

Preparatory Workshop - Basics of Qualitative Research: Philosophy and Ethics, Interviews and Ethnography

September Programme, Academic Year 2025-2026

Monday, 22 September, 15.00-17.00 (Sala del Capitolo, Badia Fiesolana)

Tuesday, 23 September, 15.00-17.00 (Sala del Capitolo, Badia Fiesolana)

Wednesday, 24 September, 15.00-17.00 (Sala del Capitolo Badia Fiesolana)

Thursday, 25 September, 15.00-17.00 (Sala del Capitolo, Badia Fiesolana)

Instructors:

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Description

This 8-hour workshop introduces researchers to some basics of qualitative analysis. It focuses on the multiple philosophical bases of qualitative methods, ethical questions that arise in qualitative work, and introduces interviews and ethnography as qualitative research tools. By the end of the workshop, researchers should appreciate why philosophy and ethics matter in both the conceptualization and execution of qualitative methods; they should also understand the basics of interview methods and ethnography. The workshop is strongly recommended for researchers with little or no prior experience with qualitative methods as it prepares them to participate effectively in the compulsory 'Introduction to Qualitative Methods' taught in the first term.

Format

Each two-hour session will consist of a 75-to-90-minute lecture, followed by 30 to 45 minutes of debate and discussion. Researchers should read the required texts prior to class and prepare for the discussion by considering the 'Discussion Questions' listed for each session. Doing the reading and preparing to debate the discussion questions are mandatory requirements; there are no excuses for not being prepared.

Readings

With one exception, all readings are available as E-Books or E-Journals through the EUI Library. For the EU Commission document on research ethics, simply click on the link.

Topics & Readings

Session I - 22 September: Philosophy of Social Science

della Porta, Donatella and Michael Keating, Editors, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) – Chapter 2.

Hall, Peter, “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics,” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Editors, *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) – Chapter 11.

Discussion Questions

- What is positivism? What is interpretism? How do they differ? Which is a better? (There’s an easy question - ☺.)
- How do philosophical starting points influence our thinking about cause, theory, data, ethics, and methods?
- Let’s say you plan to incorporate an experiment into your thesis. This is an exercise in *design and measurement*: The experiment – by allowing for systematic control and manipulation – strengthens the causal inferences you can draw. Great! But ... is the value of this exercise undercut by the fact that - *philosophically and conceptually* – social scientists are all over the map in understanding ‘cause.’
- What are the differences among normative, problem-solving theory and critical theory?

Session II - 23 September: Research Ethics

European Commission, DG Research and Innovation, “[Ethics in Social Science and Humanities](#)” (Brussels: European Commission, October 2018).

Cronin-Furman, Kate and Milli Lake, “Ethics Abroad: Fieldwork in Fragile and Violent Contexts,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51/3 (July 2018): 607-614.

Discussion Questions

- What are ethics and what roles do they play at different points in the research process?
- What are the ethical standards that social scientists must observe when collecting, analyzing and publishing data?
- How do ethics play out in differing research contexts? Consider three: elite interviews of EU Commission bureaucrats in Brussels; a field experiment in Sierra Leone; fieldwork among Roma in Hungary.
- Are the ethical aspects of your thesis finished or just beginning when the EUI Ethics Committee approves your ethics application?

Session III - 24 September: Interviewing

Mosley, Layna, Editor, *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013) – Introduction, Chapter 3.

Discussion Questions

- Political scientists and sociologists, on the one hand, and ethnographers, on the other, conduct interviews in fundamentally different ways. Do you agree or not? Why?
- How would you conduct an interview ethically?
- How does one deal with lies, dissimulation and memory when interviewing?
- How do your gender identity, nationality, status, and interview questions affect the interview process? (And why do we have two different names for these dynamics: interviewer effects and positionality?)

Session IV – 25 September: Ethnography

Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean and Benjamin Read, *Field Research in Political Science: Practices and Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapter 7.

Gusterson, Hugh, “Ethnographic Research,” in Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash, Editors, *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) – Chapter 7.

Discussion Questions

- What is ethnography and how does it differ from conducting a case study?
- What matters more to an ethnographer: Interviews or participant observation?
- How does a researcher decide what is ethical when she is working ethnographically? What role does positionality play in ethical reflexivity?
- What is the role of access in ethnography?