

CCS5006 Research Counselling Practice

Workshop 1 – Introduction to qualitative research

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Overview of handout

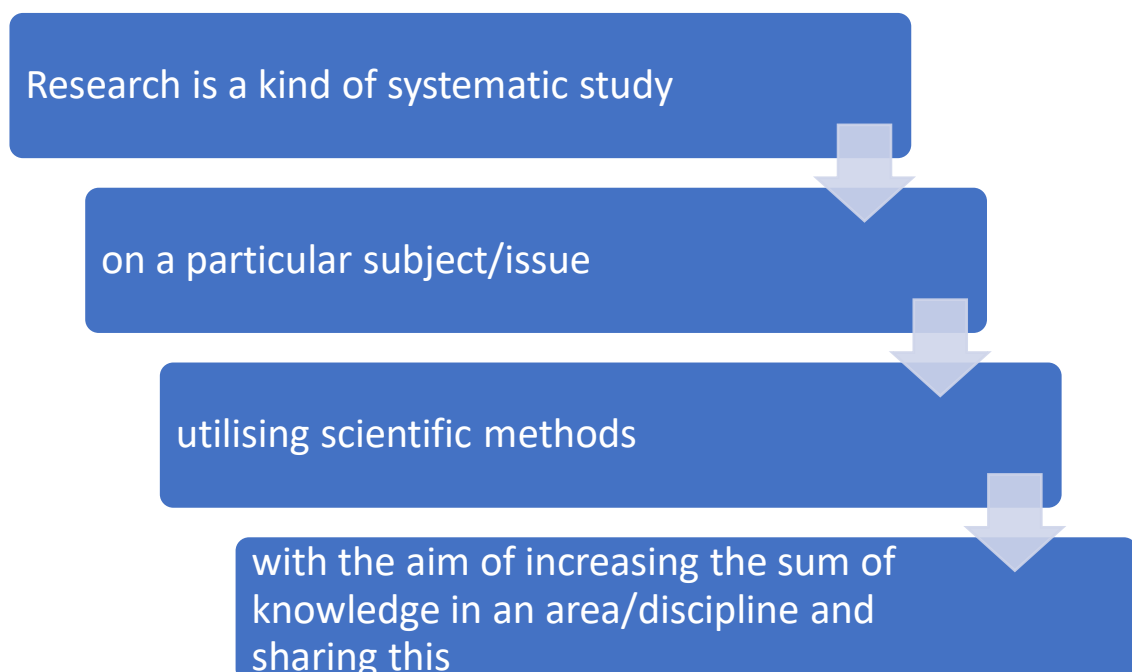
1. What is research?
2. Qualitative research characteristics
3. Qualitative data collection and analysis
4. Ethics in counselling-based research

1. What is Research?

In order to understand how to do research, it is important to explore what exactly research is. There is no one definitive definition of research, but for the purpose of this handout, we will understand research as:

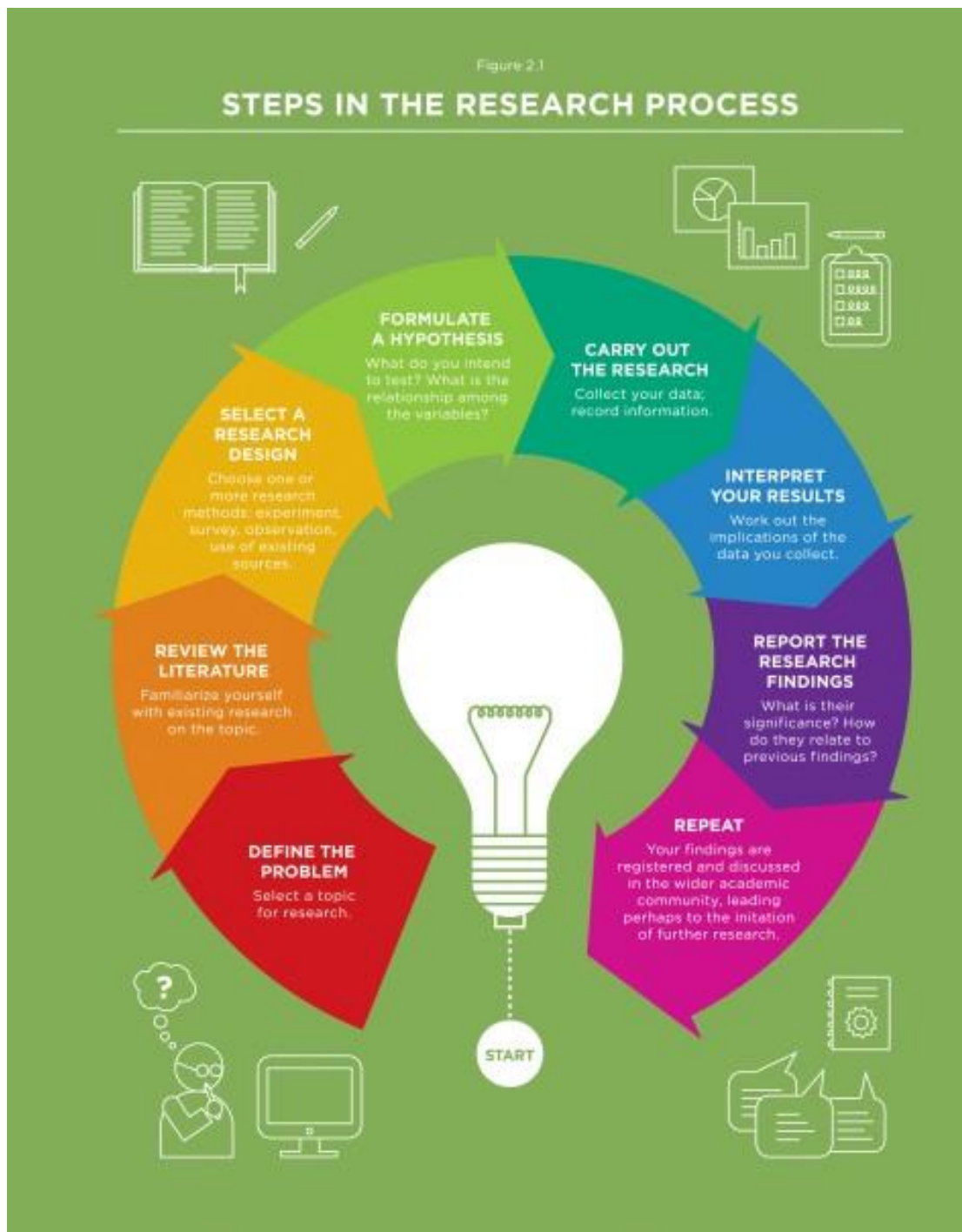
A systematic process of critical inquiry leading to valid propositions and conclusions that are communicated to interested others. A shared, interdependent, global system of knowledge that relies on open access to ideas and freedom of debate (McLeod, 2016, p. x1)

But what does this definition mean in a practical context? To better answer this, let's break this definition into separate components.



The Scientific Method

No matter the type of research you are conducting, all research follows a scientific process. This roadmap may vary, but the process is always systematic and cyclical.



[Topic.0002: Steps in the Research Process | snazlan's blog | creativecapture \(wordpress.com\)](#)

Components of Research

Whatever the design of your research, these components apply.

Aim – what do you hope to achieve through your research?

Purpose– why are you conducting your research?

Purpose of the research will shape the study design and methodology. Typically, the purpose of quantitative research is that of explanation and determination whereas qualitative research seeks to explore and understand.

- Exploration – exploration into the unknown and trying to make sense of complex phenomenon without one definitive answer e.g., the impact of face-masks on the development of the therapeutic relationship during Covid 19
- Determination – to establish a clear answer on a finite question e.g., the number of clients who complete their agreed number of session (contract)
- Explanation – research which seeks to explain and offers clear reasons for the outcome found e.g., reasons that clients do not complete agreed number of sessions.

Study design and methodology – will your research be quantitative (numerical) or qualitative (non-numerical)?

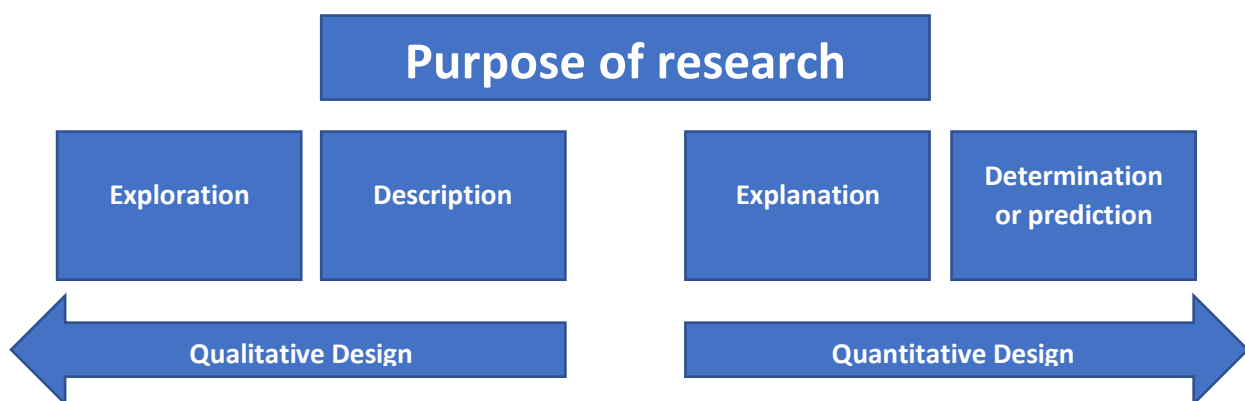
Objectives – what steps must be taken in your research to achieve desired outcome?

Unit of analysis – what will you study?

Timeline – how long will it take?

Setting – where will the research take place?

Purpose informs design



Research design

Quantitative Research Design	Qualitative Research Design
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive • Correlational • Causal comparative or quasi-experimental • Experimental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phenomenological • Ethnography • Narrative • Grounded Theory • Case Study • Action-based research
<p>Mixed methods research makes use of a combination of quantitative and qualitative designs to produce research that draws from both purposes and aims.</p>	

2. Characteristics of qualitative research

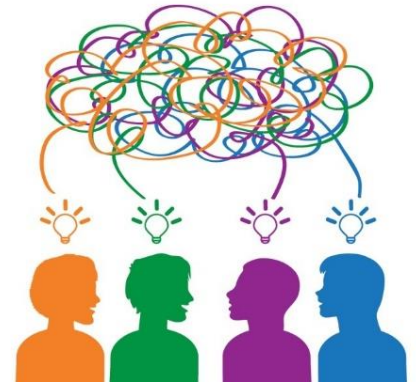


[Reveall | How to combine quantitative and qualitative user research](#)

Qualitative Research	
Aims of research	Thick description data aimed at exploration and understanding
Approach to setting	Natural
Research Strategy	Inductive approach aimed at contextualising
Sample	Can be very small but still generate meaningful data
Notions of objectivity	Intersubjectivity: building a relationship of open trust and respect between researcher and participant
Management of bias	Researcher recognises that they are a part of the research design and implementation and must become aware of their own bias and reflexivity to manage this

3. Qualitative data collection and analysis

3.1. Qualitative data collection



3.2. Qualitative data analysis

Quantitative	Qualitative
Descriptive statistics	Content analysis
Inferential statistics	Narrative analysis
	Discourse analysis
	Thematic analysis
	Grounded theory
	Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

Qualitative Analysis

All qualitative analysis methods make use of coding data into groups or themes. The examples given in the first table above are by no means the only forms of analysis methods, but rather the most common. Your research aims and focus will guide you around which analysis methodology would be best suited to your study. Below is a brief explanation of some of these methodologies.

Content analysis

Defined by Palmquist (1993) as a way to examine words or phrases within a wide range of texts, including books, chapters essays and interviews as well as informal contexts. By examining the presence or repetition of certain words and phrases in a text, the researcher is able to make inferences about the writer, the audience and the cultural and historical moment in which the writing is embedded.

Further reading around content analysis

Busch et al., 1994-2021. Content Analysis. The WAC Clearinghouse. Colorado State University. Available at [Content Analysis - The WAC Clearinghouse \(colostate.edu\)](https://wac.colostate.edu/content-analysis/)

[Qualitative Content Analysis 101 \(With Clear Examples\) - Grad Coach](#)

Narrative analysis

This method is used to analyse content from various sources, such as interviews of respondents, observations from the field, or surveys. It focuses on using the stories and experiences shared by people to answer the research questions.

[What is Narrative Analysis in Qualitative Research? — Delve \(delvetool.com\)](#)

Discourse analysis

Like narrative analysis, discourse analysis is used to analyse interactions with people, but it focuses on analysing the social context in which the communication between the researcher and the respondent occurred. Discourse analysis also looks at the respondent's day-to-day environment and uses that information during analysis

[Critical Discourse Analysis | Definition, Guide & Examples \(scribbr.com\)](#)

[What Is Discourse Analysis? Simple Definition + Examples - Grad Coach](#)

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is the most commonly used method of analysis in qualitative research. It gives you organized and richly described information regarding the database. It focuses on emphasizing, recording and examining patterns within text.

Thematic emphasises the participant's perceptions, experiences and feelings as the major object of study and is rooted in phenomenology. It permits the respondents to discuss the topic in their own words, free of limitations. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying semantic patterns in data which generates interpretative and sophisticated analyses that go beyond the obvious content.

Braun and Clarke list the six phases of thematic analysis as:

- Phase 1 - becoming familiar with your data
- Phase 2 - generating initial codes

- Phase 3 - searching for themes
- Phase 4 - reviewing potential themes
- Phase 5 - defining and naming themes
- Phase 6 - producing the report

Further reading round thematic analysis:

Braun and Clarke, [Thematic Analysis | Online Resources \(sagepub.com\)](#)

[An illustration of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach for... | Download Scientific Diagram \(researchgate.net\)](#)

Grounded Theory

Qualitative and quantitative data generation techniques can be used in a grounded theory study. Grounded theory sets out to discover or construct theory from data that is systematically obtained and analysed by using comparative analysis. While grounded theory is inherently flexible, it is a complex methodology. Researchers strive to understand the discourse and the practical application of grounded theory concepts and processes (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 1).

Further reading on Grounded Theory

Charmaz, Kathy. "Grounded Theory." [The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Social Science Research Methods](#). 2003. SAGE Publications

Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE open medicine*, 7, 2050312118822927. [Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers \(sagepub.com\)](#)

[What is Grounded Theory? | Grounded Theory Online](#)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is concerned with trying to understand lived experience and how participants make sense of their own experiences. It is centrally concerned with the meanings which those experiences hold for the participants.

At the same time, while trying to get close to the participant's personal world, IPA considers that one cannot do this directly or completely. Access is dependent on the researcher's own conceptions which are required to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity. A second important theoretical concept for IPA is, therefore, hermeneutics - the theory of interpretation.

Retrieved from [What is IPA – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Research Group \(IPARG\) \(bbk.ac.uk\)](#)

[Further reading for IPA](#)

[Evaluating the contribution of interpretative phenomenological analysis: Health Psychology Review: Vol 5, No 1 \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

[The seven-steps of IPA data analysis \(Charlick, McKellar, Fielder, &... | Download Scientific Diagram \(researchgate.net\)](#)

[\(7\) Essentials of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - YouTube](#)

3.3. Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy

For a great overview of qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy, read Levers et al., 2008. *Qualitative research in counselling: Applying robust methods and illuminating human context*. [Qualitative Research in Counseling: Applying Robust Methods and Illuminating Human Context](#)

4. Ethics and qualitative research

All research, irrespective of design must follow certain ethical guidelines and principals.

Ethical issue	Definition
Voluntary participation	Your participants are free to opt in or out of the study at any point in time.
Informed consent	Participants know the purpose, benefits, risks, and funding behind the study before they agree or decline to join.
Anonymity	You don't know the identities of the participants. Personally identifiable data is not collected.
Confidentiality	You know who the participants are but you keep that information hidden from everyone else. You anonymize personally identifiable data so that it can't be linked to other data by anyone else.
Potential for harm	Physical, social, psychological and all other types of harm are kept to an absolute minimum.
Results communication	You ensure your work is free of plagiarism or research misconduct, and you accurately represent your results.

[Ethical Considerations in Research | Types & Examples \(scribbr.com\)](#)

When conducting research, counsellors specifically must adhere to the code of ethics set out by the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) as well as the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). For the full code of ethics documents, see [The Irish Association Code of Ethics \(iacp.ie\)](#) and <https://www.bacp.co.uk/media/3908/bacp-ethical-guidelines-for-research-in-counselling-professions-feb19.pdf>. Research must also be collected and stored in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) law ([Data Protection Act 2018.pdf \(justice.ie\)](#)).

Essential further reading and resources for understanding qualitative research

- McLeod, J. (2022). Doing research in counselling and psychotherapy. *Doing Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 1-100.
- McLeod, J. (2013). *An introduction to counselling*. McGraw-hill education (UK) Chapter 25 available from [An Introduction To Counselling \(nibmehub.com\)](https://nibmehub.com)
- Ó Braonáin, C. (2015). The Research-Engaged Therapist: Why Counsellors Need to Embrace Systematic Investigation. *Eisteach*, 15(3), 18 – 22 [The-Research-Engaged-Therapist-Why-Counsellors-Need-to-Embrace-Systematic-Investigation-by-Dr.-Ciln-Braonin.pdf \(iacp.ie\)](https://iacp.ie)
- Jansen, D & Warren, K. (2020, December). *Quantitative Data Analysis 101: The lingo, methods and techniques, explained simply*. www.gradcoach.com . [Quantitative Data Analysis Methods & Techniques 101 - Grad Coach](https://www.gradcoach.com/quantitative-data-analysis-methods-techniques-101-grad-coach)
- [What Is Qualitative Research? | Methods & Examples \(scribbr.com\)](https://www.scribbr.com/qualitative-research/)