

Book review

***Real World Research. Second edition.*
by Colin Robson. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002**

Robson published the original book in 1993, and at the time it was an immediate success and 'bestseller' within the genre. In the first edition he managed to bring to life the task of doing 'real world' research, and offered a readable, rigorous, relevant and extremely comprehensive basic text on research methods. One of the recommendations from the back cover is apposite here:

'Second editions, like movie sequels, rarely surpass the originals. Real World Research is a stunning exception. Robson has brilliantly expanded and revised what was already the best book on how to actually do research in applied settings' (Joseph Maxwell, George Mason University)

The book has been thoroughly revised and brought up to date, including a large number of new references. Other additions and revisions include:

- New examples drawn from a wider range of applied fields
- Greater emphasis on flexible designs using largely qualitative methods
- Critical discussion of randomised control trials (RCTs) and statistical significance testing
- Additional material on combining qualitative and quantitative approaches
- Additional material on tests and test theory

At a time when there has been renewed interest in combining qualitative and quantitative approaches and breaking down earlier barriers between them, and a time when there is great interest in the possibilities of RCTs and the need for 'evidence-based' policy, this book provides a welcome and very readable account of some of the very real issues for real world researchers. The book takes the reader through some of the issues involved in undertaking research and the different approaches to social research, discusses the importance of developing research questions and the place of theory in this task; these sections are followed by substantial sections on design, data collection, data analysis, and dissemination. Each chapter is followed by useful further readings. This book seems to succeed in making quantitative approaches accessible and sympathetic to those committed to qualitative research and vice versa. Although it is an excellent introductory methods volume, which I would recommend that research students buy in their first year, it will prove of lasting value at least as long as a possible third edition which might appear 10 years from now. It is one of those books that can be read again and again, can be dipped into for reference, and provides an excellent resource for any research student who needs to explain or even go on to teach basic research methods.

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