

# Gorillas in the mist: by dian fossey essay



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Dian Fossey was a good researcher. But, what is a researcher? One who conducts research? Surely that is the correct definition, but to properly understand the definition we would then have to define the word research. Research is the process of collecting data and information in order to obtain knowledge about the research topic. With these definitions we can say, without a doubt, that Dian Fossey was a researcher. But why was she a “good” researcher? By reading the book ‘Gorillas in the Mist’ we can better identify why we can consider Dian a “good” researcher. She illustrates four important traits needed in order to accomplish comprehensive research. These traits are determination, consistency, knowledge, and having passion. Let’s take a closer look at each of these traits, and how Fossey illustrated them in her book.

Determination, as defined by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, is “a firm or fixed intention to achieve a desired end.” Qualitative Research Methods by Bruce L. Berg helps beginning researchers establish their desired end or research idea, and even reach it.

His “Spiraling Research Approach” allows the researcher’s idea to “continue to shift, change, and take form as the research process unfolds.” In December of 1966 Dian Fossey began her study of the African gorillas. What was her “desired end?” She wanted to introduce the world to these gentle creatures that she loved.

Her book is the direct result of her determination to introduce the world to gorillas. Her love for these animals is thrust upon the reader as she describes each interaction. For example, Dian introduces her readers to Digit as “an

inquisitive ball of fluff. ” She takes the reader on the journey through Digit’s life, where he is eventually murdered by poachers while protecting his family. Upon opening this book each reader is destined to fall in love with this “ inquisitive ball of fluff,” just as they are destined to be heartbroken upon his death. If we combine Berg’s research approach and Fossey’s determination, we become one step closer to achieving the status of a “ good” researcher.

Then, we have consistency, which Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary defines as “ harmony of conduct or practice with profession. ” Dian spent thirteen years of her life entering the jungle, collecting data, and returning to camp to analyze her data. Every researcher that entered the camp was expected to do the same. We must understand that although Dian used several ways to acquire data, allowed others to collect data for her, and studied every aspect of the gorilla’s lives, she was still consistent. As we learned in *Qualitative Research Methods* by Bruce L. Berg, triangulation uses multiple lines of action to accomplish a common goal. Every aspect of Dian’s research helped her to accomplish her goal. So, when we consider our research we must ensure that each individual set of data collection is collected consistently, as well as being an important part of achieving the research goal.

Knowledge, as defined by Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, is “ the fact or condition of having information or of being learned. ” This definition is questionable. As Albert Einstein one said “ Information is not Knowledge. While reading *Qualitative research methods* we learned the basics of reviewing literature. During this process we must focus on quality, not

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quantity. It does not matter how much literature is reviewed if none of it is learned. Dian Fossey was very knowledgeable when it came to the mountain gorillas.

She described every plant within the forest, along with its significance. She describes the terrain in the Virguna Mountains with extreme detail. Dian had conducted a high quality literature review. In her book, Dian describes her experiences with gorilla chest beats. At the beginning of her research Dian conveyed the wrong message to the gorillas. Over time she learned more about gorilla chest beats, and corrected her actions. Personally, I do not believe this is due to a fault in her literature review. Dian's research was ground-breaking.

Literature on gorilla chest beats just might not have been obtainable.

Research not only requires knowledge, it creates knowledge. The final trait is passion, or a "strong liking or desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept," according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary. There is no doubt that research can be conducted without passion, but we are not just discussing research; we are discussing good research. Within the 1981 issue of National Geographic there is an article called "The Imperiled Mountain Gorilla." This article was written by Dian Fossey. Dian's passion is displayed in two sentences, "Digit was a favorite among the habituated gorillas I was studying: In fact, I was unashamed to call him "my beloved Digit." And now, through our sorrow, anger welled up—rage against the poachers who had committed this slaughter.

This passion, I believe, is what compelled Dian to conduct such a long-term comprehensive research study. Although passion is not necessary for research, it compliments and enhances research. If we are not passionate, our determination will not be as immense. If we are not passionate, we will find ourselves being more inconsistent. If we are not passionate, our quest for knowledge will have less motivation. If we are not passionate, we will not be good researchers. Throughout this essay I have used Dian Fossey's research to enhance the understanding of each trait. Now we must leave Dian in the past.

Gorillas in the Mist and Qualitative Research Methods have made each of us understand the research process. These books should only enhance our research-self, not create it! I have decided that I am going to attempt to learn, instead of collect information; I am going to put more drive behind everything I do; I am going to try to be more harmonious, and most importantly, I am going to search for something that I have a passion for. But, I am not going to let these readings make me. We have to remember that the most memorable research is original research. Individuality, as defined by Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, is "total character peculiar to and distinguishing an individual from others."

"In short, don't go buy a plane ticket to Africa! Conducting the exact same research that Dian did will have no affect on the scientific community, and you will probably get laughed at. Be different, be bold, and be willing to take a risk. SWIC