



# Thinking Qualitatively: Introduction to Qualitative-Interpretive Methods

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9:00am – 4:30pm

## Summary

This workshop aims to introduce participants to qualitative research and its uses across the social and human sciences in the widest sense (including in interdisciplinary fields where qualitative research is quite new). The focus will be on qualitative-interpretive methods that emphasise social processes of construction of meaning (and related struggles over interpretive hegemony), whether at the individual, organisational or cultural level. However, the workshop is open to all interested participants, regardless of their epistemological or theoretical orientation.

Participants with little or no prior knowledge of qualitative research methods should, by the end of the workshop, have a fair idea of whether qualitative research is of interest to them, and if yes, how to go about thinking about their own qualitative research. Participants who already have some background in qualitative research will have an opportunity to expand their methodological horizon by thinking beyond the most widely used qualitative methods (such as qualitative interviewing), and also beyond research "techniques": indeed, the focus in this workshop will not be on the technical aspects of methodology (important as they are to ensure good quality data), but on understanding the "spirit" and logic of qualitative research, including in its ethical and practical complexities.

The workshop starts with a general introduction to the field of qualitative(-interpretive) research (its specificities, theoretical bases, typical types of research questions and research designs), before zooming in more specifically on the main types of data that qualitative researchers engage with ('natural' vs generated data; primary vs secondary data) and the specific challenges related to each of them, whether practical, epistemological or ethical. In this context, we will discuss a number of approaches to data collection, namely approaches based on questioning people in some way (such as semi-structured or biographic interviewing, open questions in questionnaires, focus group interviewing, etc.); observing people and settings (whether as a participant or a non participant observer (ethnography, shadowing, etc.), or as an indirect observer (diary research etc.); or collecting documentary data (through archives, on-line data etc.). Our general aim will be to grasp how we can make meaningful choices of data collection strategies and instruments (cf. Rich/Ginsburg 1999, McDonald/Simpson 2014 and Welch 2000, required readings).

In this context, we will also discuss issues of research design and process in qualitative research – in particular the iterative nature of the research process and how this impacts on the practicalities of research, and the efficient and context-sensitive use of "theory" in this kind of research. We will also need to address issues of power at various levels (such as the relationship between the researcher and the researched; issues of overresearch, participatory research, etc.). (cf. Clark 2008, Kriesi 1992, required readings).

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Finally, we will take a brief look at data analysis strategies, in the same spirit, e.g. with the aim of understanding the deeper logic underlying choices of "techniques". We will in particular differentiate between content-based and discourse-analytic types of analysis, and discuss the implications of each type of analysis for data collection.

Participants are very welcome to bring in their questions and research plans and projects throughout the workshop. Participants who are actively thinking about a project at this point and have a range of questions to address are very welcome to send a description of their research (as well as their main questions) to the instructor ahead of the workshop ([Lea.Sgier@unige.ch](mailto:Lea.Sgier@unige.ch)).

## Audience

The workshop is basically intended for two types of participants.

- participants with little or no prior knowledge of qualitative methods who would like to gain some understanding of the uses and challenges of qualitative research;
- participants who have some acquaintance with qualitative research, but who would like to expand their horizon by thinking creatively beyond baseline methods such as semi-structured interviewing or thematic analysis.

## Outline

### Day 1

- Introduction to qualitative research
- Working with qualitative data (generated, natural, primary, secondary etc.) – rationales and challenges
- Approaches to qualitative data collection (questioning approaches; observational approaches; documentary approaches; meta-analyses) and their specific limitations and challenges
- Research ethics in qualitative research
- Exercises

### Day 2

- Collecting qualitative data – research design and process, and the use of "theory"
- Power relations and reflexivity in qualitative research
- Qualitative data analysis – content-based vs discourse analytic approaches, and their challenges
- Quality criteria in qualitative research

## Required Readings

Please read the following five texts ahead of the workshop (in this order of priority). If you have some time to spare, you could also usefully read the (longer) Whyte text (in the Additional Resources section below).

**Rich**, Michael and **Ginsburg**, Kenneth (1999). "The Reason and Rhyme of Qualitative Research: Why, When, and How to Use Qualitative Methods in the Study of Adolescent Health". *Journal of Adolescent Health* 25: 371-378.

**McDonald**, Seonaidh and **Simpson**, Barbara (2014) "Shadowing research in organizations: the methodological debates", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal* 9(1): 3-20.

**Welch**, Catherine (2000) "The archaeology of business networks: the use of archival records in case study research", *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 8(2): 197-208.

**Clark**, Tom (2008). "We're Over-Researched Here! Exploring Accounts of Research Fatigue within Qualitative Research Engagements". *Sociology* 42 (5): 953-970.





**Kriesi, Hanspeter (1992).** "The Rebellion of the Research 'Objects'", in Diani, Mario and Eyerman, Ron (eds), *Studying Collective Action*. London: Sage, pp. 194-216.

**Credit Students:** see [Course Reserves website](#)

**Non-Credit Students:** if you are unable to access these readings through your home institution, please email us at [wssr@concordia.ca](mailto:wssr@concordia.ca) and we will do our best to assist you.

### **Additional Resources**

Alaszewski, Andy (2006). *Using Diaries for Social Research*. London: Sage, ch. 3-4 (pp. 46-83).

Bevir, Mark and Rhodes, R.A.W. (2006). "Defending Interpretation". *European Political Science* EPS 5/2006: 69-83.

Blumer, Herbert (1931). "Science Without Concepts". *American Journal of Sociology* 36(4): 515-533.

Braun, Virginia and Clarke, Victoria (2006). "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77-101.

Geertz, Clifford (1987). "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight", in Rabinow, Paul and Sullivan, William M. (eds), *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 195-240.

Ritchie, Jane, Lewis, Jane, McNaughton Nicholls, Carol and Ormston, Rachel (eds) (2013). *Qualitative Research Practice. A Guide for Social Scientists and Researchers*. London: Sage, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

Sampson, Helen (2004). "Navigating the Waves: the Usefulness of a Pilot in Qualitative Research". *Qualitative Research* 4(3): 383-402.

Schofield, Janet Ward (2002). "Increasing the Generalizability of Qualitative Research", in Huberman, A. Michael and Miles, Matthew B. (eds). *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 171-204.

\*Whyte, William Foote (1955 edition or later). *Street Corner Society. The Social Structure of an Italian Slum* ("Appendix: On the Evolution of Street Corner Society"). Chicago: The University of Chicago University Press.

**TO RECEIVE A COPY OF THE WHYTE TEXT, PLEASE EMAIL US AT [wssr@concordia.ca](mailto:wssr@concordia.ca)**

Yanow, Dvora (2006). "Neither Rigorous nor Objective? Interrogating Criteria for Knowledge Claims in Interpretive Science", in Yanow, Dvora and Schwartz-Sea, Peregrine (eds) (2006). *Interpretation and Method. Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*. Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe.

