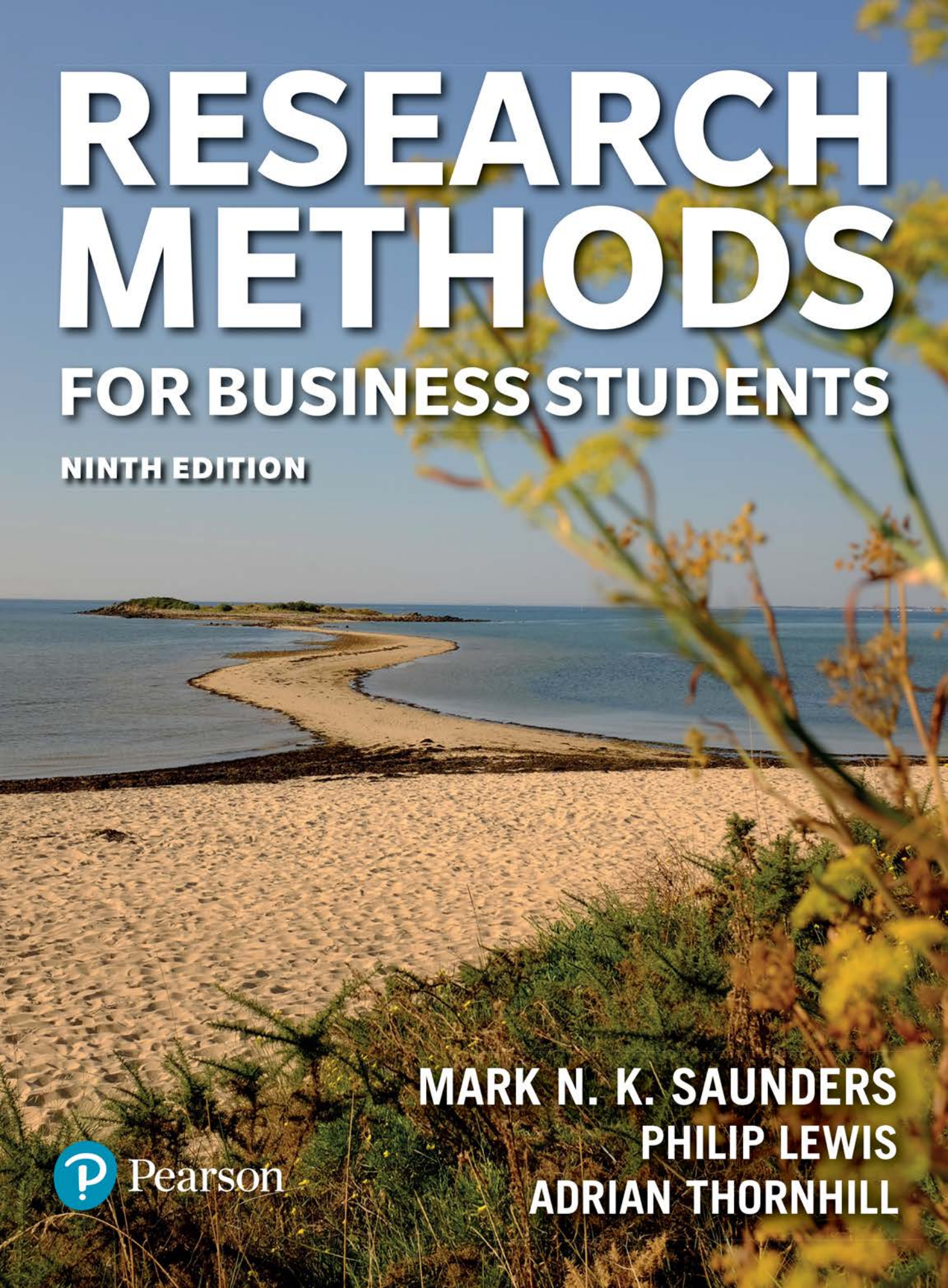
RESEARCH METHODS

FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS

NINTH EDITION



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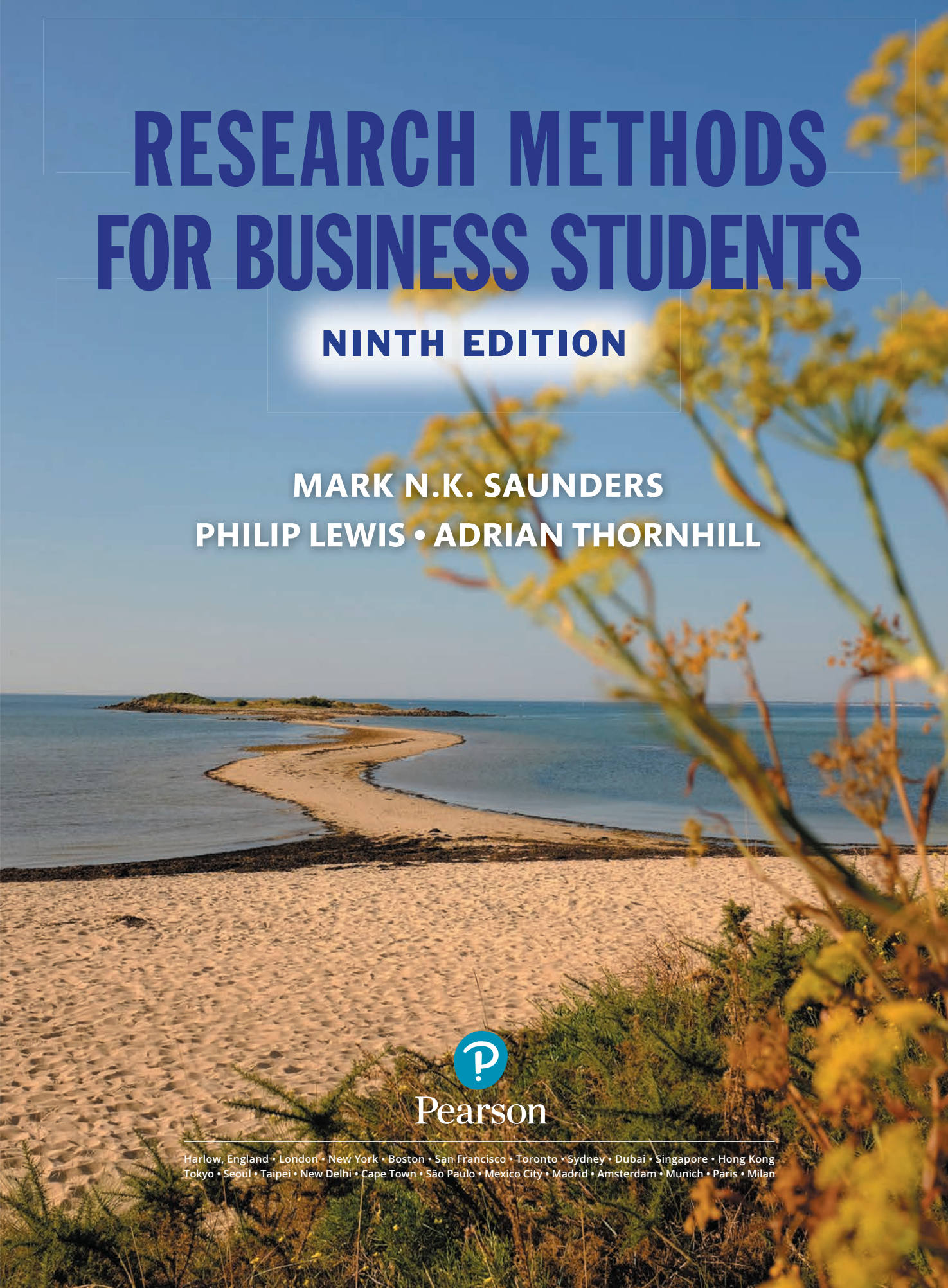

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NINTH EDITION

MARK N.K. SAUNDERS
PHILIP LEWIS • ADRIAN THORNHILL

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PEARSON EDUCATION LIMITED
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KAO Park
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Tel: +44 (0)1279 623623
Web: www.pearson.com

First published under the Pitman Publishing imprint in 1997
Then published 2000, 2003, 2007, 20009, 2012 (print), 2016, 2019 (print and electronic)
Ninth edition published 2023 (print and electronic)

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© Pearson Education Limited 2000, 2003, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016
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ISBN: 978-1-292-40272-7 (print)
978-1-292-40273-4 (PDF)
978-1-292-40274-1 (ePub)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for the print edition is available from the British Library

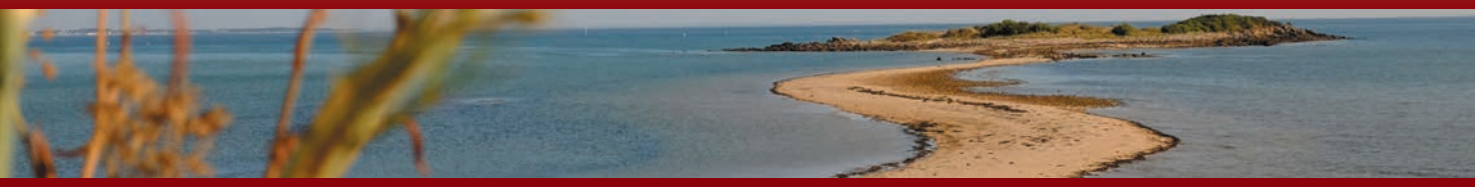
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Saunders, M. N. K., author. | Lewis, Philip, 1945- author | Thornhill, Adrian, author
Title: Research methods for business students / Mark N. K. Saunders, Philip Lewis, Adrian Thornhill.
Description: Ninth edition. | Harlow, England ; New York : Pearson, 2023. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2022042532 (print) | LCCN 2022042533 (ebook) | ISBN 9781292402727 (paperback) | ISBN 9781292402734 (pdf) | ISBN 9781292402741 (epub)
Subjects: LCSH: Business—Research. | Business—Research—Data processing.
Classification: LCC HD30.4 .S28 2023 (print) | LCC HD30.4 (ebook) | DDC 650.072—dc23/eng/20221107
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022042532
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022042533

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
27 26 25 24 23

Cover design: Michelle Morgan
Cover image: © 2022 Mark N.K. Saunders, Île de Stuhan, La Trinité-sur-Mer, Brittany, France

Print edition typeset in 9.5/12 ITC Slimbach Std by Straive
Printed in Slovakia by Neografia

NOTE THAT ANY PAGE CROSS REFERENCES REFER TO THE PRINT EDITION



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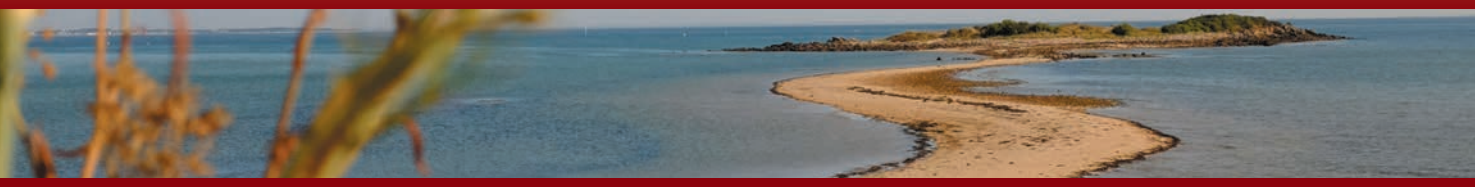

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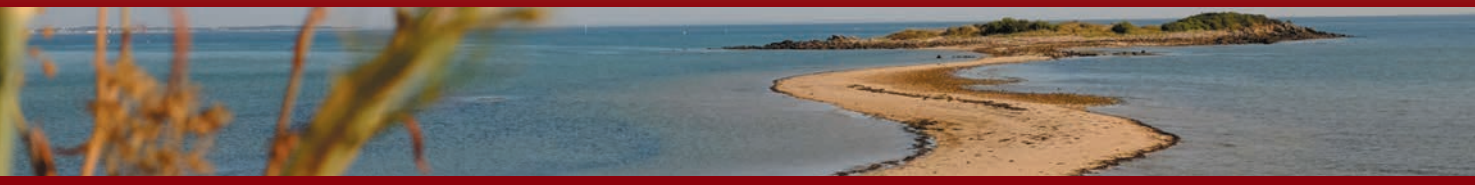

How to use this book

This book is written with a progressive logic, which means that terms and concepts are defined when they are first introduced. One implication of this is that it is sensible for you to start at the beginning and to work your way through the text, various boxes, self-check questions, review and discussion questions, case studies and case study questions. You can do this in a variety of ways depending on your reasons for using this book. However, this approach may not be suitable for your purposes, and you may wish to read the chapters in a different order or just dip into particular sections of the book. If this is true for you then you will probably need to use the glossary to check that you understand some of the terms and concepts used in the chapters you read. Suggestions for three of the more common ways in which you might wish to use this book follow.

As part of a research methods course or for self-study for your research project

If you are using this book as part of a research methods course the order in which you read the chapters is likely to be prescribed by your tutors and dependent upon their perceptions of your needs. Conversely, if you are pursuing a course of self-study for your research project, dissertation or consultancy report, the order in which you read the chapters is your own choice. However, whichever of these you are, we would argue that the order in which you read the chapters is dependent upon your recent academic experience.

For many students, such as those taking an undergraduate degree in business or management, the research methods course and associated project, dissertation or consultancy report comes in either the second or the final year of study. In such situations it is probable that you will follow the chapter order quite closely (see Figure P.1). Groups of chapters within which we believe you can switch the order without affecting the logic of the flow too much are shown on the same level in this diagram and are:

- those associated with obtaining or collecting data (Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11);
- those associated with data analysis (Chapters 12 and 13).

Within the book we emphasise the importance of beginning to write early on in the research process as a way of clarifying your thoughts. In Chapter 1 we encourage you to keep a reflective diary, notebook or journal throughout the research process so it is helpful to read this chapter early on. We recommend you also read the sections in Chapter 14 on writing prior to starting to draft your critical review of the literature (Chapter 3).

Alternatively, you may be returning to academic study after a gap of some years, to take a full-time or part-time course such as a Master of Business Administration, a Master of Arts or a Master of Science with a Business and Management focus. Many students in such situations need to refresh their study skills early in their programme, particularly

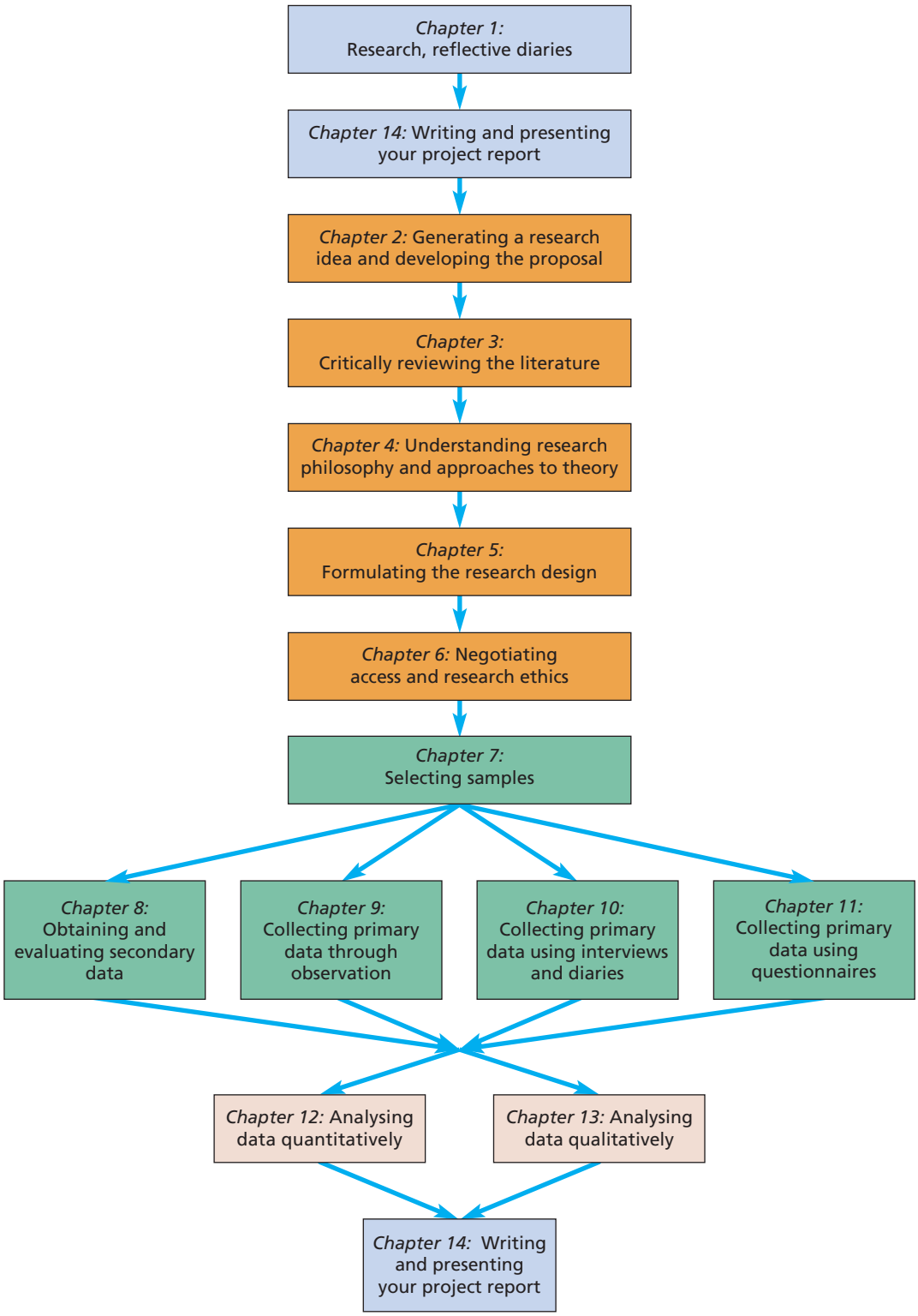

Figure P.1 Using this book for your research methods course and associated project

those associated with critical reading of academic literature and academic writing. If you feel the need to do this, you may wish to start with those chapters that support you in developing and refining these skills (Chapters 3 and 14), followed by Chapter 8, which introduces you to the range of secondary data sources available that might be of use for other assignments (Figure P.2). Once again, groups of chapters within which we believe

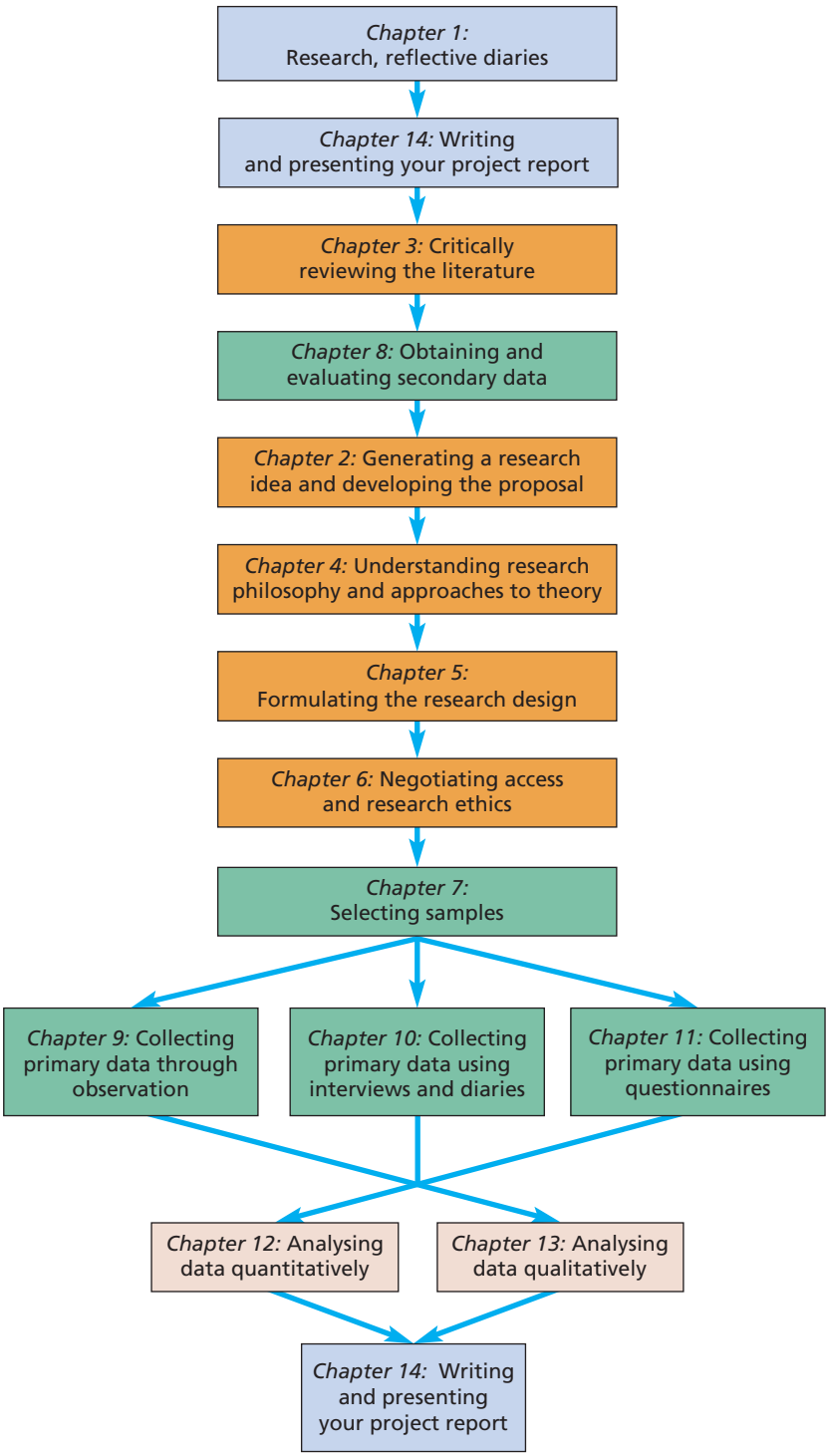

Figure P.2 Using this book as a returner to academic study

you can switch the order without affecting the logic of the flow too much are shown on the same level in the diagram and are:

- those chapters associated with primary data collection (Chapters 9, 10 and 11);
- those associated with data analysis (Chapters 12 and 13).

In addition, we would recommend that you re-read Chapter 14 prior to starting to write your project report, dissertation or consultancy report, or if you need to undertake a presentation.

In whichever order you choose to read the chapters, we would recommend that you attempt all the self-check questions, review and discussion questions and those questions associated with the case studies. Your answers to the self-check questions can be self-assessed using the answers at the end of each chapter. However, we hope that you will actually attempt each question prior to reading the answer! If you need further information on an idea or a technique, then first look at the references in the further reading section.

At the end of each chapter, the section headed 'Progressing your research project' lists a number of tasks. Such tasks might involve you in just planning a research project or, alternatively, designing and distributing a questionnaire of your own. They all include making an entry in your reflective diary or notebook. When completed, these tasks will provide a useful aide-mémoire for assessed work (including a reflective essay or learning log) and can be used as the basis for the first draft of your project report. It is worth pointing out here that many consultancy reports for organisations do not require you to include a review of the academic literature.

As a guide through the research process

If you are intending to use this book to guide you through the research process for a research project you are undertaking, such as your dissertation, we recommend that you read the entire book quickly before starting your research. In that way you will have a good overview of the entire process, including a range of techniques available, and will be better able to plan your work.

After you have read the book once, we suggest that you re-read Section 1.5 on keeping a reflective diary or notebook and Sections 14.2–14.10 on writing first. Then work your way through the book again following the chapter order. This time you should attempt the self-check questions, review and discussion questions and those questions associated with each case study to ensure that you have understood the material contained in each chapter prior to applying it to your own research project. Your responses to self-check questions can be assessed using the answers at the end of each chapter.

If you are still unsure as to whether particular techniques, procedures or ideas are relevant, then pay special attention to the 'Focus on student research', 'Focus on management research' and 'Focus on research in the news' boxes. 'Focus on student research' boxes are based on actual students' experiences and illustrate how an issue has been addressed or a technique or procedure used in a student's research project. 'Focus on management research' boxes discuss recent research articles in established refereed academic journals, allowing you to see how research is undertaken successfully. These articles are easily accessible via the main online business and management databases. 'Focus on research in the news' boxes provide topical news stories of how particular research techniques, procedures and ideas are used in the business world. You can also look in the 'Further reading' for other examples of research where these have been used. If you need further

information on an idea, technique or procedure then, again, start with the references in the further reading section.

Material in some of the chapters is likely to prove less relevant to some research topics than others. However, you should beware of choosing techniques because you are happy with them, if they are inappropriate. Completion of the tasks in the section headed 'Progressing your research project' at the end of Chapters 2–13 will enable you to generate all the material that you will need to include in your research project, dissertation or consultancy report. This will also help you to focus on the techniques and ideas that are most appropriate to your research. When you have completed these tasks for Chapter 14 you will have written your research project, dissertation or consultancy report and also prepared a presentation using slides or a poster.

As a reference source

It may be that you wish to use this book now or subsequently as a reference source. If this is the case, an extensive index will point you to the appropriate page or pages. Often you will find a 'checklist' box within these pages. 'Checklist' boxes are designed to provide you with further guidance on the particular topic. You will also find the contents pages and the glossary useful reference sources, the latter defining over 750 research terms. In addition, we have tried to help you to use the book in this way by including cross-references between sections in chapters as appropriate. Do follow these up as necessary. If you need further information on an idea or a technique then begin by consulting the references in the further reading section. Wherever possible we have tried to reference books that are in print and readily available in university libraries and journal articles that are in the major business and management online databases.

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Preface

In writing the ninth edition of *Research Methods for Business Students* we have, alongside the many comments we have received regarding previous editions, considered the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for undertaking research. The pandemic invariably caused us to adapt the way we do research posing new challenges for gaining access and recruiting people to take part, and in the collecting of data (Nind et al., 2021). Alongside an already growing use of online questionnaires, there was a shift from face-to-face to online and telephone interviews. The former of these made considerable use of cloud based video-conferencing and the latter computer assisted telephone interviewing. Ethnographic, diary and other expressive methods were also used more widely.

In response to these challenges and over developments we have fully revised the book, expanding our consideration of online, ethnographic, diary and other expressive methods and the analysis of the resulting data. In particular: Chapter 1 now includes a discussion of responsible business research; Chapter 2 contains considerably more detail on developing research questions including using the AbC (Abstract, Context) rule; Chapter 4 now considers the interrelationships between paradigms and philosophies in more depth; Chapter 5 now considers engaged scholarship; Chapter 6 now considers Internet mediated access and associated issues of ethics in more detail; Chapter 7 discusses using purchased database lists and volunteer panels alongside more detailed discussions of sample size; Chapter 9 contains enlarged sections on using researcher and informant created videos, static images and audio recordings in observation; Chapter 10 has a new section on evaluating interview practice looking at conversational space mapping and language cleanliness; Chapter 11 now provides an overview of scale development; Chapter 13 includes more detail on transcription and thematic coding, including using the Gioia method; Chapter 14 includes more detailed advice regarding using quotations from transcripts, diaries and other documentary data, as well as on poster design; and we have developed further the Glossary, which now includes over 750 research-related terms. New case studies at the end of each chapter have been developed with colleagues, providing up-to-date scenarios through which to illustrate issues associated with undertaking research. Alongside this we have also taken the opportunity to update many examples and revise the tables of Internet addresses.

As in previous editions, we have taken a predominantly non-software-specific approach in our discussion of methods. By doing this, we have been able to focus on the general principles needed to utilise a range of analysis software and the Internet effectively for research. However, recognising that many students have access to sophisticated data collection and analysis software and may need help in developing these skills, we continue to provide access to up-to-date 'teach yourself' guides to Qualtrics™, IBM SPSS Statistics™, Excel™ and Internet searching via the book's website (www.pearsoned.co.uk/saunders). Where appropriate, these guides are provided with data sets. In the preparation of the ninth edition we were fortunate to receive considerable feedback from colleagues and students

in universities throughout the world. We are extremely grateful to all the reviewers who gave their time and shared their ideas.

Inevitably, the body of knowledge of research methods has developed further since 2019, and we have revised all chapters accordingly. Our experiences of teaching and supervising students and working through the methods in classes have suggested alternative approaches and the need to provide alternative material. Consequently, we have taken the opportunity to update and refine existing worked examples, remove those that were becoming dated, and develop new ones where appropriate. However, the basic structure remains much the same as the previous eight editions.

Other minor changes and updating have been made throughout. Needless to say, any errors of omission and commission continue to remain our responsibility.

As with previous editions, much of our updating has been guided by comments from students and colleagues, to whom we are most grateful. We should like particularly to thank students from University of Birmingham, and various Doctoral Symposiums for their comments on all of the chapters. Colleagues in both our own and other universities have continued to provide helpful comments, advice and ideas. We are particularly grateful to Heather Cairns-Lee, Zeineb Djebali, Colin Hughes, Emrah Karakaya, Juliet Kele, Amanda Lee, Ben Saunders, and Nicholas Wheeler for their insightful comments and help with early drafts of chapters. Colleagues and friends again deserve thanks for their assistance in providing examples of research across the spectrum of business and management, co-authoring chapters, writing case studies and in reviewing parts of this book: Neve Abgeller, Mina Beigi, Alexandra Bristow, Clare Burns, Catherine Cassell, Fariba Darabi, Viktor Dörfler, Adina Dudau, Sarah Forbes, Mat Hughes, Joséphine Lapointe, Natasha Mauthner, Megane Miralles, Emily Morrison, Trevor Morrow, Shahrzad Nayyeri, Jonathan Scott, Maura Sheehan, Melika Shirmohamma, Marc Stierand and Catherine Wang.

We would also like to thank all of the staff at Pearson (both past and present) who supported us through the process of writing the ninth edition. Our thanks go, in particular, to Vicky Tubb, our commissioning editor, and Kay Richardson our online content developer for their continuing support and enthusiasm throughout the process. We would also like to express our thanks to Andrew Muller as content producer and as copy-editor.

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March 2022

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Nind, M., Coverdale, A. and Meckin, R. (2021) *National Centre for Research Methods: Changing Social Research Practices in the Context of Covid-19: Rapid Evidence Review.* UKRI Economic and Social Research Council. Available at: https://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/id/eprint/4458/1/NCRM%20Changing%20Research%20Practices_Rapid%20Evidence%20Review_FINAL%20REPORT.pdf [Accessed 1 March 2022]

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Chapter 1

Research, reflective diaries and the purpose of this book

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- define the nature of research;
- outline the features of business and management research;
- recall the stages you will need to complete (and revisit) as part of your research process;
- understand the importance of keeping a reflective diary;
- recognise the purpose, structure and features of this book;
- progress your research project by starting to make entries in your reflective diary or notebook.

1.1 Introduction

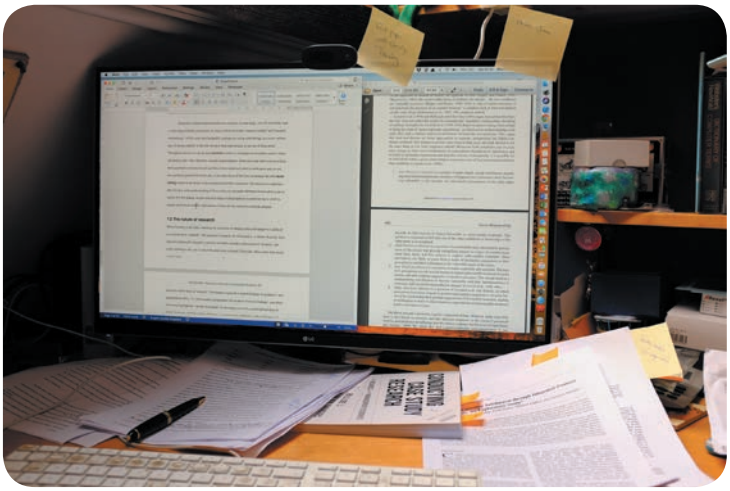
This book is designed to help you to undertake your research project, whether you are an undergraduate or postgraduate student of business and management or a practising manager. It provides a clear guide on how to undertake research as well as highlighting the realities of undertaking research, including the more common pitfalls. The book will provide you with the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake a piece of research from first thoughts about a potential research topic to writing your project report and delivering an oral presentation. As such, you will find it useful as a manual or handbook on how to tackle your research project.

After reading the book you will understand what it means to review the literature critically; have been introduced to research philosophies and approaches to reasoning; explored a range of strategies, techniques and procedures with which you could collect and analyse data; and considered how to report and present your research. Of equal importance, you will know that there is no one best way for undertaking all research. Rather you will be aware of the choices you will have to make and how these will impact upon what you can find out. This means you will be able to make a series of informed choices including your research philosophy, approaches to reasoning, strategies, techniques and procedures that are most suitable to your own research project and be able to justify them. In reading the book you will have been introduced to the

wealth of data that are available online, both online and face-to-face procedures for collecting your own data and techniques for analysing different types of data, have had a chance to practise them, and be able to select and justify which to use.

The invention of Post-it® notes

The Post-it® note is one of the best-known and most widely used office products in the world. Yet, despite the discovery of the repositionable adhesive that made the Post-it® note possible in 1968, it was not until 1980 that the product was introduced to the market (Post-it® 2022). In the 1960s, 3M research scientist Spencer Silver was looking for ways to improve the adhesive used in tapes. However, he discovered something quite different from what he was looking for, an adhesive that did not stick strongly when coated onto the back of tapes! What was unclear was how it might be used. Over the next five years he struggled to find a use for his new adhesive, talking about it and its merits to colleagues whenever possible. He became known as 'Mr Persistent' because he would not give up!



Post-it® notes in use
Source: © Mark NK Saunders 2018

Most people working for 3M know the story of what happened next and how the Post-it® note concept came about. A new product development researcher working for 3M, Art Fry, was frustrated by how the scraps of paper he used as bookmarks kept falling out of his church choir hymn book. He realised that Silver's adhesive would mean his bookmarks would not fall out. Soon afterwards the Post-it® note concept was developed and market research undertaken. This was extremely difficult as the product was revolutionary and was, in effect, designed to replace pieces of torn scrap paper! However, despite some initial scepticism within the company, Post-it® notes were launched in 1980. One year after their launch, they were named 3M's outstanding new product.

While your research project will be within the business and management discipline rather than natural science (such as developing a new adhesive), our opening vignette still offers several insights into the nature of research and in particular the business and management research you will be undertaking. It highlights that when undertaking research we should be open to finding the unexpected and how sometimes the applicability of our research findings may not be immediately obvious. It also emphasises the importance of discussing your ideas with other people.

However, a word of caution before you continue. In your study, you will inevitably read a wide range of books and articles. In many of these the terms 'research method' and 'research methodology' will be used interchangeably, perhaps just using methodology as a more verbose way of saying method. In this book we have been more precise in our use of these terms. Throughout the book we use the term **method** to refer to a procedure or technique used to obtain and analyse data. This, therefore, includes questionnaires, observation and interviews as well as both quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (non-statistical) analysis techniques and, as you have probably gathered from the title, is the main focus of this book. In contrast, the term **methodology** refers to the theory of how research should be undertaken. We believe it is important that you have some understanding of this so that you can make informed choices about your research. For this reason, we also discuss a range of philosophical assumptions upon which research can be based and the implications of these for the method or methods adopted.

1.2 The nature of research

When browsing social media, listening to the radio, watching television, listening to the radio or reading a daily newspaper it is difficult to avoid the term 'research'. The results of 'research' are all around us. A debate about the findings of a recent poll of people's opinions inevitably includes a discussion of 'research', normally referring to the way in which the data were collected. Politicians often justify their policy decisions on the basis of 'research'. Newspapers report the research findings of academics and organisations (Box 1.1). Documentary programmes tell us about 'research findings' and advertisers may highlight the 'results of research' to encourage you to buy a particular product or brand. However, we believe that what these examples really emphasise is the wide range of meanings given to the term 'research' in everyday speech.

Walliman (2020) argues that many of these everyday uses of the term 'research' are not research in the true meaning of the word. As part of this, he highlights ways in which the term is used wrongly:

- just collecting facts or information with no clear purpose;
- reassembling and reordering facts or information without interpretation;
- as an activity with no or little relevance to everyday life;
- as a term to get your product or idea noticed and respected.

The first of these highlights that, although research often involves the collection of information, it is more than just reading a few books or articles, talking to a few people or asking people questions. While collecting data may be part of the research process, if it is not undertaken in a systematic way and without a clear purpose, it will not be seen as research. The second of these is commonplace in many reports. Data are collected, perhaps from a variety of different sources, and then assembled in a single document with the sources of these data listed without any explanation of what the data means. In other words, there is no interpretation of the data collected. Again, while the assembly of data from a variety of sources may be part of the research process, without interpretation it is not research. The third emphasises, as shown in the opening vignette, how despite research often appearing abstract, it influences our daily lives and creates our understanding of the world. Finally, the term 'research' can be used to get an idea or product noticed by people and to suggest that people should have confidence in it. In such instances, when you ask for details of the research process, these are either unclear or not forthcoming.