



Abraham S. Fischler
School of Education

Qualitative Research: The Basics

Qualitative Research

I. Peer Review

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research relies heavily on a thorough grounding within the peer-reviewed literature.

Peer Review

The following three holdings are key points of evaluation:

1. quality of scholarship
2. relevance to the field
3. the appropriateness for the journal

All other sources rely on the judgment of the editors.

Peer Review

Peer-reviewed sources are visually different.

Typically, they share the following common elements:

- Title
 - Abstract
 - Introduction/Background
 - Literature Review
 - Methodology
 - Discussion/Results
 - Conclusion/Implications for Further Study
 - References
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Peer Review

Recent studies should have been published in the last 3 years. Nothing should be older unless you are citing a landmark study.

Qualitative Research: The Basics

II. Vocabulary

Words and Terms GENERALLY Used in Qualitative Research

- ▶ Perceptions
- ▶ Beliefs
- ▶ Philosophical perspective
- ▶ Interviews
- ▶ Observations
- ▶ Document analysis
- ▶ Narrative
- ▶ Transcriptions
- ▶ NVivo or other qualitative data analysis software
- ▶ Field notes
- ▶ Trustworthiness
- ▶ Transferability
- ▶ Member checks
- ▶ Coding
- ▶ Dense description
- ▶ Reflexivity

Vocabulary

- ▶ **Biography** – Exploring the life of an individual
- ▶ **Case Study** – developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases; provision of a detailed account and analysis of one or more cases
- ▶ **Ethnography** – describing and interpreting a cultural and social group; the discovery and comprehensive description of the culture of a group of people

Burke & Christensen, 2004; Creswell, 1998

Vocabulary

- ▶ **Grounded Theory** – developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed
- ▶ **Phenomenology** – understanding the essence of experiences about a phenomenon; the description of one or more individuals' consciousness and experience of a phenomenon

Burke & Christensen, 2004; Creswell, 1998

Vocabulary

- ▶ **Essence** – invariant structure of experience
- ▶ **Emic perspective** – special terms or words used by those in the group
- ▶ **Etic perspective**– an external, social scientific perspective

Burke & Christensen, 2004; Creswell, 1998

Vocabulary

- ▶ **Case** – a bounded system, bounded by time, place, etc.
- ▶ **Criterion sample** – purposeful – meeting certain criteria
- ▶ **Bracketing** – suspending preconceptions or learned feelings about a phenomenon
- ▶ **Theoretical sample** – arranged around a set of assumptions

Burke & Christensen, 2004; Creswell, 1998

Vocabulary

- ▶ **Gatekeeper** – one who is a member of or has insider status with a group
- ▶ **Informants** – participants (term used in ethnography)
- ▶ **Reflexivity** – process of critical self-reflection on one's biases
- ▶ **Going native** – identifying so completely with the group being studied that one cannot remain objective
- ▶ **Triangulation** – ways of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws – multiple data sources, multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple methods

Burke & Christensen, 2004; Creswell, 1998; Schwandt, 2001

Qualitative Research

III. Five Major Traditions in the Social Sciences

Five Major Traditions: RECAP

- **Biography**
- ▶ **Case Study**
- ▶ **Ethnography**
- ▶ **Grounded Theory**
- ▶ **Phenomenology**

Biography

Traditions in Qualitative Research – Biography Adapted from Creswell (1998), p. 65

Focus	Exploring the life of an individual	
Discipline origin	Anthropology, literature, history, sociology, psychology	
Data collection	Primarily interviews and documents	
Data analysis	Stories, epiphanies, historical content	
Narrative form	Detailed picture of an individual's life	

Biography

Data Collection Activities of Traditions in Qualitative Research – Biography **Adapted from Creswell (1998), pp. 112-13**

What is studied?	Single individual, accessible, and distinctive
Access and rapport issues/problems	Gaining permission from individuals, obtaining access to information in archives
How to select sites or individuals to study	Several strategies depending on person (e.g. convenient, politically important, a critical case)
What type of information to collect	Documents and archival material, open-ended interviews, subject journaling, participant observation, casual chatting
How is information recorded?	Notes, interview protocol
Data collection issues	Access to materials, authenticity of account and materials.
Storing information	File folders, computer files

Case Study

Traditions in Qualitative Research – Case Study **Adapted from Creswell (1998), p. 65**

Focus	Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases
Discipline origin	Political science, evaluation, urban studies, other social sciences
Data collection	Multiple sources – documents, archival records, interviews, observations, physical artifacts
Data analysis	Description, themes, assertions
Narrative form	In-depth study of a “case” or “cases”

Case Study

Traditions in Qualitative Research – Case Study Adapted from Creswell (1998), p. 65

Focus	Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases
Discipline origin	Political science, evaluation, urban studies, other social sciences
Data collection	Multiple sources – documents, archival records, interviews, observations, physical artifacts
Data analysis	Description, themes, assertions
Narrative form	In-depth study of a “case” or “cases”

Ethnography

Traditions in Qualitative Research – Ethnography Adapted from Creswell (1998), p. 65

Focus	Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group
Discipline origin	Cultural anthropology, sociology
Data collection	Primarily observations and interviews -- additional artifacts during extended time in the field (e.g., 6 months to a year)
Data analysis	Description, analysis, interpretation
Narrative form	Description of the cultural behavior of a group or an individual

Ethnography

Data Collection Activities of Traditions in Qualitative Research – Ethnography **Adapted from Creswell (1998), pp. 112-13**

What is studied?	Members of a culture-sharing group or individuals representative of the group
Access and rapport issues	Gaining access through gatekeeper, gaining confidence of informants (participants)
How to select sites or individuals to study	Finding a cultural group to which one is a “stranger,” a “representative” sample
What type of information to collect	Participant observations, interviews, artifacts, and documents
How is information recorded?	Field notes, interview and observational protocols
Data collection issues	Field issues (e.g., reflexivity, “going native,” divulging private information, deception)
Storing information	Field notes, transcriptions, computer files

Grounded Theory

Traditions in Qualitative Research – Grounded Theory

Adapted from Creswell (1998), p. 65

Focus	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field
Discipline origin	Sociology
Data collection	Interviews with 20-30 individuals to “saturate” categories and detail a theory
Data analysis	Open coding, axial coding, selective coding, conditional matrix
Narrative form	Theory or theoretical model

Grounded Theory

Data Collection Activities of Traditions in Qualitative Research – Grounded Theory Adapted from Creswell (1998), pp. 112-13

What is studied?	Multiple individuals who have responded to action or participated in a process about a central phenomenon
Access and rapport issues	Locating a homogenous sample
How to select sites or individuals to study	Finding a homogenous sample, a “theory-based” sample, a “theoretical” sample
What type of information to collect	Primarily interviews with 20-30 people to achieve detail in the theory
How is information recorded?	Interview protocol, memoing
Data collection issues	Interview issues (e.g., logistics, openness)
Storing information	Transcriptions, computer files

Phenomenology

**Traditions in Qualitative Research --
Phenomenology
Adapted from Creswell (1998), p. 65**

Focus	Understand the essence of experience about a phenomenon
Discipline origin	Philosophy, sociology, psychology
Data collection	Long interviews with up to 10 people
Data analysis	Statements, meanings, meaning themes, general description of experience
Narrative form	Description of the “essence” of the experience

Phenomenology

Data Collection Activities of Traditions in Qualitative Research – Phenomenology **Adapted from Creswell (1998), pp. 112-13**

What is studied?	Multiple individuals who experienced the phenomenon
Access and rapport issues/problems	Finding people who have experienced the phenomenon
How to select sites or individuals to study	Finding individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, a “criterion” sample
What type of information to collect	Interviews with up to 10 people
How is information recorded?	Long interview protocol
Data collection issues	Bracketing one’s experiences, logistics of interviewing
Storing information	Transcriptions, computer files

Qualitative Research

IV. Traditions Used Within and Without the Social Sciences

Focus Group (Luntz, 2011)

- ▶ A well-run focus group is a laboratory for social interaction. A good focus group requires four simple characteristics: the proper composition, an open environment, a probing moderator, and in-depth analysis.
- ▶ The consumer culture uses focus group technology, turning to academically trained market researchers to determine everything from packaging and pricing to advertising and marketing.
- ▶ Today, roughly 70% of all consumer research dollars are earmarked for qualitative research, and it is nearly impossible to find a Fortune 500 company that does not use focus groups to develop its corporate image and/or marketing strategy.

Action Research (Wadsworth, 1998)

- ▶ Participatory Action Research (PAR) is research involving all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it.
- ▶ They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts which make sense of it.
- ▶ Participatory action research is not just research which is hoped that will be followed by action.
- ▶ It aims to be active co-research, by and for those to be helped. Nor can it be used by one group of people to get another group of people to do what is thought best for them – whether that is to implement a central policy or an organizational or service change.
- ▶ It attempts to be a genuinely democratic or non-coercive process whereby those to be helped, determine the purposes and outcomes of their own inquiry.

Qualitative Research

V. Interviewing

Interviewing

The purpose of the qualitative research interview treated here is to obtain descriptions of the lived world of the interviewees with respect to interpretations of the meaning of the described lived phenomenon.

Interviewing

Life World

The topic of qualitative interviews is the everyday lived world of the interviewee and his or her relation to it.

Interviewing

Meaning

The interview seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject. The interviewer registers and interprets the meaning of what is said as well as how it is said.

Interviewing

The qualitative research interview seeks to describe and understand the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say.

Interviewing

Qualitative

The interview seeks qualitative knowledge expressed in normal language, it does not aim at quantification.

QUANTIFICATION = COUNTING

QUALIFICATION = NUANCE

Interviewing

Descriptive

The interview attempts to obtain open nuanced descriptions of different aspects of the subject's life worlds.

Interviewing

Specificity

Descriptions of specific situations and action sequences are elicited, not general opinions.

Other Interviewing Terms of Interest

- ▶ Deliberate Naïveté
- ▶ Focused
- ▶ Ambiguity
- ▶ Change
- ▶ Sensitivity
- ▶ Interpersonal Situation
- ▶ Positive Experience

Types of Interview Questions

- Introducing Questions
 - Follow-Up Questions
 - Probing Questions
 - Specifying Questions
 - Direct Questions
 - Indirect Questions
 - Structuring Questions
 - Silence
 - Interpreting Questions
- 

Quality Criteria for Interview Questions

- The extent of spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant answers
- The shorter the interviewer's questions and the longer the subject's answers, the better.
- The degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers.
- The ideal interview is to a large extent interpreted throughout the interview
- The interviewer attempt to verify his or her own interpretations of the subject's answers
- The interview is “self-communicating” – it is a story contained in itself that hardly requires much extra descriptions and explanation.

Key Concepts

- Objectivity in Qualitative Research
 - Individual Case Study (extensive knowledge of past and conjecture to future motivation)
 - The Open Mode (free, nondirective, open)
 - Interpretation of Meaning
 - Temporal Dimension
 - Human Interaction
 - Pathology as Topic of Investigation
 - Investigation of Change
- 

Seven Stages of an Interview Investigation

(Kvale, 2006)

- ▶ Thematizing (producing themes)

Formulate the purpose of an investigation and describe the concept of the topic to be investigated before the interview starts. The WHY and WHAT of the investigation should be clarified before the questions of HOW of the method is posed.

Seven Stages of an Interview Investigation

(Kvale, 2006)

- ▶ Designing

Plan the design of the study, taking into account all seven stages of the investigation, before the interviewing starts. Designing the study is undertaken with regard to obtaining the intended knowledge and taking into account the moral implications of the study.

Seven Stages of an Interview Investigation

(Kvale, 2006)

- ▶ Interviewing

Conduct the interviews based on an interview guide and with a reflective approach to the knowledge sought and the interpersonal relation of the interview situation.

Seven Stages of an Interview Investigation

(Kvale, 2006)

- ▶ Transcribing

Prepare the interview material for analysis, which commonly includes transcription from oral to written speech to written text.

Seven Stages of an Interview Investigation

(Kvale, 2006)

- ▶ Analyzing

Decide, on the basis of the purpose and topic of the investigation, and on the nature of the interview material, which methods of analysis are appropriate for the interview.

Seven Stages of an Interview Investigation

(Kvale, 2006)

- Verifying–

Since there are no concepts of generalizability, reliability, and validity of the findings in qualitative design, it is necessary to use triangulation, horizontalization, and measures of trustworthiness.

Seven Stages of an Interview Investigation

(Kvale, 2006)

- ▶ Reporting

Communicate the findings of the study and the methods applied in a form that lives up to scientific criteria, takes the ethical aspects of the investigation into consideration, and that results in a readable product.

Some Final Thoughts

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE NARRATIVE

- ▶ Qualitative Research tells a story.
- ▶ The best elements of the story should emerge from the work.