Qualitative Research: The Basics
Qualitative Research

I. Peer Review
Qualitative research relies heavily on a thorough grounding within the peer-reviewed literature.
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–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
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
Galkeeper – 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
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Exploring the life of an individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline origin</td>
<td>Anthropology, literature, history, sociology, psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Primarily interviews and documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Stories, epiphanies, historical content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative form</td>
<td>Detailed picture of an individual’s life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Data Collection Activities of Traditions in Qualitative Research – Biography
Adapted from Creswell (1998), pp. 112-13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is studied?</th>
<th>Single individual, accessible, and distinctive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access and rapport issues/problems</td>
<td>Gaining permission from individuals, obtaining access to information in archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to select sites or individuals to study</td>
<td>Several strategies depending on person (e.g. convenient, politically important, a critical case)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of information to collect</td>
<td>Documents and archival material, open-ended interviews, subject journaling, participant observation, casual chatting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is information recorded?</td>
<td>Notes, interview protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection issues</td>
<td>Access to materials, authenticity of account and materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storing information</td>
<td>File folders, computer files</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Traditions in Qualitative Research – Case Study
Adapted from Creswell (1998), p. 65

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case of multiple cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline origin</td>
<td>Political science, evaluation, urban studies, other social sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Multiple sources – documents, archival records, interviews, observations, physical artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Description, themes, assertions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative form</td>
<td>In-depth study of a “case” or “cases”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Case Study

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case of multiple cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline origin</td>
<td>Political science, evaluation, urban studies, other social sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Multiple sources – documents, archival records, interviews, observations, physical artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Description, themes, assertions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative form</td>
<td>In-depth study of a “case” or “cases’”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Traditions in Qualitative Research – Ethnography
Adapted from Creswell (1998), p. 65

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline origin</td>
<td>Cultural anthropology, sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Primarily observations and interviews -- additional artifacts during extended time in the field (e.g., 6 months to a year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Description, analysis, interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative form</td>
<td>Description of the cultural behavior of a group or an individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Data Collection Activities of Traditions in Qualitative Research – Ethnography
Adapted from Creswell (1998), pp. 112-13

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline origin</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Interviews with 20-30 individuals to “saturate” categories and detail a theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Open coding, axial coding, selective coding, conditional matrix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative form</td>
<td>Theory or theoretical model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Grounded Theory

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is studied?</th>
<th>Multiple individuals who have responded to action or participated in a process about a central phenomenon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access and rapport issues</td>
<td>Locating a homogenous sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to select sites or individuals to study</td>
<td>Finding a homogenous sample, a “theory-based” sample, a “theoretical” sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of information to collect</td>
<td>Primarily interviews with 20-30 people to achieve detail in the theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is information recorded?</td>
<td>Interview protocol, memoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection issues</td>
<td>Interview issues (e.g., logistics, openness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storing information</td>
<td>Transcriptions, computer files</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Traditions in Qualitative Research --
### Phenomenology
Adapted from Creswell (1998), p. 65

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Understand the essence of experience about a phenomenon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline origin</td>
<td>Philosophy, sociology, psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Long interviews with up to 10 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Statements, meanings, meaning themes, general description of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative form</td>
<td>Description of the “essence” of the experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Phenomenology

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is studied?</th>
<th>Multiple individuals who experienced the phenomenon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access and rapport issues/problems</td>
<td>Finding people who have experienced the phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to select sites or individuals to study</td>
<td>Finding individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, a “criterion” sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of information to collect</td>
<td>Interviews with up to 10 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is information recorded?</td>
<td>Long interview protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection issues</td>
<td>Bracketing one’s experiences, logistics of interviewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storing information</td>
<td>Transcriptions, computer files</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. Traditions Used Within and Without the Social Sciences
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.
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.
V. 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.
The topic of qualitative interviews is the everyday lived world of the interviewee and his or her relation to it.
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.
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.
Qualitative

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

QUANTIFICATION = COUNTING
QUALIFICACION = 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.