

Annotated Capstone Subgenres

The Methodology Section

Overview

Now that you've introduced readers to your project's purpose and scope and reviewed the literature surrounding your topic, it's time to describe the specific steps you took to arrive at an answer to your research question. Your Methodology section should answer two main questions: How was data collected or generated? And how was it analyzed? A detailed description of the procedures or techniques used to select and analyze information, as well as how you used this information to thoroughly understand and answer your research question, will allow readers to critically evaluate your research project's credibility. As Thomas Main says in his "Elements of a Capstone Thesis": "simply describe what you did in the course of your research to answer your problem."

Capstones rely on various types of evidence, including *qualitative* evidence, such as responses to interview questions and surveys, and *quantitative* evidence, such as data manipulation. The methodologies you rely on to answer your research question will depend on your specific project, the information and data available, and your other constraints as a researcher. After explaining your data collection process in the Methodology section, you'll present the evidence you uncovered in the Evidence section. Therefore, the Methodology section explains the *how* of your evidence (how you collected it; how you plan to use it) and the Evidence section details the *what* of your findings.

Below are excerpts from the Methodology sections of three Capstones (each of which relies on different research methodologies) annotated to highlight key moves made by writers.

Annotated Model Capstones: Methodology

Excerpt #1: "The Mandatory Inclusionary Housing: Achieving Real Housing Affordability Through The Revision of The Area Median Income Calculation"

This research is based on several methods. I relied on personal interviews including research on local agencies and/or political institutions background and implementations of the inclusionary housing policy. I also refer to my experience as a Project Coordinator for CAMBA HomeBase, a homelessness prevention program that uses the Area Median Income as income eligibility for assistance with housing subsidies vouchers and affordable housing applications. I also draw on information from my involvement with the Land Use and Housing Committee at the Bronx Community Board One of the City of New York, which covers the Area of Mott Haven to Melrose.

The primary research method utilized was personal interviews. Interviews were carried out with the Advisor for Community Affairs of the Office of US Representative Jose E. Serrano (NY-15

The writer begins by describing their affiliation with various housing and homelessness prevention programs. This writer's experience informs how they collected, synthesized, and evaluated the available data.

This second paragraph describes a **qualitative** method of analysis: interviews.

district) and Councilmember Donovan Richards, 31st District. Additional information was obtained from legislative staff of Congresswoman Nita Lowey (NY-17 district), congresswoman Yvette D. Clarke (NY-9 district) and Assemblyman Keith Wright [...]

Other research methods involve analytical review of HUD's statute, the Mayor Office and City Council text laws, Community Boards' texts decisions, congressional legislations texts and records of official testimonies.

Finally, the writer describes how they analyzed various government publications and records.

Except #2: "Smoke and Mirrors: Smoke-Free Policies and the Harms of Eviction in New York City's Public Housing"

The bulk of the research for this paper consists of the aforementioned literature review, which analyzed studies of existing smoke-free policies in individual PHAs, as well as estimations of costs and benefits of a nationwide mandate. To research the effects of the "Smoke-Free NYCHA" policy in NYCHA housing specifically, the author of this paper submitted a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request to NYCHA, inquiring into disciplinary measures taken against NYCHA tenants from the July 30th start date to the present, specifically the number of complaints from other tenants, the number of reports from NYCHA staff, the number of informal hearings, and the number of lease termination proceedings.

The author explains their analysis process for the various papers they included in their literature review.

The writer also describes their process for obtaining and analyzing various NYCHA reports.

Because the existing studies regarding attitudes of NYCHA residents on smoke-free policies were conducted prior to implementation, the author of this paper conducted one qualitative interview with a current non-smoking resident of NYCHA housing to get a sense of current feelings toward apparent effects of the policy post-implementation. The author attempted to conduct multiple interviews but faced limitations in access. Qualitative interview questions included, but were not limited to:

Next, the author explains their interview process and its limitations, detailing which questions they asked and which populations they were able to interview.

1. Are you a smoker or non-smoker?
2. How long have you been living in NYCHA Housing, and what NYCHA property do you live in?
3. What are some of the public health problems you have noticed living in NYCHA housing?
4. Was smoking an issue in your housing before the policy?
5. Were you made aware of the smoke-free policy before it was implemented on July 30th, 2018?
6. What were your feelings about the existence of a smoke-free policy in public housing before it was implemented?

7. Have you seen effects of the policy curbing smoking since implementation?
8. What do you think about the enforcement mechanism of the smoke-free policy?

Given limited resources, this paper includes neither a longitudinal study of secondhand smoke exposure among NYCHA residents, nor a survey with a significant number of respondents on NYCHA residents' perception of the smoke-free policy.

According to the National Institute of Health's Research Portfolio Online Reporting Tools, a related study to evaluate exposure, health outcomes, and implementation is ongoing at New York University. Funded by the National Cancer Institute, researchers Lorna Thorpe and Donna R. Shelley are conducting a study to evaluate health impacts of smoke-free policies in NYCHA housing. This study will monitor environmental tobacco smoke every six months for two and a half years post-policy in 200 apartments of non-smokers and common areas in NYCHA housing before and after policy implementation, and compare it with 200 apartments in demographically similar buildings that are not subject to smoke-free policies (National Health Institute, 2018). This environmental analysis will be supplemented with survey data, qualitative interviews, and focus groups to analyze implementation (National Health Institute, 2018). The study is conducted in partnership with NYCHA and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and results of this study will be used to optimize implementation within NYCHA and to develop guidance for implementing smoke-free policies in other settings (National Health Institute, 2018). Given the longitudinal nature of the Thorpe & Shelley study, the study is not expected to conclude until 2022 (National Health Institute, 2018).

The author briefly acknowledges the limitations and constraints of their methodology.

Finally, the author points toward an in-process study they'll use to answer their research question.

Except #3: "Closing the Digital Divide in New York City: Evaluating Municipal Broadband in New York City to Achieve Universal High-Speed Internet Access"

To determine the feasibility of municipal broadband in New York City, this report relies on numerous studies and in particular examines the municipal broadband deployments in Chattanooga, TN and Lafayette, LA as relevant case studies.

In terms of population size, there are no real comparable examples for New York City to model its own potential network on. However, the examples analyzed for this report are still relevant given the maturity of their networks and similarities in

The author explains how they plan to use comparable case studies to explore the feasibility of building municipal broadband networks in New York City.

The author acknowledges the limitations of existing data while still highlighting the relevancy of available case studies. The author does so by

logistical and cost considerations that New York City would face in its own network build out. Additionally, both case studies included in this report are city-operated FTTH networks – a key consideration since this report is focused on the viability of a similar network in New York City.

pointing out similarities between New York City and the cities analyzed in these reports.

The two municipal broadband networks analyzed in this report are evaluated based on the following criteria:

The author details the criteria they used to evaluate the relevant municipal networks.

- **Connectivity** – did the municipal broadband network increase broadband adoption/access in the market its serving?
- **Speed & Cost** – did the municipal broadband network impact average broadband speeds and/or cost of service for private ISPs in the relevant market?

Economic Impact – what, if any, has been the broader economic impact of the municipal broadband network in the relevant market?

Useful templates and phrases for the Methodology Section

To introduce the methodological approach:

This study uses qualitative analysis in order to gain insights into ...

This investigation utilizes X analysis and statistical methods to ...

A participatory qualitative research approach is employed in this study.

This investigation utilizes an array of assessment techniques to ...

To explain why a particular approach was selected:

A case study approach was used to allow a ...

A quantitative approach was employed since ...

Qualitative methods offer an effective way of ...

The design of the questionnaires was based on ...

The X method is one of the more practical ways of ...

Further resources

Chris, Mario John. "Methodology Section for Research Papers," San José State University Writing Center, <https://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/docs/handouts/Methodology.pdf>

"Describing Methods," Academic Phrasebank, The University of Manchester
<https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/describing-methods/>

"Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper: 6. The Methodology," USC Libraries Research Guides, <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/methodology>

"Qualitative Writing: A Student Guide to Writing with Data," Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute, <https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/blsci/files/2022/07/QuantativeWriting.pdf>