

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH TYPES

Feature / Dimension	Case Study	Ethnography	Phenomenology	Grounded Theory (GT)	Narrative Research
Main Definition & Focus	An in-depth study of a single or multiple bounded instances/phenomena within their real-world context over time.	Study of social interactions , behaviors, and perceptions within specific groups , teams, organizations, or communities.	Describing the " lived experience " and understanding the essential structure/essence of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals.	Inductively generating explanations, conceptual frameworks, or theories grounded in participant data where none exist or are insufficient.	Exploring individual experiences and identities through the personal stories and narratives told by participants.
Core Goal / Purpose	To investigate and understand complex issues in real-world settings; understand "how" and "why" phenomena happen.	Provide rich, holistic insights into people's views, actions, and the culture/context they inhabit.	Uncover new/deep meanings and describe <i>what</i> and <i>how</i> a phenomenon was experienced.	Build substantive theory from scratch through systematic data analysis.	Reveal and uncover meaning in individuals' life experiences rather than objective truths.
Nature of Data & Methodology	Can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods. Uses more variables than data points.	Exploratory; interactive-reactive approach where questions and design can be modified.	Deep, subjective, and focused on shared/common affective or emotional experiences.	Operates in reverse of traditional research (inductive/reverse-engineered hypothesis).	A compassionate, text/discourse-based methodology focused on chronology and individual histories.
Data Collection Methods	Document analysis, archival records, interviews, surveys, participant observation.	Fieldwork: Active participant observation, unstructured/in-depth interviews , documents, audio/video.	In-depth interviews (most common, e.g., Seidman 3-interview model), participant observation, diaries, focus meetings.	Simultaneous data collection and analysis, Theoretical Sampling (selecting participants based on emerging data).	Dialogue , structured/unstructured interviews, journals, autobiographies, oral histories, timelines (annals/chronicles).
Sample Size & Boundaries	Small number of participants; must have clear pre-defined boundaries (scope, time, site).	Usually a single site , but studies various individuals and activities within it.	Purposive samples (typically 5–25 participants) until data saturation is reached.	Theoretical sampling; continues until theoretical categories reach full saturation.	Focuses intensely on a very small sample (typically 1 or 2 individuals).
Data Analysis Approach	Uses triangulation across multiple sources for validation and pattern matching.	Thematic analysis (recurring meanings) and traditional Descriptive analysis.	<i>Horizontalization</i> (treating all data equally), <i>phenomenological reduction</i> , <i>clustering significant</i> statements into themes.	1. <i>Open Coding</i> (line-by-line concept discovery). 2. <i>Axial Coding</i> (connecting categories via a causal model). 3. <i>Selective Coding</i> (identifying core category).	1. Analysis of Narratives: Extracts themes across multiple stories. 2. Narrative Analysis: Synthesizes events into a cohesive story (Emplotment).

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Key Distinct Concepts	Unit of Analysis: The case itself. Types: Descriptive, Exploratory (Pilot), Explanatory (cause-effect).	Immersion (long settings exposure), Reflexivity (self-critique of researcher's impact), Emic (insider) vs. Etic (outsider) views.	Essence, Bracketing (Epoche) (suspending researcher biases). Types: <i>Descriptive</i> (Transcendental Subjectivity) vs. <i>Interpretive/Hermeneutic</i> .	Constant Comparative Method (comparing data across categories), Memo-Making, Discriminant Sampling (testing the theory in final phase).	3D Inquiry Space: Temporality (past/present/future), Sociality (personal/cultural), Spatiality (environment). Oral History.
Final Output / Product	A detailed, contextual report explaining the process, conclusions, and unique boundaries of the case.	A comprehensive holistic description, analytical evaluation, and trustworthy presentation of a cultural/social setting.	A composite description of the phenomenon's essence , allowing readers to understand the shared lived experience.	A substantive framework or fully integrated conceptual hypotheses/theories grounded entirely in empirical data.	An amalgamated narrative that integrates temporality, sociality, and spatiality into a cohesive, memorable story.
Main Strengths	Ability to handle extensive, rich details and utilize multiple data techniques for valid depth.	Provides rich, multi-layered, holistic insights into real-life social interactions in situ.	Deeply surfaces hidden voices, emotional nuances, and allows findings to emerge naturally without pre-conceptions.	Systematically generates fresh theories independent of old literature biases; dynamic connection of codes.	Captures evocative, memorable, nonlinear human perspectives; helpful for teacher/practitioner self-reflection.
Limitations & Challenges	Large data volume risks straying from focus; limited basis for statistical generalization.	Highly intensive; 'Hawthorne Effect' (altered behavior); difficult to enter/adapt to closed cultures; limited generalization.	Pure bracketing is extremely difficult to achieve; all participants must have strictly shared the exact phenomenon.	Highly complex; strict inductive limits due to unavoidable prior knowledge; hard to judge when true saturation occurs.	Extensive data requires long partnership; institutional context might distort stories; some sensitive stories are "untellable".

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