

Part I

Organizing, Writing, and Performing Dental Research

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

1 Introduction

Academics commonly are required to do research and publish to achieve promotion and tenure. Undertaking a research project is also an increasingly common course requirement for undergraduate and professional school students. Admission into good colleges and universities often necessitates that prospective students demonstrate intellectual achievement above and beyond good grades, and this frequently requires some form of research endeavor or at least participation in a research project. Similar considerations are equally applicable for new graduates or senior year predoctoral students who are attempting to gain admittance into graduate programs. Without some form of research credentialing, graduate program directors may pass over viable candidates in favor of a person who has gone that extra yard during predoctoral training. In other words, it is very beneficial to one's career prospects to be able to demonstrate intellectual curiosity through some sort of research involvement.

Most people, however, are immediately intimidated when confronted with the prospect of doing research and there tend to be feelings of "I am too old, tired, inexperienced, undereducated or too busy to do research." Such attitudes, though common, are a disservice to the prospective researcher in particular and to the advancement of knowledge in general. Further, such attitudes deprive the putative researcher of the pleasure and satisfaction of discovery and the chance to do something that no one else has ever done before. We all know the pleasurable feeling (and, let us face it, the slight feeling of superiority) that one gets from the simple task of sharing knowledge or expertise with someone else. "Hey, I've found a good short cut to the supermarket/office/mall etc." or "Have you tried this?" are very common and simple demonstrations of time well spent in acquiring new knowledge ... and that really is what research is all about.

The approach adopted in the following chapters has been to identify an issue that needs to be resolved and show how this can lead to a series of

4 Organizing, Writing, and Performing Dental Research

research projects. Then, the suggested research projects will be outlined to indicate how the projects should be pursued.

This book provides a practical guide to performing a research project and, equally important, how to share that knowledge with other people be it in the form of a thesis/dissertation, a scientific paper, a poster or an oral presentation such as a lecture. To all intents and purposes, research data that are not shared with others do not exist but, as virtually every graduate student will tell you, communicating that information is difficult. Most of us know one or more people who are “ABD” (all but dissertation), people who cannot complete their master’s or PhD degrees because they have yet to write up their research findings as a thesis or dissertation. Consequently, the second objective of this book is to help undergraduate and postgraduate students and other knowledge generators to write up their research and gain the recognition that their hard work and efforts truly deserve.