Professor Heather A. Haveman: A Detailed Outline for the Research Design Section of an Empirical Paper

Sampling Plan

- Research site: Justify your choice of context. Sometimes the description and justification of context is done in the introduction – if your paper focuses on a particular phenomenon & the theoretical exposition is limited to that phenomenon. Other times your paper tests a general theory in a single research site, or set of comparative research sites, so you really have to justify your choice of research site in the methods section.
- Actors studied: Explain & justify your selection of cases within that context. If you don't do this, you can't explain how to generalize beyond the cases you study.
- Unit of analysis: Define your unit(s) of analysis, unless that is obvious or inevitable given the exposition of your theory.

Data Sources/Data Collection Procedures and Measures

- Measures of the dependent variable(s): Describe your data sources. (If measures of the dependent variables come from the same source, then write a single subsection describing the data source before turning to the subsections that describe the particular measures.) Describe, explain, and justify your data-selection and coding procedures – how you reduce the raw data into analyzable chunks, and how you reduce problems with missing data or problematic data. This is just as important for qualitative observational, interview, or archival data as it is for quantitative experimental, survey, or archival data.
- Measures of the independent variable(s): Same as for dependent variable(s).
- Measures of the control variables: This is necessary for quantitative analysis only. For qualitative analysis, you should have selected your cases so that they vary only on the independent variables, and are similar (if not identical) in terms of all other variables. Such careful case selection allows you to control away or discount, by design, possible alternative explanations for the relationship between your independent and dependent variables.

Method(s) of Analysis

There are several ways to do this, depending on the type of data you have and the type of analysis you are going to do:

- Multivariate regression-type analysis (includes logistic, event-history, etc.) of experimental, survey, interview, network, or archival data
- Inductive network/cluster/factor analysis of observational, interview, or archival data
- Content analysis of textual data, either qualitative or quantitative (computer-assisted)
- Qualitative/narrative analysis of historical or other archival data
- Qualitative analysis of observational or interview data

The analytical method you use depends on the form of data you gather, which in turn depends on the phenomenon you are studying.

For templates on how to structure this sub-section, you should look at papers that use data & methods similar to your own.

Many empirical papers use a mix of methods – e.g., content analysis of textual data to summarize the texts and generate quantitative measures that can be input into regression-type analysis, or network analysis to produce measures of ego's position, features of dyads, or overall network structure that can be input into regression-type or cluster analysis. Whatever the methods used to analyze the data, be sure to take readers through the analysis step by step. The goal is to describe it so clearly that they could reproduce your analysis themselves.