Field Research
# Quantitative vs. Qualitative Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quantitative Research</th>
<th>Qualitative Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>• Test hypotheses&lt;br&gt;• Formulate general laws</td>
<td>• Immerse self in data&lt;br&gt;• Capture meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concepts</strong></td>
<td>• Formulate distinct variables</td>
<td>• Themes, motifs, generalizations, taxonomies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Measures</strong></td>
<td>• Created <em>before</em> data collection&lt;br&gt;• Systematic, standardized</td>
<td>• Created <em>during</em> data collection&lt;br&gt;• Ad hoc, specific to setting or researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data</strong></td>
<td>• Numerical&lt;br&gt;• Precisely measured</td>
<td>• Words, images&lt;br&gt;• From documents, observations, transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theory</strong></td>
<td>• Usually causal&lt;br&gt;• Deductive</td>
<td>• Causal or non-causal&lt;br&gt;• Inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedures</strong></td>
<td>• Standard to facilitate replication</td>
<td>• Particular to setting and researcher, rarely replicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis</strong></td>
<td>• Statistics, tables, charts&lt;br&gt;• Related to hypotheses</td>
<td>• Themes, generalizations&lt;br&gt;• Organizes data to present a coherent and consistent picture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative Data

Expressed as words, text, pictures, images, objects or other symbolic representations.

The job of the researcher is to identify important representations to a group, then discern the meaning that group members attach to these representations.
Field Research

Topics Appropriate for Field Research:

(1) The micro-processes through which social situations and structures are constructed

(2) Rules and processes of social interaction

(3) The social reality of a particular group
Field Research

Source of Data for Field Research:

(1) Observation
(2) Documents
(3) Interviews
Steps in Field Research

1. Choose a Topic of Interest
2. Select a Field Site
3. Enter the Field; Establish Connections
4. Establish a Role; Observe; Make Friends
5. Watch, Listen, Participate, Collect Data, Take Notes
6. Analyze Data; Generate Working Hypotheses
7. Focus on Areas of Interest; Connect with Theory
8. Conduct Interviews, Focus Groups or Other Targeted Data Collection
9. Disengage and Leave the Setting
10. Complete Your Analysis
11. Write Report; Inform Others
12. Get Back to Your Life


SSC 470/570: Methods of Social Research
Steps in Field Research

(1) Choose a topic of interest

• Field Researchers use the literature to focus in on a particular issue or topic they want to study and understand
• They start with a general, unfocused topic, and apply a “learning” perspective throughout data collection
Steps in Field Research

(2) Select a Field Site

• Field Researcher must carefully select a site that allows them to study their topic of interest
• They generally collaborate with local organizations or key informants
Steps in Field Research

(3) Enter the Field and Establish Connections with Subjects

• Field Researchers spend a lot of time with their collaborators and get to know people
• They review documents to learn about the history and structure of their organization and community
• They may use a variety of organizations as secondary sources
Steps in Field Research

(4) Establish a Role, Observe, Make Friends

• Field Researchers must establish an identity in the organization or community.
• They spend a lot of time talking to people, telling them what they are doing, and asking questions.
Steps in Field Research

(5) Watch, Listen, Collect Data, Take Notes

• Field Researchers observe activities, events, ordinary interactions
• They keep detailed notes of everything they observe and their reactions
• Their notes are their data; they need to review them periodically
Steps in Field Research

(6) Analyze Data and Generate Working Hypotheses

• Analysis of field data is an on-going process that involves establishing patterns in the data
• As field researchers progress, they generate working hypotheses that tie their case to a particular theoretical perspective
Steps in Field Research

(7) Focus on Aspects of Interest, Connect with Theory

• Using working hypotheses, Field Researchers focus their activities on specific events that address the hypotheses
• They think in terms of grouping or organizing information into theoretical categories
Steps in Field Research

(8) Conduct Interviews, Focus Groups, or Other Targeted Data Collection Techniques

• Field Researchers frequently use open-ended questions to understand their subjects and subject matter
• They administer the questions to selected subjects or focus groups, chosen subjects purposefully, using “snowball” sampling or advice from a key informant
• They usually record the interviews
Steps in Field Research

(9) Disengage and Leave the Setting

• Field Research involves building relationships over time, and once the project is complete, field researchers must reorient the relationships with their subjects.
• Subjects contribute a lot to the research, and field researchers must treat them with respect and dignity.
Steps in Field Research

(10) Complete the Analysis and Write the Report

• Once Field Researchers return from the field, they finalize their typology or theory, and prepare their results
• Many then verify their results with their subjects
• They then present their results to colleagues