

## **ENG 6812-0M01: Research Methods for Texts and Technology**

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**Dr. Elizabeth Wardle  
University of Central Florida**

*Instructor Email:* [ewardle@mail.ucf.edu](mailto:ewardle@mail.ucf.edu)

*Office:* Colbourn 301A

*Office Hours:* T/Th 2-5 and by appt (note: I am in the office almost every day but I'm in a lot of meetings, so it is a good idea to set up an appt to meet with me).

*Phone:* 823-5416

This course will help walk you through scholarly research, with a focus on qualitative research. We will begin with an overview—what is research? What research methods are available? From there we will move to considering how research questions are formulated and methods chosen, to how data is collected and analyzed, and finally to how scholars write about their research. You will also consider issues of ethics and institutional review board approval. In this class, then, we will take up these sorts of questions:

- What types of research are available to scholars studying texts and technology?
- How are research problems and questions made operational and transformed into plans of action?
- What is the relationship between research problems/questions and research design?
- What variety of scholarly reading and writing strategies operate within scholarship in this field?
- What are the limitations of various research and scholarly methods?

### **Course Goals**

- to help you develop a breadth of knowledge about research used to study texts and technology;
- to help you become critical readers of research and scholarship in the field;
- to help you gain experience in posing research questions and planning a research design;
- to give you experience in gaining IRB approval;
- to contribute to your professionalization.

### **Policies**

The purpose of this class is to help you understand scholarly research and practice doing it in a low stakes environment. I've tried to provide the scaffolding for this to happen, but I can't do

it for you. My basic policy is that you treat this like a learning opportunity that will make your dissertation easier, and thus show up, keep up, and be a good colleague.

### Required Texts

- Rossman, Gretchen and Sharon Rallis. *Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Sage, 2003.
- Lauer, Janice and J. William Asher. *Composition Research: Empirical Designs*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.
- Janesick, Valerie. *“Stretching” Exercises for Qualitative Researchers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Sage, 2003.
- Geisler, Cheryl. *Analyzing Streams of Language*. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2003. (This one is out of print, so only buy it if you can get it inexpensively on Amazon)

### Suggested Texts

I’m going to assume that each of you will write a dissertation, and that most of you will continue to conduct research throughout your scholarly lives. If these assumptions are correct, you would probably benefit from acquiring some or all of the following books. We won’t use them directly in class, so whether or not you purchase them is up to you.

- MacArthur, Charles, Steve Graham, and Jill Fitzgerald. *Handbook of Writing Research*. Guilford, 2008.
- Walcott, Harry. *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Sage, 2008.
- Bloomberg, Linda and Marie Volpe. *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation*. Sage, 2008.
- Esterberg, Kristin. *Qualitative Methods in Social Research*. McGraw Hill, 2001.
- Bolker, Joan. *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day*.
- Smagorinsky, Peter, ed. *Research on Composition: Multiple Perspectives on Two Decades of Change*. Teachers College Press, 2005.

### Writing Assignments & Grading

Online postings, discussion, and response as required	25%	Weekly prompts are posted on the discussion board on webcourses. Follow the instructions there. *Note: the online discussion and responses should be complete prior to class on Thursday, preferably by Wed afternoon.*
Research journal	25%	Keep a research notebook in which you respond to the various prompts asking you to brainstorm research topics, questions, and methods, and practice collecting and analyzing data. This should include the <i>Stretching Exercises</i> responses. You should bring this to each class meeting, and be prepared to turn it in at the end of the semester with your research proposal.
Refined research proposal and IRB submission form	50%	During the semester you will practice planning and conducting a pilot “mini-project” related to your area

	<p>of interest. At the end of the semester you will use what you learned to write a 3-5 page “dissertation proposal” (including a short literature review) and fill out the IRB form (you won’t submit the IRB form and this doesn’t need to end up being ; this is just practice).</p>
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Discussion Posts

To receive full credit for your discussion posts, you must: post every week, post on time, post thoughtfully, and respond to another classmate helpfully. I won’t “grade” each discussion post. Instead, I’ll read every week; if I think you are having a problem with your posting, I will contact you privately. At the end of the semester I will count to ensure that you posted all of your posts regularly and thoughtfully.

Research Journal

Your research journal is a writing to learn activity intended to help you figure out how to take notes, keep records, and make thoughtful plans. I won’t take this up and check it, but I expect you to keep up with it every week, as directed on the calendar. In fact, you’ll need to do that in order to make the weekly discussion postings in a useful way. At the end of the semester I will ask for your research journal when you turn in your research proposal. I will give you full credit for this as long as you kept it regularly and appeared to use it as a learning experience. It is entirely up to you how you want the journal to look. The easiest way might be a spiral notebook or binder, but you could also keep this electronically—or do a combination. You will need to keep both observation notes as well as articles and research planning in it, so expect a little chaos.

Refined research proposal and IRB submission form

At the end of the semester you will use everything you learned in order to practice writing a short dissertation proposal/prospectus. Obviously this is highly unlikely to turn out to be your real dissertation prospectus, but I want you to have the opportunity to practice putting one together. So you’ll refine the project you “piloted” during the semester and write a 3-5 page proposal that includes the following: statement of the research problem/topic, background on the issue (other published literature), research question, research methods including site and subjects, and possible data analysis.

You will also experience the joy of translating your research into the IRB forms so that you can be prepared for doing that later. Obviously you should not actually submit your IRB proposal.

You will turn in both your prospectus and everything that you generate for the IRB submission form.

I expect to see a proposal that is carefully thought out. I will look for a short review of the literature (synthesis not summary of perhaps 8-10 sources) that mentions a gap in the existing research that your own research will seek to address. I expect a clearly focused research

question that is manageable, and methods that are appropriate for answering the question. The proposal should be carefully organized (with headings) and should be accessible to someone who is not familiar with your topic. It should also include a correctly formatted works cited page (you can use the citation style most appropriate to your interests).