**HOW TO WRITE A METHODS SECTION**

The main goal of the methods section is to explain to the reader---in enough detail that they could reproduce what you did---how you will answer your research questions.

Below are the basic things you should cover in the methods section.

1. **What data will you use (and why?)**

If you are using existing/secondary data: Name and describe the data source. How was the data collected? How is the sample restricted?

If you are collecting your own data: How were the sample members chosen? How were observations or interviews conducted? By whom and in what setting? How were data recorded?

Discuss strengths/weaknesses of these data vs. vs. alternative options

1. **How will you measure every concept?**

Cover every concept in every question … how precisely will you measure everything?

Discuss strengths/weaknesses vs. alternative measures

1. **What analytic methods will you use to answer each research question?**

Go question by question and provide details about how the question will be answered; what will you look for in the data to answer the questions?

Discuss strengths/weaknesses (vs. alternative ways of answering the question (e.g., what are the pros and cons of your approach?)

1. **What problems do you anticipate and how will you overcome them?**

Outline threats to obtaining valid results

How will each be overcome?

When they are done with your methods section, the reader should be able to clearly understand exactly how you will answer all of your research questions. They should also understand your reasoning for making the choices that you did (e.g., about why you measured things the way you did, why you used these data and not others).

Of course, the methods section should be clearly and logically written. The reader should never have to wonder where you are going with your explanations/descriptions or why they are reading certain passages**. I strongly suggest you look closely at the methods sections of several published papers for examples; don’t focus on their substance as much as on their structure, logical flow, and organization.**