Research Paradigms: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods Research
What’s the difference?

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Quantitative
Overview
• Numerical data is collected
• Results/findings section will have data analyzed using advanced mathematical methods (e.g., t-test, chi-square, regression analysis)
• Descriptive statistics (see Caveats for more details) alone are not quantitative in nature

Search strategies
Try any of these keywords with your topic:

• Experiment
• Statistical analysis
• Numerical measurement
• Analysis type (t-test, chi-square, etc.)
• Longitudinal data
• Multilevel analysis
• Probability
• Hypothesis

Example articles


Caveats
Descriptive or contextual statistics are not an indicator of a quantitative article. Descriptive statistics include reporting numbers of individuals interviewed broken down by type (i.e., sex, ethnicity) or percentage of people agreeing/disagreeing with statements.

Remember: All quantitative studies must contain statistical analysis but not all studies that include statistics are quantitative by nature. It depends on the amount of data collected, the statistical analysis performed, and whether the author is describing/providing context versus making inferences based on data.

Qualitative Overview
- Generally focused on understanding or explaining particular events, cases, or phenomena
- Qualitative data can include narratives, descriptions of interactions, interviews, participant observation, and other types of non-numerical data
- May include descriptive statistics (e.g., number of subjects who are women) to provide context to research, but not advanced mathematical analysis

Search strategies
Try any of these keywords with your topic:
- Ethnography
- Interview
- Focus group
- Historiography
- Field notes
- Content analysis
- Discourse analysis
- Participant observation

Example articles
Caveats
While many people may associate the phrase “case study” with qualitative research, that is frequently inaccurate. Be careful using the term “case study” as a keyword in your search. There is no prescribed use, which means you could get a quantitative or qualitative study using this term.

Mixed Methods
Overview
- Results will report both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study
- Qualitative and quantitative data are meaningfully integrated
- Collecting multiple types of the same type of data (i.e., multiple types of qualitative data is not mixed methods)
- Quantitative data must undergo advanced statistical analysis

Search strategies
Try this keyword with your topic:
- Mixed methods

Example articles

Caveats
To really tell if an article is mixed methods, you must read it.

Including descriptive statistics (e.g., number of subjects who are women) to provide context to research is not an indicator of a mixed methods study. Quantitative data must undergo advanced statistical analysis.

In certain disciplines, mixed methods studies are less common and may be more difficult to find.