

Comparing Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Purpose	Identify, describe, or explain a situation; predict a solution; or control a situation or produce a positive outcome	Focuses on the human experience. Experiences are unique to the individual, time, and context
Study Framework	Fixed design intended to test a theory or concepts	Unstructured design intended to enhance understanding
Research Questions	Narrow in focus; describe the specific relationship between the theoretical concepts and the data being collected. Variables are identified prior to the research study	Explore situations from the perspective of the person in the situation. Information will be discovered throughout the research process
Setting	Controlled	Natural
Study design	Aligns with the unique research needs Ex: descriptive, correlational, quasi-experimental, and experimental	Aligns with the philosophical beliefs of the researchers Ex: phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnography, exploratory-descriptive, and historical
Sample	Larger sample size (more breadth) Subjects selected prior to the beginning of the study	Smaller sample size (more depth) Purposive sample, participants are selected until saturation point.
Data Collection	Objective, Number-based Precise, systematic gathering of information	Subjective, Text-based Interviews, focus groups, observation, text
Validity & Reliability	Depends on measurement instrument used	Depends on skill and rigor of the researcher
Data Analysis	Deductive Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis	Inductive process Analyze words; find meaning in the words through coding transcripts; identify and interpret themes
Findings or results	Tests theory Either accept or reject the hypothesis	Formulates theory Narrative summary, provides deeper understanding of the human experience

Grove, S., Gray, J. & Burns, N. (2015). *Understanding nursing research: Building an evidence-based practice* (6th ed.). St. Louis, MO: Elsevier Saunders.