Writing mixed methods research articles and theses

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Key arguments

- Integration is the defining feature of mixed methods research.
- If you keep notes/reflections/conclusions etc under topic headings during analysis (regardless of source or method used), your analysis and your writing are likely to become integrated.
Questions to consider

• How is MM different from any other research writing?
• Are you writing with a methods focus or a substantive focus?
• Are you writing alone or collaboratively?
• Who is your audience?
Potential problem areas

• Advice from ‘gurus’ to separately question, analyse, and report before integrating.
• Integrating findings across inter- or multi-disciplinary teams.
• How much do you need to write about paradigms?
• Problem of journal orientations and especially journal word limits.
The problem of journal word limits

• How do you split up your reports?
  – Write a separate methods paper
  – Write an overview paper
  – Divide the topic, not the methods
  – Look for journals that allow longer articles

• Concessions!
  – Sometimes necessary to write separately
    (e.g., clinical trials as a [sometimes] example)
  – Some papers will ‘naturally’ be based more on one
    than the other type of data/method
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Focus/Primary question</th>
<th>Types of data used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bazeley 1998</td>
<td>Who wins prestigious research funding?</td>
<td>Quantified administrative by-product data, supplemented by interviews with panel members, successful researchers and heads of departments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grbich 1998</td>
<td>The effect of departmental socialization on ECR development and productivity</td>
<td>Qualitative (comparative) case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bazeley 1999</td>
<td>Factors predictive of continuity as an active researcher after PhD</td>
<td>Survey of PhD graduates supplemented by survey of ECRs, interviews with ECRs, and responses to public advertising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asmar 1999</td>
<td>Gender and discipline differences in academic ECR experience, post PhD</td>
<td>Survey of PhD graduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsh and Bazeley 1999</td>
<td>Level of agreement in assessor scoring for grant applications</td>
<td>Administrative by-product data (assessor scores) contextualized within other project data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bazeley 2003</td>
<td>Describe and justify a definition for early career status for use by academic research funding bodies</td>
<td>Document analysis (grants schemes), surveys of ECRs and PhD graduates, interviews (multiple sources), responses to public advertising.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus!

What was your purpose?

What question(s) were you asking?

What is the take home message for the reader for *this* publication?

How does it fit into the overall context of the study?

What data do you have to support *this* message?
Framing substantive writing

• Focus on the message, not the method
• Consider the audience
• Needs a clear and progressive structure
  – What does the reader already need to know to understand this point?
  – What do they need to know now to understand what’s coming next?
  – (What are the conventions within your discipline?)
Structure

• Description before comparative and relational analyses
• General before particular
• Theory before application
• Paragraphing:
  – One point per paragraph
  – Topic sentence at start of each paragraph
  – Key words/emphasis at start of each sentence
• Provide linking sentences/paragraphs that create flow without forcing, e.g., picking up a point from previous section and developing it
  (try to avoid: summary ... I will now talk about ...).
The structure of a substantively focused mixed methods paper (Bazeley 2003)

Abstract
The ‘problem’ of early career researchers
Research design [and data sources]
Milestones in an academic research career
  Completion of high level research training
  Obtaining an academic appointment providing a stable research environment
  Balancing the demands of teaching with the need/desire to research
  Maintaining a research profile when promotion brings increased non-research responsibilities
  Achievement of established researcher status
Identifying research potential
  Qualification as a criterion
  Age as a criterion
  Length or stability of employment as a criterion
  The research ‘track record’ as a criterion
A definition for early career
Assessing early career status
Conclusion
Describing methods

• Move from general to particular
• Describe what you actually did rather than rely on labels
• Use diagrams and tables to present or summarise methods (e.g., table - in relation to questions; figure - to show sequencing)
• Be transparent, presenting ‘methods as used’
Presenting results

• Integrate! (otherwise you have not mixed methods!)

• If your paper is substantively (topic) driven, then you divide and organise the content according to a breakdown of the topic: not methods, not sources, not paradigms.
  (even if your study components were conducted separately or sequentially)
Integrate by (for example):

- Using analysis from one method to develop the design or analysis of another.

- Using different methods concurrently and/or iteratively, with data from all managed, interwoven, and analysed in a complementary way, e.g., using Excel tables, QDAS coding, Word headings to sort and bring together.

- Linking quant with qual data and using it to sort qual data for subgroups based on quant (e.g., in QDAS matrices).

- Converting codes to variables and using stats analysis to complement qual analysis.

- Exploring divergent and extreme cases; also investigating dissonance/conflict by drawing on other data.

- Developing causal models that build on statistical regularities combined with interpretive understanding of causal mechanisms.
Additional strategies

• Juxtapose statistical and text data (report side by side) – “marbling...like good pastrami” (Greene, 2007)
• Convey results using different modes of representation (e.g., text, poetry/verse, stories, pictures, graphs, tables etc.)
• Present alternative accounts conveying different understandings of the same event or situation (then analyse, explain, coordinate)
Strategies (cont.)

• Integrate using a (borrowed) theoretical perspective
• Use metaphors and narratives as means of integrating ideas
• Use tables and displays
Using Word’s features to help

• Using styles:
  – To hyperlink to ‘drop’ ideas (use the document map)
  – To create and see structure (again, using document map or outline view)
  – For efficiency (to standardise formatting)
• Create styles for each repetitive feature (of any sort)
• Learn how to format tables correctly
• Using autocorrect for repetitive words/phrases
• Use EndNote (or equivalent) for referencing.
Key message: Organise a substantive mixed methods article around issues related to the substantive topic.

• *Writing as you go* prompts questions that will enrich your analysis
  (Laurel Richardson: Writing as analysis, in D&L).

• If you *write as you analyse*, you will better integrate both your analysis and your writing.
MMIRA

Mixed Methods International Research Association

• MMIRA aims to create an international community to promote and support interdisciplinary mixed methods research

• Vision includes bringing together diverse communities of scholars, students, practitioners, policymakers, citizens, and other stakeholders, with the goals of expanding knowledge and producing social betterment and social and global justice

• Support provided through regional and international conferences, newsletters, website resources, etc. Membership includes electronic access to Journal of Mixed Methods Research

Further info: www.mmira.org
This book goes beyond mixed methods research design and data collection to provide a pragmatic discussion of the challenges of effectively integrating data to facilitate a more comprehensive and rigorous level of analysis. Showcasing a range of strategies for integrating different sources and forms of data as well as different approaches in analysis, it will help you plan, conduct, and disseminate complex analyses with confidence.