

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

What is the difference between Methods and Methodology?

Methods are the specific approach to collecting your data. This could include:

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Experiments
- Case studies
- Observational studies
- Online data collection

Every method varies in style, so it is important that you research these before applying them. For example, an interview could be structured or semi-structured. A survey could be multiple choice or long answer questions.

Methodology is the theoretical framework to support the methods chosen. It is a perspective taken on the research, which dictates how it is approached. Examples of this are:

- Phenomenology – “Phenomenology provides us with interpretations regarding the distinctions between the internal and external world as well as levels of objectivity and subjectivity.”¹
- Critical Theory – “strands of critical theory exist in terms of criticism of occidental complacency and that ruling elites and ideologies should be challenged as well as greater equality and liberty sought.”¹
- Ethnography – “research is undertaken in the field and attempts to capture and understand social action and the meaning of this action. The researcher is not based in a constructed setting or experiment but part of the everyday natural situation within which those under investigation (or those involved with research project) exist.”¹

How are methods chosen?

Every discipline uses different methods for research. For example, a study on stressed students could be examined through focus groups in the Humanities or by tracking heart rates in the Sciences. Each of these are valid, but would generate different data. Sometimes a mix of methods can be used. When selecting methods, you should:

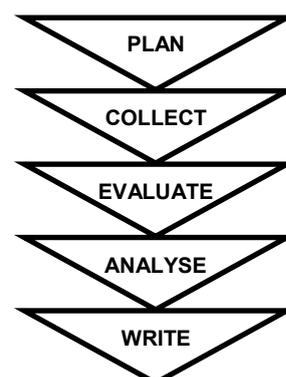
- do a literature review of similar studies,
- read about methods & methodology, and
- speak to your supervisor.

Before collecting data ask yourself:

- Do you have access to the people/resources needed?
- Is there a high risk level?
- Can you rationalise the risk level?
- Have you got ethics approval?
- Does it fit your budget and timeline?
- Will it create reliable data?
- How can you compare your data?
- How are you recruiting participants?
- Have you created consent forms?

Remember:

Your methods are a part of your entire research project, so it is important that you plan them well from the start.



What other key terms are important?

- **Ontology** – “conceptualisations of reality or truth.”¹ How can we gain knowledge of something that has yet to be proven to exist?
- **Epistemology** – “the relationship between the observer and observed.”¹ How involved is the investigator? Are the results objective or subjective?
- **Quantitative** – This research approach is about gaining a high collection of data to ensure accuracy. It is often statistically based. Surveys are an example of this.
- **Qualitative** – This research entails depth. For example, interviewing 20 people, rather than surveying 200 people, allows participants to explain their responses.

Survey Tips

- ⇒ Surveys should be simplified for easy comparison across answers.
- ⇒ Do not combine too many different types of questions (e.g. ranking 1 to 10, ranking highly likely to highly unlikely, multiple choice, long answer...)
- ⇒ Surveys vary in length. 10 to 30 questions are suitable. However, it depends on where and how they are doing the survey (e.g. street surveys will need less questions).
- ⇒ Participants should be able to skip questions that are not relevant to them.
- ⇒ Research various online survey platforms that will help to collate the data.
- ⇒ Test out the survey on peers before official use. You want to make sure the questions are clear and there are no technical glitches.

Focus Group Tips

- ⇒ Sometimes people become shy in a group. Try to make them feel comfortable. Start with simple questions and get to know them a bit.
- ⇒ Set out clear objectives.
- ⇒ Recruit suitable people.
- ⇒ Do a pilot study first, then refine it and repeat.
- ⇒ Maintain control of the group. If they start to go off track, bring the discussion back to your question.
- ⇒ Avoid leading questions, make sure you word them appropriately.
- ⇒ Do not assume you understand what a participant is saying; ask them to elaborate.

Interview Tips

- ⇒ Have consistent questions that can be easily compared across interviews.
- ⇒ Always start with a basic question to make the interviewee feel at ease.
- ⇒ Be able to adapt your interviews for in-person, email, Skype, phone etc.
- ⇒ Do not ask double questions. Keep your questions short and simple.
- ⇒ Have 10 main interview questions and 10 spare. Some interviewees will talk a lot and you will run out of time, so questions must be prioritised. Other interviewees are very succinct, so you do not want the interview to end too quickly.
- ⇒ Allow the option for your interviewee to go on tangents, but not for too long.
- ⇒ Get approval for recording interviews. This will help for accurate transcribing.
- ⇒ Look into transcribing programs.

1. Howell, K.E 2013, *An introduction to the philosophy of methodology*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London, [Accessed 6 November 2018], doi: 10.4135/9781473957633.

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