Project two research methods

Bradley Dilger ~ Fall 2014 ~ http://dtext.org/
Scientific researchers use a wide variety of different approaches to collect data used in their research, and research methods can affect the type, amount, and usefulness of data collected. This is true not only in the social sciences but in natural sciences as well. For this reason, researchers must document their methods carefully, or they will be hard-pressed to share their research in a manner which is informative and useful for others—since there's more than one way to do things, knowing *how* results were achieved helps understand *what* they mean or *why* they are important.

Research methods, then, are both plans for expected work, and records of work completed.

Build on your proposal by getting more specific about the methods you will use to learn about your discourse community:

- This not only includes longer-term plans and scheduling of your time, but nuts and bolts: how will you keep track of relevant readings? What equipment will you be using to record audio? How will you take notes?

- The chronology of your methods is very important: what will you be doing first? How will early observations, library research, or interviews shape those which follow?

- Include specific questions you expect to ask and the people you plan to involve. Who is a good target for interviews? Observation? Sharing documents? Why?

- Use the tools we have for understanding context: rhetorical situation (especially genre), discourse communities, and activity theory. Ask questions about the elements of communication they highlight. You shouldn't need to explain a bunch of specifics about discourse communities and activity theory to your partners, but you may need to explain some of your rationale to those you are working with.

In writing research, because of the complexity of the networks which shape writing, it's common for researchers to begin with a plan which has blank spaces filled in along the way. In this sense, researchers return to extend and revise their methods as they go. However, this doesn't mean winging it —but carefully considering the size and shape of those blanks, so to speak, and eliminating as much uncertainty as possible. Once research begins, researchers fill the gaps in as carefully and quickly, in line with expected methods and assumptions.

Create a document which outlines your expected methods in as much detail as you can at this point. Specify what you know, don't know, and will be filling in at a later date. Write out as much as you can — if you will have an "elevator pitch" to ask people to answer questions, write it out. If you expect to write follow-up questions by email, create a template. Etc. You can use blanks or write of generic types in your methods: e.g. "interview questions for a person who can describe the formation of rules and division of labor" or "observe work activities to identify key communication methods."

We will do this in Google Docs to make it easier for me to offer continuing assistance: with an email from you, I can check in to see what you've changed or added. Remember, you are welcome to partner with others to share data, so you should feel free to share your work with others in class as well.

Format and submission

Assignment length: Varies depending on the number and specificity of instruments developed, but at least two pages plus appendixes.

Genre, format, and style: Use an outline—it'll be easiest. Make a link to your project proposal (ask if you need help). Use comments or highlighting to mark sections where you'll be filling in the details later. I suggest you break out things like interview questions as separate sections.

Submission: Due 10/24. Create a Google Doc and share it with cbdilger@gmail.com. Ensure the name follows the format "Lastname ENG 108 Methods," with the appropriate substitution.

Points: 75.

Strategies for successful methods

- ✔ If you need some more time, just ask (<u>in writing, please</u>).

- ✔ Refer to Deans and Driscoll for help — they offer excellent advice. If you need assistance with specific tasks such as conducting interviews or managing data, let me know.

- ✔ While you don't have to stick 100% to the methods you propose, radical changes are a bad idea — so please put in the effort (preliminary research and careful planning) to minimize the chance of that happening.

- ✔ We aren't conducting research for publication. However, we still need to think about the ways we are respecting the people we interview and interact with. Don't take advantage of their time. Write thank-you notes. Consider how you'll tell their stories respectfully — how would *you* want to be written about? Consider when you need to ask their permission to share certain things — and when you should keep things private and change names and details. (Rest assured I will be helping a lot in this regard through my comments on your methods and report drafts.)

- ✔ Consider not only the second assignment — a report which describes your discourse community — but the ways you'll move that to a web presence appropriate for the group you are studying. With that in mind, you'll want to collect visuals to share, and consider how you might present primary sources on the web. Err on the side of too much, rather than too little, material to work with.