



# **Social Research Methods**

**Alan Bryman**

*Fifth edition*

**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Brief contents

Detailed contents	ix
About the author	xxiii
Introducing the students	xxiv
Guide to the book	xxv
Guided tour of textbook features	xxx
Guided tour of the ORC: lecturer resources	xxxii
Guided tour of the ORC: student resources	xxxiii
Abbreviations	xxxiv

## **Part One: The Research Process** **1**

<b>1</b> The nature and process of social research	2
<b>2</b> Social research strategies: quantitative research and qualitative research	16
<b>3</b> Research designs	39
<b>4</b> Planning a research project and formulating research questions	73
<b>5</b> Getting started: reviewing the literature	90
<b>6</b> Ethics and politics in social research	120

## **Part Two: Quantitative Research** **147**

<b>7</b> The nature of quantitative research	148
<b>8</b> Sampling in quantitative research	170
<b>9</b> Structured interviewing	197
<b>10</b> Self-administered questionnaires	220
<b>11</b> Asking questions	243
<b>12</b> Structured observation	266
<b>13</b> Content analysis	283
<b>14</b> Using existing data	308
<b>15</b> Quantitative data analysis	329
<b>16</b> Using IBM SPSS statistics	352

## **Part Three: Qualitative Research** **373**

<b>17</b> The nature of qualitative research	374
<b>18</b> Sampling in qualitative research	407
<b>19</b> Ethnography and participant observation	422

<b>20</b>	Interviewing in qualitative research	465
<b>21</b>	Focus groups	500
<b>22</b>	Language in qualitative research	525
<b>23</b>	Documents as sources of data	545
<b>24</b>	Qualitative data analysis	569
<b>25</b>	Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis: using NVivo	601
<b>Part Four: Mixed Methods Research and Writing Up</b>		<b>619</b>
<b>26</b>	Breaking down the quantitative/qualitative divide	620
<b>27</b>	Mixed methods research: combining quantitative and qualitative research	634
<b>28</b>	Writing up social research	661
	Glossary	688
	References	698
	Name index	727
	Subject index	732

# Detailed contents

About the author	xxiii
Introducing the students	xxiv
Guide to the book	xxv
Guided tour of textbook features	xxx
Guided tour of the ORC: lecturer resources	xxxii
Guided tour of the ORC: student resources	xxxiii
Abbreviations	xxxiv

## Part One: The Research Process

1

<b>Chapter 1 The nature and process of social research</b>	<b>2</b>
Introduction	3
What is meant by 'social research'?	3
Why do social research?	3
The context of social research methods	3
Elements of the process of social research	6
Literature review	6
Concepts and theories	6
Research questions	7
Sampling cases	9
Data collection	10
Data analysis	11
Writing up	11
The messiness of social research	13
<i>Key points</i>	14
<i>Questions for review</i>	14
<b>Chapter 2 Social research strategies: quantitative research and qualitative research</b>	<b>16</b>
Introduction	17
Theory and research	18
What type of theory?	18
Deductive and inductive theory	21
Epistemological considerations	24
A natural science epistemology: positivism	24
Interpretivism	26
Ontological considerations	28
Objectivism	29
Constructionism	29
Relationship to social research	30
Research strategy: quantitative and qualitative research	31
Influences on the conduct of social research	34
Values	34
Practical considerations	36

	<i>Key points</i>	37
	<i>Questions for review</i>	37
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Research designs</b>	39
	Introduction	40
	Quality criteria in social research	41
	Reliability	41
	Replication	41
	Validity	41
	Relationship with research strategy	43
	Research designs	44
	Experimental design	44
	Cross-sectional design	52
	Longitudinal design(s)	56
	Case study design	60
	Comparative design	64
	Bringing research strategy and research design together	69
	<i>Key points</i>	70
	<i>Questions for review</i>	71
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Planning a research project and formulating research questions</b>	73
	Introduction	74
	Getting to know what is expected of you by your institution	74
	Thinking about your research area	74
	Using your supervisor	74
	Managing time and resources	75
	Formulating suitable research questions	78
	Criteria for evaluating research questions	83
	Writing your research proposal	85
	Preparing for your research	85
	Doing your research and analysing your results	86
	<i>Checklist</i>	87
	<i>Key points</i>	88
	<i>Questions for review</i>	88
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Getting started: reviewing the literature</b>	90
	Reviewing the existing literature	90
	Narrative review	91
	Getting the most from your reading	95
	Systematic review	98
	Searching the existing literature	105
	Electronic databases	105
	Keywords and defining search parameters	110
	Referencing your work	112
	The role of the bibliography	112
	Avoiding plagiarism	115
	<i>Checklist</i>	118
	<i>Key points</i>	118
	<i>Questions for review</i>	119

<b>Chapter 6 Ethics and politics in social research</b>	120
Introduction	121
Ethical principles	125
Harm to participants	126
Lack of informed consent	129
Invasion of privacy	131
Deception	133
Ethics and the issue of quality	134
The difficulties of ethical decision-making	138
New media and ethical considerations	139
Ethics and the Internet	139
Ethics and visual images	140
Politics in social research	141
<i>Checklist</i>	144
<i>Key points</i>	145
<i>Questions for review</i>	146

## Part Two: Quantitative Research

147

<b>Chapter 7 The nature of quantitative research</b>	148
Introduction	149
The main steps in quantitative research	149
Concepts and their measurement	151
What is a concept?	151
Why measure?	152
Indicators	152
Using multiple-indicator measures	153
Dimensions of concepts	155
Reliability and validity	156
Reliability	156
Validity	158
Reflections on reliability and validity	162
The main preoccupations of quantitative researchers	163
Measurement	163
Causality	163
Generalization	163
Replication	164
The critique of quantitative research	166
Criticisms of quantitative research	166
Is it always like this?	167
Reverse operationism	167
Reliability and validity testing	167
Sampling	168
<i>Key points</i>	168
<i>Questions for review</i>	169
<b>Chapter 8 Sampling in quantitative research</b>	170
Introduction to survey research	171
Introduction to sampling	171
Sampling error	175
Types of probability sample	176



Simple random sample	176
Systematic sample	178
Stratified random sampling	178
Multi-stage cluster sampling	179
<b>The qualities of a probability sample</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>Sample size</b>	<b>183</b>
Absolute and relative sample size	183
Time and cost	184
Non-response	184
Heterogeneity of the population	186
Kind of analysis	186
<b>Types of non-probability sampling</b>	<b>187</b>
Convenience sampling	187
Snowball sampling	188
Quota sampling	188
<b>Sampling issues in online surveys</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>Limits to generalization</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>Error in survey research</b>	<b>194</b>
<i>Key points</i>	195
<i>Questions for review</i>	195
<b>Chapter 9 Structured interviewing</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>The structured interview</b>	<b>198</b>
Reducing error due to interviewer variability	198
Accuracy and ease of data processing	200
Other types of interview	201
<b>Interview contexts</b>	<b>202</b>
More than one interviewee	202
More than one interviewer	202
In person or by telephone?	202
Computer-assisted interviewing	204
Using mobile phones for interview surveys	205
<b>Conducting interviews</b>	<b>205</b>
Know the schedule	206
Introducing the research	206
Rapport	206
Asking questions	207
Recording answers	208
Clear instructions	208
Question order	208
Probing	212
Prompting	213
Leaving the interview	213
Training and supervision	215
<b>Problems with structured interviewing</b>	<b>216</b>
Characteristics of interviewers	216
Response sets	216
The problem of meaning	217
The feminist critique	217
<i>Key points</i>	218
<i>Questions for review</i>	219

<b>Chapter 10 Self-administered questionnaires</b>	220
Introduction	221
Self-administered questionnaire or postal questionnaire?	221
Evaluating the self-administered questionnaire in relation to the structured interview	221
Advantages of the self-administered questionnaire over the structured interview	222
Disadvantages of the self-administered questionnaire in comparison with the structured interview	223
Steps to improve response rates to postal questionnaires	225
<b>Designing the self-administered questionnaire</b>	226
Do not cramp the presentation	226
Clear presentation	226
Vertical or horizontal closed-ended answers?	226
Clear instructions about how to respond	228
Keep question and answers together	229
<b>Online social surveys</b>	229
Email surveys	229
Web surveys	230
Use of mobile telephones as a platform for self-administered questionnaires	231
<b>Mixed mode surveys</b>	232
<b>Diaries as a form of self-administered questionnaire</b>	237
Advantages and disadvantages of the diary as a method of data collection	240
<b>Experience and event sampling</b>	240
<i>Key points</i>	241
<i>Questions for review</i>	242
<b>Chapter 11 Asking questions</b>	243
Introduction	243
Open- or closed-ended questions?	244
Open-ended questions	244
Closed-ended questions	246
Types of questions	250
Rules for designing questions	251
General rules of thumb	251
Specific rules when designing questions	252
Vignette questions	259
Piloting and pre-testing questions	260
Using existing questions	261
<i>Checklist</i>	262
<i>Key points</i>	263
<i>Questions for review</i>	264
<b>Chapter 12 Structured observation</b>	266
Introduction	267
Problems with survey research on social behaviour	267
So why not observe behaviour?	269
The observation schedule	271
Strategies for observing behaviour	273
Sampling	273



Sampling people	273
Sampling in terms of time	274
Further sampling considerations	274
Issues of reliability and validity	275
Reliability	275
Validity	275
Field stimulations as a form of structured observation	277
Criticisms of structured observation	279
On the other hand . . .	279
<i>Checklist</i>	280
<i>Key points</i>	281
<i>Questions for review</i>	281
<b>Chapter 13 Content analysis</b>	283
Introduction	284
What are the research questions?	285
Selecting a sample	287
Sampling media	287
Sampling dates	287
What is to be counted?	289
Significant actors	289
Words	289
Subjects and themes	292
Dispositions	292
Coding	293
Coding schedule	293
Coding manual	293
Potential pitfalls in devising coding schemes	294
The Internet as object of content analysis	299
Content analysis of visual materials	301
Advantages of content analysis	302
Disadvantages of content analysis	305
<i>Checklist</i>	305
<i>Key points</i>	306
<i>Questions for review</i>	306
<b>Chapter 14 Using existing data</b>	308
Introduction	309
Secondary analysis of other researchers' data	309
Advantages of secondary analysis	310
Limitations of secondary analysis	312
Accessing the UK Data Archive	313
Meta-analysis	318
Official statistics	319
Reliability and validity	321
Condemning and resurrecting official statistics	322
Official statistics as a form of unobtrusive method	323
Big Data	325
<i>Key points</i>	327
<i>Questions for review</i>	327

<b>Chapter 15 Quantitative data analysis</b>	329
Introduction	330
A small research project	330
Missing data	332
Types of variable	334
Univariate analysis	336
Frequency tables	336
Diagrams	337
Measures of central tendency	338
Measures of dispersion	338
Bivariate analysis	339
Relationships, not causality	339
Contingency tables	340
Pearson's $r$	341
Spearman's rho	343
Phi and Cramér's $V$	343
Comparing means and eta	343
Multivariate analysis	344
Could the relationship be spurious?	344
Could there be an intervening variable?	344
Could a third variable moderate the relationship?	344
Statistical significance	345
The chi-square test	347
Correlation and statistical significance	348
Comparing means and statistical significance	348
<i>Checklist</i>	349
<i>Key points</i>	349
<i>Questions for review</i>	350
<b>Chapter 16 Using IBM SPSS statistics</b>	352
Introduction	353
Getting started in SPSS	354
Beginning SPSS	354
Entering data in the Data Viewer	354
Defining variables: variable names, missing values, variable labels, and value labels	356
Recoding variables	357
Computing a new variable	358
Data analysis with SPSS	360
Generating a frequency table	360
Generating a bar chart	361
Generating a pie chart	361
Generating a histogram	362
Generating the arithmetic mean, median, standard deviation, range, and boxplots	362
Generating a contingency table, chi-square, and Cramér's $V$	362
Generating Pearson's $r$ and Spearman's rho	363
Generating scatter diagrams	363
Comparing means and eta	367
Generating a contingency table with three variables	367
Further operations in SPSS	370
Saving your data	370

Retrieving your data	370
Printing output	370
<i>Key points</i>	370
<i>Questions for review</i>	370

## Part Three: Qualitative Research

373

<b>Chapter 17 The nature of qualitative research</b>	374
Introduction	375
The main steps in qualitative research	378
Theory and research	381
Concepts in qualitative research	382
Reliability and validity in qualitative research	383
Adapting reliability and validity for qualitative research	383
Alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research	384
Recent discussions about quality criteria for qualitative research	387
Between quantitative and qualitative research criteria	390
Overview of the issue of quality criteria	391
The main preoccupations of qualitative researchers	392
Seeing through the eyes of the people being studied	392
Description and the emphasis on context	394
Emphasis on process	395
Flexibility and limited structure	397
Concepts and theory grounded in data	397
The critique of qualitative research	398
Qualitative research is too subjective	398
Difficult to replicate	398
Problems of generalization	399
Lack of transparency	399
Is it always like this?	400
Some contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research	400
Some similarities between quantitative and qualitative research	402
Feminism and qualitative research	403
<i>Key points</i>	405
<i>Questions for review</i>	405
<b>Chapter 18 Sampling in qualitative research</b>	407
Introduction	407
Levels of sampling	408
Purposive sampling	410
Theoretical sampling	410
Generic purposive sampling	412
Snowball sampling	415
Sample size	416
Not just people	418
Using more than one sampling approach	419
<i>Key points</i>	420
<i>Questions for review</i>	420

<b>Chapter 19 Ethnography and participant observation</b>	422
Introduction	423
Access	425
Overt versus covert ethnography	425
Access to closed settings	427
Access to open/public settings	428
Ongoing access	430
Key informants	432
Roles for ethnographers	433
Active or passive?	438
Field notes	440
Types of field notes	442
Bringing ethnographic research to an end	445
Can there be a feminist ethnography?	446
The rise of online ethnography	447
The rise of visual ethnography	451
Writing ethnography	459
The changing nature of ethnography	461
<i>Key points</i>	462
<i>Questions for review</i>	463
<b>Chapter 20 Interviewing in qualitative research</b>	465
Introduction	466
Differences between the structured interview and the qualitative interview	466
Conducting a qualitative interview	468
Preparing an interview guide	469
Kinds of questions	472
Using photographs in qualitative interviews	476
Using a mobile interview approach	477
Using an interview guide: an example	478
Recording and transcription	479
Flexibility in the interview	483
Telephone interviewing	484
Life history and oral history interviewing	485
Feminist research and interviewing in qualitative research	488
Qualitative research using online personal interviews	490
Using Skype	492
Qualitative interviewing versus participant observation	492
Advantages of participant observation in comparison to qualitative interviewing	493
Advantages of qualitative interviewing in comparison to participant observation	494
Overview	497
<i>Checklist</i>	497
<i>Key points</i>	498
<i>Questions for review</i>	498
<b>Chapter 21 Focus groups</b>	500
Introduction	500
Uses of focus groups	501

Conducting focus groups	503
Recording and transcription	503
How many groups?	503
Size of groups	506
Level of moderator involvement	506
Selecting participants	508
Asking questions	510
Beginning and finishing	511
Group interaction in focus group sessions	512
Online focus groups	515
Limitations of focus groups	520
<i>Checklist</i>	522
<i>Key points</i>	523
<i>Questions for review</i>	523
<b>Chapter 22 Language in qualitative research</b>	525
Introduction	525
Conversation analysis	526
Assumptions of conversation analysis	527
Transcription and attention to detail	527
Some basic tools of conversation analysis	528
Overview	530
Discourse analysis	531
Uncovering interpretative repertoires	535
Producing facts	537
Critical discourse analysis	540
Overview	541
<i>Key points</i>	543
<i>Questions for review</i>	543
<b>Chapter 23 Documents as sources of data</b>	545
Introduction	546
Personal documents	546
Diaries, letters, and autobiographies	546
Visual objects	548
Official documents deriving from the state	552
Official documents deriving from private sources	553
Mass-media outputs	554
Virtual documents	556
Websites	556
Blogs	557
Chatrooms, discussion forums, and online communities	557
Social media	558
The reality of documents	560
Interpreting documents	562
Qualitative content analysis	563
Semiotics	565
Checklist	566
<i>Key points</i>	567
<i>Questions for review</i>	567

<b>Chapter 24 Qualitative data analysis</b>	569
Introduction	570
Analytic induction	571
Grounded theory	572
Tools of grounded theory	573
Coding in grounded theory	573
Outcomes of grounded theory	575
Memos	577
Criticisms of grounded theory	580
Coding	581
Steps and considerations in coding	581
Turning data into fragments	583
Problems with coding	583
Thematic analysis	584
Thematic analysis as the basis for a generic approach to qualitative data analysis	587
Narrative analysis	589
Secondary analysis of qualitative data	594
Synthesizing qualitative studies	595
Meta-ethnography	595
Thematic synthesis	596
<i>Key points</i>	598
<i>Questions for review</i>	599

<b>Chapter 25 Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis: using NVivo</b>	601
Introduction	602
Is CAQDAS like quantitative data analysis software?	602
No industry leader	602
Lack of universal agreement about the usefulness of CAQDAS	602
Learning NVivo	604
Coding	605
Searching text	611
Memos	615
Saving an NVivo project	616
Opening an existing NVivo project	616
Final thoughts	616
<i>Key points</i>	617
<i>Questions for review</i>	617

### Part Four: Mixed Methods Research and Writing Up

619

<b>Chapter 26 Breaking down the quantitative/qualitative divide</b>	620
Introduction	621
The natural science model and qualitative research	622
Quantitative research and interpretivism	624
Quantitative research and constructionism	625
Research methods and epistemological and ontological considerations	625
Problems with the quantitative/qualitative contrast	626



Behaviour versus meaning	626
Theory and concepts tested in research versus theory and concepts emergent from data	627
Numbers versus words	628
Artificial versus natural	628
<b>The mutual analysis of quantitative and qualitative research</b>	629
A qualitative research approach to quantitative research	629
A quantitative research approach to qualitative research	629
<b>Quantification in qualitative research</b>	630
Thematic analysis	630
Quasi-quantification in qualitative research	630
Combating anecdotalism through limited quantification	631
<i>Key points</i>	632
<i>Questions for review</i>	632
<b>Chapter 27 Mixed methods research: combining quantitative and qualitative research</b>	634
Introduction	635
The argument against mixed methods research	636
The embedded methods argument	636
The paradigm argument	636
Two versions of the debate about quantitative and qualitative research	637
Classifying mixed methods research in terms of priority and sequence	637
Types of mixed methods design	638
Approaches to mixed methods research	640
A content analysis of articles based on mixed methods research	640
Approaches to combining quantitative and qualitative research in mixed methods research	642
Quality issues in mixed methods research	656
<i>Checklist</i>	658
<i>Key points</i>	659
<i>Questions for review</i>	659
<b>Chapter 28 Writing up social research</b>	661
Introduction	661
Writing up your research	662
Start early	662
Be persuasive	662
Get feedback	663
Avoid sexist, racist, and disablist language	663
Structure your writing	663
Finally	668
Writing up quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research	669
Writing up quantitative research	669
Writing up qualitative research	672
Writing up mixed methods research	676

Academic writing	681
<i>Checklist</i>	684
<i>Key points</i>	686
<i>Questions for review</i>	686
Glossary	688
References	698
Name index	727
Subject index	732