

Using Qualitative Data

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Qualitative methods involve the collection of data that is not numerical.ⁱ Common methods include individual and focus group interviews, formal and informal observations, case studies and analyzing existing written documents (such as internal documents of an organization related to program implementation; reports, funding proposals, websites, and newsletters)ⁱⁱ. Qualitative methods may be used by themselves or in combination with quantitative methods. In some cases, they are used when it is not possible to obtain information using quantitative methods. This may occur when validated instruments or surveys are not available, potential responses are unknown, and/or the target audience may be uncomfortable with survey research.

Special knowledge and skills are needed to code, analyze, and interpret qualitative data in a rigorous manner. Therefore, it is beneficial to receive formal training and mentoring in qualitative methods and data analysis. In cases where training is not available, individuals may seek qualitative researchers to work as consultants on projects.

Below are some general guidelines for data analysis and interpretation:

1. **Be careful not to over-interpret the data**
2. **Resist the urge to quantify qualitative data.**
3. **Don't get hung up on any one response.**
4. **Look for convergence of data from different sources.**
5. **Resist the tendency to identify the individual behind any one response.**
6. **Contextualize the data.**ⁱⁱⁱ

See Also: [Analyzing Qualitative Data from the CDC](#)

ⁱ Trochim, W. M. (2006). The Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2nd Edition. Retrieved from Internet on December 9, 2013 from <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualdata.php>

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). Data collection methods for evaluation, Issue 18. Retrieved from the internet on December 17, 2013 from <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief18.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Eliot, S. (2012). Using qualitative data. Retrieved from internet on December 9, 2013 from <http://www.qualitative-researcher.com/qualitative-analysis/using-qualitative-data/>