Course Journal

YOUR NAME

2025-12-02

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1 Journal Home

This journal renders as a **book**. Each dated entry is a chapter.

- **MC 451 entries:** 250–300 words
- At the **end of each chapter** you'll see **three prompts**. **Answer only one**.
- Write your answer in the **Response** box; the page shows an **automatic word count** and whether you're in range.

1.0.1 Add a new entry

1. In R, run: `source("scripts/new_journal_entry.R")`
2. A new chapter like `entries/2025-09-01.qmd` appears with three prompts injected.
3. The script updates `_quarto.yml` so the new entry is included in the book.
4. Render the book: click **Render** in RStudio or run `quarto render`.

2 2025-09-04

2.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt A: Think of a media-related issue or question you find interesting (e.g., misinformation on social media, representation in film, streaming habits). Now imagine researching that issue without using any theory—just collecting facts. What would be missing from your findings? Reflect on how theory might deepen or improve your ability to explain or understand the issue. What questions might theory help you ask?

2.2 Response

A media-related issue I find interesting and have considered writing about in the newspaper is how diversity is currently being displayed in movies and shows. Many of times, it feels like filmmakers and showrunners add a "diverse" character to check some sort of box or put them as a side character instead of writing them real, meaningful parts. If I were to research this without any theory, I would probably be collecting a lot of numbers. Such as, the ratio of diversity among casts, how many characters are from such and such backgrounds, but other than that, I am not sure what else can be done. The bigger picture would be what's missing. How does that representation come across to audiences? Do they feel a certain movie or TV show had meaningful diversity or did it seem forced? Is said person a part of said diverse group? Without theory, there wouldn't be a way to explain how people respond or the impact of what they are watching. Theory can help ask and explain how authentic representation might change how an audience connects with a piece of media and how stories are told. It can also raise questions like why do some portrayals feel forced, how "token" characters effect the viewing experience and what role does culture or the industry play in shaping the representation we see. Using theory allows for the research to go beyond just counting and instead actually showing the effects of diversity on audiences and storytelling.

2.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 251

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: In range

3 2025-09-08

3.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt A: Think about a claim you've seen online that you weren't sure was true. How would the principles of empiricism and control help you design a study to test whether it was accurate?

3.2 Response

I had seen a post online with text stating something along the lines of, "Those who only get 5 hours of sleep a night can risk health problems as they get older." While I didn't do any further research into the validity of this statement at the time, by using empiricism you could perhaps find observable evidence by using data from people's sleeping patterns and habits and then tracking those to different health outcomes. This allows you to rely only on factual evidence instead of just taking something at face value. Being objective removes bias from the data, like your own sleep habits and helps ensure that the results reflect what is actually happening rather than your own bias having influence. Determinism can then be used to show that health problems do or do not have identifiable causes, as in this case, consistently getting too little sleep. Control could account for all of the other variables that may have impacts on one's sleep, like age, diet, stress level or other factors. Then, whether they effect health outcomes and the link between sleep and health issues. For instance, comparing people who average 5 hours of sleep with those who average around 8 hours, all while controlling for these other factors, to see if differences in health outcomes show up. By applying all of these principles, you can make a full, well-rounded study to test whether a claim is true instead of just believing what you see right off the bat.

3.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 252

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: In range

4 2025-09-08

4.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt B: Imagine you are researching a public social media platform like X (formerly Twitter), Reddit, or TikTok. Would you consider the content you're analyzing to be public or private? Would you need to obtain informed consent? Why or why not? Reflect on the ethical gray areas that emerge in digital research and how you would navigate them.

4.2 Response

I would consider the content I am analyzing to be public information. Users are broadcasting their thoughts and opinions for everyone to see, so anything that is shared publicly is open to be analyzed by the public. I don't think informed consent would be necessary in this area. You're not pulling someone off the street and asking them to take part in an experiment — you're essentially using data that is already available online. While it may be polite to ask users for permission and or credit them in certain cases, the content is already accessible to everyone. If the information is only being used to calculate a statistic, I don't think permission or accreditation would be necessary at all, since the focus is on the data rather than the individual. The ethical gray area comes in how the information is used. As stated above, it depends on whether you are using someone as a source or as a percentage. Crediting the user when appropriate shows respect for their content, but direct quoting could risk identifying the user in ways that may be harmful depending on the nature of what was posted. Researchers just need to be mindful about how/how much information they share. The content may be public, but researchers should have a responsibility to avoid causing unnecessary harm to the user.

4.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 227

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: Out of range

5 2025-09-15

5.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt C: In your own words, explain the difference between an annotated bibliography and a proper literature review. Why is that difference significant? Reflect on a time when you had to summarize multiple sources for a paper or project. Did you organize those sources thematically, or treat each one individually? Looking ahead, how will your approach change when writing your literature review?

5.2 Response

An annotated bibliography is basically sources with a short explanation for each of them. On the other hand, a literature review is more about giving a larger view, maybe even like storytelling, about the research and how the sources connect, including themes and things of that sort. I would say it's much more detailed and involved than an annotated bibliography.

Honestly, I can't remember a time I summarized multiple sources. I am kind of used to academic journal writing, basically letting all of the citations do the talking and adding a bit of my own details. I guess, if I had to relate it to this, maybe when researching for a presentation? Going through multiple sources to first understand the information, make sure it lines up with others, and then trying to put it in my own words in a way that makes sense to me. I would say, regardless, I organize them thematically — it just makes the most sense and keeps everything organized on the document and in my head.

I think organization is the best way to take on any long writing endeavor. I personally like to use one document for everything or a note on my computer so everything is in one space, using red text to separate things I need to fix, work on or just notes. But at this moment, I can't think of anything I would do differently to do a review more succinctly.

5.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 243

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: Out of range

6 2025-09-22

6.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt A: Think of a broad media-related topic you've been curious about—something like influencer culture, algorithmic feeds, or news bias. Now, imagine you're preparing to research this topic. Would you start with a research question or a hypothesis? Why? Reflect on how much you already know (or don't know) about the topic, and how that affects whether exploration or prediction is the better fit.

6.2 Response

If I was preparing a media related research topic, for this sake, influencer culture, I think I would begin with a research question.

A research question is more open ended, it's more broad, which also makes sense for a topic that is still new in many ways and constantly changing, evolving. Influencers hold an immense amount of power. They shape trends and industries, are able to build personal connections unlike other models that allow them to persuade on more than just products or services, but social issues we are now seeing. While I feel like I have a decent grasp on the topic, I still don't think I know enough to confidently make a prediction at the very beginning.

Starting with a hypothesis would mean having a specific expectation already in mind, which I don't — like "influencers directly increase a consumer's trust in products." That kind of prediction assumes I already have a strong base of knowledge about influencer culture and how it operates. But, I only know general things, not enough to jump straight into testing specific things.

So, by starting with a research question, I can dig deeper into areas I don't fully understand yet. A question like "How do influencers shape audience trust in products?" or "What role do influencers play in shaping foreseeable trends?" helps as a sort of guide for the research while letting actual facts speak for itself if that makes sense.

6.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 243

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: Out of range

7 2025-09-29

7.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt B: Imagine you are planning a study on how college students interact with AI tools like ChatGPT. Would you choose a probability sampling method or a non-probability one? Why? Consider your research goals—do you want to generalize to all college students or understand a specific group more deeply? Explain your choice and what trade-offs it involves in terms of access, time, cost, and generalizability.

7.2 Response

For starters, I think I would probably choose a probability sampling method since it will be random and can more accurately reflect the college pool. Since the goal is to understand how students interact with AI tools, probability sampling wouldn't just reflect those who already use the tools, which isn't realistic.

The question of understanding a "specific group more deeply" doesn't raise any curiosities for me about certain majors or programs, although I would be interested in which genders use it more frequently and for what purposes, especially with research recently showing women are more likely to have AI "partners."

The trade-off is that a lot of students probably wouldn't want to provide a sample, even if told it's anonymous, out of fear of academic issues or outing themselves in some way. I know when I saw an AI survey come into my .edu email, my reaction was "nah," so participation would definitely be a challenge. And because I'd want the data to be generalized, it would probably be harder to find people than if I were just asking my friends and my friends' friends. But to get actually meaningful results, I think the data needs to reflect the wider college student population.

7.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 209

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: Out of range

8 2025-10-05

8.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt B: Select one of the following concepts: political engagement, body image, media literacy, or interpersonal trust. First, write a short conceptual definition for the term in your own words. Then, brainstorm 2–3 specific ways a researcher might operationalize that concept. What kinds of survey questions, observational criteria, or behavioral measures might capture it? How do your choices shape what "counts" as evidence?

8.2 Response

I would define body image as how one sees or feels about their body. It can be positive or negative, based on what you think about how you look and the response you have to that, like how confident or insecure you are. A researcher may "operationalize" the concept by surveying how satisfied someone feels in their body and if they ever compare their appearance to others online. They could also look at behavior patterns, like whether you upload photos without a second thought or heavily edit them to make an idealized version of yourself. A survey shows what people will admit they think or feel about their bodies, while observing behavior can show what people might not say, since actions often speak truth. How you measure body image will shape what counts as evidence.

8.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 135

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: Out of range

9 2025-10-13

9.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt C: Why do you think people often ignore or skip surveys? From your perspective as both a respondent and future researcher, what strategies would make you more likely to complete a survey? How do your answers shape the way researchers must think about sampling and nonresponse?

9.2 Response

I think people often ignore or skip surveys because they feel it's pointless or just a waste of time. A lot of surveys are long, tedious or repetitive, and it's easy to want to call it quits after a few boring minutes. I also think some people worry about privacy, especially when a survey claims to be anonymous but asks for your personal information. For many, it might also be that they feel their opinion doesn't matter or that they don't know enough about the topic for their response to be helpful.

From my perspective as both a respondent and a future researcher, the biggest thing that would make me more likely to complete a survey is simplicity. Keeping it short, clear and to the point makes a big difference. Incentives help too, even something small like being entered into a $15 gift card drawing can go a long way. I also think a survey that looks clean, professional and is easy to navigate or access makes people more likely to finish it.

If a survey is too long or boring, certain kinds of people might not respond, which can make the results less accurate. Because of that, researchers need to do what they can to make surveys engaging and easy to complete. They also need to make sure they are reaching out to enough people and making sure different types of participants are represented.

9.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 239

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: Out of range

10 2025-10-20

10.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt B: Choose a communication-related research question you're interested in (e.g., "Does political meme exposure influence voting confidence?"). Then briefly describe how you might set up a simple experiment to test that question. What would you manipulate? What would you measure? How would random assignment help strengthen your conclusions?

10.2 Response

We have discussed this a little bit in class, but does a politician having a humorous social media presence help them with young voters? To test this question, I would create an online experiment where participants are tasked with viewing two fake politicians' Instagram accounts. Both post about the same political issues and policies, but one uses Reels with trending audios and humorous captions, while the other maintains a more traditional and serious tone. The manipulated variable in this experiment is the politician's social media tone. After viewing the posts, participants would complete a short survey measuring each politician's likability, trustworthiness and voting appeal. EX: "I find this candidate relatable," "I would consider voting for this candidate" and "I trust this politician's judgment," rated on a 1–5 scale. Higher scores would indicate a more positive perception of the candidate. What would be measured are the participants' overall attitudes toward the candidates and their willingness to support them as the goal is to see if the more humorous candidate is rated as more likable and relatable among younger people, potentially increasing voting appeal. Random assignment may actually have some positive and negative impacts. Unless the experiment includes politicians from different parties to cater to the different political preferences, people may be led by their bias instead of focusing on the topic at hand. Otherwise, it's helpful to show whether the politician's tone, not the participant's existing opinions, is what actually causes the difference in perception.

10.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 251

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: In range

11 2025-10-27

11.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt A: Think about a media environment you engage with regularly—TikTok, news headlines, TV dramas, YouTube comments, etc. Choose one and describe a research question that could be answered through content analysis. What would you want to measure? Would you be more interested in manifest content (what's there) or latent content (the underlying tone or message), and why?

11.2 Response

To begin, my research question would be how often influencers use appeals like confidence, self-love or female empowerment to promote products in sponsored posts. I would measure how often this kind of emotionally driven language is used, like phrases that promote positive self-image, and how followers respond. In this scenario, I would be more interested in the latent content because I'd be analyzing the underlying tone of how influencers subtly create an emotional connection to entice followers to purchase what they're promoting, rather than focusing on surface-level product features in a post.

By doing such an analysis, social media marketing strategies could reveal how product promotion has shifted from simply having a lot of followers and people wanting something because you have it, to focusing more on emotional relatability and connection. Large follower counts don't hold the same power they once did — followers now value authenticity over popularity. Many influencers market themselves as genuine and almost like a friend, so appeals to empowerment or self-love feel more personal to their followers. Understanding these patterns could help explain how influencers build trust and loyalty while still encouraging consumer behavior, and show how there has been a real shift in what drives people to buy things online.

11.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 208

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: Out of range

12 2025-11-03

12.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt C: The chapter argues that wrangling is not just technical work—it's interpretive. Think about a time you had to make a judgment call while organizing information (e.g., editing a document, categorizing files, formatting content). How might similar interpretive choices show up in data wrangling? How does this shape the final story your data tells?

12.2 Response

Each week, for every class, I am organizing and formatting my notes, making interpretative decisions. Deciding which information is important enough to be bolded, where I should section off certain topics and just general rearranging so I can easily read or scan my notes and find things without strain. I'm constantly making judgment calls about what matters most, what connects to what and how to represent that visually. I decide when something deserves its own section or when a topic should stay within the same category.

I suppose, in a way, that is similar to data wrangling. When someone is structuring data, they aren't really just doing technical work, they're making interpretive choices about what is relevant and how to group things. I might choose to highlight a concept that seems most important for understanding a class lecture, and a person wrangling data might decide which variables are worth keeping in their dataset. Both shape a final project, just in different ways.

12.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 0

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: Out of range

13 2025-11-10

13.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt B: Describe a time when a graph or chart helped you understand something better than a list of numbers could. What did the visual help reveal? Based on this chapter, which principle of good visualization do you think was at work? If you've seen a bad graph or misleading chart, describe that too—and explain what could have made it clearer.

13.2 Response

I would say always — regardless of the circumstance — a graph or chart helps me understand something better than numbers alone. I've never really been someone who can just look at a list of numbers (or anything math related) and instantly grasp what they mean, if that makes sense. When information is visualized, I'm able to decipher it quicker and easier. For example, in my criminal justice class the other week, we did a coin flip test with the entire class. The professor wrote all the results on the board in a long line of numbers. Not only did it feel disorganized, but it also made it hard to see any sort of pattern. It would have been much easier to understand if it had been displayed as a bar graph or scatterplot showing the frequencies and distribution of results.

Regarding the principle of good visualization, I'd say clarity was at play? For me, a good visual is organized so the information is immediately clear and easy on the eyes. I can't recall a bad graph or misleading chart, but a pie chart that adds up to over 100% or uses too many thin slices would probably fall under "bad," or at least unhelpful.

13.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 207

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: Out of range

14 2025-11-17

14.1 Choose one prompt to answer

Prompt A: This chapter describes inference as a "leap" from sample to population. Reflect on what makes that leap trustworthy—or risky. Why is it not enough to observe a pattern in your sample? How does hypothesis testing help, and what limits remain even when your results are statistically significant?

14.2 Response

Inference is described as a "leap" from a sample to a population because you're looking at a small group of people and are trying to figure out what might be true for a much larger group of people. That leap only works if the sample actually represents the population. If the sample is too small or not balanced, the jump becomes risky. That's why just noticing a pattern in your sample isn't enough. A pattern might look authentic, but it may be a coincidence or something unique to that specific group of people.

Hypothesis testing helps because it gives you a way to check whether the pattern you found is likely to be real or just chance. Instead of assuming the difference you see matters, hypothesis testing basically asks, "How likely is it that this result happened by coincidence?" If the answer is "not very likely," then the result is statistically significant, meaning it might actually say something about the whole population.

Even with significance, there are limits. A significant result doesn't automatically make your finding meaningful and it doesn't fix a sample that wasn't representative in the first place. Tests can still lead you in the wrong direction and sometimes results that look solid won't hold up when repeated. So, inference is important and useful, but there's always some uncertainty when you try to make that jump from a small group to an entire population.

14.3 Word Count & Range Check

Word count: 244

Required range (MC451): 250-300 words

Status: Out of range