

Qualitative Research vs. Quantitative Research

"The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Proponents of such studies claim that their work is done from within a value-free framework" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8)¹.

Definition: Qualitative	Definition: Quantitative
<p>When speaking of kinds of research, qualitative refers to studies of subjects that are hard to quantify, such as art history. The term qualitative research tends to be a residual category for almost any kind of nonquantitative research. [...]</p> <p>The qualitative-quantitative distinction is often overdrawn. It is difficult to avoid quantitative elements in the most qualitative subject matter. For examples, "The painter entered his 'blue period' in the 1890s." And qualitative components are crucial to most good quantitative research, which begins with theories, concepts, and constructs.</p>	<p>Said of variables or research that can be handled numerically. Usually contrasted (too sharply) with qualitative variables and research. Many research designs lend themselves well to collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, and many variables can be handled either qualitatively or quantitatively. For example, naturalistic observations can give rise to either or both kinds of data. Interactions can be counted and timed with a stopwatch or they can be interpreted more holistically.</p>

Definitions taken from the *Dictionary of Statistics & Methodology* by W. Paul Vogt²

Qualitative Research:

- The major instrument for data collection and analysis *is* the qualitative researcher.
- Research is "in the field"—conducting interviews, observing and recording behavior.
- Data is narrative (words).
- Focused on the individual, human level. Rich detail and description are important.
- Concerned with process more so than outcomes and results.
- Subjective; the researcher immerses him/herself.
- Research design is flexible and evolving.

Quantitative Research:

- Questionnaires, inventories, and computers are used as data collection methods.
- Data is numerical, statistical.
- Large sample sizes are used to produce generalizations for a population.
- Research begins with a hypothesis—the goal being to explain a specific phenomena with numbers and objective data.
- Objective; the researcher observes but does not actively participate.
- Research design is structured and well-tested.

¹ Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

² Vogt, W. P. (2005). *Dictionary of statistics & methodology: A nontechnical guide for the social sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Research with Informants [Qualitative]

1. What do my informants know about their culture that I can discover?
2. What concepts do my informants use to classify their experiences?
3. How do my informants define these concepts?
4. What folk theory do my informants use to explain their experience?
5. How can I translate the cultural knowledge of my informants into a cultural description my colleagues will understand?

Research with Subjects [Quantitative]

1. What do I know about a problem that will allow me to formulate and test a hypothesis?
2. What concepts can I use to test this hypothesis?
3. How can I operationally define these concepts?
4. What scientific theory can explain the data?
5. How can I interpret the results and report them in the language of my colleagues?

Table content taken from Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

If you would like additional resources regarding qualitative and quantitative research, please ask a Librarian for assistance.