

Qualitative Research:

interviews, focus groups & narrative.



Where do I start my research?



- 1. Decide on a focus: what interests, excites or angers you ...**
- 2. Starting where you are: what you know already, your context, experiences ...**
- 3. Researching the background: the context, people, appropriate literature ...**
- 4. Acknowledging the constraints: time, resources, competence ...**

Robson (2002)

Paradigms comprise:



Ontology: What I know

Epistemology: How I come to know what I know.

Methodology: ethnography, survey, case study, action research, narrative ...

Theoretical perspective: Post Positivist, Interpretivist, Symbolic interactionist...

Methods: questionnaire, observation, interview...

Tend to or Typically ...	Qualitative Approaches	Quantitative Approaches	Mixed Methods Approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use these philosophical assumptions • Employ these strategies of inquiry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructivist/ transformative knowledge claims • Phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postpositivist knowledge claims • Surveys and experiments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pragmatic knowledge claims • Sequential, concurrent, and transformative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ these methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-ended questions, emerging approaches, text or image data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closed-ended questions, predetermined approaches, numeric data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both open- and closed-ended questions, both emerging and predetermined approaches, and both quantitative and qualitative data and analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use these practices of research as the researcher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positions him- or herself • Collects participant meanings • Focuses on a single concept or phenomenon • Brings personal values into the study • Studies the context or setting of participants • Validates the accuracy of findings • Makes interpretations of the data • Creates an agenda for change or reform • Collaborates with the participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests or verifies theories or explanations • Identifies variables to study • Relates variables in questions or hypotheses • Uses standards of validity and reliability • Observes and measures information numerically • Uses unbiased approaches • Employs statistical procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collects both quantitative and qualitative data • Develops a rationale for mixing • Integrates the data at different stages of inquiry • Presents visual pictures of the procedures in the study • Employs the practices of both qualitative and quantitative research

Issues in interviewing:

- ✓ Make *decisions* about
 - whom,
 - how many,
 - when,
 - how often to interview...
- ✓ *Access*, resources...
- ✓ Trust, *consent*...
- ✓ Asking *questions*, avoiding leading questions, controlling the process of interviewing ...
- ✓ Hearing *responses*...





Cautions!

There is consent to take part.

The interview is not done by secret recording of discussions or the use of casual conversations as research data. It is openly a meeting intended to produce material that will be used for research purposes – and the interviewee understands this and agrees to it.

Caution: participant(s) may withdraw from the study at any stage.

Interviewees' words can be treated as 'on the record' and 'for the record'.

The point is, though, that unless interviewees specify to the contrary, the interview talk is 'on record' and 'for the record'.

Caution: data that will be made public should not reveal the identity of the participant(s).

The agenda for the discussion is set by the researcher.

Although the degree of control exercised by the researcher will vary according to the style of interviewing, there is a tacit agreement built into the notion of being interviewed that the proceedings and the agenda for the discussion will be controlled by the researcher.

Caution: The superficial similarity between an interview and a conversation can generate an illusion of simplicity.

Types of research interviews

➤ Structured interviews:

tight control over the format of the questions and answers (*like a questionnaire which is administered face to face with a respondent*) e.g. Computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI)

➤ Semi-structured interviews:

the interviewer still has a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered. However, with the semi-structured interview the *interviewer is prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics are considered*, and, perhaps more significantly, to *let the interviewee develop ideas* and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher.

➤ Unstructured interviews:

The researcher's role is to be as un-intrusive as possible – to start the ball rolling by introducing a theme or topic and then *letting the interviewee develop their ideas and pursue their train of thought*.

Interview Forms:

- **Computer-assisted Interviews**
- **Focus Group Interviews**
- **Factual Interviews**
- **Conceptual Interviews**
- **Narrative Interviews**
- **Discursive Interviews**
- **Confrontational Interviews**



Interview Script:

is a guide that can merely contain some topics to be covered, or it can be a detailed sequence of carefully worded questions.

Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009

Example:

Interview Protocol Project: University Reaction to a Terrorist Incident

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

(Briefly describe the project purpose)

Questions: 1. What has been your role in the incident?

2. What has happened since the event that you have been involved?

3. What has been the impact on the university community that you have been involved?...

...thank the individual for participating in the interview and assure his/her confidentiality.

Interview Questions:

Thematically, the questions relate to ***what*** of an interview. The questions will differ depending on ***purpose***: whether the researcher is interviewing for spontaneous descriptions of the lived world, interviewing for coherent narratives, or interviewing for a conceptual analysis of the person's understanding of the topic. The more spontaneous the interview procedure the more likely one is to obtain unprompted, lively, and unexpected answers from the interviewees. Questions will also depend on ***type of analysis*** you plan to use.

Dynamically, the questions pertain to the ***how*** of an interview. Questions should promote a ***positive interaction***, keep the ***flow of the conversation*** going and ***stimulate the subjects*** to talk about their experiences and feelings. The questions should be ***easy to understand, short, and devoid of academic language***.

Example: **what** and **why** questions are asked and answered before **how** questions:

What happened and why did it happen? How did you feel then?

Kvale & Brinkmann , 2009

Types of Questions to ask:

Types of interview question	Examples
Introducing questions	“Can you tell me about....?”, “Could you describe...”
Direct questions	“Have you ever received money for good grades?”
Follow-up questions	“Could you expand on that point?”, “How did you feel about that?”
Specifying questions	“What did you think then?”, “Has that happened to you?”
Probing questions	“Could you say something more about that?”, “Can you give a more detailed description of what happened?”, “Do you have examples of this?”
Indirect questions	Projective questions such as ‘How do you believe other pupils regard the competition of grades?’
Structuring questions	Ensuring relevant themes are covered, e.g., “I would now like to introduce another topic:...”
Interpreting questions	“You then mean that....?” “Is it correct that you feel that...?”
Silence	By allowing pauses the interviewees have ample time to associate and reflect and break the silence themselves

- **What if the participant is giving me short or incomplete answers?**

Ask them *Why?* questions or *Tell me more about...*
Avoid yes/no answer questions.



- **What if there are awkward silences?**

Its something you should get used to & allow to happen, as it may prompt the user to speak More. Don't try to fill in silence or provide them with easy answers.

- **What if the participant is talking too much or going off-track?**

The script is a guide, but don't feel you have to stick 100% to the running order – as long as you cover all your core topics. The more the participant talks the better !


Retrived from: <http://www.slideshare.net/jloliver/user-research-interviews>

Issues in interviewing

In what ways can an interview be a negative experience for the interviewee?

E.g.,

- 'revealing' info they wish they hadn't
- having been pushed to think hard
- having spent time when they actually wanted to be elsewhere
- feeling they couldn't answer Qs/give the R-er what s/he wanted
- not having been allowed to talk about what they wanted to talk about
- not having received any info
- ...



Which of these (from each category) may have positive impact on your data?

Which of these may have negative impact on your data?

Which of these may have ethical consequences you might need to consider?

In what ways can an interview be a positive experience for the interviewee?

E.g.,

- having got to share their experiences and be listened to
- having gotten to off-load their heart
- having gotten out of class...

Characteristics of Focus Group Interviews

Participants

- ≅ Carefully recruited
- ≅ 5 to 10 people per group, 6-8 preferred
- ≅ Similar types of people
- ≅ Repeated groups

Environment

- ≅ Comfortable
- ≅ Circle seating
- ≅ Tape recorded

Moderator

- ≅ Skillful in group discussions
- ≅ Uses pre-determined questions
- ≅ Establishes permissive environment



Analysis and Reporting

- ≅ Systematic analysis
- ≅ Verifiable procedures
- ≅ Appropriate reporting

Krueger, 2002

Moderator Skills

Exercise mild unobtrusive control
Adequate knowledge of topic
Appears like the participants

Be mentally prepared

Alert and free from distractions
Has the discipline of listening
Familiar with questioning route

Use purposeful small talk

Create warm and friendly environment
Observe the participants for seating arrangements

Make a smooth & snappy introduction

Standard introduction

1. Welcome
2. Overview of topic
3. Ground rules
4. First question

Use pauses and probes

5 second pause

Probes:

"Would you explain further?"

"Would you give an example?"

"I don't understand."

Introduction

Welcome

Introduce moderator and assistant

Our topic is ...

The results will be used for ...

Your were selected because ...

Guidelines

No right or wrong answers, only differing points of view

We're tape recording, one person speaking at a time

We're on a first name basis

You don't need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views

Rules for cellular phones and pagers if applicable.

For example: We ask that your turn off your phones or pagers. If you cannot and if you must respond to a call, please do so as quietly as possible and rejoin us as quickly as you can.

My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion

Talk to each other

Opening question



Krueger, 2002

- **Use open-ended questions**

What did you think of the program?

How did you feel about the conference?

Where do you get new information?

Be cautious of phrases such as *"how satisfied"* or *"to what extent"*

- **Avoid dichotomous questions**

These questions can be answered with a "yes" or "no«

- **Use "think back" questions.**

Take people back to an experience and not forward to the future

- **Use different types of questions**

- **Use questions that get participants involved**

Use reflection, examples, choices, rating scales, drawings, etc.

- **Focus the questions**

Sequence that goes from general to specific



All things considered question

This question asks *participants to reflect on the entire discussion* and then *offer their positions or opinions* on topics of central importance to the researchers.

Examples:

"Suppose that you had one minute to talk to the governor on merit pay, the topic of today's discussion. What would you say?"

or

"Of all the things we discussed, what to you is the most important?"

- **Summary question**

- **Final question**

The moderator reviews the purpose of the study then asks the participants:
"Have we missed anything?"



Narrative research

is a design of inquiry from the humanities in which the researcher studies the *lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives* (Riessman, 2008). This information is then often retold or restoried by the researcher into a narrative chronology. Often, in the end, the narrative combines views from the participant's life with those of the researcher's life in a collaborative narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)

Defining features :

- Researchers collect *stories* from individuals (& documents, group conversations) about individuals' lived and told experiences. There may be a strong *collaborative* feature of narrative research as the story emerges through interaction or dialogue of the researcher and the participant(s).
- Narrative stories tell of individual *experiences* and may shed light on the *identities* of individuals.
- Different *forms of gathering stories*: interviews, observations, documents, pictures etc
- Stories are shaped into *chronological order* by researcher although they may not be told this way by participants
- Types of analysis: thematical (what was said), structural (how it was said), dialogic/performance (who the story is directed toward) etc.

(Creswell, 2012)

Researchers gather qualitative stories through interviews and conversations



TYPES OF NARRATIVE RESEARCH FORMS:

- Biography** (a type in which the researcher writes and records the experiences of another person's life)
- Autobiography** (written and recorded by the individuals who are the subject of the study)
- Life story or life history** (a life period or entire life of a person found in single episodes, private situations etc.)
- **Oral history** (gathering of personal reflections of the events, their causes and effects)
Example: teachers and children in the classroom or stories told about the organization
- Testimonies** (told through various theoretical lens and perspectives)
- **Narrative interviews** (open-ended questions about the person's experience)
- Personal narratives** (reflection on the experience)

Three factors to influence narrative research in the field of education (Cortazzi, 1993):

- an increased emphasis on teacher reflection
- an increased emphasis on teachers' knowledge
- to bring teachers' voices to the forefront by empowering teachers to talk about their experiences



Narrative Research

Procedure

1. Determine if the research problem or question best fits narrative design
2. Select one or more individuals who have stories or life experience "to tell"
3. Collect information about the context of these stories (job, home, culture, time, place)
4. Analyze the stories and "restory" them into a framework to make sense
5. Collaborate with participants by actively involving in the research

Challenges

1. Extensive information about the participant
2. Clear understanding of the context of the person's life
3. Attention of the individual's experience
4. Uncover the "hidden"
5. Be reflective of your own political and cultural background

Useful questions to ask:

- WHAT can they tell us?
WHAT are the experiences in this life?
WHAT are the stories that can be told from these experiences?
WHAT are some "turning points" in the stories?
WHAT are some theories that can be related to this individual's life?





Who to sample for a narrative research?

- an available person
- a person, convenient to study
- a famous or important individual
- marginalized person
- an ordinary person

Ethical Issues:

- confidentiality
- benefits
- consent procedure
- covert activities
- the purpose of the study, its nature
- sharing your experience



The tips for a good narrative writing:

- focus on a single individual (2 or 3 persons)
- collecting a story about a significant issue related to this individual life
- develops a chronology that connects different phases and aspects of the story
- tells a persuasive story
- is told in a literary way
- reports themes that build from a story
- brings a researcher (his/her “self”) into the story
- focuses on the “turning point” of a person’s life

The threats to validity in qualitative studies...

observer bias...

...invalid information resulting from the perspective the researcher brings to the study and imposes upon it

observer effects...

...the impact of the observer's participation on the setting or the participants being studied

