- Discuss steps taken to gain entry to the setting and to secure permission to study the participants or situation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). It is important to gain access to research or archival sites by seeking the approval of **gatekeepers**, individuals at the research site that provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to be done. A brief proposal might need to be developed and submitted for review by gatekeepers. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) advance topics that could be addressed in such a proposal:
  - Why was the site chosen for study?
  - What activities will occur at the site during the research study?
  - Will the study be disruptive?
  - How will the results be reported?
  - What will the gatekeeper gain from the study?
- Comment about sensitive ethical issues that may arise (see Chapter 3, and Berg, 2001). For each issue raised, discuss how the research study will address it. For example, when studying a sensitive topic, it is necessary to mask names of people, places, and activities. In this situation, the process for masking information requires discussion in the proposal.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Comments about the role of the researcher set the stage for discussion of issues involved in collecting data. The data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured or semistructured observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information.

- Identify the *purposefully selected* sites or individuals for the proposed study. The idea behind qualitative research is to **purposefully select** participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question. This does not necessarily suggest random sampling or selection of a large number of participants and sites, as typically found in *quantitative* research. A discussion about participants and site might include four aspects identified by Miles and Huberman (1994): the *setting* (where the research will take place), the *actors* (who will be observed or interviewed), the *events* (what the actors will be observed or interviewed doing), and the *process* (the evolving nature of events undertaken by the actors within the setting).
- Indicate the type or types of data to be collected. In many qualitative studies, inquirers collect multiple forms of data and spend a considerable time in the natural setting gathering information. The collection procedures in qualitative research involve four basic types, as shown in Table 9.2.

Table 9.2 Qualitative Data Collection Types, Options, Advantages, and Limitations

Data Collection Types	Options Within Types	Advantages of the Type	Limitations of the Type
Observations	• Complete participant—researcher conceals role • Observer as participant—role of researcher is known • Participant as observer—observation role secondary to participant role • Complete observer—researcher observes without participating	• Researcher has a first-hand experience with participant. • Researcher can record information as it occurs. • Unusual aspects can be noticed during observation. • Useful in exploring topics that may be uncomfortable for participants to discuss.	• Researcher may be seen as intrusive. • Private information may be observed that researcher cannot report. • Researcher may not have good attending and observing skills. • Certain participants (e.g., children) may present special problems in gaining rapport.
Interviews	• Face-to-face—one-on-one, in-person interview • Telephone—researcher interviews by phone • Focus group—researcher interviews participants in a group • E-mail internet interview	• Useful when participants cannot be directly observed. • Participants can provide historical information. • Allows researcher control over the line of questioning.	• Provides indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees. • Provides information in a designated place rather than the natural field setting. • Researcher's presence may bias responses. • Not all people are equally articulate and perceptive.

(Continued)

Table 9.2 (Continued)

Data Collection Types	Options Within Types	Advantages of the Type	Limitations of the Type
Documents	• Public documents, such as minutes of meetings, or newspapers • Private documents, such as journals, diaries, or letters	• Enables a researcher to obtain the language and words of participants. • Can be accessed at a time convenient to researcher—an unobtrusive source of information. • Represents data which are thoughtful in that participants have given attention to compiling them. • As written evidence, it saves a researcher the time and expense of transcribing.	• Not all people are equally articulate and perceptive. • May be protected information unavailable to public or private access. • Requires the researcher to search out the information in hard-to-find places. • Requires transcribing or optically scanning for computer entry. • Materials may be incomplete. • The documents may not be authentic or accurate.
Audio-Visual Materials	• Photographs • Videotapes • Art objects • Computer software • Film	• May be an unobtrusive method of collecting data. • Provides an opportunity for participants to directly share their reality. • It is creative in that it captures attention visually.	• May be difficult to interpret. • May not be accessible publicly or privately. • The presence of an observer (e.g., photographer) may be disruptive and affect responses.

NOTE: This table includes material taken from Merriam (1998), Bogdan & Biklen (1992), and Creswell (2007).

- **Qualitative observations** are those in which the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site. In these field notes, the researcher records, in an unstructured or semistructured way (using some prior questions that the inquirer wants to know), activities at the research site. Qualitative observers may also engage in roles varying from a non-participant to a complete participant.
- In **qualitative interviews**, the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants, interviews participants by telephone, or engages in focus group interviews, with six to eight interviewees in each group. These interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants.
- During the process of research, the investigator may collect **qualitative documents**. These may be public documents (e.g., newspapers, minutes of meetings, official reports) or private documents (e.g., personal journals and diaries, letters, e-mails).
- A final category of qualitative data consists of **qualitative audio and visual materials**. This data may take the form of photographs, art objects, videotapes, or any forms of sound.

- In a discussion about data collection forms, be specific about the types and include arguments concerning the strengths and weaknesses of each type, as discussed in Table 9.2.

- Include data collection types that go beyond typical observations and interviews. These unusual forms create reader interest in a proposal and can capture useful information that observations and interviews may miss. For example, examine the compendium of types of data in Table 9.3 that can be used, to stretch the imagination about possibilities, such as gathering sounds or tastes, or using cherished items to elicit comments during an interview.

DATA RECORDING PROCEDURES

Before entering the field, qualitative researchers plan their approach to data recording. The proposal should identify what data the researcher will record and the procedures for recording data.

- Use a *protocol* for recording observational data. Researchers often engage in multiple observations during the course of a qualitative study and use an **observational protocol** for recording information while observing. This may be a single page with a dividing line down the middle to separate *descriptive notes* (portraits of the participants, a reconstruction of dialogue, a description of the physical setting, accounts of particular

Table 9.3 A List of Qualitative Data Collection Approaches

Observations
• Gather field notes by conducting an observation as a participant. • Gather field notes by conducting an observation as an observer. • Gather field notes by spending more time as a participant than as an observer. • Gather field notes by spending more time as an observer than as a participant. • Gather field notes first by observing as an outsider and then moving into the setting and observing as an insider.
Interviews
• Conduct an unstructured, open-ended interview and take interview notes. • Conduct an unstructured, open-ended interview, audiotape the interview, and transcribe it. • Conduct a semistructured interview, audiotape the interview, and transcribe the interview. • Conduct a focus group interview, audiotape the interview, and transcribe it. • Conduct different types of interviews: email, face-to-face, focus group, online focus group, telephone interviews
Documents
• Keep a journal during the research study. • Have a participant keep a journal or diary during the research study. • Collect personal letters from participants. • Analyze public documents (e.g., official memos, minutes, records, archival material). • Examine autobiographies and biographies. • Have participants take photographs or videotapes (i.e., photo elicitation). • Chart audits • Medical records
Audio-visual Materials
• Examine physical trace evidence (e.g., footprints in the snow). • Videotape or film a social situation or an individual or group. • Examine photographs or videotapes. • Collect sounds (e.g., musical sounds, a child's laughter, car horns honking). • Collect e-mail messages. • Collect cell phone text messages. • Examine possessions or ritual objects. • Collect sounds, smells, tastes, or any stimuli of the senses.

SOURCE: Adapted from Creswell (2007).

events, or activities) from *reflective notes* (the researcher's personal thoughts, such as "speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices" Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 121). Also written on this form might be *demographic information* about the time, place, and date of the field setting where the observation takes place.

● Use an **interview protocol** for asking questions and recording answers during a qualitative interview. This protocol includes the following components:

- A heading (date, place, interviewer, interviewee)
- Instructions for the interviewer to follow so that standard procedures are used from one interview to another
- The questions (typically an ice-breaker question at the beginning followed by 4–5 questions that are often the subquestions in a qualitative research plan, followed by some concluding statement or a question, such as, "Who should I visit with to learn more about my questions?"
- Probes for the 4–5 questions, to follow up and ask individuals to explain their ideas in more detail or to elaborate on what they have said
- Space between the questions to record responses
- A final thank-you statement to acknowledge the time the interviewee spent during the interview (see Creswell, 2007)

● Researchers record information from interviews by making handwritten notes, by audiotaping, or by videotaping. Even if an interview is taped, I recommend that researchers take notes, in the event that recording equipment fails. If audiotaping is used, researchers need to plan in advance for the transcription of the tape.

● The recording of documents and visual materials can be based on the researcher's structure for taking notes. Typically, notes reflect information about the document or other material as well as key ideas in the documents. It is helpful to note whether the information represents primary material (i.e., information directly from the people or situation under study) or secondary material (i.e., secondhand accounts of the people or situation written by others). It is also helpful to comment on the reliability and value of the data source.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Discussion of the plan for analyzing the data might have several components. The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data (some qualitative researchers like to think of this as peeling back the layers of an onion), representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. Several generic processes might be stated