

# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THEORY AND PRACTICE

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*Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice* is intended to be a one-stop resource for all those approaching qualitative research for the first time, as well as providing an overview of core concepts and issues for those revisiting this vastly expansive, and rapidly expanding, subject area. The book is intended to be both a handbook providing practical guidelines on conducting qualitative research, and a jump off point for reflection on the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings for different qualitative research methodologies.

To these ends, each aspect of the research process is covered for a plethora of approaches, from selecting a research project, to choosing a research design, how to go about data collection and analysis and, finally, how to interpret and write up the findings. The book also helpfully considers the more general philosophical basis of qualitative research compared to the positivistic underpinnings of most quantitative research. Overall, the book would provide a useful companion to most undergraduate and postgraduate course on research methodology, and the principles could be applied across practically all social research contexts.

The text is divided into seven sections, which cover a range of integrated topics. Part 1 'Considering perspectives' locates qualitative approaches in terms of its relation to quantitative positivist approaches and provides information regarding the practical and theoretical choices a qualitative researcher may have to make during the process. In Part 2, 'Acknowledging a position', the authors discuss the array of philosophical perspectives that may inform different methodologies. Part 3 'Framing the study' provides a model for conceptual approaches across the spectrum of qualitative approaches and introduces the authors' own conceptual innovation 'the Qualitative Wheel of Research Choices'. In Part 4, 'Choosing a research approach' the authors outline the details of ten research methods that are often used by qualitative researchers. Part 5 'Collecting data' covers issues relating to conducting research, including selecting a research context and participants, as well as discussing gaining ethical approval. In part 6, 'Working with data and findings', the authors discuss how to code data, alongside analysis and interpretation of the research findings (including insuring quality). Finally, Part 7 'Writing about the research' explores how the author might position themselves in the text, as well as writing up the research for publication.

A key innovation provided by the book is the Qualitative Wheel of Research Choices. This tool provides a means by which qualitative researchers can conceptualise the five 'moments of choice' the authors consider crucial in the process of going about qualitative research. These five moments include: choice of research paradigm (e.g. phenomenological, social constructionist etc.); choice of research phenomenon (e.g. individuals, groups, concepts etc.); selection of qualitative research approach (e.g. grounded theory, narrative etc.); data collection approach (e.g. interview, observation, focus group etc.); and analytic strategy (e.g. thematic analysis, content analysis, constant comparison etc.). The Qualitative Wheel of Research Choices is then set against the concept of a set of 'research lenses', which is basically a means by which researchers can locate their research according to the paradigm, phenomenon, approach, data collection and analysis of the research study. The text is helpfully illustrated with clear diagrams of the Wheel and the different research lenses, along with illustrations of how these concepts may interact.

Also included in the book is 12-month access to an Interactive eTextbook. This facility offers the purchaser access to a range of resources including author videos introducing the book and the Qualitative Wheel of Research Choices, an Interactive version of the Qualitative Wheel of Research Choices, exclusive chapters on writing and publishing qualitative research, links to relevant journals, conferences and online resources, additional case study abstracts and the ability to highlight, annotate, cut and paste, and notes that can be shared across the classroom. The addition of the online materials represent a fairly comprehensive and helpful accompaniment to the book itself, especially in terms of providing a more dynamic, interactive version of the Qualitative Wheel of Research Choices.

Overall, the book presents a fairly comprehensive overview of key developments in the field of qualitative inquiry, and gives plenty of practical, hands-on advice on how to conduct a successful qualitative study. Each chapter contains an array of relevant, real-life examples from expert researchers around the globe to illustrate the main theoretical and methodological research topics. The diversity of research methods covered by the book is also broad and inclusive. Again, each method is illustrated with the use of practical examples from leading experts in the fields of education, sociology, psychology, social sciences and health.

The strength of inclusivity is also a weakness in some respects: whilst the breadth is welcome, the depth is sometimes lacking. In trying to encompass a range of research methods I sometimes thought the authors provided an over-simplified account of some approaches. The chapter on Ethnography, for example, I thought did not account for the complexities of the manifold variations of this method. I also wondered whether there was too much consideration of paradigmatic factors against pragmatic ones. However, the authors do provide useful references and options for further reading for the more advanced or curious researchers.

Another weakness is the authors' use of the Qualitative Wheel of Research Choices. In a market saturated with textbooks and how-to manuals, the authors' attempts to innovate here are both welcome and unique. However, I found the Wheel to be a bit over-complicated and not very user-friendly. It is worth noting that the dynamic interface of the interactive online version makes the process more comprehensive. Still, I'm not convinced such an innovation is really necessary or adds anything substantial to what is already out there on the topic.

Such criticisms aside, *Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice* provides a useful and comprehensive introduction to this often perplexing area. I believe it would be a good place to start as any for the beginning and neophyte qualitative social researcher.

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