Exercises

# Chapter 8: Formulating a research question

## Exercise 1: Examine access issues and possible solutions

Take a research topic that interests you. Now consider the ways in which access to situations or informants might be a problem. Then examine how you might redefine your research topic to remove the problem of access.

## Exercise 2: Visualize how your key project components relate

Draw a flow chart of no more than one page setting out your key concepts and how they relate.

## Exercise 3: Form what, how, and why research questions

Review your area of research interest in terms of the following questions (Mason, 1996: 14) and formulate your research problem in terms of one kind of puzzle:

1. How or why did X develop? (a developmental puzzle)
2. How does X work? (a mechanical puzzle)
3. What causes X or what influence does X have on Y? (a causal puzzle)

Take a research topic which interests you. Then reformulate it as:

1. a ‘what’ question
2. a ‘how’ question
3. a ‘why’ question.

## Exercise 4: Get to grips with the character of your research topic

Howard Becker is the author of a very useful book for research students called Tricks of the Trade (1998). One trick he mentions suggests the following exercise:

1. Ask your supervisor (or a fellow student who knows your work reasonably well) to offer a snap characterization of what you are trying to find out.

2. Now respond to this characterization of your work (e.g. by denying it or modifying it).

This exercise, says Becker, should help you to get a better understanding of what you are trying to do.