encoded through devices such as

in-group words in the title, for example, woman/women/feminist in feminist writing; the moral or activist “credentials” of the author, for example, the author’s role in particular social movements; references to moral and activist authorities; empowerment metaphors, and book blurbs and prefatory material about how this work relates to real people’s lives. (pp. 32-33)

Finally, for the academic publications (e.g., journals, conference papers, academic books), she marked it by a

three types of quotes most useful. The first consists of short eye-catching quotations. These are easy to read, take up little space, and stand out from the narrator's text but verify it—piled up and indented, and indented to signify different perspectives. For example, in the caring interaction phenomenological study by Riemen (1986), tables contain short quotes containing statements of significance from participants in the study. Dialogue, a variation of quotes, may be used, such as in the Principal Selection Committee study by Wolcott (1994a) in which he states conversation between candidates (e.g., "Mr. Fifth") and the interviewing principals.

The second consists of embedded quotes, briefly quoted phrases within the analyst's narrative. These quotes, according to Richardson (1990), prepare a reader for a shift in emphasis or display a point and allow the writer (and reader) to move on. We use embedded quotes extensively in our gunman study (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995) because they consume little space and provide specific concrete evidence, in the informants' words, to support a theme. Embedded quotes also are used extensively in the childhood sexual abuse grounded theory study by Morrow and Smith (1995).

A third type is the longer quotation, used to convey more complex understandings. These are difficult to use because of space limitations in publications and because longer quotes may contain many ideas and so the reader needs to be guided both "into" the quote and "out of" the quote to focus his or her attention on the controlling idea that the writer would like the reader to see. In the Vonnie Lee biography, Angrosino (1994) states several long quotes to provide complete answers to questions posed to Vonnie Lee and to develop for the reader a sense of Vonnie Lee's voice, questions such as "Why do you like the bus so much?" (p. 21).

Authorial Representation

How much of the "self," the researcher, is present in the narrative? What is the authorial stance of the writer (Richardson, 1994; Tierney, 1995)? How does the writer give "voice" to the researcher or what Derrida (1981) calls the "metaphysics of presence"?

prominent display of academic credentials of author, references, footnotes, methodology sections, use of familiar academic metaphors and images (such as "exchange theory," "roles," and "stratification"), and book blurbs and prefatory material about the science or scholarship involved. (p. 32)

Although I emphasize academic writing here, researchers encode qualitative studies for audiences other than academics. For example, in the social and human sciences, policymakers may be a primary audience, and this necessitates writing with less methods, more parsimony, and a focus on practice and results.

Richardson's (1990) ideas triggered my own thoughts about how one might encode a qualitative narrative. Such encoding might include the following:

- *An overall structure that does not conform to the standard quantitative introduction, methods, results, and discussion format. Instead, the methods might be called "procedures," and the results might be called "findings." In fact, the heading might be phrased in the words of participants in the study as they discuss "denial," "retrigging," and so forth, as I did in our gunman case (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995).*
- *A writing style that is personal, familiar, perhaps "up-close," highly readable, friendly, and applied for a broad audience.*
- *A level of detail that makes the work come alive (**verisimilitude** comes to mind [Richardson, 1994, p. 521]), a criterion for a good literary study where the writing seems "real" and "alive," transporting the reader directly into the world of the study, whether this world is the cultural setting of principals discussing the specifics of candidates they interviewed (Wolcott, 1994a) or women expressing emotion about their abusive childhoods (Morrow & Smith, 1995).*

Quotes

In addition to encoding text with the language of qualitative research, authors bring in the voice of participants in the study. Writers use ample quotes, and I find Richardson's (1990) discussion about

TABLE 9.1 Overall and Embedded Rhetorical Structures and the Five Traditions of Inquiry

Tradition of Inquiry	Overall Rhetorical Structures	Embedded Rhetorical Structures
Biography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent of author interpretation (Clifford, 1970) Extent of voice to subject (Denzin, 1989b) Progressive-regressive method (Denzin, 1989b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Epiphany (Denzin, 1989b) Theme or key event (Smith, 1994) Transitions (Lomask, 1986)
Phenomenology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapters in a "research manuscript" (Moustakas, 1994) The "research report" (Polkinghorne, 1989) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Figure or table for essence (Grigsby & Megel, 1995) Discussion about philosophy (Harper, 1981) Creative closing (Moustakas, 1994)
Grounded theory study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Components of a grounded theory study (May, 1986) Parameters of a grounded theory study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent of analysis (Cheritz & Swanson, 1986) Form of propositions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) Use of visual diagram (Morrow & Smith, 1995)
Ethnography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Types of tales (Van Maanen, 1988) Description, analysis, and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994b) "Thematic narrative" (Emerson et al., 1995) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tropes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) "Thick" description (Denzin, 1989b) Dialogue (Nelson, 1990) Scenes (Emerson et al., 1995) Literary devices (Richardson, 1990)
Case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report format with vignettes (Stake, 1995) Substantive case report format (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) Types of cases (Yin, 1989) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funnell (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995) Amount of description (Merriam, 1988)

Overall Rhetorical Structure

At the larger structural level, the biographer needs to discern the degree to which there is "intrusion of the author into the manuscript" (Smith, 1994, p. 292). This issue, the extent of author interpretation in a biography, varies from one study to another. Clifford (1970)

QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

When the writer is omniscient, postmodern thinkers "deconstruct" the narrative, challenging that every text is contested terrain and cannot be understood without references to ideas being concealed by the author and contexts within the author's life (Agger, 1991). This theme was espoused in my earlier discussion of Denzin's (1989a) "interpretive" approach to biographical writing.

How should an author proceed? According to Richardson (1994), the best writing acknowledges its own "undecidability" forthrightly, that all writing has "subtexts" that "situate" or "position" the material within a particular historical and locally specific time and place. In this perspective, no writing has "privileged status" (Richardson, 1994, p. 518) or superiority over other writings. Strategies to convey the position of the writer include disclosure by the author of his or her biases, values, and context that may have shaped the narrative. Also, the writer can be "present" in the narrative report through devices such as an epilogue (see Asmussen & Creswell, 1995), reflective footnotes, interpretive commentaries, or a section on the role of the researcher (see Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

In addition to these rhetorical issues, the writer needs to address how he or she is going to compose the overall narrative structure of the report and use embedded structures within the report to provide a narrative within the tradition of choice. I offer Table 9.1 as a guide to the discussion to follow, recognizing that I raise many overall and embedded structural approaches as they apply to the five traditions of inquiry.

BIOGRAPHY

Turning to biography, I am reminded of Edel (1984), who commented that "every life takes its own form and a biographer must find the ideal and unique literary form to express it. In structure, a biography need no longer be chronological" (p. 30). Edel's comment suggests that the traditional approach of a chronological treatment of the subject may have given way to more diversity in the form and structure of a biography. This has been my experience as I examine individual biographies and explore the literature about the narrative structure of them.

Other embedded rhetorical devices include the use of transitions, at which biographers excel. Lomask (1986) refers to these as built into the narratives in natural chronological linkages. Writers insert them through words or phrases, questions (which Lomask calls being "lazy"), and time-and-place shifts moving the action forward or backward. In addition to transitions, biographers employ foreshadowing, the frequent use of narrative hints of things to come or of events or themes to be developed later.

Angrosino's (1994) study of Vonnie Lee, for example, illustrates many biographical writing structures. At the outset, we are told that this is "explorations in life history and metaphor" (p. 14) as the type of biographical writing. Although difficult to classify according to Clifford's (1970) taxonomy of biographies, it has elements of the artistic and scholarly biography where Angrosino tells a compelling story of Vonnie Lee within the scholarly context of Vonnie Lee's life, his bus ride, and the thematic meanings of this bus ride. Certainly, Angrosino focuses on a key event, perhaps a minor epiphany in Vonnie Lee's life of the bus ride. When Angrosino joins Vonnie Lee on his bus ride, the reader gains a sense of movement from one bus stop to another until they reach Vonnie Lee's place of employment. The transitions of this journey are natural, and his struggles in life are foreshadowed early in the story through the recapitulation of his abusive early life. This bus journey, on several levels, becomes a metaphor for Vonnie Lee's life of empowerment and stability.

PHENOMENOLOGY

Those who write about phenomenology (e.g., Moustakas, 1994) provide more extensive attention to overall structures than to embedded ones. However, as in all forms of qualitative research, one can learn much from a careful study of research reports in journal article, monograph, or book form.

Overall Rhetorical Structure

The highly structured approach to analysis by Moustakas (1994) presents a detailed form for composing a phenomenological study.

organizes the possibilities. With minimal author interpretation, an "objective" biography is written, typically in the form of a collation of facts held together by a chronological theme. Next, although considered popular writing, the "artistic and scholarly" form is a presentation in a lively and interesting manner. Alternatively, in a "narrative" biography, the writer fictionalizes scenes and conversations based on letters and documents. Finally, in the "fictionalized" biography, the study reads like a historical novel with minimum attention to original research and primary documents.

Another large structural issue in a biography is the amount of voice given to the subject in the study. Denzin (1989b), for example, writes about the interpretive model of biographical writing. The researcher might write from the *subject's perspective*, with the narrative resting on the edited transcripts of interviews and minimal interpretation by the researcher. A *subject-produced biography* actually is an autobiography, an "instance of life," (p. 61) without being shaped by the investigator.

Finally, to study the "meaning structures" (Denzin, 1989b, p. 67), Denzin employs making sense of an individual's life using a **progressive-regressive method** whereby the biographer begins with a key event in the subject's life and then works forward and backward from that event, such as in Denzin's study of alcoholics.

Embedded Rhetorical Structure

Denzin (1989b) describes the "key event" or the "epiphany," defined as interactional moments and experiences that mark people's lives. He distinguishes four types: the major event that touches the fabric of the individual's life; the cumulative or representative events, experiences that continue for some time; the minor epiphany, which represents a moment in an individual's life; and episodes or relived epiphanies, which involve reliving the experience. Similar to Denzin's key event, Smith (1994) recommends another embedded structure: finding a theme to guide the development of the life to be written. This theme emerges from preliminary knowledge or a review of the entire life, although researchers often experience difficulty in distinguishing the major theme from lesser minor themes.

These analysis steps—horizontalizing individual statements, creating meaning units, clustering themes, advancing textural and structural descriptions, and presenting an integration of textural and structural descriptions into an exhaustive description of the essential invariant structure (or essence) of the experience—provide a clearly articulated procedure for organizing a report (Moustakas, 1994). In my experience, individuals are quite surprised to find highly structured approaches to phenomenological studies on sensitive topics (e.g., “being left out,” “insomnia,” “being criminally victimized,” “life’s meaning,” “voluntarily changing one’s career during midlife,” “longing,” “adults being abused as children” [Moustakas, 1994, p. 153]). But the data analysis procedure, I think, guides a researcher in that direction and presents an overall structure for analysis and ultimately the organization of the report.

Consider the overall organization of a report as suggested by Moustakas (1994). He recommends specific chapters in “creating a research manuscript”:

■ *Chapter 1: Introduction and statement of topic and outline.* Topics include an autobiographical statement about experiences of the author leading to the topic, incidents that lead to a puzzlement or curiosity about the topic, the social implications and relevance of the topic, new knowledge and contribution to the profession to emerge from studying the topic, knowledge to be gained by the researcher, the research question, and the terms of the study.

■ *Chapter 2: Review of the relevant literature.* Topics include a review of databases searched, an introduction to the literature, a procedure for selecting studies, the conduct of these studies and themes that emerged in them, a summary of core findings and statements as to how the present research differs from prior research (in question, model, methodology, and data collected).

■ *Chapter 3: Conceptual framework of model.* Topics include the conceptual framework including theory to be used as well as the concepts and processes related to the research design (Chapters 3 and 4 might be combined).

■ *Chapter 4: Methodology.* Topics include the methods and procedures in preparing to conduct the study, in collecting data, and in organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing the data.

■ *Chapter 5: Presentation of data.* Topics include verbatim examples of data collection, data analysis, a synthesis of data, horizontalization, meaning units, clustered themes, textural and structural descriptions, and a synthesis of meanings and essences of the experience.

■ *Chapter 6: Summary, implications, and outcomes.* Topics include a summary of the study, statements about how the findings differ from the literature review, recommendations for future studies, the identification of limitations, a discussion about implications, and the inclusion of a creative closure that speaks to the essence of the study and its inspiration for the researcher.

A second model, not as specific, is found in Polkinghorne (1989) where he discusses the “research report.” In this model, the researcher describes the procedures to collect data and the steps to move from the raw data to a more general description of the experience. Also, the investigator includes a review of previous research, the theory pertaining to the topic, and implications for psychological theory and application. I especially like Polkinghorne’s comment about the impact of such a report:

Produce a research report that gives an accurate, clear, and articulate description of an experience. The reader of the report should come away with the feeling that “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that.” (p. 46)

Embedded Rhetorical Structure

Turning to embedded rhetorical structures, the literature provides the best evidence. A writer presents the “essence” of the experience for participants in a study through sketching a short paragraph about it in the narrative or by enclosing this paragraph in a figure. This latter approach is used effectively in a study of the caring experiences of nurses who teach (Grigsby & Megel, 1995). Another structural device is to “educate” the reader through a discussion about phenomenology and its philosophical assumptions. Harper (1981) uses this approach and describes several of Husserl’s major tenets as well as the advantages of studying the meaning of “leisure” in a phenomenology.

the findings are the theory itself, i.e., a set of concepts and propositions which link them" (p. 148). May continues to explicate the overall structure of a grounded theory report and contrasts this structure with a "hypothetico-deductive" (hypothesis-testing) research in a qualitative project:

- *A study includes the major research question, how it evolved, and the definitions of key terms. In a grounded theory study, this question is broad, and it will change several times during data collection and analysis.*
- *The writer includes a literature review, but this review "neither provides key concepts nor suggests hypotheses as it does in hypothetico-deductive research" (May, 1986, p. 149). Instead, this literature review shows gaps or bias in existing knowledge, thus providing a rationale for a grounded theory study. A researcher does not provide a theoretical framework in this review inasmuch as the intent of grounded theory is to generate or develop a theory.*
- *Writing the methodology early in a study poses difficulties because it evolves during the course of the study. However, the researcher begins somewhere, and she or he can describe preliminary ideas about the sample, the setting, and the data collection procedures.*
- *The findings section presents the theoretical scheme. The writer includes references from the literature to show outside support for the theoretical model. Also, segments of actual data in the form of vignettes and quotes provide useful explanatory material. This material helps the reader form a judgment about how well the theory is grounded in the data.*
- *A final section discusses the relationship of the theory to other existing knowledge and the implications of the theory for future research and practice.*

Strauss and Corbin (1990) also provide broad parameters for their grounded theory studies. They suggest the following:

- *Develop a clear analytic story. This is to be provided in the selective coding phase of the study.*
- *Write on a conceptual level, with description kept secondary to concepts and the analytic story. This means that one finds little description of*

Finally, I personally like Moustakas's (1994) suggestion: "Write a brief creative close that speaks to the essence of the study and its inspiration to you in terms of the value of the knowledge and future directions of your professional-personal life" (p. 184). Despite the phenomenologist's inclination to bracket himself or herself out of the narrative, Moustakas introduces the **reflexivity** that psychological phenomenologists can bring to a study, such as casting their initial problem statement within an autobiographical context.

Riemen's (1986) nursing research study of the caring interaction of nurses and their clients portrays many of the overall and embedded structural forms of a phenomenological study. Riemen presents this study as a "scientific report" complete with the sections identified earlier by Moustakas (1994). She also identifies the problem, the design, the review of the literature, a definition of terms, procedures for collecting and treating data, an analysis through the steps—statements, meanings, clusters of themes, and exhaustive descriptions—based on a procedure similar to that of Moustakas by Colaizzi (1978), and a discussion in light of the literature, conclusions, and summary. The end point of the findings is several exhaustive descriptions in caring and noncaring interaction. She places these descriptions in tables in the text rather than in figures. The study also includes a discussion about the philosophical perspectives of phenomenological research.

GROUNDED THEORY

From reviewing grounded theory studies in journal article form, qualitative researchers can deduce a general form (and variations) for composing the narrative. The problem with journal articles is that the authors present truncated versions of the studies to fit within the parameters of the journals. Thus, a reader emerges from a review of a particular study without a full sense of the entire project.

Overall Rhetorical Structure

Most important, authors need to present the theory in any grounded theory narrative. As May (1986) comments, "In strict terms,

of Strauss and Corbin (1990). We begin with open coding, move to axial coding complete with a logic diagram, and state a series of explicit propositions in directional (as opposed to the null) form.

Another embedded narrative feature is to examine the form for stating propositions or theoretical relationships in grounded theory studies. Sometimes, these are presented in "discursive" form, or describing the theory in narrative form. Strauss and Corbin (1990) present such a model in their theory of "protective governing" (p. 134) in the health care setting. Another example is seen in Conrad (1978) with formal propositions about academic change in the academy.

A final embedded structure is the presentation of the "logic diagram," the "mini-framework," or the "integrative" diagram where the researcher presents the actual theory in the form of a visual model. The elements of it are identified by the researcher in the axial coding phase, and the "story" in axial coding is a narrative version of it. How is this visual model presented? A good example of this diagram is found in the Morrow and Smith (1995) study of women who have survived childhood sexual abuse. Their diagram shows a theoretical model that contains the axial coding categories of causal conditions, the central phenomenon, the context, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. It is presented with directional arrows indicating the flow of causality from left to right, from causal conditions to consequences. Arrows also show that the context and intervening conditions directly impact the strategies. Presented near the end of the study, visual form represents the culminating theory for the study.

ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnographers write extensively about narrative construction, such as how the nature of the text shapes the subject matter, to the "literary" conventions and devices used by authors (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). The general shape of ethnographies and embedded structures are well detailed in the literature.

Overall Rhetorical Structure

For example, Van Maanen (1988) provides the alternative ways in which "tales" can be told in an ethnography. Many ethnographies are

the phenomenon being studied and more analytic theory at an abstract level.

- *Specify the relationships among categories.* This is the theorizing part of grounded theory found in axial coding when the researcher tells the story and advances propositions.
- *Specify the variations and the relevant conditions, consequences, and so forth for the relationships among categories.* In a good theory, one finds variation and different conditions under which the theory holds. This means that the multiple perspectives or variations in each component of axial coding are developed fully. For example, the consequences in the theory are multiple and detailed.

Embedded Rhetorical Structure

In grounded theory studies, the researcher varies the narrative report based on the extent of data analysis. Chentitz and Swanson (1986), for example, present six grounded theory studies that vary in the types of analysis reported in the narrative. In a preface to these examples, they mention that the analysis (and narrative) might address one or more of the following: description; the generation of categories through open coding; linking categories around a core category in axial coding, thus developing a substantive, low-level theory; and a substantive theory linked to a formal theory.

I see grounded theory studies that include one or more of these analyses. For example, in a study of gays and their "coming out" process, Kus (1986) uses only open coding in the analysis and identifies four stages in the process of coming out: identification in which the gay undergoes a radical identity transformation; cognitive changes in which the individual changes negative views about gays into positive ideas; acceptance, a stage in which the individual accepts being gay as a positive life force; and action, the process of engaging in behavior that results from accepting being gay such as self-disclosure, expanding friends to include gays, becoming politically involved in gay causes, and volunteering for gay groups. By contrast, Creswell and Brown (1992) examine the faculty development practices of chairpersons who enhance the research productivity of their faculties. We take the reader through most of the coding procedures

written in the realist tale, reports that provide direct, matter-of-fact portraits of studied cultures without much information about how the ethnographers produced the portraits. In this type of tale, a writer uses an impersonal point of view, conveying a "scientific" and "objective" perspective. A confessional tale takes the opposite approach, and the researcher focuses more on his or her fieldwork experiences than on the culture. The final type, the impressionistic tale, is a personalized account of "fieldwork case in dramatic form" (p. 7). It has elements of both realist and confessional writing and, in my mind, presents a compelling and persuasive story. In both the confessional and impressionistic tales, the first-person point of view is used, conveying a personal style of writing. Van Maanen states that other, less frequently written tales also exist—critical tales focusing on large social, political, symbolic, or economic issues; formalist tales that build, test, generalize, and exhibit theory; literary tales in which the ethnographers write like journalists, borrowing fiction-writing techniques from novelists; and jointly told tales in which the production of the studies is jointly authored by the fieldworkers and the informants, opening up shared and discursive narratives.

On a slightly different note, but yet related to the larger rhetorical structure, Wolcott (1994b) provides three components of a good qualitative inquiry that are a centerpiece of good ethnographic writing as well as steps in data analysis. First, an ethnographer writes a "description" of the culture that answers the question, "What is going on here?" (p. 12). Wolcott offers useful techniques for writing this description: chronological order, the researcher or narrator order, a progressive focusing, a critical or key event, plots and characters, groups in interaction, an analytical framework, and a story told through several perspectives. Second, after describing the culture using one of these approaches, the researcher "analyzes" the data. Analysis includes highlighting findings, displaying findings, reporting fieldwork procedures, identifying patterned regularities in the data, comparing the case with a known case, evaluating the information, contextualizing the information within a broader analytic framework, critiquing the research process, and proposing a redesign of the study. Of all these analytic techniques, the identification of "patterns" or themes is central to much ethnographic writing. Third, interpretation should be involved in the rhetorical structure. This means that the researcher can extend the analysis, make inferences from the

information, do as directed or as suggested by gatekeepers, turn to theory, refocus the interpretation itself, connect with personal experience, analyze or interpret the interpretive process, or explore alternative formats. Of these interpretive strategies, I personally like the approach of interpreting the findings both within the context of the researcher's experiences and within the larger body of scholarly research on the topic.

A more detailed, structured outline for an ethnography is found in Emerson et al. (1995). They discuss developing an ethnographic study as a "thematic narrative," a story "analytically thematized, but often in relatively loose ways . . . constructed out of a series of thematically organized units of fieldnote excerpts and analytic commentary" (p. 170). This thematic narrative builds inductively from a main idea or thesis that incorporates several specific analytic themes and is elaborated throughout the study. It is structured into the following:

- *First is an introduction that engages the reader's attention and focuses the study, then proceeds to link the researcher's interpretation to wider issues of scholarly interest in the discipline.*
- *After this, the researcher introduces the setting and the methods for learning about it. In this section, too, the ethnographer relates details about entry into and participation in the setting as well as advantages and constraints of the ethnographer's research role.*
- *Analytic claims come next, and Emerson et al. (1995) indicate the utility of "excerpt commentary" units, whereby an author incorporates an analytic point, provides orientation information about the point, presents the excerpt or direct quote, and then advances analytic commentary about the quote as it relates to the analytic point.*
- *In the conclusion, the author reflects and elaborates on the thesis advanced at the beginning. This interpretation may extend or modify the thesis in light of the materials examined, relate the thesis to general theory or a current issue, or offer a meta-commentary on the thesis, methods, or assumptions of the study.*

Embedded Rhetorical Structure

Ethnographers use embedded rhetorical devices such as figures of speech or "tropes" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Metaphors, for

example, provide visual and spatial images or dramaturgical characterizations of social actions as theater. Another trope is the synecdoche, in which ethnographers present examples, illustrations, cases, and/or vignettes that form a part but stand for the whole. Ethnographers present storytelling tropes examining cause and sequence that follow grand narratives to smaller parables. A final trope is irony, in which researchers bring to light contrasts of competing frames of reference and rationality.

More specific rhetorical devices depict scenes in an ethnography (Emerson et al., 1995). Writers can incorporate details or "write lushly" (Goffman, 1989, p. 131) or "thickly," description that creates verisimilitude and produces for readers the feeling that they experience, or perhaps could experience, the events described (Denzin, 1989b). Denzin (1989b) talks about the importance of using "thick description" in writing qualitative research. By this, he means that the narrative "presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships . . . [and] evokes emotionality and self-feelings. . . . The voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard" (p. 83). He further contrasts thin description with thick description:

- *Thin description*: "I had trouble learning the piano keyboard" (Denzin, 1989b, p. 85).
- *Thick description*: "Sitting at the piano and moving into the production of a chord, the chord as a whole was prepared for as the hand moved toward the keyboard, and the terrain was seen as a field relative to the task. . . . There was chord A and chord B, separated from one another. . . . A's production entailed a tightly compressed hand, and B's . . . an open and extended spread. . . . The beginner gets from A to B disjointly" (Sudnow, 1978, pp. 9-10).

Also, ethnographers present dialogue, and the dialogue becomes especially vivid when written in the dialect and natural language of the culture (see, e.g., the articles on Black English vernacular or "code switching" in Nelson, 1990). Writers also rely on characterization in which human beings are shown talking, acting, and relating to others. Longer scenes take the form of sketches, a "slice of life" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 85), or larger episodes and tales.

Ethnographic writers tell "a good story" (Richardson, 1990). Thus, one of the forms of "evocative" experimental qualitative writing for Richardson (1990) is the fictional representation form in which writers draw on the literary devices such as flashback, flashforward, alternative points of view, deep characterization, tone shifts, synecdoche, dialogue, interior monologue, and sometimes omniscient narrator.

In Wolcott's (1994a) Principal Selection Committee study, for example, time is altered as a literary device as one hears first not about the successful candidate in the selection process but rather about Candidate No. 7 ("Mr. Seventh"). Also, in terms of the larger structure, with an introduction, "the ethnographic approach" (p. 116), and the "results," in the proceedings of the Principal Selection Committee, Wolcott tells a realist tale with several elements included in the thematic narrative as described by Emerson et al. (1995). Within the larger framework of his book, *Transforming Qualitative Data*, Wolcott (1994b) includes this principal selection story as an example of emphasis on description as he takes the reader through the details of the process of interviewing each of the candidates for the principal's position. Toward the end of this study, however, Wolcott analyzes three themes and notes in the conclusion his reflecting comments on the role of the principal in public schools. Thus, Wolcott follows his own model of description, analysis, and interpretation as an overall guiding structure for his composition. In addition, he refers to his story of the search process as an "episode," a longer scene as discussed by Emerson et al. (1995). He also refers to the "variety-reducing" behavior of the Principal Selection Committee, spoken of metaphorically as a cybernetic system, and mentions the paradox of both encouraging and managing change that falls on a principal. Wolcott (1994a) packs the study with quotes and provides a vivid picture of the committee deliberations. These pictures show his use of thick description, for example, his discussion about "Mr. First," the principal finally selected by the committee, and this individual's comments about his junior high:

Mr. First described programs and problems at his junior high school. He explained how he had tried to break down the resistance of those parents who "have the attitude that the school only calls once a year and that's when the kid is in trouble." He cited several aspects of secondary school administration which he disliked: "I don't like the sports emphasis in high school, the problems with buses and scheduling, the court cases. Last year

- *Next, several of the issues are probed further. At this point, too, the writer brings in both confirming and disconfirming evidence.*
- *Assertions are presented, a summary of what the writer understands about the case and whether initial naturalistic generalizations, conclusions arrived at through personal experience or offered as vicarious experiences for the reader, have been changed conceptually or challenged.*
- *Finally, the writer ends with a closing vignette, an experiential note, reminding the reader that this report is one person's encounter with a complex case.*

I like this general outline because it provides description of the case; presents themes, assertions, or interpretations of the researcher; and begins and ends with realistic scenarios.

A similar model is found in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) substantive case report. They describe a need for the explication of the problem, a thorough description of the context or setting, a description of the transactions or processes observed in that context, saliences at the site (elements studied in depth), and outcomes of the inquiry ("lessons learned").

At a more general level yet, I find Yin's (1989) 2 x 2 table of types of case studies helpful. Case studies can be either single-case or multiple-case design and either holistic (single unit of analysis) or embedded (multiple units of analysis) design. He comments further that a single case is best when a need exists to study a critical case, an extreme or unique case, or a revelatory case. Whether the case is single or multiple, the researcher decides whether to study the entire case, a holistic design, or multiple subunits within the case (the embedded design). Although the holistic design may be more abstract, it captures the entire case better than the embedded design. However, the embedded design starts with an examination of subunits and allows for the detailed perspective should the questions begin to shift and change during fieldwork.

Embedded Rhetorical Structures

What specific narrative devices, embedded structures, do case study writers use to "mark" their studies? One might approach the

I spent one day out of every two weeks in court. I'd rather be working with kids earlier in their lives, not in the kind of conference I sat in recently with a parent when a doctor told the mother her alternatives are either to give the daughter 'The Pill' or lock her up in a cage." (p. 138)

CASE STUDY

Turning to case studies, I am reminded by Merriam (1988) that "there is no standard format for reporting case study research" (p. 193). Unquestionably, some case studies generate theory, some are simply descriptions of cases, and others are more analytical in nature and display cross-case or inter-site comparisons. The overall intent of the case study undoubtedly shapes the larger structure of the written narrative. Still, I find it useful to conceptualize a general form, and I turn to key texts on case studies to receive guidance.

Overall Rhetorical Structure

One can open and close with vignettes to draw the reader into the case. This approach is suggested by Stake (1995), who provides a complete outline for the flow of ideas in a case study. These ideas are staged as follows:

- *The writer opens with a vignette so that the reader can develop a vicarious experience to get a feel for the time and place of the study.*
- *Next, the researcher identifies the issue, the purpose, and the method of the study so that the reader learns about how the study came to be, the background of the writer, and the issues surrounding the case.*
- *This is followed by an extensive description of the case and its context—a body of relatively uncontested data—a description the reader might make if he or she had been there.*
- *Issues are presented next, a few key issues, so that the reader can understand the complexity of the case. This complexity builds through references to other research or the writer's understanding of other cases.*

description of the context and setting for the case from a broader picture to a narrower one. For example, in our gunman case (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995), we describe the actual campus incident first in terms of the city in which the situation developed, followed by the campus and, more narrow yet, the actual classroom on campus. This funneling approach narrows the setting from that of a calm city environment to a potentially volatile campus classroom and seems to launch the study into a chronology of events that occur.

We also are cognizant of the amount of description in our case study versus the amount of analysis and interpretation or assertions. In comparing description versus analysis, Merriam (1988) suggests that the proper balance might be 60%/40% or 70%/30% in favor of description. In our gunman case, we balance in equal thirds (33%-33%-33%)—a concrete description of the setting and the actual events (and those that occurred within 2 weeks after the incident); the five themes; and our interpretation, the lessons learned, reported in the discussion section. In our case study, the description of the case and its context did not loom as large as in other case studies. But these matters are up to writers to decide, and it is conceivable that a case study might contain mainly descriptive material, especially if the bounded system, the case, is quite large and complex.

Our gunman study (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995) also represents a single-case study (Yin, 1989), with a single narrative about the case, its themes, and its interpretation. In another study, the case presentation might be that of multiple cases, with each case discussed separately, or multiple case studies with no separate discussions of each case but an overall cross-case analysis (Yin, 1989). Another Yin (1989) narrative format is to pose a series of questions and answers based on the case study database.

Within any of these formats, one might consider structures for building ideas. For example, in our gunman study (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995), we descriptively present the chronology of the events during the incident and immediately after it. The chronological approach seems to work best when events unfold and follow a process; case studies often are bounded by time and cover events over time (Yin, 1989). In addition to this approach, one might build a theory composed of identifying variables (or themes) that are interrelated; use a "suspense" structure with an "answer" to the outcome of the case presented first, followed by the development of an explanation

for this outcome; or use an "unsequenced" structure consisting of events, processes, or activities not necessarily presented in the order in which they unfolded in the case (Yin, 1989).

A COMPARISON OF NARRATIVE STRUCTURES

Looking back over Table 9.1, I present many diverse structures for writing the qualitative report. What major differences exist in the structures depending on one's choice of tradition?

First, I am struck by the diversity of discussions about narrative structures. I found little crossover or sharing of structures among the five traditions, although, in practice, this undoubtedly occurs. The narrative troupes and the literary devices, discussed by ethnographers, have applicability regardless of tradition. Second, the narrative structures are highly related to data analysis procedures. A phenomenological study and a grounded theory study follow closely the data analysis steps. In short, I am reminded once again that it is difficult to separate the activities of data collection, analysis, and report writing in a qualitative study. Third, the emphasis given to writing the narrative, especially the embedded narrative structures, varies among the traditions. Ethnographers lead the group in their extensive discussions about narrative and text construction. Phenomenologists and grounded theory writers spend little time on this topic. Fourth, the overall narrative structure in some traditions is clearly specified (e.g., a grounded theory study, a phenomenological study, and perhaps a case study), whereas it is open to interpretation in others (e.g., a biography, an ethnography). Perhaps this conclusion reflects the more structured approach versus the less structured approach, overall, among the five traditions of inquiry,

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I discussed writing the narrative report. I began by discussing several rhetorical issues the writer must address. These issues include the audience for the writing, the encoding for that audience, the use of quotes, and an assessment of the representation of the author in the text. Then I turned to each of the five traditions of

inquiry and presented overall rhetorical structures for organizing the entire study as well as specific embedded structures, writing devices, and techniques that the researcher incorporates into the study. A table of these structures shows the diversity of perspectives about structure that reflects different data analysis procedures and discipline affiliations. I concluded with observations about the differences in narrative structures among the five traditions, differences reflected in the variability of approaches, the relationships between data analysis and report writing, the emphasis in the literature of each tradition on narrative construction, and the amount of structure in the overall architecture of a study within each tradition.

▼ ADDITIONAL READINGS

A good, thoughtful book on writing qualitative research is Wolcott's (1990b) popular book. For examining the issue of authorial presence, I recommend Geertz's (1995) recent book in anthropology and an earlier book by Clifford and Marcus (1986). For general principles in writing scholarly research, examine Creswell (1994). For a discussion about encoding texts for audiences, see Richardson (1990). For the types of tales that can be told, the Van Maanen (1988) book is applicable in all the traditions of inquiry. Readers also are advised to examine qualitative studies found in journal articles and books as well as comments addressed by writers such as Denzin (1989b), Moustakas (1994), Strauss and Corbin (1990), Emerson et al. (1995), Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), Stake (1995), and Yin (1989).

Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. E. (Eds.). (1986). *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. (1989b). *Interpretive interactionism*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. L., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Geertz, C. (1995). *After the fact: Two countries, four decades, one anthropologist*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Richardson, L. (1990). *Writing strategies: Reaching diverse audiences*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wolcott, H. F. (1990b). *Writing up qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (1989). *Case study research: Design and method*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

EXERCISES

1. Show that you understand the overall and embedded rhetorical structures for writing within your tradition of inquiry by drafting a complete narrative for your project. You might model your narrative after a journal article format using your tradition.
2. Develop a plan for the narrative structure for a study within your tradition of inquiry. To do this, design a matrix with two columns and seven rows. In the first column, list several writing criteria: the overall writing approach, the intended audience for the study, the encoding to be used in the narrative, the approach to using quotes, the strategies to display authorial presence, the general outline of the flow of the ideas in the manuscript, and the embedded rhetorical devices. In the second column, add information about how each criterion will be addressed in your project.