

Reflecting on your experiential context:

The point of this exercise is to write a memo on how your experience is relevant to your research. Use the memo to reflect on the context of what you bring to the study – your background, experiences, theoretical concepts, assumptions, values and feelings. What prior connections do you have to the topics, issues or settings you plan to investigate? How do these affect the way you are approaching your research? What is the lens through which you are looking at the phenomena you want to study?

This memo is to help you to examine and critique these motives and assumptions and to discover what resources your experience provides. There is no particular structure that works best for the memo. However, you should not write a general account of your background and experiences; this is not an autobiography. You need to focus on those experiences, values and assumption that are most directly related to your planned research project and to reflect specifically on how these may affect your research.

One way to begin is to brainstorm anything that comes to mind when you think about your site or your topic and jotting these ideas down without immediately trying to organize or analyze them. One strategy that may be helpful in getting started on this memo is to “freewrite” responses to the following sentence completion stems; simply get your pen (or computer) moving and write whatever comes into your head in response to each of these, without trying to think carefully about your response, and then go on to the next one after a couple of minutes.

1. The thing I am most excited about in my study is...
2. My main hope for this study is...
3. The main thing I am afraid of in doing this study is...
4. The biggest assumption I am making in my research is
5. One thing I am sure of about what is going on is...
6. The main way that this research draws on my own experience is...
7. I would be really surprised if, as a result of the research, I learned...

Try to identify the issues you have raised that are most likely to be important in your research, think about the implications of these, and organize your reflections more systematically into a memo.