

Skills

Objectives

- Learn how to think and interpret critically
- Identify the steps of doing sociological research
- Identify the steps of writing effectively

Vocabulary

bias	deductive thinking	inductive thinking	research design	variable
cause and effect	ethics	objective thinking	scientific method	
control group	experiment	paraphrase	thesis statement	

Background

In this section, students learn skills in thinking, interpreting, researching, and writing that will help them “develop sociological imagination” and a deeper awareness of the kinds of work sociologists actually do. The chapter has three sections: on thinking and interpreting critically, doing research, and writing effectively.

Students learn what objective thinking is and distinguish between inductive and deductive reasoning. They discover how to interpret various types of graphics: graphs, maps, tables, and cartoons. They analyze the importance of recognizing bias and separating fact from opinion. Specific examples tie the thinking skills to research in sociology.

Students then survey the field of sociological research. They apply the steps of the scientific method to sociology. Then they explore in detail four ways to collect sociological data: surveys, observations, experiments, and use of existing information. Students analyze each method in terms of the kinds of data it can gather and in terms of its advantages and disadvantages to researchers. Students also analyze how sociologists organize and interpret the data they gather.

In the last section, students identify the general guidelines that sociologists follow in publishing the results of their studies. Students discover the importance of planning your writing, expressing the main idea, using evidence to support the main idea, and making generalizations and drawing conclusions.

In reading and discussing this chapter, students should become aware that sociology, because it is a social science, depends on accurate and informed communication. Sociologists must therefore develop skills both in English writing and in science.

Further Resources

- Hult, Christine. *Research and Writing in the Social Sciences*. New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1995.
- Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.

For Discussion

Review

1. What is the difference between inductive thinking and deductive thinking?
2. What are four types of graphics used in sociology?
3. In sociology research, what are the five steps of the scientific method?
4. What are four steps of writing effectively?

Critical Thinking

1. Which do you think is more likely to be biased, inductive or deductive reasoning? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Why is it important for a sociologist to be able to distinguish facts from opinions?
3. Why is it important to consider ethical questions when designing an experiment? Describe real or hypothetical experiments in your answer.
4. What are some ways in which data from surveys can be used and misused?
5. Do you think that sociology really can be objective and free of bias? If so, what principles would ensure objectivity? Support your opinions with real or hypothetical examples.

Activities

1. Skills: Identifying Bias

Choose a major social problem, such as urban gangs, teenage pregnancy, or urban sprawl. Ask each student to read a different article about the issue. Ask students to identify instances of bias in the articles and to suggest how the articles might be made more objective.

2. Surveys of Surveys

Have students research and report on the increasing use of surveys in everyday life, including television polls, political polls, marketing polls, and census results. Reports should include information on how data from these surveys are gathered and used.

3. Internet: Instant Electronic Data

Ask students to check out large online shopping sites and to notice ways in which these sites are tracking the information being entered. For example, at many sites the consumer fills a shopping cart, which indicates a possible buying pattern even if the consumer decides not to buy. Discuss how such information might be used and misused.

4. Special Sources: Sociology in the Marketplace

Have students read business magazines and find articles about sociological topics or based on sociology issues. Ask them to prepare reports on how sociology can be used to anticipate market trends, develop a business plan and create a profitable business.

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As you read this section, write an answer to each question below.

1. Identify four different types of graphics and what kinds of information the graphics are used to display.

2. Why is it important to use the scientific method in doing sociological research?

3. What are three principles that should be followed in a scientifically designed survey?

4. What is the purpose of a control group in an experiment?

5. What should be the characteristics of a thesis statement (main idea) in a sociology paper?

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Find the best answer for each item. Then circle that answer.

1. Which term means reasoning from particular instances to general principles?
 - a. deductive reasoning
 - b. inductive reasoning
 - c. bias of the observed
 - d. paraphrasing
2. What is the term for reasoning from the general to the particular?
 - a. deductive reasoning
 - b. inductive reasoning
 - c. observer bias
 - d. scientific method
3. Which of the following is a tendency or inclination that draws a person away from objective thinking?
 - a. inductive reasoning
 - b. deductive reasoning
 - c. bias
 - d. scientific method
4. What is the term for a social fact that might change?
 - a. cause and effect
 - b. control
 - c. experiment
 - d. variable
5. Which of these is a graphic that displays data in parallel columns?
 - a. graph
 - b. map
 - c. table
 - d. cartoon
6. What is a statement that represents truth and can be checked for accuracy?
 - a. fact
 - b. bias
 - c. opinion
 - d. conclusion
7. What is the term for a detailed plan or method for collecting data scientifically?
 - a. objective thinking
 - b. research design
 - c. thesis statement
 - d. generalization
8. What is a term for taking part in the process you are observing?
 - a. bias
 - b. research design
 - c. participant observation
 - d. scientific method
9. What functions to isolate the variables in an experiment?
 - a. bias
 - b. control group
 - c. research design
 - d. thesis statement
10. Which term expresses the main idea of a sociology paper?
 - a. experiment results
 - b. independent variable
 - c. deductive thinking
 - d. thesis statement

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Read each description, and write the letter of the correct term on the line.

1. Objective thinking requires that you look at a sociological phenomenon _____.
 - a. from the majority point of view
 - b. from the minority point of view
 - c. from the outside in
 - d. as generally as possible
2. The sociological imagination tries to make a link between the individual and _____.
 - a. broad societal influence
 - b. the scientific method
 - c. objective reasoning
 - d. a thesis statement
3. Maps organize information about people within geographical and _____ boundaries.
 - a. sociological
 - b. economic
 - c. variable
 - d. political
4. The relationship between an event and its result is known as _____.
 - a. observer bias
 - b. cause and effect
 - c. the scientific method
 - d. a conclusion
5. The first step in the scientific method is _____.
 - a. forming a hypothesis
 - b. collecting data
 - c. defining the problem
 - d. analyzing the data
6. The fifth step in the scientific method is _____.
 - a. forming a hypothesis
 - b. collecting data
 - c. defining the problem
 - d. analyzing the data
7. In a(n) _____, every member of a population has the same chance of being selected.
 - a. random sampling
 - b. representative sampling
 - c. interview
 - d. questionnaire
8. The two main methods of conducting surveys are the interview and the _____.
 - a. random sampling
 - b. representative sampling
 - c. conclusion
 - d. questionnaire
9. Summaries, _____, and quotations are three ways to present evidence gathered from other sources.

a. conclusions	c. paraphrases
b. questionnaires	d. surveys
10. An effective conclusion to a sociology paper _____.
 - a. is supported by the data that has been gathered
 - b. reflects the writer's bias
 - c. contains the widest possible generalizations
 - d. suggests a course that society should follow

Essay Question

Which of the three sociological perspectives do you think lends itself best to objective thinking? Support your opinions with examples from this textbook.