

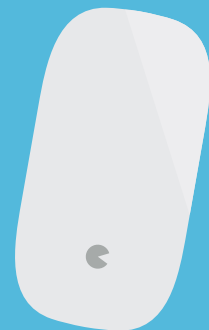
Writing as a Method of Inquiry

**Panel for the International Congress of
Qualitative Inquiry**

May 2019

WHAT DO NEW QUALITATIVE RESEARCHERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT **WRITING?**

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**You can download these
slides from**

Don't forget the hyphen!

www.marcusweaver-hightower.com/

ICQI2019

ADJUST THIS!!

HOW TO WRITE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

MARCUS B. WEAVER-HIGHTOWER



ROUTLEDGE



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Presentation theme

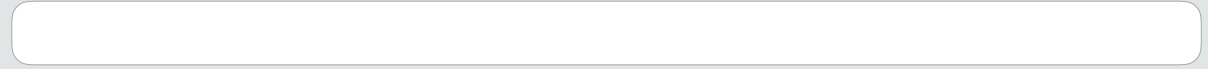


There are more qualitative researchers than ever before—given increasing acceptability, the rise of mixed methods, etc.



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Presentation theme



Where do beginners learn about qualitative writing?

- Coursework
- Colleagues
- Textbooks and methods articles
- Conferences and workshops
- Professional organization or journal standards
- Reading a lot
- Trying it and getting feedback



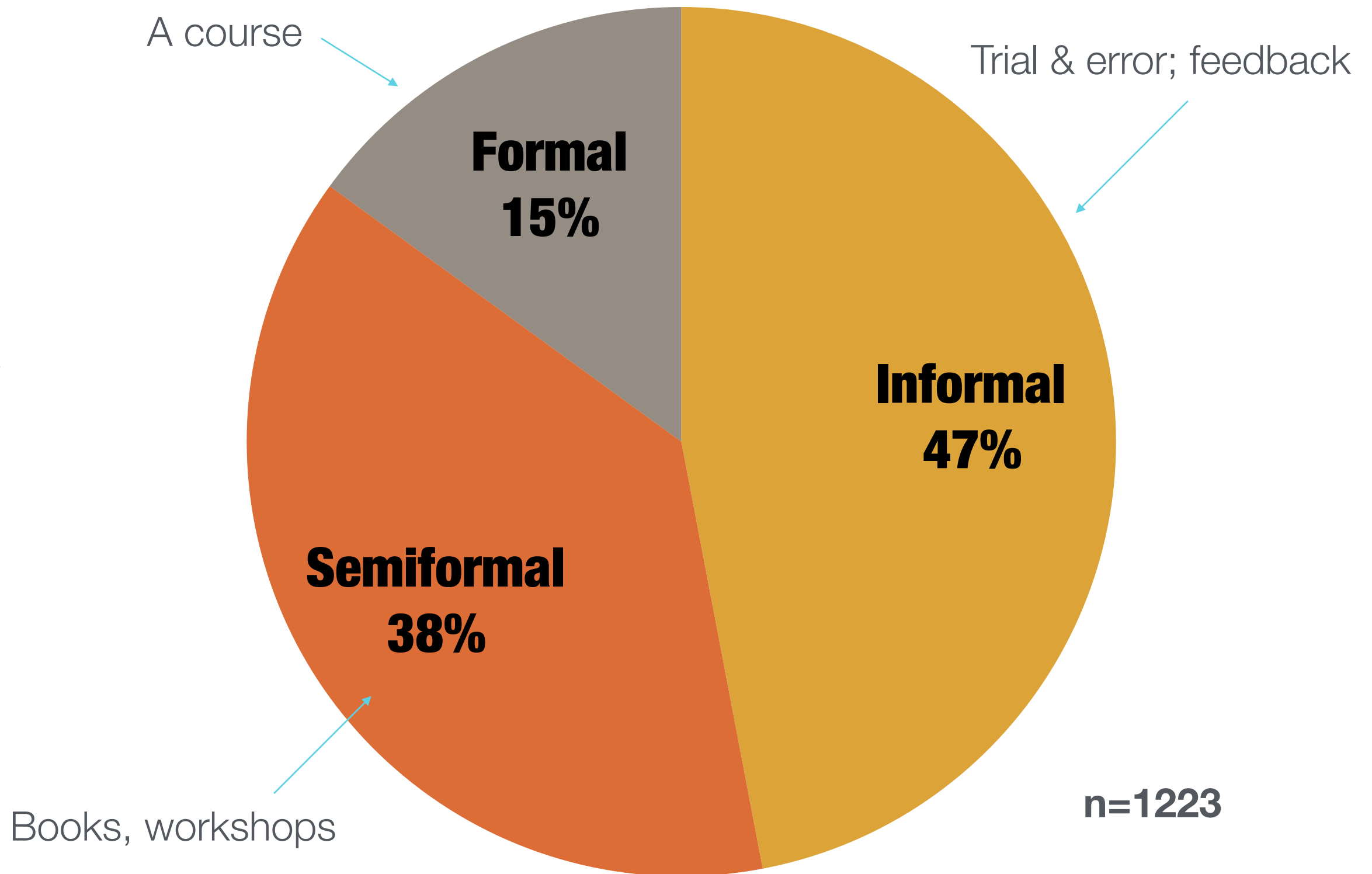
Barriers to learning qualitative writing

- Lack of qualitative coursework in some disciplines
- Little or no writing advice in texts
- Lack of training (and confidence) in writing for instructors

Counseling Psychology in 2005: 10% of programs required a qualitative course (Ponterotto, 2005)

Psychology in 2017: 39% offer a graduate-level qualitative course (Rubin, Bell, & McClelland, 2018)

HOW ACADEMICS LEARN TO WRITE (SWORD, 2017, CHAP. 4)






Barriers to learning qualitative writing

- Lack of qualitative coursework in some disciplines
- Lack of professional development opportunities
- Little or no writing advice in texts
- Lack of training and confidence in writing for instructors
- Professional standards and journals sometimes don't differentiate for qualitative
- Limited opportunities to meaningfully practice
- *SO MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT **QUALITATIVE!!***
- *SO MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT **WRITING!!***

**MUCH WRITING
ADVICE CENTERS ON
WHAT SECTIONS A
MANUSCRIPT
SHOULD CONTAIN
AND WHAT TO
INCLUDE IN THOSE
SECTIONS.**

“What to” rather than “how to”



**MUCH WRITING
ADVICE
CENTERS ON
MOTIVATING
STUDENTS TO
WRITE.**

**BUT IS THAT WHAT
BEGINNERS
REALLY WANT AND
NEED TO KNOW?**

WHAT DO STUDENTS WANT TO KNOW?

- **Method:**

- PollEverywhere question at beginning of two workshops on qualitative writing:
 - What's something about writing that you hope to learn about today? Please be specific; instead of 'to write better' say something like 'how to eliminate prepositions.'
- Respondents
 - Workshop 1=21, Workshop 2=17; TOTAL of 38
 - Graduate students at various stages, experience levels
- Basic thematic analysis in Atlas.ti

Clearly
leading!

WHAT I LEARNED, PT. 1

Things I expected students would be interested to learn about:

Style

Complex writing issues

How to write particular parts of a manuscript

Time /process

conciseness

details

eliminate adverbs

eliminate prepositions

neologisms

passive voice

synthesize

tone

transitions

vocabulary/ word choice

revision

Style

Complex writing issues

How to write particular parts

Time /process

“How to make my writing less descriptive”

VS.

“How do I know when I have enough details?”

“What I should be thinking about as I design my study to ease the writing process”

designing for easier writing

positionality

using theory

positionality

Style

Complex writing issues

How to write particular p

Time /process

Style

Complex writing issues

How to write particular parts of a manuscript

Time /process

closings

literature review

theoretical framework

using data

Style

Complex writing issues

How to write particular parts of a manuscript

Time /process

revision processes

time

writer's block

“How to use my time most efficiently”

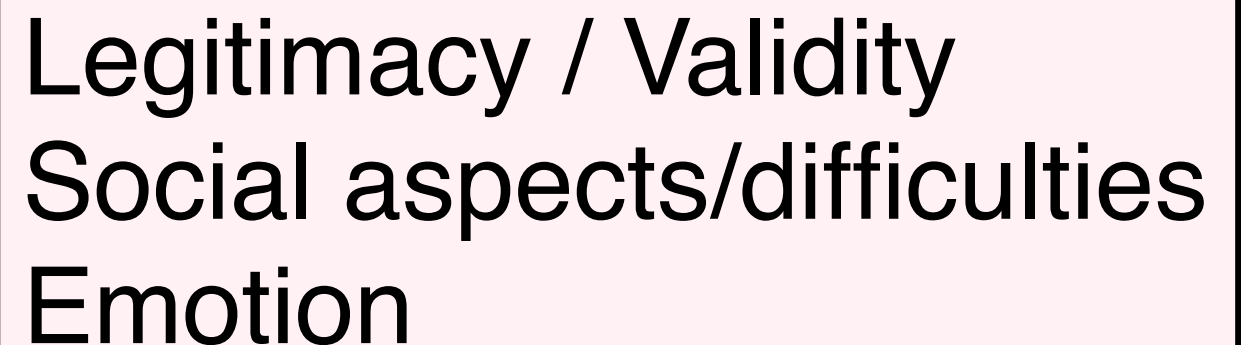
WHAT I LEARNED, PT. 2

Stark reminders of the *social and emotional aspects* of learning qualitative

Legitimacy / Validity
Social aspects/difficulties
Emotion

“How to make case studies legit / powerful”

positionality
powerful
trustworthiness/validity



Legitimacy / Validity
Social aspects/difficulties
Emotion

“My college is more 'quant' focused. I need to be sure that my writing meets the expected rigor of my program and can demonstrate my commitment to trustworthiness.”

criticism by others
acceptability/standards
navigating department/committee
participant voice

Legitimacy / Validity
Social aspects/difficulties
Emotion

“I want to know if my voice is too informal. I get told I have a strong narrative voice but have no problem making up neologisms or using passive voice.”

“How to let the participant's voice be heard.”

(lack of) confidence

criticism by others

emotion/pressure

uncertainty

Legitimacy / Validity
Social aspects/difficulties
Emotion

"How to break out of writer's block, especially when the root cause is being overwhelmed, and uncertain where to begin to get something--anything-- done."

WHAT I LEARNED, PT. 3

Some students just aren't ready for writing (for others)

Other Qualitative Processes
Where to start?

data analysis

design

ideas

**Other Qualitative Processes
Where to start?**

“Doing a case study in a whole school setting. What is the length of time you should spend at the site? How many participants?”

Other Qualitative Processes Where to start?

"How to break out of writer's block, especially when the root cause is being overwhelmed, and uncertain where to begin to get something--anything-- done."

"How do I begin? Where do I begin?"

"How to start writing"

"...where to start when I finally get to the writing stage."

“

Although it appears self-evident, we must nevertheless note that the first step in effectively communicating and publishing qualitative research is to develop qualitative research competence. Absent this competence, it is difficult to effectively communicate qualitative methods and findings because, in many qualitative inquiry approaches, the research and writing happen concurrently and iteratively.

”

(Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007, p. 405)

WHAT DO STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW?

DATA SOURCES

- Observations from 15 years of teaching introductory and advanced qualitative research to students from many disciplines
- Preliminary analysis of advice from qualitative textbooks
- Task analysis for my book

TASKS INVOLVED IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WRITING

- Many types and contexts for writing (course paper, proposal, dissertation, conference paper, etc.)
- General writing skills (structure, revision, transitions, etc.) **AND** qualitative-specific writing skills
- Knowing parts of a research paper/book
- Meeting the goals of qualitative research (intellectual and practical; Maxwell, 2013)
- Establishing presence, both subjectivity and a sense of place

TASKS INVOLVED IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WRITING (CONT.)

- Using different data materials (interviews, fieldnotes, docs, etc.)
- Making supportable qualitative claims
- Using qualitative theory and literature
- Talking about qualitative methods (in all their messiness)
- Writing from different qualitative approaches (discourse analysis, grounded theory, autoethnography, etc.)
- Writing for different audiences—who might or might not understand qual
- Professional behaviors and practices (publishing, collaboration, etc.)

TASKS INVOLVED THAT ARE OFTEN NOT TAUGHT *EXPLICITLY* IN QUALITATIVE COURSES

- Writing about ambiguity?! (to follow St. Pierre's point from her keynote)
- Analyzing the **WRITING** in example texts.
- Differing rhetorical requirements of disciplines and approaches
- Rhetorical grammar of qualitative research (e.g., nouns [consistency, centrality in sentence]; theory- and relationship-building through conjunctions and prepositions)
- Academic revision skills (who does *demonstrations* of active voice or weeding out "This" and "That"?)

IMPLICATIONS FOR QUAL WRITING INSTRUCTION

- More **research** on student needs and *effective* instruction
- **Intentionality** about what we do with writing. What we leave out must be a thoughtful choice.
- Need **explicit** attention to the emotions students have and the social complexities of writing.

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