

Research Design: How Do I Match My Research Method(s) to My Research Question(s)?

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Originally Published: 2017

Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc.

City: London, United Kingdom

ISBN: 9781526408532

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526408532>

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How Do I Match My Research Method(s) to My Research Question(s)?

The method(s) you use must be capable of answering the research questions you have set. Here are some things you may have to consider:

- Often questions can be answered in different ways using different methods
- You may be working with multiple methods
- Methods can answer different sorts of questions
- Questions can be answered in different ways.

The matching of method(s) to questions always matters. Some methods work better for particular sorts of questions.

If your question is a [hypothesis](#) which must be falsifiable, you can answer it using the following possible methods:

- An [experimental method](#) using statistical methods to test your hypothesis.
- [Survey data](#) (either generated by you or secondary data) using statistical methods to test your hypothesis.

If your question requires you to describe a social context and/or process, then you can answer it using the following possible methods:

- You can use data from your own surveys and/or secondary data to carry out [descriptive statistics](#) and numerical taxonomy methods for [classification](#).
- You can use qualitative material derived from:
 - [Documentary research](#)
 - [Qualitative interviews](#)
 - [Focus groups](#)
 - [Visual research](#)
 - [Ethnographic methods](#)
- Any combination of the above may be deployed.

If your question(s) require you to make causal statements about how certain things have come to be as they are, then you might consider using the following:

- You can build quantitative causal models using techniques which derive from statistical [regression analysis](#) and seeing if the models “fit” your quantitative data set.
- You can do this through building [simulations](#).
- You can do this by using figurational methods, particularly [qualitative comparative analysis](#),

which start either with the construction of quantitative descriptions of cases from qualitative accounts of those cases, or with an existing data set which contains quantitative descriptions of cases.

- You can combine both approaches.

If your question(s) require you to produce interpretive accounts of human social actions with a focus on the meanings actors have attached to those actions, then you might consider using the following:

- You can use [documentary resources](#) which include accounts of action(s) and the meanings actors have attached to those actions. This is a key approach in historical research.
- You can conduct [qualitative interviews](#).
- You can hold [focus groups](#).

- You can do this using [ethnographic observation](#).
- You can combine any or all of above approaches.

If your question(s) are evaluative, this could mean that you have to find out if some intervention has worked, how it has worked if it has, and why it didn't work if it didn't. You might then consider using the following:

- Any combination of quantitative and qualitative methods which fit the data you have.
- You should always use *process tracing* to generate a careful historical account of the intervention and its context(s).

Transcript

00:17 There are a number of considerations in research design process about the sample ethical considerations, et cetera. One of the big decisions interview researchers make is about the level of structure. So, in other words, to what extent, will the interview questions, sub questions, follow-up questions, be articulated in advance?

00:40 And, to what extent, will they be expected to emerge from the interaction of the interview? And there are deep epistemological and philosophical reasons why researchers choose one style or another. But for researchers using technology, there are additional things to think about.

01:00 Let me give you an example. If I am conducting an interview using a text-based technology, either using a mobile device, instant messaging, or texting in a virtual environment, then I might want to think through my questions in advance very carefully and break the questions into smaller

01:24 questions because I don't want the interviewee to get bogged down trying to type long responses. I want to keep that flow back and forth of give and take. On the other hand, if I'm using a technology, like video conference or meeting space where we're

01:45 using audio and perhaps even a webcam, then a more unstructured approach might work well because the technology allows for a more natural kind of a conversation. But, then, I would need to make some decisions about how I want to present myself as a researcher.

02:06 Do I want to be on camera? Do I want the research participant to see me either making an introduction or throughout the entire interview? If I'm going to be on camera throughout the entire interview, then, again, I would need to be somewhat prepared because I don't want to be looking down or looking away from the camera

02:27 and kind of breaking the connection with the research participants. So the decisions about the level of structure in the interview, while rooted in the methodology, have other implications when you're thinking about the design for an online interview.

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