

Introduction

There are five individual assignments to be submitted. The first three assignments (1-3) are an opportunity to practice different qualitative methods, and to reflect on them in discussions with course instructors and other students. The last two assignments (4-5) are iterations on writing a research proposal. It is an advantage to build on assignments 1-3 in your research proposals.

Since these assignments are individual, you can choose to relate the topic for interviews and observations to your PhD project. If this is not possible, however, you can choose a different topic for your interview and observation. While not a formal requirement, the individual form on the assignments provides a good opportunity to use this coursework in planning your PhD project. You are of course free to also use references from your own field of research, but please use the course curriculum when reflecting on your process.

You are of course free to cooperate as you wish, but you will all have to turn in our own individual assignments.

Deadlines and feedback

Assignment	Delivery	"Feedback"
1: Interview	Fri February 4 th , 12 noon	Feb 8th
2: Observation	Fri March 4, 12 noon	March 8th
3: Reflections on qualitative research methods	Fri March 18 th , 12 noon	March 22nd
4: First draft of RP	Fri April 8 th , 12 noon	Seminar feedback
5: Final draft of RP	Fri May 6 th , 12 noon	Written feedback

Assignment 1 — Semi-structured interview

The purpose of this assignment is to work with and reflect on interviews as a qualitative research method. You have probably conducted interviews earlier in your education as part of gaining insight in a design process. However, in this course interviews will be more directed toward reflecting about what can be learned (or not learned) through the different data gathering methods. In other words, you will not be interviewing “a user”, but rather “an informant” about their life or expertise within a certain field.

a) Fieldwork

Arrange an interview with a person you consider relevant for your master project. If you do not have a clear vision of your project yet, you can use this assignment as an opportunity to explore at least one of the directions you envision your project might take. While it would of course be most useful for your project to find “the perfect” person to interview, this might not be so easy. We encourage you to attempt to contact people relevant for your topic, however it is also fine to interview someone you know, as a fellow student, a friend, a family member, or a professional acquaintance. However, remember that you should be able to argue for your choice of informant, so they should be relevant for your topic or be knowledgeable about the specific field of research or use context.

The form of a semi-structured interview means that you will prepare a list of questions but not necessarily ask all of them or ask them in the order they appear in the list. Consider first what you might want to learn from this person about something related to your master project. Based on these reflections, prepare a list of questions you would like to ask them. This kind of interview should resemble a conversation, where the informant’s responses will guide which questions you will ask. Try to keep the interview as non-directive as possible: Listening and seeking to understand the informant’s perspective is key to this kind of interview.

We encourage you to conduct this interview digitally, as we believe it is valuable to practice such an approach to data gathering. You can use Zoom or similar platforms (if you choose other platforms than Zoom, please consider privacy concerns such as data logs). However, you can do the interview physically if both you and your informant are comfortable with that.

You have to ensure that you have the informant’s informed consent before you start the interview. See guidelines at the Data Protection Official’s webpage (Personvernombudet for forskning): <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvernombud/index.html> The interview should not be audio recorded (if your masters project has been approved for audio recorded interviews, you can of course record it, however this audio should not be considered a part of the coursework and we ask you not to transcribe the interview until after this assignment). Instead, bring pen and paper, and jot down key terms and phrases during the interview.

The interview should last at least 30 minutes.

b) Delivery

Write a document that sums up your interview notes and any reflections you might have about using this method. You should include a brief introduction of your theme and why you chose this person for your interview, and what you expected you might learn by talking to them (please note that the introduction should be no longer than one paragraph of approximately 150-250 words).

Further, you should give a brief summary of this kind of interview as a research method. What might be learned, and what cannot be learned. This might help you reflect more on what *you* learnt or did not learn. If you did the interview via Zoom, you may also reflect on how this is different from doing physical interviews.

The document should be approximately 1000 words (between 1,5-2 pages of text), and should include minimum three references from the curriculum.

Assignment 2 — Observation

The purpose of this assignment is to practice observation and note-taking, and to reflect on observation as a research method. You are free to choose which type of observation you want to conduct, i.e., passive or participant observation.

a) Fieldwork

Go to a setting (a public setting or a place relevant for your master project) and carry out a one-hour observation. If you cannot go to a place that is relevant for your master project, you can go to any other place where information and communication technology of some kind is present (e.g., ticket machines, cell phones, computers, digital artefacts). Observe and record movements, interactions, sights, sounds, spatial arrangements, and anything else that strikes you. Write as much as you can about the setting and take notes of what you see. After the observation, write up your notes in a more coherent document.

b) Delivery

Write a document that sums up your field notes and any reflections you might have about using this method. If you wish, you may give a brief description of your project or research theme however this should be no longer than 100-150 words. You should include the type of setting, the date and time of your observations, why you chose this setting, and a rough map of the setting. Further, your document should include a description of what you saw, heard, or otherwise noticed. Did you see any patterns or deviations from patterns? Are some people acting differently than others? Do you believe some of your observations are more significant than others? Explain how.

The document should be approximately 1000 words (between 1,5-2 pages of text), and should include minimum three references from the curriculum.

Assignment 3 — Reflections on qualitative research

The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on your own experiences in the course thus far and discuss using the curriculum. Each subtask should be approximately 500 words and include references from the curriculum. In total, the document should be approximately 1500 words (about 3 pages of text) including references.

a) Reflect

First, you should reflect over your experiences from Assignments 1 and 2, and give a brief analysis/summary of your topic.

To help you get started, you can ask yourself questions such as:

- Did I experience or learn anything new during the interview and observation? Either before, during or after the interview.
- What did I think about interview / observation as a method earlier this semester, and what do I think about it now?
- What do I know after doing an observation and an interview that I did not know before?
- Have I tried these methods before? Have I learned anything new about them?
- What have I learned about qualitative research?

b) Discuss

In this subtask, you should reflect critically on your role as a researcher and discuss this using the curriculum.

To help you get started, you can ask yourself questions such as:

- Have I acted as an “objective” researcher? How?
- Did I make any patterns from the observation / interview?
- What can I “actually” know / learn during interviews / observations, and what are assumptions I make?
- How do I manage to differentiate between what I observe and what I assume that I observe? What does this mean for the material gathered?
- Which methods are appropriate for different situations?
- Which methods are more or less appropriate for gathering different kinds of material?

c) Diary study

In this subtask, you will be both researcher, observer and subject / informant. The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on how you experience the world, and how this might influence your research, both data gathering and analysis. Write a diary every afternoon / evening for 3-4 days. After this, choose 1-2 situations or incidents and reflect on how you experienced these.

To help you get started, you can ask yourself questions such as:

- What do I think about this experience?
- Why did I think or react the way I did?
- Does previous experiences have any consequence for how I now experience the events in my own everyday life?
- What do I remember now about this experience?
- Does it feel different now than it did when it happened?

Essay or chapter on qualitative research (Assignment 4 and 5)

Qualitative research can refer to different practices and methods, and this assignment should help you better grasp how different qualitative research methodologies and methods give different opportunities in light of your own research. You are of course free to use additional references from your own field of research, but we ask that you mainly stick to the curriculum and use this to discuss the methodological choices of your project. For the two last assignments, you should **either**

- a) Write an essay on a chosen topic related to your project/this course. If your PhD project consists of mostly quantitative research, you can re-formulate your RQ to make it suitable for an interpretive qualitative approach.

To help you get started, you can ask yourself questions like:

- Are there any parts of my project that could be re-imagined to deepen my understanding of the phenomenon I am researching further/differently?
- Which qualitative research methods or methodologies would be suited to answer the research questions I wish to answer?
- What would I learn by having a qualitative approach to gathering and analysing empirical material that I cannot learn through the methods I am currently pursuing in my project?

- b) Write the methods chapter for your Kappa or an extended methods section for a paper. If you already have or plan to gather and analyse qualitative empirical material for your project, you may use these assignments as an opportunity to get started on your Kappa. If you are early in your PhD, you can use this as an opportunity for thoroughly planning your data gathering/analysis.

Your final submission should

- Include a brief introduction to your project/case and present the field of research and your current (or imagined qualitative) research question.
- Account for your choices regarding paradigm/methodology/methods using the curriculum.
- Discuss your positionality as a researcher.
- Include (at least) a short section of how you will protect the privacy of your participants. You may also write a longer discussion on ethical considerations and issues tied to your field of research and impacts this may have on methodological choices.

Assignment 4 — Methods chapter: first draft

- 3-5 pages (1500-2500 words)
- 1,15 line space
- Times New Roman font size 12 (or similar)

Assignment 5 — Methods chapter: final draft

- 5-7 pages (max 2800 words)
- 1,15 line space
- Times New Roman font size 12 (or similar)