



Qualitative research: *when* and *why* to use it sources. Adapted from: Guest, G., Namey, E.

E., & Mitchell, M. (2013). *Qualitative Research : Defining and Designing*, Sage. ; Dawson, C., (2002). *Practical Research Methods, How to Books.* ; Berg, B.L., (2001). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, Allyn & Bacon. ; <https://explorable.com/quantitative-and-qualitative-research>

At the most basic level, all research can be divided into two methodologies: qualitative (non-numerical data) or quantitative (information of numerical data or information which can be converted into numerical data).

When doing your dissertation or other research at undergrad or post-grad levels, you will be thinking about whether that research is the best methodology. This brief guide provides some of the questions and answers to help you decide.



1. What are the aims and use of the research?

	Qualitative	Quantitative
Hypothesis	Broad	Narrow
Description	Whole picture	Focused
Type of Research	Exploratory	Conclusive

Quantitative research is generally used to show the what of a finding and is therefore more useful in the earlier parts of a research project where no reliable data exists. It is about quantity and as it is seen as more “scientific and precise”, as it uses numerical data.

Qualitative research about quality as it uses focus groups or interviews which are usually less in number, but more in depth. It is therefore more exploratory and provides a more detailed description of the research topic. These approaches examine the how and why of a finding, and can help uncover and explain human *behaviour, attitudes* and *experiences* which are difficult to find using qualitative data collection.

2. How will you gather data?

Quantitative approaches use large-scale numerical or measurable data from or primary methods such as surveys, interviews or questionnaires or other measurements, or secondary sources. This collected data is used to generate statistics which are then analysed to show features and model and explanations of what is being observed.

Qualitative researchers on the other hand might use structured and non-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, archival research, documentary or content analysis, participant observation or narratives.

3. What approach and type of data will you use?

Quantitative research aims to be *objective* as it only uses observable and precise data.

Data is presented in tables of numbers and statistics.

Qualitative research aims to understand human behaviour. It is largely interpretive and therefore *subjective*. Data will usually be presented through words (from interviews), objects (from artefacts), and images (through videos).

Remember, these two methodologies are not better or worse, just different. They both have their strengths and weaknesses and sometimes a combination of the two is best (known as “triangulation”). For instance, you maybe want to find out both what the human behaviour is and explain why and/or how this is the case.