

George Mason University
EDRS 812
Qualitative Methods in Educational Research
Fall, 2012

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Course Description, Goals and Objectives

Prerequisites: Successful completion of EDRS 810 or equivalent coursework or experience.

Course Goals:

1. Understand the essential characteristics of qualitative research and the key ways in which this approach differs from other research strategies.
2. Understand the assumptions embodied in the major approaches to qualitative research and how to use these in conducting and evaluating qualitative studies.
3. Design and carry out a small-scale qualitative study.
4. Effectively communicate, both in writing and verbally, the design, process, and results of such a study.

Expectations:

Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>].

Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>]. Please let me know how I can best adjust the course to your strengths and needs.

Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301gen.html>].

Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account. If you have a preferred email account other than your .gmu address, please let me know.

Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor. Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

Campus Resources

The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].

The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].

Course Structure:

There are four main components of this course:

1. A weekly **class meeting**. The first part of each class will be devoted to mini-lectures on key topics, demonstrations, class exercises, and discussion of the readings.
2. The **assigned readings** are an essential part of this course, providing necessary preparation for class lectures, activities, and discussions. They also cover important aspects of qualitative research that there is not time to discuss in class.
3. An individual (or collaborative) qualitative **research project**. A brief description of this project and the requirements are provided below.
4. The last hour or so of most class meetings will be structured as a support group for your research project. You will receive **consultations** from me and the rest of the class on your project and provide feedback to others.

Required Texts

American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication style manual* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: APA.

Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (2010). *Designing qualitative research* (5th ed.). London: Sage.

Maxwell, J.A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Supplemental Texts

Emerson, R., R. Fretz, & L. Shaw (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2008). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Schwandt, T.A. (2007). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wolcott, H. F. (2009). *Writing up qualitative research (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Other readings will be available on Blackboard.

Evaluation

Grades will be issued on graded scale. Failure to complete and submit the assignments on a timely basis will constitute grounds for a failing grade.

Final project and presentation (paper due Dec. 7):	70%
Research proposal (due Oct. 22):	10%
Class participation:	20%

Grading Scale

90-100:	A
80-89:	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
Below 60:	F

Written Assignments

A number of short written assignments relating to your research project are due throughout the semester. These assignments are not graded (with the exception of the research proposal, which is graded), but will be returned with my feedback. These assignments are intended as preliminary draft pieces of your final project.

Please submit assignments electronically. Include your last name and the assignment name in your file name, like this: last name_assignment. Mine would be: orange_interview1.

Assignments are due by the start of class. Late assignments are not accepted without prior permission.

Research Project

The research project comprises the majority of your grade (70%) and is the main part of your coursework. The purpose of this project is for you to learn how to use qualitative research skills to collect data and through this, to gain an understanding of the goals, methods, assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses of a qualitative approach to research. The scope of this project is limited to allow you to focus on these areas. You may wish to use this project as a pilot for your dissertation research.

This project must be qualitative in nature, as discussed during the first class meeting. The focus does not have to be educational. Any setting or group of participants will likely be a potential source of data for this project. Throughout the semester, assignments related to the research project are due. These allow me to provide feedback on your project as you work.

There are five specific requirements for your project:

1. **No covert research.** This is 1) ethically problematic, 2) too difficult to manage for someone just beginning to learn qualitative research, 3) restricts your research options, and 4) doesn't allow you to learn the key skill of negotiation with those you study. You must have the informed consent of the participants in your research. We will discuss this in more detail in connection with one of the assignments, developing a proposal for Human Subjects approval for your study (in most cases you will not need actual HSRB approval for your course project, unless you are collecting person-identifiable data from minors or plan to publish the results).

2. **No primarily comparative studies.** Your main research question can't focus on a difference between two groups or settings or between two categories of people; if your main interest is in such a question, I will usually recommend limiting your study to one of these settings or categories. (Differences that *emerge* from your study may be a legitimate focus; check with me.) While explicitly comparative studies are a valid and important form of qualitative research, they are not a good way to learn how to do qualitative research. Comparison is likely to 1) push you toward more quantitative questions and modes of thinking, 2) reduce the depth of understanding you can gain of one group, setting, or category, and 3) make it more difficult for you to learn what is essential in qualitative research. In most cases, a course project based primarily on observation should be limited to a single setting.

3. A minimum of **1) 3 hours of interviews, or 2) 3 hours of observations of a single setting, plus at least one hour of interview data with one or more participants in that setting.** For an interview study, you will need to record your interviews (using either audiotape or videotape), and to transcribe at least 3 hours of interview material. Normally, this will involve interviewing at least 3 different participants. In special circumstances, it may be possible to work with a single participant; check with me. For an observational study, you will need to do at least 3 hours of observations of your setting, taking written notes, and to reorganize, rewrite, and expand your rough notes to make them usable for analysis. Normally, this will involve at least 3 separate

observations. The difference in the amount of material required for interview and observational studies is because interviews require more time to transcribe, and because they usually provide more material to work with for analysis. (Videotaped observations are a special case; if you plan to videotape some activity, talk to me about the amount of material required, which depends on the kind of analysis you'll be doing.) Copies of your transcripts or rewritten observational notes must be handed in with your final report.

4. Data collection must take place across the semester. You can't rely mainly on previously collected data, or conduct all of your observations or interviews in a brief period (one week or less). You need to be able to learn from your experiences, and to make corrections to your study design and techniques as you proceed.

5. You will need to share your work for feedback. Any arrangements that you make with participants in your study must not prevent discussing your field notes and interview transcripts (with names deleted if necessary) in class. (Class members will be required to respect the confidentiality of this information.) Sharing your work in class is the only way that I can really assess the actual process of your research, and is also an important part of that process. You can't do the work of this class in isolation.

Some general guidelines for conducting the study:

1. Begin immediately to locate respondents/a site and schedule a series of interviews and observations, as appropriate. Arranging a fit between your schedule and the schedule of your respondents can often be a problem, and you must anticipate and plan for delays and postponements. If you plan to get IRB approval, it is especially important to plan ahead.
2. Do not choose respondents who are close friends or the spouse/companion of close friends. Do not choose participants over whom you have supervisory authority (e.g. principals studying their teachers, teachers studying their students). You do not want to coerce participants directly or indirectly. Data from participants over whom you have power over is often not authentic.
3. Take careful and detailed notes of conversations even if you make audio recordings. Take detailed observational notes as well.
4. Begin analyzing your data after your first interview. Do not wait until all the data are in to begin to make sense of what you have.

I am just as interested in your methods journal as I am the final product. Start your journal as soon as you begin thinking about your project. I am less concerned with your writing style here and will evaluate the journal based on content rather than format and grammar/spelling. This document is for you, most importantly, and serves as a place to track your thoughts and journey through the research process.

Course Outline

August 27: Introduction to the Course and to Qualitative Research

We will overview the syllabus and course requirements and discuss the general philosophical and conceptual components of qualitative research.

September 3* no class

September 10: The Nature of Qualitative Research

Assigned Readings:

Marshall & Rossman, Ch. 1 & 2.

Maxwell, Ch. 1 & 2

Strauss & Corbin, (1990). Getting started and Theoretical sensitivity.

Recommended:

Creswell, Ch. 1 & 2.

Denzin & Lincoln. The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research.

Merriam, (2002). Introduction to Qualitative Research.

Wolcott (1994). Learning Qualitative Inquiry.

September 17: Planning a Study & Choosing a Design Framework

***DUE: Research project rationale and research questions (pp. 2-3)**

Assigned Readings:

Agee (2010), Developing qualitative research questions.

Creswell, Ch. 3

Marshall & Rossman, Ch. 4, (pp. 57-76), Ch. 5, (pp. 89-98).

Maxwell, Ch. 3 & 4

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Ch. 4

September 24: Site and Participant Selection

***DUE: Project Idea Memo**

Assigned Readings:

Bogden & Biklen, (2007). Fieldwork.

Creswell, Ch. 4

LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch (1993) Selecting and sampling in qualitative research.

Marshall & Rossman, Ch. 5, (pp. 99-111).

Maxwell, Ch. 5 "Site and Participant Selection"

Recommended:

Ells (2011), Communicating Qualitative Research Study Designs to Research Ethics Review Boards.
Patton (2002). Purposeful sampling.

October 1: Research Relationships and Ethics

***DUE: Research Project site selection/context**

Assigned Readings:

Creswell, Ch. 5.
Deutsch (2004). Positionality and the Pen.
Marshall & Rossman, Ch. 3, Ch. 5, (pp. 112-131).
Maxwell, Ch. 5, "Developing Research Relationships"

Recommended:

Ballmingie & Johnson (2011), The vulnerable researcher: Some unanticipated challenges of doctoral fieldwork.
Eckert (1989) Field work in the high school.
Reybold (2003-2004) Faculty socialization and the emergence of research ethos in education.

****October 8/meets October 9: Focusing the Study**

***DUE: Research Project data collection plan**

Assigned Readings:

???Creswell, Ch. 6.
Marshall & Rossman, Ch. 5, (pp. 112-131).
Rodgers & Cowles (1993). The qualitative research audit trail: A complex collection of documentation.

Recommended:

October 15: Observations

***DUE: Researcher Identity Memo**

Assigned Readings:

Creswell, Ch. 7
Hirsch & Deutsch (2005). Gender Wars in the Gym.
Marshall & Rossman, Ch. 5 (pp. 137-141).

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Ch. 1-3
Hodder, Ch. 4

October 22: Interviews

*** DUE: Research Proposal**

Assigned Readings:

Creswell, Ch. 6.
Marshall & Rossman, Ch. 5 (pp. 142-170).
Maxwell, Ch. 5

Recommended:

Mero-Jaffe (2011). Is That What I Said? Interview Transcript Approval by Participants.
Patton (2002), Ch. 7, Qualitative interviewing.
Seidman (1998) Transcribing interviews.

October 29: Types of Qualitative Studies

Assigned Readings:

All are in Creswell:
Creswell, Ch. 4.
Ethnography Example: Appendix E. Rethinking cultural resistance: Core values of the straight edge movement.
Phenomenology Example: Appendix C. Cognitive representations of AIDS.
Grounded Theory Example: Appendix D.

November 5: Analysis and Interpretation

Assigned Readings:

Creswell, Ch. 8
Marshall & Rossman, Ch. 8.
Maxwell, "Decisions about data analysis".

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Ch. 6.

November 12: Interpretive, Narrative, and Case Analysis

Assigned Readings:

Case Study Example: Appendix F: Campus response to a student gunman.
Narrative Example: Appendix B: Living in a space between participant and researcher as a narrative inquirer.
Maxwell & Miller (2008) Categorizing and connecting strategies.
Wolcott (1994) Interpretation.

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, Ch. 5.

November 19: Discussion and Review of Data Collection and Analysis

***DUE: Data Collection and Analysis Memo**

Assigned Readings:

Creswell, Ch. 10.

Eisenhart & Howe (1992), Validity in educational research.

Maxwell, Ch. 6.

Recommended:

Marshall & Rossman, Ch. 3

November 26: Writing Up a Qualitative Study

***DUE: Return draft of project paper to your partner with feedback.**

Assigned Readings:

Creswell, Ch. 9

Marshall & Rossman,

Wolcott (2002). Writing Up Qualitative Research... Better.

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Ch. 7.

Wolcott (2001). Writing Up Qualitative Research.

December 3: Research Projects Presentations

***Final papers due by December 10.**