

PSYCHOLOGY



SERIES

## USER'S GUIDE

### Exploring Qualitative Methods



This programme is the final one in a series of four on **Research Methods and Statistics**.

The guide is written for teachers and will be particularly helpful for those new to psychology teaching.

It is designed to be read before viewing and an overview of the content and structure of the video/DVD is given to assist with planning and lesson preparation. The DVD includes a menu linking to sections within the programme. The default setting is to play the programme through automatically. To select a section highlight the relevant heading using the arrows on your remote control and press 'ENTER'. The chosen section will then play through and return to the menu for your next choice.

Running time: 45 minutes

**The video/DVD is under copyright law and may not be duplicated**

Any graphics reproduced in the User Guides may be photocopied for use with students.

We hope you find the video/DVD a useful teaching tool.

## Aim of the Series

Many students of Social Sciences approach 'anything to do with Maths' with trepidation. The aim of this series is to try to nurse them gently through the process of preparation, analysis and testing in research while teaching them all the basic terms and techniques required by the examination boards.

## Content

The first programme, [Introduction to Designing Experiments](#), now known as 'the spaghetti bolognese one', takes a relatively light-hearted introductory look at design and methods.

The second one in the series, [Organising Quantitative Data](#), uses a musical theme to explain how to use descriptive statistics to illustrate quantitative data. It is expected that students will have a basic knowledge of these topics before watching this video/DVD.

This third programme, [Inferential Statistics](#), looks at probability and testing using a magic and circus skills theme. It is an introduction to inferential statistics and aims to show students that statistics is important but can be fun and within their capabilities.

This fourth and final video in the series, [Exploring Qualitative Methods](#), uses the theme of dreams and sleep to explore qualitative techniques and methods. Once again Amy is our presenter and there is interesting live footage throughout with supporting graphics, animations, discussion points and questions for the viewers.

It is assumed that the audience will have watched the first three programmes and/or will have a reasonable knowledge of inferential statistics prior to viewing. We suggest that viewers compile a list of advantages and limitations of the qualitative method. A template, as shown in the programme, is given on page 9 of this User Guide and may be printed out. A similar chart could be used to summarise the pros and cons of the four qualitative methods explored.

Four methods are looked at in particular:

- **Questionnaire Method**
- **Interview Method**
- **Observational Method**
- **Case Study Method**

We also look at two ways of summarising the large amounts of data that is gathered, using:

- **Content Analysis**
- **Correlational Method**

Running times (where relevant) given in pink.

## 00.00 Introduction

The first section briefly recaps the strengths of the scientific method i.e. manipulating variables, cause and effect and the advantages of gathering quantifiable data i.e. testing, reliability, control.

## 01.15 Measuring human experiences and feelings

- But, how can we quantify human feelings such as unhappiness?
- How can we measure the need to succeed?
- Can we reduce falling in love to a number?

## 01.45 Pause to consider

*Can the content of our dreams be measured and tested?*

Discussion could be around measurement of REM during sleep which only shows the length and type of sleep which occurs. The only way to find out what people are *actually* dreaming is to ask them – this leads into the various methods we can use for gathering qualitative data.

## 02.30 Alternatives to the scientific method

- Introduction and aims of qualitative research.
- Comparison of qualitative and quantitative data.



We suggest that viewers compile a list of advantages and limitations of the qualitative method.

## 05.00 Questionnaire method

This is quite a long section (9 minutes) and goes into some detail as it is a complex method which is commonly used in student practical work.

## 05.30 Pause to Consider

Which of these questions will produce qualitative data?

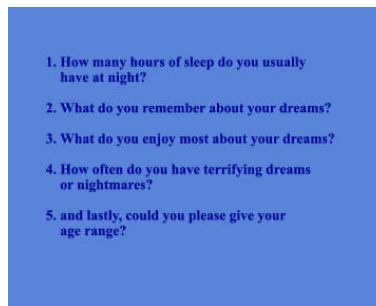
*Do you dream in colour?  
What do you enjoy about your dreams?*

Planning the style of the questionnaire – looking at choices to be made



## 10.30 Test – which questions would produce qualitative data?

A short questionnaire is developed looking at examples of poor design and highlighting, with animations, some of the common errors – multiple content, implicity, ambiguity and leading questions.



The viewer is asked which of the five questions will collect qualitative data?

Practical advice is given about presentation and administration of the questionnaire. There is a brief discussion of analysis of results.

## 14.00 The Interview Method

The differences between structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews are discussed and the applications of each are illustrated.



More informal interviews are related to Grounded Theory.

## 20.00 Observational Method

- Bandura's work with Bobo dolls is used as an example of using the observational *technique* while manipulating variables, thus a quantitative method, but it is the qualitative observational *method* that is described here. The aims, methods, importance of planning, problems of recording, ethics and ecological validity are discussed.
- Viewers follow a demonstration observation where drama students are asked to decide amongst themselves which parts each will take in a play. While they decide on their characters, two observers are tallying the decision-making styles that they observe.

## 24.00 Pause to consider

*How might demand characteristics and observer bias cause problems?*

We see the observers comparing their results and they discuss the importance of inter-observer reliability.

Participant observation is exemplified when a middle-aged researcher is seen attempting to join the teenage drama group.

## 26.45 Case Study Method

The different methods of investigation that can be used are illustrated following a student who conducts a study of an 11 year old girl. The unique aspects of this method are discussed and the need for sensitivity, confidentiality, permissions and not trying to resolve problem issues that may arise, with details of how to write up the report.

## 30.00 Content Analysis

This is a useful technique for summarising large amounts of data gathered in case studies, interviews and observation method.

The technique is described using an example of material from young peoples' dreams. Two students transcribe the content from tape recordings and then decide on the main themes independently and compare notes.

<b>fame</b> money, riches in public eye winning sports star	<b>feelings</b> fear, terror embarrassment failure, loss happiness freedom	<i>still to be categorised</i> monsters food, parties blindness pests talking dogs insects
<b>people</b> mother, father siblings, friends sweetshop lady unknown person authority	<b>activities</b> chasing, falling losing things eating running away	chocolate distortion masks forgetting

The frequency of items in each category are tallied. Further comparisons are made and the categories improved and subdivided if necessary.

money, winning lottery		2
famous person, recognition		3
being rich, others envious	-	5
singing in public - success		4
singing in public - failure		1
recording own music		1
sports star - recognition		6
sports, winning, success		4
best at something, admiration		3
no mention of fame	-	11

## 34.00 Pause to consider

*Why were two analysts used? Why do we subdivide categories?*

The frequency counts can be quantified using percentages and graphs. Advantages and disadvantages.

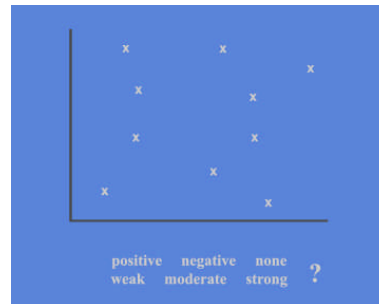
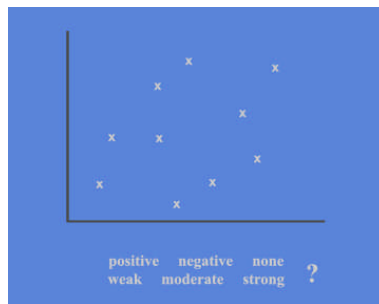
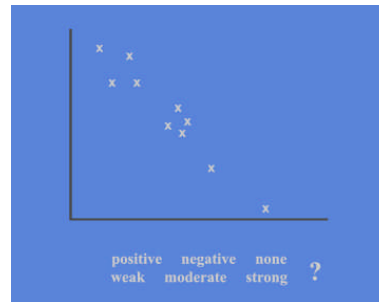
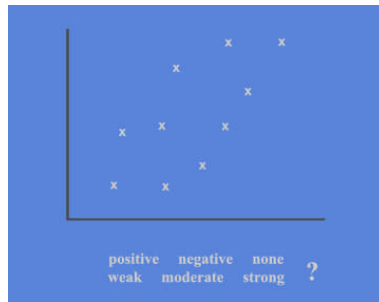
## 37.00 Correlational Method

Correlation is included in this programme as it is not inferential. It can also be useful in testing for reliability in qualitative methods.

- Scattergrams
- Tests

## 39.00 Reading Scattergrams

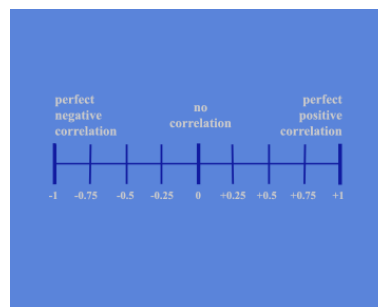
Four scattergrams are presented for the audience to interpret according to strength and direction of relationship.



## 40.00

A Spearman's Rank Order Correlation is worked through using the responses to two of the earlier questionnaire items which have been coded.

The result of  $r^2 = -0.58$  is plotted on a scattergram and marked on the scale below.



## 44.00 Summary

The four qualitative methods have been looked at in varying depth as judged necessary. Obviously the content cannot be comprehensive but the live demonstrations will supplement textbook detail and, hopefully, bring the methods to life.

**The following issues are stressed during the programme:**

**Qualitative and quantitative** – the methods are not strictly one or the other but it is the data collected that is qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative data can be converted into quantitative data.

**Reliability or validity?** – the choice is between having tight control over error and bias, manipulating the independent variable to show cause and effect and the high reliability of scientific method OR having the rich detailed quality data with high ecological validity of qualitative methods.

**Recording** – the importance of not relying on memory and note-taking alone to record observations and interviews and the need to transcribe recordings and write up reports as soon as possible.

**Pilot Studies** – the need to plan carefully is stressed. Most procedures can be piloted beforehand in order to predict problems and allow adjustments to be made before the main study is carried out.

**People skills** – all work with people requires good interpersonal skills but this is especially so with indepth studies such as interviews, observations and case studies. The key words are professionalism, respectfulness and consideration.

**Ethics** – ethical consideration is raised throughout e.g. the importance of dealing sensitively with participants, keeping their personal information confidential, asking permission before recording anyone on tape or film, debriefing and thanking the participants.

## Qualitative Methods

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>

## **Interview Skills**

It can be a good idea to give some training to students before sending them off to interview the general public. The training will depend on the type of interview but there are some general guidelines below.

### **Preparation and Planning**

- Know the aims of the interview.
- Have a set number of questions written down to ensure that they are asked.
- Questions should adhere to the same rules as those for questionnaires i.e. avoid asking two questions at once; use open questions; avoid multiple content, leading questions, ambiguity and do not ask anything too personal.
- Pilot the questions on several people and ask for feedback.

### **Interviewing Skills which can be practised on friends**

- Ask participant if you may record the interview on tape.
- Assure the participant of confidentiality.
- Try to create a natural flow of conversation to put the interviewee at ease.
- Look attentive and show genuine interest – remember how valuable everything the person says will be to your research.
- Ask questions pleasantly and in language that can be easily understood.
- Start with easy, non-threatening questions to give confidence.
- Adopt a relaxed and non-dominant posture.
- Listen to what is being said, allowing time to answer.
- React positively and non-judgmentally to the answers whatever you think.
- Recognise when a 'Yes' or 'No' is not definite and ask a probe question to obtain further information.
- If you don't receive the exact information required ask a prompt question e.g. Answer: 'Because I enjoy it'. Prompt: 'Can you tell me in what way you enjoy it?'
- Provide a brief summary at intervals saying what you understand the interviewee has said. This checks that interpretation is accurate as well as showing the interviewee that they are being listened to and understood.
- Inform the interviewee when you are moving on to a different topic.
- Keep the interview as short and concise as possible without losing the free flowing relaxed style. Be happy to let them go off the subject but bring them back on track in your next sentence.
- Keep the interview as short and concise as possible while making sure all your key questions have been answered.
- Thank the participant for their help and answer any questions they may have.

## Transcriptions

- A good reason for keeping the interview as short as possible is the task of transcribing. Every 15 minutes of tape recording you have can take 2-3 hours to transcribe.
- Every word that is said is transcribed from the tape or notebook.
- It can be useful to include 'err' and 'um's, laughter, tears, pauses and signs of anxiety, such as hand wringing. Include the interviewer's words as these can also add to the whole picture.

## Example transcript of a child's dream (illustrated in the programme)

- 1.0 *Could you tell me about your dream, Nyela?*
- 1.1 Well, I'm in the playground and there's a group of children chasing me
- 1.2 and it changes to the woods
- 1.3 and I can't run fast enough to get away from them
- 1.4 and they keep chasing and chasing me (*pause*)
- 1.5 And then I run up a tree,
- 1.6 they keep looking at me and chasing me and pulling funny faces (*anxious*)
- 1.7 and then I end up at the top of the tree
- 1.8 but I can't get any higher,
- 1.9 it's all slippery and then I wake up (*looks sad*)
- 1.10 *That must have been scary.*
- 1.11 Yes (*looks upset*)

It is important to number the lines in some way so that they can be referred to in the report and quickly found by the reader. It can be simply 1-10+ or if you have more than one interview in the same study you can use 1-1, 2-1, 3-1 etc as above.

## Observation

- Qualitative data will be obtained from ecological observations, i.e. those observing behaviour in the natural environment.
- As with most qualitative data it has higher validity than laboratory observational data because the behaviour is naturally occurring.

## **Behaviour Sampling**

- Individual or group sampling? Recording the behaviour of one individual in a group at a time gives more accurate observations.
- Event sampling – key behavioural events are recorded every time they occur e.g. making eye contact, touching, pretend play. It is difficult to spot every example of the behaviour in large areas with large groups of people such as a shopping centre or playground. However, observing just one type of event decreases the chances of events being missed.
- Time sampling – behaviour is observed for discrete periods of time, say one minute in every five or one hour a day. Behaviour may be missed which occurred between the time-samples but it is assumed that over time it will produce quite an accurate picture of the occurrence of the behaviour.
- Behavioural coding – categories of behaviour can be used which reflect the expected range of behaviours found in a pilot study or previous research. The observer then tallies each instance of a behaviour e.g. interaction between family members. For larger groups video recordings can be made although the camera can miss events that are out of range. An example of observers using a coding system for decision-making styles is shown in the programme.

## **Observing Natural Behaviour**

- The most difficult aspect of this method is observing without being noticed.
- Even if, for example, elaborate plans are made to hide in an office block and look down on a shopping street, there is still the possibility that a face at the window will be noticed over time and also the likelihood that behaviour will be missed from a distance.
- If they know they are being watched, people will become self-conscious and change their behaviour. The usual method is to observe as unobtrusively as possible and gradually become a familiar figure in their environment who is ignored. This is often the case in play groups where, providing the observer doesn't engage with the children, they will find the observer boring and turn their attention to something more interesting.
- It is only after this acclimatization period that sampling of behaviour can begin.
- The programme takes the viewer through an example observation and shows the importance of having more than one observer for inter-rater reliability.

## Participant Observation

One way around the problem of being seen to be observing, is to become part of the group. This obviously only works in social groups that are appropriate. An observer in a play group would have to become a carer, an office worker in an office and a shopper in a shopping centre. This makes recording observations extremely difficult unless, for example, you observe in a college library as a student where taking notes is the norm. The programme shows an example of a middle-aged researcher attempting to become part of a group of teenage drama students to make the point that it is often not possible to use this method.

## Correlational Method

This is more a design than a method and is included in this programme because it does not use the scientific method and therefore didn't fit into the programme on Inferential Statistics.

Scattergrams and correlational tests are covered in the programme. However, there are some aspects of correlation which we reserved for discussion in this guide.

## Line of Best Fit

- This is a line which best represents the shape or size of a correlation.
- It can be useful as a visual summary of the relationship between two variables. This is often misused by students who tend to just put a line anywhere through the middle of a set of plotted scores.
- It could be suggested that they draw an oval which encloses most of the scores on the scattergram. The line can then be placed so that it forms the optimal long axis of the oval. This presents a more accurate picture and identifies outliers more clearly
- If the positioning of this line is calculated, it is known as a **regression line** and shows the direction or degree of a correlation. This can be used for making predictions about pairs of scores e.g. if the value of the  $x$  score is this then the value of the  $y$  score is likely to be that. The real value of regression lines, which justifies the tedious calculations, is that it allows us to make predictions about scores that weren't actually included in our study, that is we can start to make predictions about the whole population.

## Reliability of Tests and Correlation

**Reliability** is about making sure that the method applied gives consistent measurements. As well as standardised psychometric tests, this can also apply to qualitative methods such as questionnaires and observations. Correlation is used to show this consistency over time.

**Test Re-test** allows the external reliability of a method to be checked. For example, a questionnaire should give similar scores when repeated on the same participants under similar conditions, say a week later. The responses can be coded in some way and the two test scores for each person correlated using Spearman's rank correlation. A high positive correlation coefficient would suggest that the questionnaire was measuring reliably. One problem with this is that people may remember their answers from the first time and not really consider the question carefully.

**Split-Half Method** looks at the internal reliability of a measure, i.e. how consistent a measure is within itself.

- In this method the questions are split in some way either odds and evens or first half and second half. The two halves are then correlated and a high positive correlation coefficient would indicate a reliable measure.
- If the correlation is low it may be because half the questions in a questionnaire would produce a similar answer from the majority of people e.g. Do you consider yourself emotionally stable? and the other half would produce widely differing responses e.g. How creative would you say you were?
- The way in which the questions are split can make a difference. Research shows that if the questions are divided into two in a different way they can give slightly different results.

## Inter-observer Reliability

Correlation can also be used to check the relationship between the scoring of two researchers' observations. The sum of the tallies in each behaviour category for two observers is correlated. A high positive coefficient would mean that they were scoring in the same way.

## Writing Up Reports

Methods for writing up a qualitative study report for A Level are very similar to those for quantitative studies. The exact format will depend on that set by the different examination boards but it will be necessary to adapt these to suit qualitative data, especially the methods and results sections. If in doubt check with the examination board.

### Guidelines for students may include:

#### Reflexivity

- It is very important in qualitative studies to be **reflexive**, i.e. to realise that you as a researcher start with your own interests, past experience, characteristics, biases and values. This will affect the research that you choose to do and your interpretation of it – just as lectures reflect the person who delivers them and books and articles reflect their author.
- It is therefore very important to be questioning about what you are doing and to include these reflections in your report. This is especially the case with face to face work with participants who will inevitably be starting from a different place to you. Using two observers, raters or analysts helps to prevent bias as does asking for a second opinion about your interpretation.

#### Methods

- In this section of your report you need to describe the qualitative method used and explain why this is appropriate as well as giving the usual detail of design, participants, sampling and materials in enough detail to allow the study to be replicated.
- The **Procedure** should include the pilot studies, any permissions obtained and ethical issues which arose as well as the exact detail of what happened.

## Results

- This section will vary according to the method used.
- All the data collected must be summarised in some way with all the raw data placed in the Appendix.
- Some brief summaries need to be included such as tables and graphs.
- Closed question responses can be summarised using counts or percentages.
- Open question responses can be listed in a summary of main themes or categories.
- Numbers of observations recorded under each behaviour category can be presented on a summary chart.
- Case Study data can *describe* under headings such as biography, education, medical history, career path, family etc. The discussion takes place later.

## Appendices

- All the raw data gathered should be clearly titled, numbered and included in the Appendices at the back of the report. This could include a copy of original questionnaires, observation tally charts, interview transcriptions, material such as artwork and transcriptions from case studies, lists of content analysis categories, details of pilot studies etc.
- Summaries discussed in the main body of the report should refer the reader to the raw data in the Appendices by its number, e.g. (see Appendix 5).

Be careful that quantitative terms are not used in the report e.g. experiment, experimenter, tested. Instead use the terms study or research, researcher and interviewed.

## Reference Books for Teachers and Researchers

Banister, P., Burman, E., Taylor, M. and Tindall, C. (1994) *Qualitative Methods in Psychology – a research guide* Open University Press

Coolican, H. (2004) *Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology* 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Hodder and Stoughton

Hayes, N. (Ed) (1997) *Doing Qualitative Analysis in Psychology* Psychology Press Open University Press

Hayes, N. (2000) *Doing Psychological Research - gathering and analysing data* Open University Press

Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Blackwell

## Textbooks for Students

Teachers will struggle to find good textbooks and resources for A Level students which explain the use of qualitative methods clearly and simply enough. Most general textbooks skip over it, which is strange as so many qualitative reports are submitted now for A Level exams. The books above are written for undergraduate and postgraduate level research and although Nicky Hayes (2000) writes particularly clearly, it is in too much depth for A Level students.

### Two useful books for qualitative studies and ideas are:

Flanagan Cara (1998) *Practicals for Psychology* Routledge

Ideal for teachers to find ideas for practicals. Students can select from 20 practical reports and learn how to design, conduct and write up own report. Full of useful teaching points and advice for students including ethical issues, questionnaires and examiners' comments.

Banyard, Philip and Grayson, Andrew (1996) *Introducing Psychological Research* Macmillan

This is a marvellous handbook for teachers (may have run into further editions by now!). It contains over 60 detailed summaries of well-known research studies covering most syllabus topic areas. Questions for students with suggested answers.

### Ethical Guidelines available from:

The British Psychological Society  
St Andrew's House  
48 Princess Road East  
Leicester  
LE1 7DR

## Recommended websites

[www.uniview.co.uk](http://www.uniview.co.uk)

a large collection of psychology videos, DVDs, posters, brain jellies, X-psyting extras, etc. The Number Cruncher CD will calculate commonly used statistical tests including Correlation.

[www.theATP.org](http://www.theATP.org)

the Association for the Teaching of Psychology home website

[www.psyonline.edgehill.ac.uk](http://www.psyonline.edgehill.ac.uk)

an excellent site designed for AQA (A) specifically but useful for all students – with a staff chat room!

[www.s-cool.co.uk](http://www.s-cool.co.uk)

revision guide covering most topics for psychology students

[www.bps.org.uk/publications/rd.cfm](http://www.bps.org.uk/publications/rd.cfm)

access to the free BPS Research Digest which will be e-mailed to you fortnightly; articles specially written with A Level students in mind

[www.holah.karoo.net](http://www.holah.karoo.net)

information, fun activities, links – excellent for staff and students alike

[www.dialogical.net/psychology](http://www.dialogical.net/psychology)

a vast amount of information – ideal for researchers; includes lists of all psychology departments in the world, history of psychology, lists of journals etc

<http://psych.hanover.edu>

useful information from a happening college in the USA

[www.citeULike.org](http://www.citeULike.org)

good for finding journal articles

## **The Association for the Teaching of Psychology**

The ATP has highly experienced teachers and examiners ready to give advice and assistance, especially for new teachers of this topic. They can recommend textbooks and resources that will get you started.

ATP Helpline: Dorothy Coombs

work: [dorothy@pursglove.ac.uk](mailto:dorothy@pursglove.ac.uk) 01287 280800

home: [dorothycoombs@24whinchat.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:dorothycoombs@24whinchat.freeserve.co.uk) 01287 636502

New teachers of this topic are well advised to get in touch with ATP:

Association of Teachers of Psychology  
c/o The British Psychological Society  
St Andrew's House  
48 Princess Road East  
Leicester  
LE1 7DR

Annual Conference - The ATP holds an excellent conference for members each July. As well as lectures and workshops, there is an opportunity to meet the examiners and to browse all the latest books and resources.

### **Materials, Videos, DVDs**

Other titles available in the Psychology Live Series include:

- ✓ [The Study of Attention](#)
- ✓ [The Study of Memory](#)
- ✓ [Perception: the theories](#)
- ✓ [Classical and Operant Conditioning](#)
- ✓ [Further Approaches to Learning](#)
- ✓ [Cognitive Development](#)
- ✓ [Language Development](#)
- ✓ [Evolution by Natural Selection](#)
- ✓ [Reductionism](#)
- ✓ [Introduction to Designing Experiments](#)
- ✓ [Organising Quantitative Data](#)
- ✓ [Inferential Statistics](#)

Also recommended:

[Number Cruncher CD-ROM](#)

Uniview has a large collection of resources for most areas of psychology, biology and sociology. See the catalogue online or contact us to request a copy.

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