

## Qualitative Research Methods<sup>1</sup>

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| Instructors:     | Piotr Binder (piotr.binder@ifispan.edu.pl);<br>Marta Olcoń-Kubicka (molcon-kubicka@ifispan.edu.pl) |
| Office hours:    | Fridays 10:00-12:00 (Zoom, by appointment)   |
| Semester:        | second (Spring 2026)   |
| Teaching method: | seminar  |
| Workload:        | 30 teaching hours (over 11 sessions)   |
| Schedule:        | Fridays 14:00-16:00 (Zoom)   |

### Course description

This course is compulsory for Sociology and is open to PhD students from other tracks as an optional module. While no prior qualitative research experience is required, familiarity with basic social science research methods is recommended. It provides an advanced introduction to qualitative research in the social sciences, oriented toward doctoral-level research practice, with an emphasis on making methodological choices transparent, well-justified, and aligned with research questions.

The course is organized as a progression through the main phases of qualitative inquiry. Each session features two thematic blocks, each accompanied by a guided discussion that links assigned readings to participants' diverse doctoral projects. The course begins by establishing a methodological orientation to qualitative research, including how digitalization shapes research questions, data collection, and analysis in contemporary settings. It then moves to research ethics and research design as foundations of responsible qualitative practice, and subsequently focuses on fieldwork and ethnographic sensibilities (including hybrid and digital configurations). Interviewing is covered next, including online and qualitative longitudinal approaches, followed by transcription as a step in preparing and engaging with qualitative materials. The final part discusses analysis across approaches and connects analytic work to the lifecycle of qualitative data: re-use and re-analysis, the role of QDAS, and research data management.

Digitalization and AI are addressed as developments that shape the qualitative workflow, not as separate topics. The course therefore emphasizes methodological judgement: understanding trade-offs, ensuring transparency and accountability, and developing feasible research designs and analytic plans appropriate for doctoral projects. By the end of the course, students should be able to: (1) critically assess qualitative studies, (2) articulate and justify methodological choices in relation to their own research projects, and (3) develop coherent analytic plans appropriate for doctoral-level qualitative research.

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<sup>1</sup> The development of this revised syllabus was supported through the Graduate School for Social Research's participation in the NAWA PROM program, which funded Piotr Binder's research visit to the University of Liverpool, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, in June 2025.

## Course outline

### MEETING 1 - March 6, 2026

[Please note: this session will be 30 minutes longer]

#### Topics

- Organizational issues (syllabus, course requirements, and assessment, up to 30 min.)
- The Nature of Qualitative Research: Between textbooks and research practice
- Transformations in Qualitative Research During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

#### Required readings

- Paulus, Trena M. and Jessica N. Lester. (2021). Ch 1: Introduction to Doing Qualitative Research in a Digital World (pp. 1-30). In: *Doing Qualitative Research in a Digital World*. London: Sage.
- Lee, Allen S. and Suprateek Sarker (2023). Ch 2. A Philosophical Perspective on Qualitative Research in the Age of Digitalization (pp. 15-27). In: Boyka Simeonova and Robert D. Galliers (eds). *Cambridge Handbook of Qualitative Digital Research*. Cambridge University Press.

### MEETING 2 - March 13, 2026

#### Topics

- Research Ethics in Practice (Beyond Compliance)
- Informed Consent, Confidentiality, and Data Protection

#### Required readings

- Flick, Uwe. (2022). Ch 74. Diversity, Ethics, and Transparency as Continuing Challenges in Designing Qualitative Research (pp. 1-16). In: Uwe Flick (ed). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*. London: Sage.
- Jemielniak, Dariusz. (2020). Ch 4. Research Ethics. In: *Thick Big Data: Doing Digital Social Sciences*. Oxford University Press

#### Optional

- National Science Centre. *Guidelines for Applicants to Complete the Ethics Issues Form in the Proposal*:  
[https://www.ncn.gov.pl/sites/default/files/pliki/regulaminy/2021\\_12\\_wytyczne\\_dla\\_w\\_nioskodawcow\\_kwestie\\_etyczne\\_ang.pdf](https://www.ncn.gov.pl/sites/default/files/pliki/regulaminy/2021_12_wytyczne_dla_w_nioskodawcow_kwestie_etyczne_ang.pdf)
- British Sociological Association. (2017). *Statement of Ethical Practice*:  
[https://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa\\_statement\\_of\\_ethical\\_practice.pdf](https://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice.pdf)
- Association of Internet Researchers. *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0*:  
<https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>

### MEETING 3 - March 20, 2026

#### Topics

- Designing Qualitative Research
- Developing Research Questions

### Required readings

- Rapley, Tim. (2022). Developing Research Questions: The Social Lives of Ideas, Interests and Questions (pp. 1-25). In: Uwe Flick (ed). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*. London: Sage.
- Cheek, Juliane. (2022). Ch 21. The Impact of Funding on the Ways Qualitative Research is Thought About and Designed (pp. 339-355). In: Uwe Flick (ed). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*. London: Sage.

### Optional

- Alvesson, Mats et al. (2022). Ch 2. Reflexive Design in Qualitative Research (pp. 41-54). In: Uwe Flick (ed.). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*. London: Sage.

## MEETING 4 - March 27, 2026

### Topics

- Ethnographic Fieldwork: Core Practices
- Fieldnotes and Observation: Recording the Field

### Required readings

- Buscatto, Marie. (2022). Ch 28. Designing Ethnographies (pp. 467-482). In: Uwe Flick (ed). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*. London: Sage.
- Emerson, Robert M. et al. (2011). Ch 2. In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes (pp. 21-43). In: *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

### Optional

- Silverman, David. (2024). Ch 10. Ethnography (pp. 219-255). In: *Interpreting Qualitative Data*. London: Sage.

## MEETING 5 - April 3, 2026

### Topics

- Hybrid / Digital Ethnography: Online–Offline Entanglements
- Digital & AI Toolset: Tools, Workflows, Risks

### Required readings

- Ens, Nicola et al. (2023). Ch 9. Demystifying the Digital: A Case for Hybrid Ethnography in IS (pp. 125–139). In: Boyka Simeonova and Robert D. Galliers (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Qualitative Digital Research*. Cambridge University Press.
- Morgan, David L. (2023). Exploring the Use of Artificial Intelligence for Qualitative Data Analysis: The Case of ChatGPT (pp. 1-10). *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22. DOI: 10.1177/16094069231211248.

## Optional

- Jowsey, T., Braun, V., Clarke, V., Lupton, D., & Fine, M. (2025). We Reject the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence for Reflexive Qualitative Research (pp. 1-5). *Qualitative Inquiry*. DOI:10.1177/10778004251401851.

## MEETING 6 - April 10, 2026

### Topics

- Individual In-Depth Interviews (IDIs): Conducting and Quality
- Focus Group Interviews (FGIs): Moderation and Dynamics

### Required readings

- Brinkmann, Svend, and Steinar Kvale. (2018). Ch 5. Conducting an Interview (pp. 57-71); Ch 7. Interview Quality (pp. 89-103). In: *Doing Interviews*. London: Sage.
- Barbour, Rosaline. (2018). Ch 2. Focus Groups in Practice (pp. 15-27). In: *Doing Focus Groups*. London: Sage.

## Optional

- Caillaud, Sabine et al. (2022). Ch 41. Designing Focus Groups (pp. 684-698). In: Uwe Flick (ed.). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*. London: Sage.

## MEETING 7 - April 17, 2026

### Topics

- The Practice of Online Interviewing
- (In-Person, Hybrid, and Remote) Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR)

### Required readings

- Salmons, Janet E. (2022). Ch 11. Eliciting Data Online (pp. 209-230). In: *Doing Qualitative Research Online* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Henwood, Karen, and Fiona Shirani. (2022). Ch 25. Qualitative Longitudinal Design: Time, Change, Interpretive Practices (pp. 1–25). In: Uwe Flick (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*. London: Sage.

## Optional

- Thunberg, Sarah, and Linda Arnell. (2022). Pioneering the use of technologies in qualitative research – A research review of the use of digital interviews (pp. 757–768). *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 25(6). DOI: 10.1080/13645579.2021.1935565.

## MEETING 8 - April 24, 2026

### Topics

- Transcription as an Analytical Act
- AI Transcription: Automation, Quality, and Risks

### Required readings

- Paulus, Trena M. and Jessica N. Lester. (2021). Ch 7. Transcribing Innovations (pp. 207–246). In: *Doing Qualitative Research in a Digital World*. London: Sage.

### Optional

- Jenks, Christopher J. (2018). Ch 8. Recording and Transcribing Social Interaction (pp. 118-130). In: Uwe Flick (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*. London: Sage.
- Ellingson, Laura L. and Molly M. Sotirin. (2020). Ch 4. Engaging Transcripts (pp. 53-71). In: *Making Data in Qualitative Research*. New York: Routledge.

## MEETING 9 - May 8, 2026

### Topics

- Fundamentals of Qualitative Data Analysis
- Grounded Theory Method (GTM): Practice and Design

### Required readings

- Rapley, Tim. (2016). Ch 20. Some Pragmatics of Qualitative Data Analysis (pp. 331–345). In: David Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Thornberg, Robert, and Elaine Keane. (2022). Ch 27. Designing Grounded Theory Studies (pp. 452–465). In: Uwe Flick (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*. London: Sage.

### Optional

- Charmaz, Kathy, and Antony Bryant. (2016). Constructing Grounded Theory Analyses (pp. 347–362). In: David Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

## MEETING 10 - May 22, 2026

### Topics

- Thematic Analysis (TA): Classic and Reflexive Approaches
- Re-use and Re-analysis of Qualitative Data

### Required readings

- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology (pp. 77-101). *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3(2). DOI: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
- Corti, Louise. (2022). Ch 32. Secondary Qualitative Data Analysis (pp. 535-553). In: Uwe Flick (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*. London: Sage.

### Optional

- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. (2022). Ch 8. One Big Happy Family? Understanding Similarities and Differences between TA and Its Siblings (pp. 223-257). In: *Thematic Analysis. A Practical Guide*. London: Sage.

## MEETING 11 - May 29, 2026

### Topics

- Facilitating Data Analysis with QDAS and AI Assist
- Qualitative Data Management: Planning, Storing, Securing

### Required readings

- Friese, Susanne. (2022). Ch 19. Role and Impact of CAQDAS Software for Designs in Qualitative Research (pp. 307-326). In: Uwe Flick (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*. London: Sage.
- National Science Centre. Data Management Plan – Guidelines for Applicants: [https://www.ncn.gov.pl/sites/default/files/pliki/regulaminy/wytyczne\\_zarzadzanie\\_danymi\\_06\\_2020\\_ang.pdf](https://www.ncn.gov.pl/sites/default/files/pliki/regulaminy/wytyczne_zarzadzanie_danymi_06_2020_ang.pdf)

### Optional

- Flick, Uwe. (2018). Ch 4. Using CAQDAS for Advancing the Quality of Qualitative Research (pp. 41-52). In: *Managing Quality in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

### Learning outcomes

Student knows and understands the world's achievements relating to:

- theoretical foundations
- general and selected specific issues of the academic or artistic discipline at a level enabling the revision of existing paradigms
- the methodology of scientific research

Student is able to take advantage of knowledge from different academic or artistic fields to creatively identify, formulate and innovatively solve complex problems or perform research activities, especially:

- define the aim and subject of the research,
- formulate a research hypothesis
- develop research methods, techniques and tools and use them creatively
- draw conclusions on the basis of research results

Student is ready to

- critically evaluate the achievements of one's academic discipline
- critically evaluate one's contributions to the development of that field
- recognize the value of knowledge in solving cognitive and practical problems

## Course requirements and assessment

Course participants can earn a maximum of 100 points across three components: attendance (10 points), contribution to in-class discussion (20 points), and the essay (70 points). Final grades are based on the total number of points and are assigned according to the grading scale in the table below, which also includes the corresponding ECTS grades.

|                           |                           |                           |                           |                        |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>A</b> 94-100 <b>5</b>  | <b>B+</b> 87-89 <b>4+</b> | <b>C+</b> 77-79 <b>3+</b> | <b>D+</b> 65-69 <b>2+</b> | <b>F</b> 0-59 <b>1</b> |
| <b>A-</b> 90-93 <b>5-</b> | <b>B</b> 84-86 <b>4</b>   | <b>C</b> 74-76 <b>3</b>   | <b>D</b> 60-64 <b>2</b>   |                        |
|                           | <b>B-</b> 80-83 <b>4-</b> | <b>C-</b> 70-73 <b>3-</b> |                           |                        |

### Attendance (10 points)

Attendance is expected at all class sessions. The course comprises 11 sessions, and students may miss up to one session. Any health-related issues will be taken into consideration.

### Contribution to the in-class discussions (20 points)

Class discussions are an essential element of this course. Everyone is expected to come to class prepared for a meaningful conversation about the readings. The overall grade may be adjusted by up to 20 points based on active participation in the class debates. This adjustment will be based on the relevance and insightfulness of contributions.

### Essay (70 points)

Students are required to submit an academic essay (about 3,000 words, +/- 5%, excluding abstract and references) based on one published scholarly monograph in the social sciences, in which qualitative research is central to the empirical study. The selected monograph should preferably be relevant to the student's PhD project.

This assignment is not a book review or a chapter-by-chapter summary with occasional methodological comments. The purpose is to produce a focused methodological analysis of a published qualitative study and to use it as a basis for an improved or alternative approach to addressing the same research problem.

The essay is expected to include three clearly identifiable parts:

#### 1) *Methods presentation*

A concise presentation of the qualitative research design and methods used in the monograph (e.g., research setting and case boundaries, sampling/recruitment, data types and data collection procedures, ethical approach, and the main steps of analysis).

#### 2) *Methodological critique*

A critical assessment of the methodological choices made in the monograph. The critique should focus on methodological fit and trade-offs (strengths, limitations, consequences for the study's claims, and issues of transparency/reflexivity), rather than a general analysis of the book.

### 3) *Revised research design*

A coherent proposal for an improved or alternative research design addressing the research problem examined in the monograph. The proposal should outline data sources, sampling/recruitment, and an analytic approach, and justify why these choices would strengthen the study compared to the original design. It should be feasible and internally consistent.

#### Structure and formatting

The essay should follow standard academic conventions and be organized along the following components: title and author details; abstract (up to 250 words); introduction; main body (covering methods, critique, and revised design); conclusions; and reference list. The text should include page numbers and in-text citations (for both paraphrases and direct quotations, where used). All sources cited in the text must appear in the reference list.

#### Book selection and student responsibility

Selecting an appropriate monograph is part of the assignment. Students should consult the chosen monograph with the instructor by Meeting 5 (for confirmation). Before sending a title for consultation, students are expected to verify that the book meets the criteria stated above. If a suitable title has not been confirmed by Meeting 6, the instructor will recommend up to two options. Students are responsible for ensuring access to the monograph (via the library or online).

#### Why a monograph?

Qualitative research often generates unstructured, multi-layered data that requires space to be presented and interpreted transparently. Compared to standard journal articles, monographs more often provide the breadth and contextual detail necessary to follow the research process, evaluate methodological decisions, and assess how empirical materials support the study's claims.

## **Readings**

All required readings and optional materials will be provided to course participants via Google Drive. These materials are for academic instruction only and are not to be shared further. Please consult the course outline for the readings assigned to each class.

## **Deadline and submission**

The essay deadline is **June 12, 2026, at 17:00 (Warsaw time, CEST)**. Essays must be submitted by e-mail to [pbinder@ifispan.edu.pl](mailto:pbinder@ifispan.edu.pl). If a student anticipates a delay, they must notify the instructor at least 24 hours before the deadline and provide a brief justification. Late submissions are accepted only at the instructor's discretion. Essays submitted after the deadline without sufficient justification will incur penalties, with a maximum possible score of 50 points.