

2.4 Practical: What role can interviews play in understanding human behaviour?

The big picture

Subtopic question(s)

During this subtopic, you will be working towards answering the following subtopic question:

- What role can interviews play in understanding human health and well-being?

Think about these two questions:

1. Did you feel stressed this past week?
2. What are your experiences with stress this past week?

Which question do you think can provide more insight into your health and well-being?

Interviews are a commonly used method in psychological research (**Figure 1**), as they allow researchers to gather detailed, in-depth information on a variety of issues. Quantitative research methods, such as experiments, are often not able to gather such rich, qualitative data.



Figure 1. Interviews are often used to understand health and well-being.

Credit: kate_sept2004, Getty Images

There are many different types of interviews, and the types of questions asked depend upon the goals of the research. In relation to the two previous questions, the first one, ‘Did you feel stressed this past week?’, is a closed-ended question. This elicits a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response. Closed-ended questions, while easy to distribute, give researchers limited information about individual experiences. While they find out that you may have felt stressed this past week, they do not know *why* you felt stressed or the level of stress that you felt. On the other hand, the second question, ‘Tell me about your experiences with stress this past week.’, is an open-ended question. This allows individuals to elaborate on their personal perspectives and experiences. You can tell the researcher *why* you feel stressed and they can gain a better understanding about the issue.

Making connections

In subtopic 1.1 Research methodology

(<https://app.kognity.com/study/app/psychology-new/sid-540-cid-763690/book/big-picture-id-49350/>), you learned about using qualitative research to understand human behaviour. In topic 2 Health and well-being (<https://app.kognity.com/study/app/psychology-new/sid-540-cid-763690/book/the-big-picture-id-49425/>), you learned about health problems and mental health disorders. As you now know, health and well-being is highly complex and deeply personal. By using interviews, researchers can better

understand these issues in-depth. Participants can share their experiences and offer perspectives on sensitive topics, such as depression and addiction, that other research methods might not be able to capture as well.

cell membrane and others are not enveloped. Virus examples include bacteriophage lambda, coronaviruses and HIV.

A2.3.3—Lytic cycle of a virus

Students should appreciate that viruses rely on a host cell for energy supply, nutrition, protein synthesis and other life functions. Use bacteriophage lambda as an example of the phases in a lytic cycle.

A.2.3.4—Lysogenic cycle of a virus

Use bacteriophage lambda as an example.

A2.3.5—Evidence for several origins of viruses from other organisms

The diversity of viruses suggests several possible origins. Viruses share an extreme form of obligate parasitism as a mode of existence, so the structural features that they have in common could be regarded as convergent evolution. The genetic code is shared between viruses and living organisms.

A2.3.6—Rapid evolution in viruses

Include reasons for very rapid rates of evolution in some viruses. Use two examples of rapid evolution: evolution of influenza viruses and of HIV. Consider the consequences for treating diseases caused by rapidly evolving viruses.

Linking questions

- What mechanisms contribute to convergent evolution?
- To what extent is the natural history of life characterized by increasing complexity or simplicity?

A3.1 Diversity of organisms

Unity and diversity—Organisms

Standard level and higher level: 3 hours

Additional higher level: 2 hours

Guiding questions

- What is a species?
- What patterns are seen in the diversity of genomes within and between species?

SL and HL

A3.1.1—Variation between organisms as a defining feature of life

Students should understand that no two individuals are identical in all their traits. The patterns of variation are complex and are the basis for naming and classifying organisms.

A3.1.2—Species as groups of organisms with shared traits

This is the original morphological concept of the species as used by Linnaeus.

A3.1.3—Binomial system for naming organisms





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What are the strengths and limitations of interviews?

A-1: Bias C-4-3: Describe the advantages and disadvantages of different research methodologies. C-4-11: Identify the steps to ensuring credibility in research.

C-4-12: Identify strategies for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research.



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Learning outcomes

- Describe the advantages and disadvantages of different research methodologies.
- Identify the steps to ensuring credibility in research.
- Identify strategies for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research.
- Discuss how bias can influence the collection and interpretation of data in interviews.

Facilitation guidance

In this section, students will understand the importance of minimising bias and upholding credibility in qualitative research. It is important to ensure students are thinking of how they can apply these same strategies in their own practical, and why they are important to uphold.

Section

Student... (0/0)

Feedback



Print (/study/app/psychology-new/sid-540-cid-763690/book/what-are-the-strengths-and-limitations-of-interviews-id-49467/print/)

Assign

Subtopic question(s)

During this subtopic, you will be working towards answering the following subtopic question:

- What role can interviews play in understanding human health and well-being?

Conducting qualitative research can be problematic as it is a very subjective process. When planning, conducting and analysing your interviews, it is important to try to minimise bias and uphold credibility. This ensures you get the most accurate and representative results possible.

Theory of knowledge

Interviews are a way of gaining knowledge on psychological issues. Qualitative methods, however, are more open to interpretation and subjectivity. Throughout this subtopic, consider the following question:

Reflection question

- To what extent is objectivity possible in the production or acquisition of knowledge?

Bias

Bias is a common problem that can influence the interview process before, during and afterwards. There are several types of bias that can affect interviews, including participant bias and researcher bias. Minimising bias in interviews is important because it can affect the quality of the data collected, the generalisability of the findings to other populations and settings, and the credibility of the researchers.



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Participant bias can affect interviews when participants provide answers that they think are socially acceptable, rather than their own honest opinions. They also might say what they think the researcher wants to hear!

Demand characteristics can occur. These are cues in the interview that may lead to participants changing their answers to what they think is expected of them.

Researcher bias occurs when the researcher's own values, beliefs or opinions affect how the interview is conducted or the interpretation of the results. For example, a researcher may find their own day-to-day life very stressful. This experience, along with the topic, may lead to a biased interpretation of other people's experiences with stress. They could also ask leading questions to 'lead' participants in a certain direction with their responses, or emphasise certain responses. Researchers should ensure that they construct questions in a neutral, open-ended way.

HL Extension

Q Motivation

Motivation can sometimes skew an interviewer's objectivity. If they are too eager to confirm a hypothesis or obtain certain responses, they may consciously or unconsciously ask leading questions or interpret answers in a biased way.

Publication bias is the tendency to publish studies that achieve a statistically significant result, as opposed to studies that do not. Because the success of a researcher's career is determined by the frequency with which they publish studies in journals, researchers themselves become biased towards achieving statistically significant results that confirm their hypothesis.

Publication bias is a major issue in the field of psychology today. For example, Kühberger et al. (2014) (<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0105825>)¹ conducted a statistical analysis on a random sample of 1,000 published pieces of research across an array of psychology disciplines. They concluded that there is 'pervasive publication bias in the entire field of psychology.'

- How is publication bias related to the extrinsic motivation of a researcher?
- How could this affect the interview process?

The motivation of a participant can also affect the outcome of the interview. For example, it could affect how openly and accurately they respond.

- Why might a participant in an interview experience intrinsic motivation to provide answers they think the interviewer wants to hear?
- How might such behaviour affect the outcome of an interview?

In focus group interviews, dominant respondent bias can occur when one person dominates the conversation and influences the responses of others. This can result in the over-representation of one perspective rather than the whole group. Conformity can also be an issue in focus groups. Participants may conform to others' opinions, rather than state their own opinions. How might you minimise conformity and dominant respondent bias when you conduct a focus group interview?

Q Concept

Bias

Discuss how bias can influence the collection and interpretation of data in interviews.

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Reflection questions



1. How do you think you can minimise bias in research?
2. Is it possible to have an interview-based research study free from bias?

Credibility

Credibility in research refers to the measure of how trustworthy the data collection and analysis methods are (**Figure 1**), and how accurate and valid the findings are. In interviews specifically, it is important to know that the participant's responses reflect reality and that the researcher's interpretations are accurate. Essentially, a study that has high credibility has very little bias.



Figure 1. Credibility is important to uphold in research.

Credit: PhotoAlto/Odilon Dimier, Getty Images

There are many ways to uphold credibility and avoid bias in research studies, and you can engage in these practices when you conduct your practical. Some of these include:

- Reassure participants that their responses will remain confidential so that they feel like they can be honest and open.
- Use researcher triangulation. This way, multiple researchers can attend the focus group interviews, each observing and taking notes independently. Once the interviews have been conducted, each researcher can analyse the data independently, identifying themes, patterns or insights through inductive content analysis.
- Use member checking (also known as credibility checks). Researchers share their thematic data summaries with participants to ensure that the perspectives of the participants have been represented accurately.
- Engage in reflexivity. Researchers reflect on their own values, biases and assumptions that may have affected the interview process. These factors could influence the creation of the questions, how the interviews are conducted or the interpretation of the data. This should be done at all stages of the interview process!
- Accurate recording and transcription of data. In the following sections, you will explore tools that can be used to do this.





HL Extension

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Q Technology

The introduction of technology over time has significantly transformed the way research is conducted in psychology. In qualitative research, interviews have become more accessible and efficient. For example, video conferencing tools, such as Zoom, have made it easier to conduct interviews remotely and reach participants worldwide. Transcription software has increased efficiency and made data analysis much quicker.

Reflection questions

1. What other opportunities has technology enabled in relation to psychological research?
2. What challenges does the use of technology present to conducting research-based interviews?

ⓘ Teacher instructions

Goals

- To identify the steps to ensuring credibility in research.
- To identify strategies for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research.
- To discuss how bias can influence the collection and interpretation of data in interviews.

Facilitation guidance

The following activity engages students in critically thinking about the credibility and bias that could be present in interviews. Rather than answering questions, they are generating their own questions. For example, to assess potential participant bias, they could ask where the interviews took place or if they were anonymous.

The activity includes a summary of the study. However, do encourage students to visit the hyperlinked original study for more detail and to read excerpts from the interviews.

This activity is done as a think-pair-share, where students read the study individually, then pair up to generate questions, but this can also be done individually. Once students have generated their questions, they post them on a collaborative platform (such as Padlet), or they can generate their questions on A3 / large sheets of paper. To finish the activity, allow students time to rotate around the room to try to answer their peers' questions.

⊗ Activity

IB learner profile attribute: Inquirer/Knowledgeable/Thinker

Approaches to learning: Thinking

Time required to complete activity: 30—45 minutes

Activity type: Individual/Pairs

Assessing credibility and bias in interviews

Concept application: Bias/Measurement

Read through the following scenario:



Student view

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Radovic et al. (2017) [\[2\]](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.12.002) explored how social media use influences and is influenced by psychological distress among 23 adolescents (18 female, 5 male) diagnosed with depression and currently receiving treatment. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling at two clinical sites. Parental consent was obtained and confidentiality was guaranteed for all participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted either by phone or in person, and these explored social media use and its impact on mood.

The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and assigned a code using content analysis. The adolescents reported both positive and negative aspects of social media use. Positive uses included seeking out content for entertainment, humour or social connection. Negative uses involved sharing risky behaviours, experiencing cyberbullying and making self-deprecating comparisons with others.

The findings identified three specific patterns of use: 'oversharing' (frequent updates or excessive personal information), 'stressed posting' (sharing negative updates) and encountering 'triggering posts'.² As part of their treatment, these adolescents shifted from negative to more positive social media use. The study discusses implications for clinicians advising depressed adolescents on managing social media use.

In pairs, generate a list of questions you would need to ask to assess the credibility and possible bias of this study. These questions should be related to the following:

- Interviewer's role
- Participant bias
- Question design
- Context and setting
- Ethical considerations

Post your questions on a collaborative platform or around the room on large pieces of paper. Then answer at least two questions about the study by replying to a post or writing responses on the paper.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Describe the advantages and disadvantages of different research methodologies.
- Identify the steps to ensuring credibility in research.
- Identify strategies for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research.
- Discuss how bias can influence the collection and interpretation of data.

¹ Kühberger et al. (2014) [\[2\]](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0105825) 'Publication bias in psychology: a diagnosis based on the correlation between effect size and sample size', *PLoS One*, 5th September 2014. Licensed under the CC-BY-4.0 licence [\[2\]](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

² Radovic et al. (2017) [\[2\]](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.12.002) 'Depressed adolescents' positive and negative use of social media', *Journal of Adolescence*, Volume 55, Pages 5–15. © John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

3 section questions ^

Question 1

SL HL Difficulty:

What is the primary purpose of assessing credibility in an interview?


Student view

- 1 To evaluate the truthfulness and reliability of the research process



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- 2 To determine the interviewer's level of education
- 3 To assess the researcher's physical appearance
- 4 To judge the researcher's experience

Explanation

The primary purpose of assessing credibility in an interview is to evaluate the truthfulness and reliability of the research process.

Question 2

SL HL Difficulty:

Certain participants may dominate the discussion, which can limit the range of perspectives captured. This type of bias is known as:

- Dominant respondent ✓

Accepted answers

Dominant respondent

Also accepted

Dominant participant, Dominant respondents, Dominant respondent, Dominant respondents

Explanation

Some individuals may dominate the conversation, which can skew the data and lead to under-representation of quieter participants' views.

Question 3

SL HL Difficulty:

Which of the following is an example of bias in an interview?

- 1 The interviewer asks leading questions. ✓
- 2 The interviewer asks detailed and consistent questions.
- 3 The interviewer is neutral and objective.
- 4 The interviewer uses a variety of question types.

Explanation

When the interviewer asks leading questions that suggest a particular answer, as this indicates bias by steering the interviewee towards a specific response.

[◀ Previous section\(/study/app/psychology-new/sid-540-cid-763690/book/how-are-interviews-used-to-investigate-human-behaviour-id-49466/review/\)](#)



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2. Health and well-being / 2.4 Practical: What role can interviews play in understanding human behaviour?



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Practical activity: Introduction

C-4-2: Identify the appropriate selection of research methodology to investigate a psychological question.



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Teacher instructions

Goal

Section • To identify the appropriate selection of research methodology to investigate a psychological question.

Facilitation guidance

For the practical, students will conduct interviews with their peers. They can choose any topic from health and well-being, for example, social media use, coping with stress or gaming.

Allocate students into small groups and then allow them to lead this practical themselves. In this first section, students will develop their research question. You can do this together as a class and each group can use the same research question, or students can come up with their own.

Before beginning the practical, go through the basic overview of the strengths and limitations of each type of interview, as outlined in [section 2.4.1](#) (/study/app/psychology-new/sid-540-cid-763690/book/how-are-interviews-used-to-investigate-human-behaviour-id-49466/). Students should have a good understanding of why each type of interview is used in psychological research, and what purpose each is best suited for.

? Subtopic question(s)

During this subtopic, you will be working towards answering the following subtopic question:

- What role can interviews play in understanding human health and well-being?

Before a researcher conducts a study, it is important that they engage in careful planning. Researchers need to clearly state their purpose in order to select the appropriate type of interview. You can choose from semi-structured, structured or focus group interviews for your practical.

First, you need to decide what you are aiming to achieve with your interview. Are you exploring attitudes and beliefs, or understanding experiences? Or you might have more specific information that you may wish to gather.

A good research question should be:

- Clear
- Focused
- Researchable
- Open-ended
- Realistic

Take a look at these two research questions. Which one is better?



- ‘Why is school stressful for students?’



- ‘How do high school students perceive and manage academic stress?’

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The first question lacks specificity regarding which aspects of school stress are being examined (such as academic pressure). It also does not give direction for the research methodology. For example, it does not explore how students cope with stress, omitting a critical component of understanding the issue.

In contrast, the second question is focused and allows students to explore both the causes of stress (academic pressures) and the coping mechanisms (especially social support) that students rely on, which could lead to a deeper understanding of stress management among their peers (**Figure 1**). It’s broad enough to allow for varied responses, but specific enough to guide the research in a clear direction.

With your teacher, use the following steps to develop a specific research question about health and well-being.

IV Internal assessment criteria

Introduction

- The aim or research question is clearly stated and focused.
- The real-life problem is described and the impact on the population of interest is explained.
- Relevant findings and conclusions of two pieces of research are explained and linked to the investigation.



Figure 1. Focused research questions are a crucial element of any research study.

Credit: Maks_Lab, Getty Images

Practical tasks

Developing a research question

Develop a research question by following these steps. Write your answers on a large piece of paper.

1. What do you already know about health and well-being?
2. What questions do you have about health and well-being? Choose an area to explore (for example, stress or social media addiction).

Student view

3. Conduct research to find at least two research studies related to your ideas.
4. Using this research, focus on a specific aspect of health and well-being. What issue or gap in the research does your practical aim to explore?
5. As a group, develop one research question. Ensure that your question is not too broad or too narrow, and is manageable within the class practical time constraints and resources.
6. Share your research question with another group and evaluate each other's question. Is the question clear? Is it specific? Can it be researched given the available time and resources?
7. Take on board the feedback from the other group. Repeat step 5, if necessary, to finalise your question.

Once you have decided on a research question, choose the type of interview you are going to use to investigate the question. Here are some key considerations for each type of interview:

- Focus group interviews are best suited for exploratory research where you want to understand group dynamics, generate ideas or capture a range of perspectives on a topic. Use focus groups if you want to see how participants interact and influence each other's responses, for example, if you are interested in the collective experiences of students regarding stress and coping mechanisms. You will also need three to eight participants per focus group.
- Semi-structured interviews are ideal for in-depth exploration of *individual* experiences and perspectives, while allowing for flexibility in questioning. This type of interview works well if you have specific topics to cover but want to allow flexibility for participants to elaborate on their thoughts. For example, you may aim to gain in-depth insights into individual experiences of stress. You will need fewer participants as these can be quite time-consuming to conduct and analyse.
- Structured interviews are suitable for collecting specific data, with less focus on depth as the questions are fixed. Use structured interviews when you need standardised responses and want to quantify the data. For example, you may want to quantify the stress levels and coping strategies of a large group of students. This type of interview can accommodate a larger sample size as the data analysis is less time-consuming.

Requirements for different interview types

It is important to be aware of the participant requirements for each interview type. You will need to have one participant if you choose to conduct an individual interview. If you choose to conduct a focus group, you will need to have three to eight participants per focus group.

The completion of the activities in this practical will be helpful when designing your own research proposal for the Internal Assessment. Your knowledge and understanding from the practicals will be assessed in Paper 2.

Paper 2 criteria

Knowledge and understanding

- The response demonstrates detailed knowledge and understanding of the research methodology relevant to the class practical.
- Psychological terminology is used accurately.

Design

- The procedure of the research method is explained with accuracy and detail.
- Psychological terminology relevant to the research method is used effectively.



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Learning outcomes

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Identify the appropriate selection of research methodology to investigate a psychological question.

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Practical activity: Explore and design

C-4-2: Identify the appropriate selection of research methodology to investigate a psychological question. C-4-8: Understand the stages of thematic analysis.

Section

Student... (0/0) 



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Teacher instructions

Goals

- To identify the appropriate selection of research methodology to investigate a psychological question.
- To understand the stages of thematic analysis.

Facilitation guidance

In this section, students will devise an interview guide of questions in their groups. Ensure students understand that these need to be either closed- or open-ended questions depending on the type of interview they decide to conduct. Ensure students are aware of the time constraints relevant to your school, as these interviews can take a long time to conduct and process.

Additionally, address the importance of ethical considerations. Provide students with a consent form template from the teacher support materials. Ask students to reflect on their questions to ensure no sensitive or unethical issues may arise.

Topic selection and ethical considerations

It is important that you take the time to discuss what topics are appropriate or inappropriate to address via an interview within the context of health and well-being. For example, it is not ethical for students to ask other students about self-harm or any mental health issues as this would be a violation of medical privacy.

Some appropriate topics to focus on are sleep, exercise, diet or motivation relating to health and well-being. While it would be appropriate to investigate school-based stressors, it may not be appropriate to investigate home-based stressors.

? Subtopic question(s)

During this subtopic, you will be working towards answering the following subtopic question:

- What role can interviews play in understanding human health and well-being?

In this section, you will decide with your group what type of interview you are going to conduct; this can be either a structured, semi-structured or focus group interview.

Once you have decided on a type of interview, work in your group to develop an interview guide of questions you want to ask. These questions should be clear and contain either open-ended or closed-ended questions depending on the type of interview you decide to do. Try to avoid leading questions or making any assumptions about your participants!

Concept

Bias

Leading question bias occurs when a question is phrased in such a way that it suggests a particular answer or influences the respondent to reply in a specific direction.

 Student view



Reflection questions

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- Take time to reflect on your own beliefs or assumptions. How might they influence the way you frame questions?
- What impact could leading questions have on the data you collect?

For example, which question is better?

- 'How often do you feel overwhelmed by school?'
- 'How does school make you feel?'

The first question assumes that participants feel overwhelmed by school, whereas the second does not! You should strive to create neutral and open-ended questions in order to encourage honest and unbiased responses (**Figure 1**). Quality question creation is a large part of establishing credibility.



Figure 1. Researchers must be cautious to avoid leading questions in their interviews.

Practical tasks

Developing interview questions

In your groups, create a list of interview questions that explore the issue identified in your research question. These will be open-ended questions, closed-ended questions or both, depending on the type of interview. Remember that you may only have 15 to 20 minutes to collect your data, so you may not have time for many questions.

- For focus group interviews, you will generate a list of questions that aim to stimulate discussion. These questions should encourage your participants to share their thoughts, experiences and perspectives.
- For semi-structured interviews, you will generate an interview guide with questions that allow flexibility to explore in-depth responses while maintaining enough structure to address specific topics of interest. Use prepared questions as a guide, but be prepared to be flexible so that you can dig deeper into emerging themes!
- For structured interviews, generate a list of questions that will be asked in the same order and phrased identically. These should be direct and clear, as the purpose of this type of interview is to objectively compare responses.

Student view



Closed-ended questions are often used in structured interviews.

⌚ Paper 2 criteria

Design

- The procedure of the research method is explained with accuracy and detail.
- Psychological terminology relevant to the research method is used effectively.

Ethical considerations

- Complete the informed consent form template provided by your teacher. This form should include the purpose of the research, how the data will be used and participants' right to withdraw at any point of the interview.
- Once you have recruited your participants, you will distribute your consent form to them.
- Participants should be told that their data will remain confidential.
- Review your questions to ensure that there are no psychological or emotional impacts of the interview. No participants should be put at risk of distress or harm!
- Create a debrief for your participants at the end of the study.

Assigning roles

When planning your interview, it is important that each group member has a clear role to ensure the interview is organised and efficient. Allocate roles to your group members from this list:

- **Interviewer:** This person conducts the interview, asking the participants questions.
- **Note-taker:** This person documents key points, non-verbal cues (for example, body language, gestures) and any other details that might not be captured in a recording.
- **Technician:** This person is responsible for setting up and managing the audio recording of the interviews.
- **Research assistant:** This person supports the interviewer by providing logistical support, such as managing materials and keeping track of time.

III Internal assessment criteria

Research methodology

- The choice of research method is explained.
- The procedure is explained.
- Relevant ethical considerations are described and explicitly linked to the investigation.

☒ Learning outcomes

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Identify the appropriate selection of research methodology to investigate a psychological question.
- Understand the stages of thematic analysis.



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Question 1

SL HL Difficulty:

The interview guide is the collection of questions that the interviewer plans to ask during the interview or focus group.

Accepted answers and explanation**#1** guide**General explanation**

The interview guide is the term for the list of questions that the interviewer plans to ask during the interview or focus group.

Question 2

SL HL Difficulty:

Which of the following is **not** a suggested role for you or members of your group in the interview or focus group?

- 1 Time-keeper
- 2 Interviewer
- 3 Note-taker
- 4 Technician

Explanation

The suggested roles are interviewer (conducts the interview), note-taker (documents key points), technician (manages audio recording and tracks time) and research assistant (supports the interviewer).

The keeping of time should be the responsibility of the technician.

Question 3

SL HL Difficulty:

Which of the following is **not** an interview type that you can choose to conduct for your practical?

- 1 Spiral interview
- 2 Focus group
- 3 Structured interview
- 4 Semi-structured interview

Explanation

You and your group can choose to conduct either a focus group, a structured interview or a semi-structured interview. There is no such thing as a 'spiral' interview.



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2. Health and well-being / 2.4 Practical: What role can interviews play in understanding human behaviour?

Practical activity: Collect and process

C-4-7a: Identify and discuss how data is represented and analysed in different forms based on the design of the study and the nature of the data.

C-4-7b: Analyse and interpret different types of data tables, graphs and results. C-4-8: Understand the stages of thematic analysis.



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Goals

- To understand the stages of thematic analysis.
- To identify and discuss how data is represented and analysed in different forms based on the design of the study and the nature of the data.
- To analyse and interpret different types of data tables, graphs and results.

Facilitation guidance

Data collection for interviews can be a long process, so it is important that students keep these interviews simple. The number of questions asked and time spent conducting interviews can be flexible depending upon time and resources in your school. However, it will help students realise the complexity of analysing interview data. Encourage students to use audio-recording tools so that they can go back and review responses. **Table 1** suggests some tools, but this is not a limited list; your school may have other tools.

This section provides a good opportunity to discuss with students the importance of ‘setting up the interview’ and how the environment can influence the outcome of the interview.

Once students collect their data, they will transcribe the interviews (see **Table 1** with recommended tools or they can do it themselves) and then analyse it using thematic analysis. This section walks them through this and includes an example.

? Subtopic question(s)

During this subtopic, you will be working towards answering the following subtopic question:

- What role can interviews play in understanding human health and well-being?

In this section, you will plan how you are going to *conduct* your interview and then collect the data.

Some things to think about are:

- Make sure you conduct your interviews in a comfortable environment; this can help participants respond more openly and honestly. For example, if you are conducting this interview with your peers at school, a classroom could be a good environment.
- How are you going to audio-record the interview? Don’t forget to include this on your informed consent forms!
- Practise your interviewer skills; engage in active listening, be neutral and keep the discussion on-topic.
- If you have time, conduct a test run of the questions with a small group of peer reviewers (and ask your teacher to check them). This can help to ensure your questions are clear and follow a logical sequence.



Student
view

Concept

Measurement

Objective measurement can be challenging in qualitative research, as these methods (such as interviews) focus on understanding human experiences, behaviours and perceptions, which are inherently subjective.

Reflection question

1. How can researchers balance the need for standardised, objective measurements with understanding the complexity of human behaviour?

Interviewer skills

In psychology research, conducting interviews requires a specific set of skills to ensure interviewers collect accurate data while ensuring participants feel comfortable. Some of these skills you can practise include:

- **Active listening:** This means paying close attention to what the participant is saying, making them feel heard and valued. Focus on what the participant is saying, maintain eye contact, nod and give brief acknowledgements.
- **Building rapport:** By establishing rapport, you can create a trusting environment where the participant feels safe sharing information. Use a friendly, conversational tone, show genuine interest in the participant's responses and express empathy if needed.
- **Managing the interview flow:** It is important to know how to keep the interview on track and relevant to the research goals. Practise using phrases like 'I appreciate that insight. Let's return to [specific question/topic]' or 'Could I ask you to expand on your thoughts specifically regarding [specific question/topic]?''
- **Maintaining objectivity:** This ensures you are not influencing the participant's responses with personal biases or reactions. Avoid expressing your personal opinions or reactions, maintain neutral facial expressions and avoid leading questions.
- **Probing and follow-up questions:** Particularly in semi-structured and focus group interviews, probing and asking follow-up questions allows you to dive deeper into participants' responses. Use questions like 'Can you tell me more about that?' or 'Why do you feel that way?'

HL Extension

Culture

When conducting interviews, it is important to be aware of cultural differences and to be sensitive to diverse backgrounds. This helps to ensure the quality of the responses, and prevents misunderstandings, cultural stereotypes and bias.

Reflection question

1. How do you think you can increase your cultural competency as a researcher?

Practical tasks

Collect your data

- Limit your interview to 15 to 20 minutes, otherwise you will have *lots* of data to transcribe.

- Audio-record your interviews using one of the suggested tools in **Table 1**.
- For a focus group interview:
 - The interviewer should introduce themselves, the topic, and discuss expectations, while the note-taker should record key points, themes and non-verbal cues that may be relevant. The technician should set up and conduct the audio-recording.
 - If you find that your participants' answers are lacking detail, encourage them to expand on their responses with follow-up questions, for example, 'Why do you think that is?' or 'Can you tell me more about that?'
- For a semi-structured and structured interview:
 - The interviewer should have an interview guide or list of predetermined questions that you constructed as a group.
 - Each participant will be interviewed individually and will also be audio-recorded.
- Once you have completed the interviews, transcribe the audio-recording into a word document or use one of the tools in **Table 1**.

Paper 2 criteria

Application

- The knowledge and understanding of the concept are well developed.
- There are clear and detailed links between the concept and the class practical.

Data collection tools

Recording and transcribing data are important steps in the interview process. Using reliable data collection tools can avoid human error and ensure that data is accurate for analysis. **Table 1** has examples of tools you can use to audio-record and transcribe your interviews. Keep in mind that choosing the right tool depends on the needs of your research, such as the level of detail required in transcription, the quality of recording needed, budget constraints and available time.

Table 1. Data collection tools

Type	Examples	Strengths	Limitations
Digital voice recorders	Your school may have available recorders	High-quality audio, portable	Audio only (no transcription availability)
Smartphone recording apps	Voice Memos (iPhone), Easy Voice Recorder (Android)	Accessible, portable, simple to use	Storage, battery, audio only
Computer recording apps	Windows Voice Recorder, Voice Memos (iOS), Audacity	Built-in recording, portable (if on laptop), simple to use	Audio quality may vary, editing may be challenging
Automatic transcribing tools	Otter.ai, Descript	Time-efficient, multiple speakers supported	Editing often required

When you use any of these tools, make sure you test recording quality prior to your interviews, ensure you have consent for recording, back up the files and have a back-up method!



Data collection

Overview
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- An appropriate and effective data collection tool to measure behaviour has been created.
- Decisions made when creating the data collection tool are explained and relevant to the aim or research question of the investigation.
- Potential challenges when collecting data are explained and relevant to the investigation.

Next, you are going to process the data you have transcribed. This can be a lengthy process! Review the process of thematic analysis you learned about in [section 1.1.7](#) (/study/app/psychology-new/sid-540-cid-763690/book/how-is-qualitative-data-transformed-into-credible-evidence-for-a-psychological-theory-or-claim-id-49357/) and work through the following steps to process your data. Summarise the key themes that have emerged.

Making connections

In [section 1.1.7](#) (/study/app/psychology-new/sid-540-cid-763690/book/how-is-qualitative-data-transformed-into-credible-evidence-for-a-psychological-theory-or-claim-id-49357/), you learned about thematic analysis. This is the process where researchers analyse the responses of participants and annotate transcripts to organise those responses into different 'themes' and 'sub-themes' (by developing a coding scheme). These themes are supported with direct quotes (evidence) from the participants. Now it is your turn to apply this process to the data from your interviews.

Reflection question

1. How is qualitative data transformed into credible evidence for a psychological theory or claim?

Process your data

Now that you have your data, you are going to work through the steps of thematic analysis (**Figure 1**).

1. Read through the responses you have collected

- Start by reading through and familiarising yourself with the transcript without making any assumptions or interpretations. You are simply trying to understand what participants are saying.

2. Create codes

- As you read, highlight and underline interesting phrases or words that are relevant to your research question.
- Give each phrase or word a 'code' – these help you to organise the data and group similar ideas.
- For example, if a student is talking about pressure from parents to succeed, you might assign the code 'pressure from parents.'

3. Group the codes into themes

- See if any of the codes you have created fit together.
- If any of the codes repeat, then group them together under broader *themes*.
- For example, 'pressure from parents' and 'school expectations' could be grouped together under 'Sources of stress.' If a theme captures how students cope with stress, such as exercising, you could label this 'Coping strategies.'

4. Review and refine

- Go back through the transcripts to make sure your themes represent the data accurately, and that you haven't missed anything.
- You may need to combine themes or split them up.
- Make sure you explain and name the themes to accurately represent what they are about.

5. Report your themes

- Summarise each theme into a short paragraph and use quotes from the interviews to illustrate and support them.



- Share your results in a report or presentation, using each theme as a subheading.

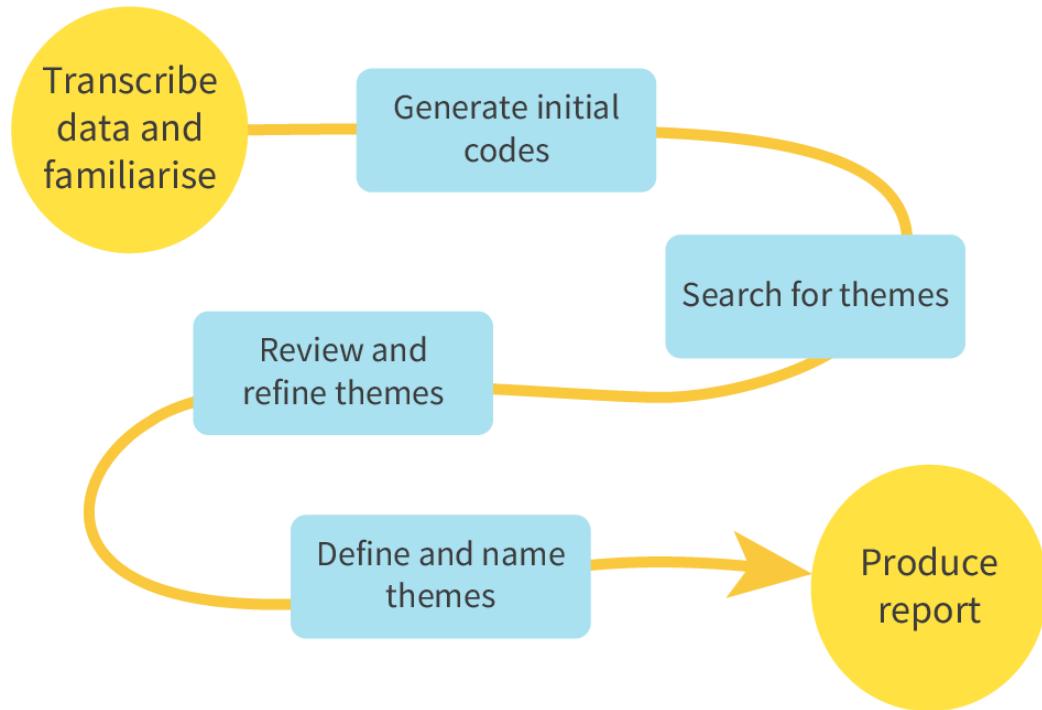


Figure 1. The process of thematic analysis. Adapted from [Braun and Clarke \(2008\)](#).

(<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>).¹

More information for figure 1

The stages in the flowchart are: Transcribe data and familiarise; Generate initial codes; Search for themes; Review and refine themes; Define and name themes; and Produce report.

Now look at the following example and apply the steps of thematic analysis.

- First, read these interview excerpts:
 - Excerpt 1:** ‘I always feel like I have too much homework. Sometimes, I stay up really late just to finish everything, and then I’m exhausted the next day.’
 - Excerpt 2:** ‘My parents expect me to get good grades in every subject. It’s stressful because I don’t want to disappoint them, but sometimes it’s too much pressure.’
 - Excerpt 3:** ‘When I’m stressed, I usually go for a run or hang out with my friends. It helps me feel better and takes my mind off things.’
- Then, for each excerpt, create codes that capture the main ideas:
 - Excerpt 1:** ‘too much work,’ ‘late nights,’ ‘lack of time,’ ‘exhaustion’
 - Excerpt 2:** ‘parental expectations,’ ‘fear of disappointing,’ ‘pressure to succeed’
 - Excerpt 3:** ‘exercise for stress relief,’ ‘social support,’ ‘distraction from stress’
- Now that you have coded the main ideas, you can group them into broader themes and explain the theme in a sentence or two:

Theme 1: Parental pressure

- Codes:** ‘parental expectations,’ ‘pressure to succeed,’ ‘fear of disappointing’



- This theme captures the stress students feel due to the pressure from parents to perform well.

Theme 2: Time management challenges

- **Codes:** ‘late nights,’ ‘lack of time’
- This theme relates to students feeling they don’t have enough time for both schoolwork and other activities, leading to stress.

Theme 3: Coping strategies

- **Codes:** ‘exercise to relieve stress,’ ‘social support,’ ‘distraction from stress’
- This theme covers the different ways students manage stress, such as physical activities, talking with friends and seeking support from others.
- Review and refine, if necessary.
- Finally, summarise your themes.

Parental pressure: Many students feel significant stress due to expectations from parents. This often leads to fear of failure or disappointment.

Time management challenges: Students frequently mentioned struggling to keep up with both schoolwork and extracurricular activities, leading to feelings of exhaustion and frustration.

Coping strategies: To manage stress, students use various coping strategies, including physical exercise and talking with friends, which helps them feel supported and less alone.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Understand the stages of thematic analysis.
- Identify and discuss how data is represented and analysed in different forms based on the design of the study and the nature of the data.
- Analyse and interpret different types of data tables, graphs and results.

¹Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2008) ↗(<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>) ‘Using thematic analysis in psychology’, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Volume 3, Issue 2, Pages 77–101. © Taylor & Francis.

3 section questions ^

Question 1

SL HL Difficulty:

To gather your data from an interview, it is crucial that you use a recording device and then be sure to transcribe the interview.

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Accepted answers and explanation

#1 transcribe

General explanation

There are a variety of suggested tools that you could use to record the interview, and two suggested digital tools to aid with transcription.

Question 2

SL HL Difficulty:

In thematic analysis, 'Step 1' is to read through the responses you have collected. What is the primary purpose of this step?

- 1 To become familiar with the content without making interpretations
- 2 To identify and create initial codes for the data
- 3 To group similar responses into preliminary themes
- 4 To select relevant quotes for the final report

Explanation

Step 1 (reading through the responses) is important so that you can familiarise yourself with the transcript without making any assumptions or interpretations. You are simply trying to understand what participants are saying.

Question 3

SL HL Difficulty:

At what point should you review and refine your themes?

- 1 After grouping codes into initial themes
- 2 Before reading the transcripts
- 3 Only after writing the final report
- 4 Before creating any codes

Explanation

After you have grouped your codes into initial themes, you should go back through the transcripts to make sure your themes represent the data accurately and that you haven't missed anything. You may need to combine themes, or split them up.

Make sure you explain and name the themes to accurately represent what they are about.

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Next section [▶/s](#)



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2. Health and well-being / 2.4 Practical: What role can interviews play in understanding human behaviour?

Practical activity: Conclude and evaluate

C-4-3: Describe the advantages and disadvantages of different research methodologies.

C-4-7a: Identify and discuss how data is represented and analysed in different forms based on the design of the study and the nature of the data.

C-4-7b: Analyse and interpret different types of data tables, graphs and results. C-4-11: Identify the steps to ensuring credibility in research.

C-4-12: Identify strategies for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research.

C-4-13: Discuss factors that should be considered when transferring findings of a study to another population or context. C-4-12: Identify strategies for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research.

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Goals

- To describe the advantages and disadvantages of different research methodologies.
- To identify the steps to ensuring credibility in research.
- To identify strategies for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research.
- To identify and discuss how data is represented and analysed in different forms based on the design of the study and the nature of the data.
- To analyse and interpret different types of data tables, graphs and results.
- To discuss factors that should be considered when transferring findings of a study to another population or context.

Facilitation guidance

This final part of the class practical is a good opportunity for students to discuss the common themes they may have found. Discuss if there were any surprising or unexpected responses, and why this may be. Finally, discuss with students the challenges that they faced during the interviews and when processing the data. How did they overcome these challenges? Prompt students to think about group dynamics, conformity/groupthink, sensitivity of the issues, researcher bias, subjectivity in interpreting the data, logistics and recording challenges, and so on.

Students will share their conclusions and evaluation of their practical in a presentation or a report.

Subtopic question(s)

During this subtopic, you will be working towards answering the following subtopic question:

- What role can interviews play in understanding human health and well-being?

In any good research study, a researcher will spend time reflecting on the interview process (**Figure 1**). This is what is called reflexivity. A researcher considers their own role in their interviews, and how their own biases or perspectives could have influenced the outcome. This process is important for establishing credibility in qualitative research. For example, are you often stressed at school? Maybe the way that you perceive stress could have impacted your interpretation of the results.

Student view

Perspective

A researcher's perspective plays a significant role in the research process, particularly during interviews. This highlights the importance of examining the impact of individual viewpoints in research.

Reflection question

1. How might a researcher's perspective influence the dynamics of an interview?

In your groups, it is also important to consider what worked well, and what didn't. What would you do differently next time? It is important to realise that conducting interviews well takes many years of experience, so don't be too hard on yourselves! Work through the practical tasks to help you to reflect, and to evaluate your interviews.

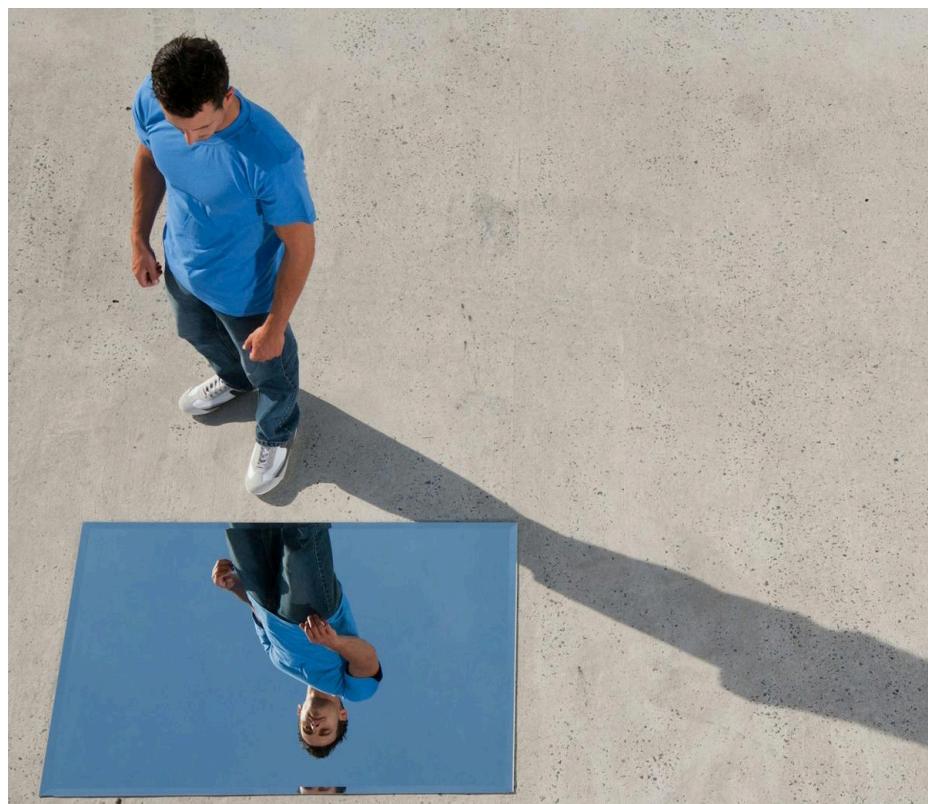


Figure 1. Reflexivity is an important part of the research process.

Credit: Martin Barraud, Getty Images

Practical tasks

Drawing conclusions

Based on the data you have collected, you are going to draw conclusions about your data in response to the research question and share this with the class. Work through the following steps with your group:

- **Review your findings:** What key themes emerged from your interviews? Review the themes that emerged and summarise these findings.
- **Revisit your research question:** Do your findings support, partially support or refute the research question? It's okay if they don't support your question – it's all part of the process!



- **Consider possible explanations:** Why do you think you got these results? Are there any other factors to consider, such as participant behaviour or biases?
- **Revisit the research and theories:** Connect your findings to the theories or research you investigated when developing your research question in [section 2.4.3 \(/study/app/psychology-new/sid-540-cid-763690/book/practical-activity-introduction-id-49468/\)](#). Do your findings align with existing research and/or theories?
- **Address limitations:** What limitations may have been present in your interviews? Revisit the questions you generated in the activity in [section 2.4.2 \(/study/app/psychology-new/sid-540-cid-763690/book/what-are-the-strengths-and-limitations-of-interviews-id-49467/\)](#) and apply these to your own research.
- **Suggest future research:** What questions do you still have on the topic? What was not answered through your interviews?

Share your responses in a presentation to the class.

Some additional tips:

- Include brief, relevant quotes from the interview to help support your conclusions – but don't overload your report with quotes.
- Avoid only including the themes that support your research question and include all perspectives, including different or unexpected ones!

Reflecting on the process

- Reflect back on your process. What challenges did you have when conducting the research? How did you overcome these?
- What challenges did you face when processing the data collected for the interviews? How did you overcome these?
- If you were to repeat the process, what steps would you take to ensure credibility in your interviews?
- What did you learn about the interview process? Why is the type of interview you used beneficial in psychological research?
- How might the skills learned through this process be applied to other research contexts?
- Can you evaluate how the findings from this practical would transfer to other contexts?

HL Extension

Paper 3 exam tip

Reflection is a core component of progress. In this section, you were asked to reflect on your process of conducting an interview.

Paper 3 requires that you apply reflective consideration to a piece of research. In order to refine these skills, complete the following in regard to your own interview:

- Discuss how you could have improved the credibility of your findings.
- Discuss how you could have minimised bias in your investigation.
- To what extent are your findings transferable to other populations or contexts?

Paper 2 criteria

Compare and contrast

- Similarities and differences are discussed in detail.



- Psychological terminology relevant to the research methods is used effectively.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Describe the advantages and disadvantages of different research methodologies.
- Identify the steps to ensuring credibility in research.
- Identify strategies for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research.
- Identify and discuss how data is represented and analysed in different forms based on the design of the study and the nature of the data.
- Analyse and interpret different types of data tables, graphs and results.
- Discuss factors that should be considered when transferring findings of a study to another population or context.

2 section questions ^

Question 1

SL HL Difficulty:

- 1 Reflexivity ✓ refers to the process of a researcher considering their own role in their interviews, and how their own biases or perspectives could have influenced the outcome.

Accepted answers and explanation

#1 Reflexivity

General explanation

Reflexivity is the process of a researcher considering their own role in their interviews, and how their own biases or perspectives could have influenced the outcome. This process is important for establishing credibility in qualitative research. For example, if researching the question, Are you often stressed at school?, the way that the researcher perceives stress could impact their interpretation of the results.

Question 2

SL HL Difficulty:

Which of the following is **not** one of the steps in drawing conclusions from your research data?

- 1 Calculating the statistical significance of your results ✓
- 2 Connecting your findings to existing theories and research
- 3 Reviewing key themes that emerged from interviews
- 4 Suggesting directions for future research

Explanation

Calculating the statistical significance of results is not a required part of the qualitative research process and therefore is not a required step to take when drawing conclusions about your data.



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2. Health and well-being / 2.4 Practical: What role can interviews play in understanding human behaviour?



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assistance

Learning outcomes

By the end of **subtopic 2.4**, you should be able to:

- Identify the appropriate selection of research methodology to investigate a psychological question.
- Understand the stages of thematic analysis.
- Describe the advantages and disadvantages of different research methodologies.
- Identify the steps to ensuring credibility in research.
- Identify strategies for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research.
- Discuss how bias can influence the collection and interpretation of data in interviews.
- Identify and discuss how data is represented and analysed in different forms based on the design of the study and the nature of the data.
- Analyse and interpret different types of data tables, graphs and results.
- Discuss factors that should be considered when transferring findings of a study to another population or context.



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2. Health and well-being / 2.4 Practical: What role can interviews play in understanding human behaviour?

Collected research studies

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Notebook



Glossary

Reading
assistance

These are the main research studies mentioned throughout this subtopic. However, this is not an exhaustive list, and you are encouraged to use other research studies that are relevant.

Students are not required to memorise all details of the studies but may wish to include them to support their explanations.

Student
view

Summary	Evaluation
<p>Radovic et al. (2017) ↗ (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.12.002)</p> <p>Location of study USA</p> <p>Aim To investigate how social media affects adolescents with depression</p> <p>Method Semi-structured interviews with 23 adolescents aged 13–18 years.</p> <p>Results The study identified both positive and negative impacts. Positively, social media provided support, connection and relatable content, helping some feel less isolated. Negatively, it introduced risks like cyberbullying, social comparison and feelings of inadequacy, sometimes worsening depressive symptoms.</p> <p>Conclusion While social media can offer valuable support, it may also intensify negative emotions, suggesting the need for interventions to guide healthier social media use for depressed adolescents.</p>	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-depth data. A deep understanding of adolescents' personal experiences and nuanced views on social media, providing rich qualitative data. Addresses a current, widely relevant issue, highlighting both positive and negative effects of social media, which could inform mental health interventions and policies. <p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 23 participants from a single location. Thus, the findings may not be representative of all adolescents with depression, limiting the study's generalisability. Relying on self-reports can introduce bias, as participants may under-report or over-report their experiences, or might lack self-awareness about the impact of social media on their mental health. Cross-sectional design. The study provides a snapshot of adolescents' experiences at one time point. <p>Ethical considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since participants were minors, the study likely required parental consent along with the adolescents' consent. Confidentiality and anonymity. Protecting participants' personal information was critical due to the sensitive nature of both their mental health status and their social media use. Discussing topics like depression and social media negativity could have been distressing for participants.

Summary	Evaluation
<p>Levy et al. (2005) ↗ (https://doi.org/10.1081/JA-200066810)</p> <p>Location of study USA</p> <p>Aim To explore the subjective experiences and perceptions of ecstasy among college students who use the drug, focusing on its effects, motivations for use and social contexts</p> <p>Method Researchers conducted four focus groups with college students who reported using ecstasy. The sessions included open-ended discussions to gather qualitative data on participants' experiences, emotions and views regarding the use of ecstasy.</p> <p>Results The analysis revealed several key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive experiences: Participants often described feelings of euphoria, enhanced social connections and emotional openness during ecstasy use. Motivations for use: Common motivations included seeking pleasurable experiences, enhancing social interactions, and coping with stress or anxiety. Negative consequences: Participants also acknowledged potential negative effects, such as anxiety during the comedown, and concerns about drug purity and safety. <p>Conclusion While ecstasy use among college students is often associated with positive social and emotional experiences, it is also accompanied by significant risks.</p>	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The focus group method allows for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, capturing nuanced perspectives on ecstasy use that quantitative methods may overlook. The study addresses an important public health issue, potentially informing prevention and harm reduction strategies. <p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups typically involve a limited number of participants, which may restrict the generalisability of the findings to the broader population of ecstasy users. The reliance on self-reported experiences can introduce bias, as participants may under-report negative effects or exaggerate positive experiences due to social desirability or recall bias. The presence of multiple participants can influence individual responses, with some participants possibly conforming to group norms or feeling uncomfortable sharing their true thoughts. <p>Ethical considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants need to provide informed consent, understanding the purpose of the study and how their data will be used, especially given the sensitive nature of drug use. Confidentiality and anonymity. Identities must be kept confidential to protect them from potential stigma or legal repercussions associated with drug use. Discussing drug use can evoke strong emotions or trigger distressing memories. Researchers should be prepared to provide support or referrals to mental health resources if needed.

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