

# Interviewing Members of the Public: An Introduction to Qualitative Interviewing

3<sup>rd</sup> Term, Academic Year 2023-2024

**Instructors:** Paulus Wagner, Laurène Le Cozanet

**Credits:** 20

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## Dates, Times, and Rooms:

Thursday 11 April 2024	09:00-13:00 (Seminar room 2, Badia Fiesolana)
Friday 12 April 2024	09:00-13:00 (Seminar room 2, Badia Fiesolana)
Monday 15 April 2024	<u>13:00-17:00</u> (Seminar room 2, Badia Fiesolana)
Tuesday 16 April 2024	09:00-13:00 (Seminar room 2, Badia Fiesolana)
Wednesday 17 April 2024	09:00-13:00 ( <u>Seminar room 3</u> , Badia Fiesolana)

## Overview

Qualitative interviews belong to the standard repertoire of social scientific research, but there is a lot of confusion about when and how using them actually makes an impact. This adds to practical issues with the use of interviews: methods textbooks cannot fully advise you on how to deal with interpersonal research situations or with field access. Last but not least, interviews are very useful in mixed methods designs, but there is no general recipe on how to combine methods fruitfully.

This workshop addresses these issues by providing a hands-on introduction to qualitative interviewing tailored to the needs of researchers who seek practical methodological advice on how to use qualitative interviews either as the main element of their research design or as secondary element of a mixed methodology. In a total of five sessions, we will cover the full cycle of research design and process, providing applied know-how, studying examples from multiple social science subfields, and putting each step into practice. The workshop focuses on interviewing members of the public, i.e. “ordinary” citizens as opposed to elites. Typical research questions relate to issues of socio-economy, political attitudes and behaviours, policy reception and street-level interactions, organizations, gender, race, sexuality, or science and technology.

A main goal of the workshop is to provide space and advice for participants to advance on their research designs. All participants are asked to bring a (real or hypothetical) research question to work on. If you have already conducted field research, you may bring your transcripts to advance on them during the course. Group work is encouraged for participants who seek a generic introduction rather than working on a specific paper. The workshop consists of lectures and practice sessions in which participants work on mini-assignments that cover all elements of the research process from drafting a research design, a sampling and field access strategy and an interview design, up to testing interviewing methods and writing a brief research report.

Participants can choose either to validate the course (80% participation, presentation on last workshop day) or to audit the course. In addition, participants have the opportunity to submit mini-assignments to receive feedback.

If you have questions or want to have a chat on qualitative and mixed methods, do not hesitate to reach out: [paulus.wagner@eui.eu](mailto:paulus.wagner@eui.eu)

## Indicative Program

Each lecture will be taught at hands of applied examples. A full (non-mandatory) reading list will be provided before the start of the workshop.

### Thursday, 11th April

#### **09:00 – 10:50            Technical basics and typical use-cases (Lecture)**

The workshop will start with a brief introduction to what types of qualitative interview methods there are, comprising structured, semi-structured, and open questions, problem-centered and narrative (biographical) interviews, ethnographic interviews and focus groups. Our focus will be on discussing, what types of research questions are best answered by use of these approaches?

Interviews can be used to learn about subjective meaning, about social practices, as well as about causal mechanisms. They can be helpful in situations where other sources of data are not available, but equally inform us about aspects of social reality that are hardly visible in other data types. We will place a focus on reflecting strengths and weaknesses, yet even more notably, complementarity with regard to other methodologies, namely ethnography on the one hand, and quantitative and quasi-experimental methods on the other. Finally, we will discuss inductive vs. deductive approaches and how they inform fieldwork strategies as well as triangulation strategies in exploratory or explanatory sequential (mixed methods) designs.

#### **11:00 – 11:55            Work on your research question (Practice)**

In this practice session we will reflect on the research questions brought by participants. Which interviewing methods, or which combinations of methods could help us to shed light on them? Individual projects are encouraged for participants who aim to advance on specific papers; group work for those who seek to develop generic skills.

Mini-assignment 1: Choose a methodology to study your research question. Justify your choice.

#### **12:00 – 13:00            Sampling and field access (Lecture and Practice)**

We will provide a brief introduction to non-representative sampling techniques (quota sampling, convenience sampling), focusing on what is required to make a sound qualitative argument. Subsequently, we will discuss field access strategies, addressing issues such as institutionally mediated field access, gate keepers, and snowballing. This will include a discussion of research ethics: how do we present the research project to intermediaries, what do we (not) disclose and how does this interact with our research goals?

Mini-assignment 2: Draft a sampling and field access strategy, briefly reflecting on practical and ethical implications.

## Friday, 12th April

### **09:00 – 11:20 Interview design (Lecture and Practice)**

We will discuss the design of interview questionnaires, focusing on how to turn a research question (and if given, hypotheses) into a coherently ordered set of interview questions. We will discuss strategies to access the information we are interested in while dealing with various sources of bias, practical and ethical considerations, and most importantly, with the dynamics of human cognition, emotion, and memory. Further, we will discuss questions such as, how do you establish a “red thread” in an interview questionnaire – providing cognitive coherence and social legitimacy – while staying flexible to react to issues that come up in the process? Each interview method (problem-centered, narrative, ethnographic etc.) requires a specific combination of meticulous preparation and interactive spontaneity. In the light of such considerations, participants will take time to work on their interview questionnaires.

Mini-assignment 3: Design an interview questionnaire.

### **11:30 – 13:00 Interviewing (Practice)**

In this practice session we will take the plunge and start conducting interviews. Workshop participants will have the opportunity to test questionnaires on each other, receiving first empirical feedback on their questionnaire design and interviewing approach.

Mini-assignment 4: Conduct at least one interview and register it. If possible, conduct interviews in a real field setting outside of the workshop. Participants who have already done interviews may bring transcripts to work on them.

## Monday, 15th April

### **13:00 – 15:50 Handling interview situations and navigating fieldwork (Discussion)**

Based on the experiences made by participants and on literature examples, we will discuss approaches to handling interview situations. This comes with a focus on the “craft” of interviewing: framing the situation, listening, reacting, process steering. We reflect on how the relationship between interviewer and interviewee shapes the interview situation (and influences the results); on strategies to navigate diverse conversation styles, narration styles, and interaction norms, and emotions. We discuss how conversation flow can be negotiated both with the predesigned questionnaire and with queries that come up during the interview.

Subsequently, we will take time to discuss how fieldwork evolves in-between concrete interview situations. Explorative approaches require a significant amount of “steering” or in other words, continuous research choices, during the fieldwork process.

### **16:00 – 17:00 Interview analysis & interpretation (Lecture)**

In this session, we will open up the universe of approaches to the interpretation of qualitative interview data. Our focus will be on the tension field of concept and categories between inductive development based on the data and deduction from existing literature. We will address various methods of qualitative data analysis (content analysis, text analysis, discourse analysis, linguistic approaches, etc.) and discuss how we can learn about diverse objects of inquiry by analyzing qualitative interview data (meaning, emotions, practices, processes, mechanisms). Another important focus lies on how to account for heterogeneity e.g. by building typologies. We will

finish by reflecting on how the validity of an analysis is defined in (diverse) qualitative and mixed methods approaches.

Briefly, we will address the transcription of interviews (strategies and tools) as well as approaches to text processing and the uses of qualitative data analysis software (Nvivo, MAXQDA).

## Tuesday, 16th April

### **09:00 – 10:50            Applied examples (Lecture and Discussion)**

We will take time to in-depth discuss chosen examples of qualitative interview-based research from the literature in sociology and political science.

### **11:00 – 13:00            Interview analysis & interpretation (Practice)**

Based on the theory session on Monday, participants have time to analyze interviews they have conducted during the workshop (or interviews priorly conducted by participants) and we collectively discuss issues, obstacles, and strategies to deal with them.

Mini-assignment 5: Analyze the conducted interview(s).

## Wednesday, 17th April

### **09:00 – 11:00            Presentation of results and group presentations**

Each participant or group who has collaborated will give a brief presentation on their research process and their results, highlighting both obstacles encountered and a strategy to scale up the project into a full (article or dissertation chapter -length) research project.

Mini-assignment 6: Write a short research report.

### **11:00 – 13:00            Writing up and publishing qualitative research (Discussion)**

In a final session, we will discuss strategies to present qualitative results in written text as well as publication formats of qualitative and mixed-methods research.

## Instructors

### **Paulus Wagner**, Max Weber Fellow in SPS

Paulus uses qualitative and mixed methods at the intersection of political science and sociology. For his PhD thesis, he conducted 150 biographical interviews with working class citizens in several European countries to understand how personal experiences of the socio-economy inform political views. He has priorly held a workshop on biographical interviewing at Sciences Po and has several years of teaching experience in political science and sociology.

### **Laurène Le Cozanet**, Max Weber Fellow in LAW

Laurène has taught Political Science, history of Anthropology, Sociology of education, STS and social science fieldwork at undergraduate, masters and doctoral level at various institutions

including Paris Dauphine PSL University, Sciences Po Paris, École normale supérieure and Université de Lyon. She has co-organised doctoral workshops in STS in France and India, seminars (contemporary forms of industry; multidisciplinary approach to data) and conferences (relations between universities and the 'economy'; history of the social security number; publics of quantification) and is particularly experienced in advising qualitative field research.

Thursday & Friday sessions are taught by Paulus; Monday-Wednesday sessions co-taught by Laurene and Paulus.

## **Bibliography** (will be updated)

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See the introduction : "Just Talk to People"? Interviews in Contemporary Political Science

### *Analysing Discourse*

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### *Examples - use of interviews in research design*

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### *Politics of interviewing*

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