

Social Science Research

Babbie, E. *The Practice of Social Research: 5th ed.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth (1987).

Reviewed by **Judith M. Forsythe**, Graduate Student, Department of Speech Communication, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE, 68588.

As Babbie declares in part one of his book, we have been conducting scientific research for all or our lives. With this in mind, Babbie sets

out to lay the groundwork for social science research, its theory, research design, and statistics.

This book is intended to be a *general* social science research text, giving a researcher the background needed to move on to advanced statistical techniques. Given this purpose, Babbie's text is an excellent source for a researcher, especially for a beginning researcher who is not sure where to begin.

After reviewing the background of social science theory and research, Babbie offers an excellent overview of the nature of causation (an important notion considering some researchers still confuse correlation and causation). All through the book, Babbie utilizes up to date real life examples instead of bogging down the beginner with irrelevant studies on topics which no one is familiar. An example is the topic of marijuana smoking and GPA which is used to illustrate correlation and causality. Other topics used throughout the book for illustrative purposes include, AIDS, peace, welfare, and discrimination.

Once the reader is oriented to social science research and its purpose, Babbie moves on to describe research design and the steps involved: conceptualization and measurement, operationalization, and sampling. An entire chapter is devoted to each of the components. Again, Babbie gives a very good overview on the strategy for researching a topic, explaining the purpose of research, and approaches for getting started on designing a study. Within this unit of the text, sections worth mentioning are the discussion on conceptualization (very beneficial for the beginning researcher) and the discussion on the types of reliability and validity. While the statistical aspects of validity and reliability are not described (for this is not the author's intent), the different types of each are described in more detail than many texts offer and in an easy to understand manner. In fact, most of the text is written in a conversational tone that does not weigh down or confuse the beginner.

Progressing from the theory and basic principles of social science and research design, Babbie moves into the pragmatics of different designs: experimental, survey, and field research. Each design is discussed in separate chapters that include sections on appropriate topics, sampling, analysis, and strengths and weaknesses of the design.

The survey research chapter may be of particular interest, especially for forensics researchers who conduct much of their studies through surveys. Babbie offers a comprehensive overview of questionnaire and telephone survey research, detailing the monitoring of returns and response rates. Also discussed is interview surveys. The description of these methods is followed by a useful comparison of the three methods.

Another area of growing research interest (especially for forensic researchers) is field research. Babbie discusses the techniques used in the area and also gives the reader an article on studying everyday life that exemplifies field research.

Another plus in Babbie's text is a chapter on a topic that should be read by all (not just beginning) researchers (some more than others)—Ethics. Babbie covers the ethical issues in social research and offers an illustrative article on the ethical issues of research on human sexuality.

The strengths of this textbook lie in the coverage of social science theory and research and the pragmatics of experimental, survey, and field research. Babbie does not delve into the area of advanced statistics except to give the reader a flavor of what is available (such as correlation, regression, path and factor analysis). Besides, there are many handbooks available that detail these methods. Another strength, as mentioned earlier, is Babbie's conversational tone. If the beginner is becoming confused and frustrated, Babbie's tone seems to indicate "it's all right," after all Babbie does not take himself too seriously (as indicated in his preface, the original title for his first text was *A Survey Research Cookbook and Other Fables*). If you find yourself becoming too serious, check out the glossary of terms for under the definition of many terms is a humorous second definition. For example, 'reductionism': (2) the cloning of ducks; or 'scale': (2) one of the less appetizing parts of a fish. Students, however, should not use one of these definitions on an exam—I already tried.