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Looking Beyond Arts and Crafts: A Book Review of Research for Designers

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Abstract

In this book review of *Research for Designers: A Guide to Methods and Practice*, I provide a summary of the book's content and a brief description of each chapter. I also discuss the book's structure, organization, strengths, and weaknesses. This review concludes with the evaluation that *Research for Designers* is an excellent resource and practical guide for novice researchers from any academic discipline, but especially so for researchers and practitioners in the design field.

Keywords

Design, Research Methodology, Writing Research Reports

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Looking Beyond Arts and Crafts: A Book Review of *Research for Designers*

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*In this book review of *Research for Designers: A Guide to Methods and Practice*, I provide a summary of the book's content and a brief description of each chapter. I also discuss the book's structure, organization, strengths, and weaknesses. This review concludes with the evaluation that *Research for Designers* is an excellent resource and practical guide for novice researchers from any academic discipline, but especially so for researchers and practitioners in the design field. Keywords: Design, Research Methodology, Writing Research Reports*

They say never judge a book by its cover, but what intrigued me most about *Research for Designers* (Muratovski, 2015) was its highlighter yellow cover design that instantly caught my eye. Reading this book from a student perspective (Chenail, 2010), I first wondered how *Research for Designers* could help me. I am a social science student, not a designer. Nor do I have any intention of entering the design field. However, *Research for Designers* makes clear that the approaches to design research overlap with many other disciplines, which makes this book an excellent study companion for any student with research aspirations in mind. Overall, *Research for Designers: A Guide to Methods and Practice* is a well-structured guidebook that provides an overview of the most useful research methodologies for novice researchers, especially researchers in the design field. In this book review I will provide a summary of the book's content, discuss why I chose this book, discuss the author's intent, and end with an evaluation of the book's strengths and weaknesses.

Organization and Content

Research for Designers focuses on the four main methodologies that would be most useful to designers: qualitative, quantitative, visual, and applied research. The book's introduction explains why research is important for designers in a field that is rapidly changing and experiencing a "design evolution" (Muratovski, 2015, p. 13). Chapters two and three explain the purpose for the book's cross-disciplinary approaches and the basic concepts of research practices.

The book's subsequent chapters include helpful tables, figures, and illustrations. These graphics do an excellent job of complimenting the learning material and are a thoughtful addition to a study companion marketed towards an audience of novice researchers and visual learners.

Why I Chose This Book

I was instantly intrigued by *Research for Designers'* cross-disciplinary focus. The author emphasizes in multiple chapters that cross-disciplinary studies are increasingly important for designers due to the social, cultural, and environmental impacts of their work and that designers will need to increase their proficiency in cross-disciplinary research in order to keep pace with the changing nature of their design field.

As an interdisciplinary student in the humanities and social sciences, I was familiar with most but not all methodologies and methods discussed in this book. Qualitative and quantitative are standard methodologies for many graduate students, but visual research and applied research, two methodologies useful to designers, are less popular in other academic curriculums. With this in mind, students outside the design field may find this book especially useful if they would like to familiarize themselves with information on alternative research methods outside of quantitative and qualitative research.

Author's Intent and Purpose

The purpose of this book is to help design students and design practitioners learn a basic understanding of research methods in their field. Muratovski argues that designers are no longer “artistic service producers” (p. 18), but actual strategic planners that help solve problems and offer solutions to complex issues through design. Trends in the design field indicate there is a cultural shift in the industry and that designers must learn to be cross-disciplinary researchers to keep up with this change.

Unfortunately, there are very few resources for designers in the field who wish to learn more about research. A quick search on research books for designers reveals less than five books with similar content, none of which seem to cover the scope of research methods that Muratovski produces in *Research for Designers*.

Since the book was written for novice researchers in mind, the book touts a clear and non-academic style that makes it an accessible read. The non-academic tone of this book is purposeful. *Research for Designers* was not just written for design students, but also designers in the field who do not necessarily have a research background. As a result, this book can also be helpful to emerging researchers such as graduate or Ph.D. students from any disciplinary background who seek to have a better understanding of multiple research methodologies.

For practical purposes, the author does include more information about research practices that would be most useful to designers. For example, in each methodology chapter he adds a subchapter on how to prepare a design report and what information to include in a design report document. In addition, he includes a whole chapter that specifically addresses practical tasks that designers will need to complete such as research reports, design briefs, and executive summaries.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Like all good guidebooks, *Research for Designers* is well-organized and written in a way that is intellectually accessible and comprehensible to a diverse audience of readers. The book does an excellent job of simplifying complex ideas into easily digestible terms and provides step-by-step examples of practical ways to apply research methods. What I found most impressive were the complimentary graphs and figures used to supplement the text, which added an extra touch of thoughtful detail to the content of the book.

The book demonstrates many practical examples of how theory can be put into practice in real life. For example, in the chapter on qualitative methodology, the author provides a thorough annotated example of what a proper in-depth interview should look like. In addition, for designers working in the field, the author provides guidance on how to complete design reports for each methodology section included in the text.

Despite *Research for Designers'* many strengths, there are areas for improvement which the author can address in future editions of the book. First, the information covered is so broad that, at times, it becomes a double-edged sword that can be both helpful to novice researchers but also disadvantageous in that the depth of knowledge discussed in each chapter

has distinct limitations. Nowhere is this clearer than the section on quantitative research. In the chapter where quantitative research is discussed, the author does a good job of covering quantitative data collection methods but provides weak coverage of statistical analysis. This is not altogether the author's fault since a thorough discussion of quantitative research and statistical analysis would be enough information for the author to write another book and would far exceed the intention and scope of *Research for Designers*. However, to improve upon any important missing information in each chapter, it would be helpful for the author to provide suggested supplemental reading that would assist readers in gaining further guidance and knowledge on each research methodology.

Overall, *Research for Designers: A Guide to Methods and Practice* is an excellently crafted, user-friendly book created for novice researchers and professional designers. Within its two-hundred and forty-two pages, it covers a great deal of information about qualitative, quantitative, visual, and applied research, and it never neglects to inform the reader of how these research methods and methodologies can be put to practical use.

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Author Note

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