

# 1 Conventions or Alternatives?

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## 1.1 Debates to resolve

This book is a guide through the choices to be made when deciding how to report research, principally in social sciences (including health), arts and humanities but also with relevance to, and examples from, natural and applied sciences and law. It covers research written as theses and dissertations, chapters, books, reports and articles in academic, professional or general media such as newspapers. It reviews the options for presenting research orally as lectures, keynotes, conference papers and even TV game shows.

All of these forms of reporting research have well established conventions for their formats. All of them also have growing numbers of alternative possibilities. These have generated debate about what is or is not acceptable. My aim is to make this debate more

manageable for those wanting to assess which of the conventional formats (1.3) or alternative possibilities (1.4) on offer is most appropriate for reporting their current research.

This debate, polarizing conventions and alternatives, was encapsulated for me in a conversation with fellow conference delegates following an academic's word-for-word reading aloud of his conventional research paper. The listeners' views on the presenter differed radically. I report this 'mini' research into their opinions as a poem in Box 1.1.

### Box 1.1 Differentiating conventional and alternative research writing styles: poetic format

#### *Conference Debate*

It's like listening to poetry,

He said.

I go to a conference to hear the poetry of the paper;

The paper is like poetry read by the real, actual writer,

Word for word,

Like all papers,

He said.

I learn later from reading the paper,

But not *at* the conference.

There you only go to hear researchers as poets.

You hear them interpreting their own poetry of words,

Their nuances, their cadences, their enthusiasm.

They do not need to explain them to YOU.

It is enough to be close to academic celebrities,

He said.

It should be teaching,

She said.

I go to a conference to learn from the presentation of the paper,

It is research, explained by the originator,

Just the main issues,

Different styles,

She said.

*(Continued)*

## Box 1.1 (Continued)

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You should comprehend from hearing a clear summary of the paper

There, *at* the conference.

You see researchers illuminating with PowerPoint,  
 Duplicated notes, pictures, sound, enthusiasm;  
 They feel the need to share with US.  
 So you are close to great teachers,

She said.

Angela Thody, 2005

Did my poem appeal to you, annoy you or intrigue you, as an 'alternative' way of reporting research data? Is it appropriate for the opening of a textbook on research writing and presentation? Did the visual differences in the layout of the two verses add to, or detract from, the message? Should the personal forms of 'I', 'my' and 'you' in this chapter so far have been mixed with the impersonal (it, one)? These exemplify the types of questions which this book explores.

To illustrate the opposite pole in this debate, the poem's information in conventional, 'textbook' form is in Box 1.2. What is your reaction to this?

## Box 1.2 Differentiating conventional and alternative research writing styles: textbook format

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Two styles are suggested to which research reporting should conform:

*either*

Accepted academic conventions, as summed up by an academic journal editor, 'make life easier for our referees by writing a clear, concise paper; that is, structured in a traditional manner' (Murray, 2004: 1). Natural and social scientists therefore report their research in strictly uniform scientific experiment format; humanities' authors follow chronological, or logical, formats. Both indicate objectivity, neutrality, researcher distance and impersonality.

*or*

(Continued)

## Box 1.2 (Continued)

'Innovative, user-friendly formats' (Gomm and Davies, 2000: 141) associated with postmodernism and its doubt that there is any one right method. All methods are deemed subjective; they represent particular viewpoints of which the researcher's is one. Research reporting formats embrace widely differing approaches such as poetry, photography or novelistic style. Subjectivity is unavoidable, bias is openly stated, researchers reveal themselves overtly, and personality is more than welcome.

A. Thody, 2005

### 1.2 Context of the debates

Unusual modes for academic writing are nothing new. Cobbett's 1818 guide to alternatives for the conventions of English grammar, for example, written as letters to his son, was described as 'more entertaining than many novels ... his Grammar is unlike any other' (O'London, 1924: 48). A 2003 example of the same unconventionality in the grammar textbook genre is *Eats Shoots and Leaves* by Lynne Truss (2003) which leavens language rules with humour and idiosyncratic proselytizing.

Nor have the ways which I have termed 'conventional' always been thus. An American 1955 study by Butts of assumptions underlying Australian education, for example, consisted of chatty personal reflections from random encounters. It was regarded as conventional and good research, yet there was no rigorous sample selection, literature review or methodology (Thody, 1994a). Butts was simply a travel writer of his day doing what we might now dismiss as 'educational tourism', but the social sciences had little opportunity to do anything else for some time. As recently as 1979, for example, Parsons and Lyons pleaded that university researchers should be able to get into real schools and risk interviewing real administrators, something we now see as normal and vital. Until then, surveys through questionnaires had dominated subjects such as education management research, for example. Utilizing conventional scientific formats for this type of research fitted the data well and also accorded with the desire of the social sciences to be accepted as being as rigorous as the natural sciences.

This desire to be like the natural sciences can be accounted for by the dominance of positivism for the first half of the twentieth century. Positivism gave credibility to many disciplines and dictated their forms (Hughes, 1990: 36). The scientific formats of writing that emerged from this positivism were adopted by the academic social science writers of the 1960s onwards. In doing so, however, they:

broke with their own inherited traditions ... They showed little of the nostalgia toward lost practices ... They worked new devices ... to support greater ease of access and better serve the interests of scholarship. (Willinski, 2000: 62)

These are the same objectives that helped to propel a new debate about research writing and presenting from the 1990s, since by then there had been a huge diaspora in research methods, not matched by variety in the academic formats of reporting research. It had also been realized that all research, from any discipline and in any format, has an endemic ‘literary dimension ... yet concealed by realist metaphysics’ (Scott and Usher, 1999: 19–20). The concealment lies in applying conventional, scientific formats for writing and presenting research without considering their suitability for a particular topic or research method. Any research report should tell a story of discovery from its inception to its conclusion – a story that so captures the reader’s imagination that they will act upon the outcomes.

Conventional style is not, however, inherently bad. Arguments for and against conventional and alternative styles are considered next in this chapter, together with an outline of the features of each.

## 1.3 Conventional formats

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### 1.3.1 Definitions

The conventional (or traditional, or scientific) format begins with a statement of the problem to be solved and the setting of this in its context of previous research on the same topic (including the literature review). This is part of the rationale for the problem which stresses the importance of studying it. Next, the research methodology is recounted. From this the findings emerge, ending with the conclusions drawn from the material presented.

The order will sometimes vary but the elements remain unchanged, whether the research reported is from the natural sciences, the applied sciences of engineering and medicine, or the social sciences. In the humanities and law, the traditional conventions would be either the production of a chronological account in numbered order, or an argument presenting first one and then the other side of the account.

These major formats all have codified conventions for style and language (5.3, 12.2) such as the American Psychological Association (APA, 2001; 2005), the Modern Languages Association (MLA, 2003), the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA, 2002) and for American law, *The Bluebook* (Bluebook, 2000).

This style works best where:

- significant amounts of quantitative and/or factual data have to be transformed into easily understandable text (in any discipline);
- the work was following through an experiment (in natural or applied sciences) or a quasi-experiment (in social or health sciences);
- there is a logical chronological or debate sequence (in law and the humanities);
- the research subjects are inanimate (such as literature texts) or dead (as in history);
- results have to be compared, where data are cumulative, and where results have to be replicated.

The aim is to produce an objective, distant report in which the views and activities of the phenomena or respondents are reproduced exactly as they happened. It is assumed

that the researcher has not influenced how the natural phenomena or the people have performed, behaved or commented. The researcher speaks only in the conclusions to the report and these conclusions are confined to whatever is obvious from the data. It is assumed that readers do not influence the interpretation; it is important that they interpret it exactly as has the writer. Reader and writer influence on the data is to be, and can be, avoided. The understandings on which this style is based are that the research has produced general, unassailable truths which have been proved from irrefutable evidence and which must be presented to the readers with exactitude.

The current debate about the applicability of alternative formats in place of the traditional must not obscure the value of conventional, scientific reporting. The logical sequencing of writing up research as an experiment possesses an elegant simplicity and the near-certainty of acceptance by peers, policy makers and publishers. It is common for reporting quantitative, qualitative and narrative data. Its advantages are discussed below.

### 1.3.2 Advantages

#### 1.3.2.1 *A training ground*

Mastery of conventional formats has become almost an admission ticket to academia with ‘tremendous material and symbolic power ... [which will] increase the probability of one’s work being accepted into “core” ... journals’ (Richardson, 1998: 353). To gain this acceptance, establishment mores must be followed, the establishment being editors, referees, thesis examiners, professorial promotion committees and research funders (Chapter 3). For new researchers, success with conventional formats is a compulsory rite of passage.

Those who argue in its favour point out that it helps students to learn to write and to think like everyone else, in the accepted forms of their disciplines (Zeller and Farmer, 1999: 5). This is much more than just a ritual game, performed for the sake of ritual. It can be seen as marking the end of an apprenticeship. The thesis, or early articles, in conventional formats show that the writer knows the ground rules for the making of the test piece. Once that is perfectly completed, the apprentice can then proceed as a master of the craft and is entitled and enabled to embellish, with the skills of literary and artistic formats, any type of data, quantitative, qualitative or narrative.

#### 1.3.2.2 *Simplicity and comparability*

The scientific style has seemingly unassailable logic and clarity which demonstrate analytical, synthetic and critical thinking, the hallmarks of a good academic. Alternatives from the postmodernist genre are criticized for their rejection of scientific approaches, rational economics or social justice, and for their incomprehensible language (Stevenson, 2003). The option of alternatives is seen to complicate issues of ‘authorship, authority, truth, validity and reliability ... [and] the greater freedom to experiment with textual form ... does not guarantee a better product’ (Richardson, 1998: 359).

The challenge with admitting plurality to the options for presentation and writing is that the possible approaches are like the many new methodologies themselves, lacking ‘the confident clarity’ of positivist approaches (Hughes, 1990: 138). Alternative formats can produce:

sprawling and self-indulgent descriptions that are free of meanings or claims ... lazy writing in the sense that authors only reproduce what they have collected and ... readers have to work hard to make sense of the reportage and to deduce the claims. (Knight, 2002: 194)

In contrast, conventional formatting does generally avoid such excesses and facilitates comparisons amongst research outputs presented in the same styles, and often in the same places, in reports. Relationships amongst findings can easily be displayed when the data appear in similar ways even in different reporting formats. The presentation of data in tables, graphs and diagrams provides visuals which make assimilation easier.

### 1.3.2.3 *Political, professional and academic acceptance*

Conventional formats proclaim the respectability that policy makers need. They have to demonstrate simply, to large and often sceptical audiences, that there is enough evidence for proposed changes. Conventional formatting provides this readily since research findings always appear as unarguable, neutral facts. This provides the necessary persuasiveness to encourage professionals to put research findings into practice (Silva, 1990).

In academia, where careers depend on research recognition, writing theses and articles, and preparing presentations, are much quicker if the most generally accepted format is adopted; alternatives are harder work. Work in conventional formats is more likely to be accepted than alternatives (Chapter 14) since examiners, editors and research assessors work to the standards of conventional formats (3.4.6). The findings of a research project can be sufficiently controversial in themselves without adding contention over an innovative writing style. The 'harsh realities of becoming new members of [the academic] discourse community' (Gosden, 1995: 39) crown convention with success because academic writing is a major means of social communication amongst academic peers (Holliday, 2002: 124; Jakobs and Knorr, 1996). Such successful communication matters, not only to individual careers, but also to university research ratings which determine university research income.

Formal and informal ratings systems are world-wide. The United Kingdom's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) commenced in 1992. New Zealand adopted a similar system in the early 2000s (Lord, Robb and Shanahan, 1998). The USA's Carnegie ratings, introduced in 1973, operate somewhat similarly though with less force than the RAE (Middaugh, 2001). Japan is investigating the possibility of such a system, and countries such as Israel consider closing colleges that are insufficiently research productive. Hong Kong and Australia also monitor university outputs (Mok and Lee, 2002; Taylor, 2001a; Mok, 2000). This is not a climate in which to take risks.

### 1.3.2.4 *Globalization*

The 'market' for research findings is now global; a standardized format helps international acceptance since conventions create meanings readily understood across cultures. Conventions for research writing and presentation are the equivalent of the McDonald's logo, Marriott Hotel bedrooms, shopping malls or aircraft emergency instructions. With all of these, as with the conventional, scientifically oriented format of

research reporting, consumers know that they will get the same everywhere; they get what they see and they know the format has been honed to international standards of efficiency and effectiveness. It is unlikely to be exciting but it will be safe.

**But is *safety* the context within which academic research should always operate? What are the alternatives?**

### REFLECTIONS

Section 1.3 above has been written in the impersonal, third person, passive voice. This is the generally accepted style in conventional formatting. In 1.4 below, about alternatives, I employ mainly the personal, first person, active voice since this is more often found in alternative approaches to reporting research (5.3.3.6).

## 1.4 Alternatives

### 1.4.1 Gaining acceptance?

I remember my surprise, when first attending North American academic conferences, on noticing that virtually all the papers were identical in their text appearance. Even the font style and size were uniform. Bryman (2001) evinced similar astonishment on discovering how little difference there is between the styles and formats of articles whether the author is presenting qualitative or quantitative data. I soon discovered the reason for the standardization; the American Psychological Association's style manual (APA) has been adopted by other disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. The handbook of the Modern Languages Association (MLA) performs the same standardizing functions for humanities disciplines.

Why, I mused, in the USA and Canada, so often depicted as lands of freedom, is so little discretion allowed to, or taken by, highly intelligent academics on how to present their work? Why have APA guidelines for writing up psychology experiments been adopted so wholeheartedly by other disciplines? These rules are designed for such topics as 'Referential communication by chimpanzees', an experiment which concluded that 'the deployment and gestures and gaze alternation between a banana and an observer were manifested as integrated patterns of nonverbal reference' (Leavens, Hopkins and Thomas, 2004: 55). Can such rules be equally suitable for the behaviours of district superintendents (Griffin and Chance, 1994) or teaching ethics to nurses (Krawczyk, 1997)?

Even where there are no strictures, such as when academics present their research orally, why do many academics still elect to 'read' their papers and to eschew the livelier arts of demonstration and teaching? I have found that these conventions, which

result in almost identical written and oral presentations of conference papers, have appertained at many conferences I have attended world wide in the last thirty years and in every set of contributors' instructions for journals. Even the *Review of Religious Research* came up with nothing more than the conventional requirements. 'Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing' a research report as a hymn or a medieval illuminated manuscript! Outside of North America, I have not found quite such tight adherence to APA and MLA, but the requirements of journals, thesis assessments and conference presentations still veer strongly towards the conventional.

I have been relieved to find that I am not alone in questioning APA's domination (Zeller and Farmer, 1999; Vipond, 1996; Bazerman, 1987) or the universal appropriateness of conventional forms:

We have been encouraged to take on the omniscient voice of science, the view from everywhere ... Nurturing our own voices releases the censorious hold of 'science writing' ... as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche ... [and] homogenization through professional socialisation. (Richardson, 1998: 347)

I've also encountered a few brave, alternative presenters, mainly at North American conferences. Their ideas included:

- readers' theatre (where researchers acted their research respondents' views);
- dance interpreting the emotions arising from findings;
- town meetings (researchers reported their findings briefly as political speeches and then invited audience participation, assisted by mobile microphones);
- debates (six researchers had exactly three minutes each to put their cases).

I added myself to these experiments. I assumed the persona and costume of a nineteenth century Tasmanian teacher to deliver a lecture on colonial education with language and props appropriate to the time (though a twentieth century overhead projector had to substitute for a magic lantern). Audio and video recordings made for me of Zimbabwean school pupils in uniform, singing their school song, launched a lecture on girls' education in Africa. I concluded this with leading community singing of the same school song with the audience. When delivering historical lectures, I often wear several changes of clothing or hats, gradually stripping off as we pass through each period. When illustrating the strengths and weaknesses of systems of governance, I pull out members of the audience to represent the stereotypes. A group of us (including two Greeks) ran a Romano-Grecian seminar to report our research on European integration, since the Romans and Greeks had been the first European integrationists. The seating was rearranged into a square, wine and grapes were served throughout, and we all wore matching T-shirts summarizing our main finding. I frequently devise concluding songs that summarize the principal features of research reported in my lectures. While this is meant to be entertaining, it is not gratuitous. Each format is designed to convey the research findings appropriately and better than can words alone, to reinforce learning, and even to transmit ideas that are hard to put into words.

I noticed, however, that mine and others' alternatives tended to come from groups not strongly represented in the academic establishment – women, ethnic minorities and

the physically differentially abled. The alternatives thus appear to be ‘fringe’ events, on the edges of a sea of convention.

As a ‘fringe’ we could just dismiss them, but we face a conundrum:

**Successful research is that which proves something new, original, innovative and at the cutting edge of ideas; our most generally acceptable forms of research writing and presentation usually shun all of these.**

What then are the alternatives, and what are the arguments that favour extending the options for writing and presenting research?

#### 1.4.2 Definitions

I cannot encapsulate alternatives so easily as the conventional formats since alternatives can be as varied as word-for-word transcribed interviews (Rice, 2004), photographs with minimal text (Staub, 2002), narrative poetry (Woodley, 2004) (this book’s examples are in Chapters 9 and 10) or tabulated quantitative data presented without commentary (Chapter 8). I can, however, formulate their distinguishing characteristics:

- ✚ We celebrate and acknowledge the subjectivities of writers, research respondents and readers as positive contributions to enhanced understanding; all will affect research writing and presentation.
- ✚ We accept that there are multiple perspectives on any research problem and we must present all of these in order to give as fully rounded a view as possible.
- ✚ We can be adventurous, entertaining and emotional, drawing from fiction, poetry, painting, photography, performances, sculpture, posters, music and other creative work.
- ✚ We ‘expect to be reflexive ... to write in the first person ... and to write with passion’ (Knight, 2002: 194).
- ✚ We can question the suitability of any format; we can take this even to the extremes of deconstruction and anarchy where meaning is whatever you and the readers want it to be, and accept that these various meanings may not be the same.
- ✚ We will often incorporate most or all of the basic elements of the conventional format (the statement of the problem, its context, literature, methodology, findings and conclusions) but not necessarily in that order, nor will they always be immediately obvious.
- ✚ We can apply alternative formats for quantitative, qualitative or narrative data.
- ✚ Our aim is to be intentionally focused on language as a persuasive tool (Chapters 3, 4, 5) for who ever is the principal audience for the research. This may be a solitary PhD student who has borrowed your thesis on inter-library loan, a TV game show audience, fellow professionals at a public conference interested in changing practice or experienced, specialist academics examining a thesis (3.4, 3.5, 3.6).

### 1.4.3 Reasons for emergence of alternatives

#### 1.4.3.1 *Postmodernism*

Postmodernism from the 1970s has led us to understand that research, and its writing and presentation, are always partial and context bound. We can no longer claim that things are exactly right or wrong; our data cannot irrefutably prove anything; we ourselves are irretrievably intertwined in the methodology and the writing. We now accept that our personal judgement, interpretations and subjectivities (and those of other researchers) not only are inextricably involved in all decisions from inception to presentation of a research project, but also have a rightful place that must be publicly acknowledged. Postmodernism also gives us licence to doubt and to suspect; researchers are as much likely to peddle research as propaganda as are politicians. The previously clear lines between subjective and objective or between fact and fiction have become hazy and we should reflect this in how we write and present research. We should flout convention.

#### 1.4.3.2 *Changing attitudes to the natural and social sciences*

As a 1960s' student, the first university lecture I attended discussed how social sciences might, and must, become more like natural sciences. The debate still rages (To, 2000) but there is growing scepticism about the rightness of the natural sciences as scientists contradict each other daily (each contradiction based on irrefutable experimental research) and the natural sciences are themselves finding that their own research reporting is as much open to linguistic questions as is that of the humanities and social sciences. These ferments blur the lines between social and natural sciences and the humanities, particularly in how they reach the public consciousness (Willinsky, 2000: 233). There is a huge debate about whether the conventional formats of 'scientific' writing do or do not aid clarity, and even about the meaning of clarity itself (Zeller and Farmer, 1999: 12–14).

This leads us to question the appropriateness of applying scientific norms to areas which are not sciences. Qualitative and narrative research have had to hide behind structures that depersonalize our outputs (even requiring us, for example, to report participant observation in the third person). We can, however, now begin to quit the paranoia that limits our research writing to the conventional pseudo-scientific style.

#### 1.4.3.3 *New research and technical methodologies*

Qualitative ethnographic and narrative methods have much developed since 1975. We now use focus groups, photography, life history, email interviewing, observation, diaries, critical incidents and more. These do not always fit comfortably with conventional reporting formats. In trying to make them do so, I find that I can lose the excitement, personality and immediacy of the original research. Hence we experiment with alternative ways of writing and presenting research, so widening 'the schism between those who adhere to the scientific model of writing and those who choose to supplement that model with tools from the literary world' (Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao, 2004: 1197).

Experiments arising from this methodological pluralism have become more evident and more realizable with developments in computer-based systems for composing

documents. From the late 1980s word processors developed, first simply as super-typewriters, getting words down more efficiently and correctly than handwriting. The linear view of writing remained initially unchanged, leaving unrecognized the 'inter-connectedness of and alternation within the writing sub-processes' (Sharples and van der Geest, 1996: 8). By 2006, computer progress had made writing a different experience, one that significantly influences what appears in a research report. We take variations in **font (typeface) SIZE** and **colour** for granted. We now incorporate them **boldly** to enhance conventional and alternative styles, reporting with, for example, variegated pie charts, graphs and diagrams (though I wait to see a PhD thesis with its title in rainbow hues). Photographs and drawings can be inserted cheaply and quickly. Text blocks can be formatted at the commencement of a project report and remain unchanged without the further intervention of the writer. We can enliven with animated pictures, the thousand and one PowerPoint slides that raise our professionalism in any presentation. Utilizing analysis software, tables of categorized data appear as if by magic. I write theses, books, articles and reports directly on screen, mail and mark, read, annotate and question without ever downloading to paper. Text can be data in itself; it can be moved outside the flat space of a computer screen through hypertext and three dimensions, becoming 'geometrical forms, objects and structures ... [which] may hang on the wall, rotate on hinges or unfold' (Tonfoni and Richardson, 1994: 32).

So far, I think we have been playing with these developments as with a new toy, but they have democratized hitherto restricted print techniques. From the 2000s, we are all now sufficiently computer literate that our computer techniques are not just embellishment but an essential part of reporting that can affect meaning itself. Computers have given us the power to be alternative.

## 1.5 Resolving the debates?

### 1.5.1 The middle ground

The conventional versus alternatives debate has the disadvantage of problematizing what is often regarded as non-contentious (Cresswell, 1994: 193). Postmodernism generates this contention since 'there are no universal methods to be applied invariantly' (Scott and Usher, 1999: 10) but it does have the advantage of offering many options and alternatives are increasingly accepted (Holliday, 2002). Fortunately, postmodernism also presents us with a way of resolving the conventional/alternatives debate because it does not automatically reject the conventional but asks instead, 'What is appropriate?'

The conventional and the alternatives are best seen as ideal types at either end of a continuum. In any one piece of writing or presentation, a researcher will lean towards one ideal or the other, but it is possible to incorporate elements of both. Ways of reporting research can combine the rigour and precision of conventional scientific formats, as the spine of a research report, with the flesh of alternative humanity. The latter will reveal all the voices which have contributed to the research (including your own as the researcher). The whole combines the literary, narrative arts of arrangement, accentuation and artistry. The following extracts show combined conventional and alternative styles from refereed journal articles.<sup>1</sup>

## Extract 1

Fail, Thompson and Walker's (2004) study, on identity and Third Culture Kids, admirably combines the conventional and the alternative. The first half is an extensive, and traditionally expressed, literature review, all written in the impersonal passive voice and in past tenses (5.3.3.5, 5.3.3.6): 'Reverse culture shock has been well documented in the research on Third Culture Kids ... Downie (1976) drew certain conclusions from his study of TCKs returning to college in the United States' (Fail et al., 2004: 321, 322).<sup>2</sup>

The data are then presented as substantial verbatim extracts from life history interviews, in the first person present tense, without commentary or linking text, such as:

*'Anna: (My) friends in Geneva are all international ... I see myself as a vagabond, based in nothing. I could die in any country in the world ... I am FREE like a bird.'*

After the verbatim data, the article reverts to the original impersonal, passive past as the author summarizes the collective views of the respondents in relation to each of the themes extracted from the literature.

## Extract 2

My report, on nineteenth century school management, is an invented account of a nineteenth century headteacher's fictional day, created from original sources, but presented as imaginary non-participant observation by myself as the fantasy researcher (Thody, 1994b). This semi-fictional record shows, for example: 6.45 a.m. Equipment orders: [the principal] selects the order book for equipment. He is listing the number of slate pencils required. He pauses to consult a supplier's catalogue for guidance on the appropriate length of pencils for different ages of children.

This fiction is firmly embedded within conventional elements of an introduction (11.10) with the research questions followed by a rationale for education history, a justification for its disparate sources and a literature review. The fiction is justified in the text, by its conventional origins in real sources, by advice from postmodernist experts requiring readable history, and by its uses of imaginative literature and its portrayal of multiple voices.

You must also be aware that attitudes to 'convention' are changing. Those who developed the 1960s' scientific, traditional modes are now retiring from academic life; thus the tentative questioners of the 1990s could take the opportunity to engage in more trenchant debate in the 2000s towards a new break with tradition. Your careers have ten-fifty years to completion, time to see the alternatives themselves become the 'new conventions' and time to become the new conveyors of alternative styles to those whom you are, or will be, teaching. You can be the generation that rewrites the thesis regulations to offer freedom to candidates.

It is also possible that we may just be witnessing a time lag while academics adjust to, and start to employ, alternative possibilities regularly. It is nothing new for changes in presentation and writing up requirements to lag behind new opportunities for change, as a 1990 author noted:

Since 1984, when the first edition of this Green Guide [to publishing in scholarly journals] was published, dramatic changes have occurred in the technologies for processing

text and graphics. There has been considerably less development in the general principles and procedures for publishing. (Sadler, 1990: Foreword)

### 1.5.2 The guiding principles

To find a way to meet the challenges from this ferment, you have to make choices. Your choices should be determined by:

- ✦ your own dialogue with your data generated as you write from the start of your project and as you plan all its stages, including its final written or spoken formats (2.2);
- ✦ the precedents for reporting the type of research you have done and whether or not you want to break these (2.3.1);
- ✦ your personality and what appeals to you (2.3.2);
- ✦ the practicalities of time and money that constrain your formats (2.3.3);
- ✦ the people reading, or listening to, your research (Chapter 3);
- ✦ the purposes for which you are reporting your research (Chapter 4);
- ✦ the arts and craft of writing (Chapter 5).

## 1.6 Chapter outlines

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In the rest of Part One, 'Preparation', I discuss the above guiding principles.

In Part Two, 'Selection and Reduction', I apply these principles. Chapters 6 and 7 consider how to reduce, to manageable quantities, your primary research data and your secondary data for literature and methodology reviews.

Part Three, 'Production', offers quantitative, qualitative and narrative styles for the findings from your research. Each of them is most usually associated with a particular form of data but is found with the other types of data. They are:

- 1 the conventional (scientific) style, mainly reporting quantitative data, experiments and quasi-experiments (Chapter 8);
- 2 the alternative of artistic reporting, largely associated with qualitative data (Chapter 9);
- 3 the alternative of literary styles, often restricted to narrative data (Chapter 10).

It is important to remember that 'most of the ideas [for writing] apply equally well to qualitative and quantitative approaches' (Cresswell, 1994: 193). Just because your data are qualitative does not mean that you should confine your options to the artistic; look also into scientific and literary forms. Likewise, the scientifically inclined can include literary or artistic approaches, and the literati should consider more than just the narrative.

Common to all three styles is the need to make an impact with your reporting, since you want to ensure that someone will be persuaded to take action as a result of your work. The rest of Part Three offers guidance on the beginnings and ends of research writing – those all-important titles, introductions, abstracts and conclusions through which to 'hook' your readers (Chapter 11). Having made an opening impact, you need to ensure this is maintained through the demonstrated rigour of your work. Chapter 12 therefore reviews citation requirements.

Part Four, 'Publication: Reference Guides', concerns the end products of your research – presentations (Chapter 13) and publications (Chapter 14) – and raises awareness of the legal issues associated with writing and presenting, such as copyright and intellectual property (Chapter 15).

Part Five, 'Valediction', farewells you with an Epilogue (Chapter 16) reviewing the literature about writing and presentation; reveals the research methodology for the book and the author's biography in the Appendix (Chapter 17); and lists the references and further reading in a bibliography.

## 1.7 Review

Deciding how to write and present research needs to be as central to research project planning as are all other elements of methodology. Postmodernism has extended the possibilities for formatting and style options, referred to above as 'alternative'. Modernist structuralism continues to support conventional styling. The dichotomy between the two is not as great as these apparently opposing terms indicate. There is middle ground between them. To help you to negotiate this, the first stage is the guiding principles discussed in Chapters 2–4.

### REFLECTIONS

Postmodernists believe that researchers must share power with their readers by making transparent the researcher's own attitudes since these will subconsciously affect what is written. Readers are thus better able to judge the validity of the research. From reading this chapter, what do you think are my underlying assumptions? Turn to the Appendix on research methods (Chapter 17) to find out if you were right about me and assess the extent to which this chapter has been affected by my attitudes.

## Notes

- 1 'Refereed' journals are those for which articles are subjected to review by specialist academic experts before editorial acceptance. They are also known as 'peer reviewed', 'core' or 'academic' journals. They are regarded as more prestigious than 'professional' journals, for which only the editor, or a small editorial panel, decides whether or not to accept articles. Academic careers depend upon your research being published in refereed journals.
- 2 Sources cited solely within quotations are not included in the bibliography.