

**Length:** 1700-2000 words

**Format:** APA format including citations; follows IMRAD organization

**Research Requirements:** Min. 3 interviews, recorded, transcribed and coded

## Task

Your task in the last course unit is to design and conduct a qualitative research study and then write about your findings. Qualitative research methods involve gathering information "directly from the people involved in a particular event, situation, or issues" (*Rhetoric of Inquiry*, p. 232), and so you'll be interviewing people to gather the data that you'll analyze.

Specifically you will investigate your own local food culture by interviewing (in person or by phone/Skype) three to five people from the community you grew up in. Your goal is to develop an understanding of the traditions and foodways that shape your own cultural identity.

## Research Question

As with all research projects, your qualitative study will be driven by a research question. Possible topics include local eating/cooking customs, food sources (farming, gardening, hunting, grocery stores, farmer's markets), regional/local specialties, family recipes, and personal eating habits (if related to the community at large in some way).

Your research question should include:

1. your topic, or area of inquiry (e.g. "unique or generic local food culture")
2. the population or group of people you want to talk to, to conduct your research ("people who live in Knoxville")
3. What, specifically, you want to know (this should be an open-ended question that welcomes multiple answers)

So, your research question might turn out looking like this:

How connected do Knoxville residents feel to a unique local food culture? Do they have pride in local food specialties of the past (e.g. the pig-burger, steamed subs) or are these being forgotten and replaced with newer, less unique, options?

**One tip:** Generally, you'll want to choose a population that you're already connected to in some way — e.g. a community you grew up in or spent a significant amount of time in. As you think about your topic, think about who you know or could speak to for the project.

## Research Interviews

The research you conduct for this project will be different than your other projects thus far. Rather than reading sources or searching through archives, you will conduct **at least three (3)** interviews with "ordinary people... whose experiences, beliefs, and attitudes pertain to the research question you're asking" (*Rhetoric of Inquiry*, p. 233). Each interview will be 10-15 minutes long (30 minutes max!), and you'll then transcribe and analyze your interviews to extrapolate the results for your study.

Interviewees can include family members, friends, neighbors, and other acquaintances (former teachers, coaches, religious leaders, et al.) but should span a range of demographics (age, gender, race, occupation, and so on).

## Audience

As with your first unit paper, your audience for your qualitative research paper is me and other scholars who participate in academic conversations that take place through published scholarship and are interested in your topic but who may not be overly familiar with the particular groups or issues you are investigating. This means you will want to write in an academic style, but without relying too strongly on specialized concepts or jargon without explanation.

## Genre

The qualitative research paper is a very specific academic genre that is most often used in the social sciences, education, and writing studies but is seen in all disciplines when the goal is to report on research you have personally conducted. Many qualitative research papers, and papers in the sciences more generally, follow IMRAD format or organization, which is an acronym that stands for Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion.

## Steps

1. **Define your research question.** Your qualitative study will be shaped by your research question, which will identify the topic, population, and issue/question you'd like to research. You can draw on your prior topics or start a new topic, so long as your choice falls under the umbrella of our larger theme.
2. **Develop your research plan.** After you've established your research question, you'll develop a research plan. This will include:
  - (a) Who you will ask and how you will ask them to be in your study?
  - (b) How you will collect, record, and save data from the interviews in a way that protects your participants' privacy?
  - (c) How you write interview questions that are ethical and enlightening/relevant for your research question?

NOTE You will need to have the interview(s) finished by April 25, 26 at the very latest, in order to make adequate progress on this paper.

3. **Collect your data.** Put your plan into action and conduct your interviews. Use the recordings to transcribe the interviews.
4. **Analyze your data.** You'll analyze your interview transcripts through a process known as coding, which will help you to spot patterns and themes within your data and will form the basis of your results.
5. **Draft and revise your paper.** Pull together a draft of your your project, then bring it to our peer review session. You'll get feedback from your classmate; if you'd like, you can also take your project to the Writing Center for additional feedback before you finally submit it.

## Tips

Keep the following in mind as you research, draft, and revise your essay:

- Manage your time wisely. Qualitative research involves human participants, which means you'll have other peoples' schedules to consider as you conduct your interviews, and so you'll need to make sure to plan ahead and meet your deadlines.
- People that you interview for the study need to be **18 and up**.
- Don't forget to record your interviews (always with your participants' knowledge and permission, of course). Having a recording is essential in being able to transcribe the interview and write up the data.
- Have fun! If this is your first experience with qualitative research, don't let the newness of the process scare you; gathering data by talking with people is a fun way to conduct research, so be sure to pick a topic and a population of people to study that you're excited to explore.