

In-class exercise: Qualitative vs Quantitative methods

The goal of the first session of the research methods course is to get students thinking about why social scientists use different methods; what the comparative strengths and weaknesses of these methods are; and to nuance their understanding of the difference between the types of methods.

The class is split in groups of 8-12 students. Each group is led by a tutor who uses mixed methods in their work. Students work in threes. They are given a table (see below) on A3 paper and a set of coloured cards representing various research methods and approaches. The students are asked to debate in which columns each card belongs (quantitative, qualitative or both). They then have to explain to the other groups where they have placed the cards and why. The themes discussed in this card-sorting exercise are picked up in later lectures.

	QUALITATIVE	QUANTITATIVE	BOTH
1. Methods (yellow) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interviews • surveys • ethnography • experiments 			
2. Role of theory (green) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inductive /developing • deductive/testing 			
3. Structure (orange) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highly-structured, fixed • flexible, open 			
4. Position of researcher (light blue) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subjective/present • objective/absent 			
5. Number of cases (pink) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • few • many 			
6. Aim of inquiry (light green) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncovering perceptions • Determining frequencies • Describing • Generalising • Uncovering causal relations 			