

SOC204H1F
INTRODUCTION TO QUALITATIVE METHODS
Department of Sociology
University of Toronto
Summer 2025

Day/Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10am–1pm EST
Location: online/synchronous via Zoom

Instructor: Dr. Jaime Nikolaou
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Office Hours: by appointment

Teaching Assistants: Hammad Khan
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COURSE OVERVIEW

This course introduces students to the foundations of qualitative inquiry in sociology. Focusing on the relationship between individual actions and broader social structures, students will explore how sociologists seek to understand human behaviour and meaning-making—that is, how to assess how people make sense of their social worlds. Throughout the course, students will learn how to craft sociologically imaginative research questions and design systematic projects for answering them using qualitative methods. By developing research proposals, students will also gain hands-on experience and build foundational skills in qualitative design.

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- explain the strengths and limitations of various qualitative research methods
- critically assess and interpret published qualitative studies
- formulate clear, researchable questions for qualitative inquiry
- design and plan effective qualitative research projects

ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION

ASSIGNMENT	DUE	WEIGHT
Prompts	ongoing	5%
Tutorials	ongoing	40%
Take-Home Test	3 June	25%
Research Proposal	17 June	30%

PROMPTS (5%): At the end of each lecture, I will pose a simple methods-related question to guide your reading for the next class. For example, before Class 2, you might be asked: “What is reflexivity and how is Cherneski (2020) a reflexive scholar?”. Your response should be 400–500 words and submitted to Quercus by 10am before the next class. These discussion board posts will be graded “pass/fail”, and for each quality submission will earn 1% toward your final grade (up to a maximum of 5%). Please note: you must submit your own post before you can view your peers’ responses.

TUTORIALS (40%): Tutorials in this course are meant to foster your sociological imagination around a topic of personal interest and build your practical skills in qualitative research design. Led by TAs, they will include in-class writing exercises, group workshops, and student presentations. As with lecture, tutorial attendance is mandatory, and you will earn 1-15% for each class you attend and submit work for. Tutorials are scheduled for most classes, and submission instructions will be provided during class. Though weighted low individually, tutorials are essential to this course and you will struggle to progress with your Research Proposal if you do not submit work for all of them. TAs will provide personalized feedback on all tutorial submissions, which you can and should adapt for the following assignments.

TAKE-HOME TEST (25%): On 3 June, we will not meet as a group. Instead, you will complete an online test due by the end of scheduled class time. Before writing the test, you should have a clearly defined qualitative research question and a strong grasp of how different types of data variously fit your question. You will have six weeks to develop these foundations through required readings and scaffolded tutorials. You will receive detailed feedback on your test, which will help inform your student presentation and Research Proposal for the remainder of the course.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL (30%): Your final project for this course is a 10-12 page Research Proposal, based on the qualitative research question you have been working on throughout term. This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade and due on 17 June. Detailed instructions will be provided well in advance of the due date.

FORMATTING: All term work must be submitted online via Quercus. Assignments must be double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1” margins—no exceptions. Please use American Sociological Association style for all citations and referencing, which is well summarized here: [ASA Style Guide, 7th edition](#).

COURSE SCHEDULE

The course textbook is cited below and available for short-term digital rental via [VitalSource](#):

van den Hoonaard, Deborah K. and Lisa-Jo van den Scott. 2021. *Qualitative Research in Action: A Canadian Primer (4th edition)*. Oxford University Press.

In this course, you will read a combination of methodological chapters from the course textbook and empirical studies that showcase qualitative research in action. All readings are digitally—either for download or through Quercus. While I will make every effort to follow the schedule below, please note that it is subject to change at my discretion.

	LECTURE	TUTORIAL
CLASS 1 (6 May): Course Overview & Qualitative Epistemology	methods: Chapters 1-2	no tutorial
CLASS 2 (8 May): Reflexivity & Research Design	methods: Chapter 3 empirical: Schwalbe (1996)	worth 3% due 9 May
CLASS 3 (13 May): Interviews	methods: Chapter 6 empirical: Twine (2006) empirical: Fox & Neiterman (2015)	worth 5% due 14 May
CLASS 4 (15 May): Interviews II	methods: Chapter 7 empirical: Thompson (1992) empirical: Taylor et al. (2016)	worth 3% due 16 May
CLASS 5 (20 May): Ethnography	methods: Chapter 5 empirical: Pascoe (2005) empirical: Taylor & Rupp (2004)	worth 5% due 21 May
CLASS 6 (22 May): Ethnography II	empirical: Heath (2005) empirical: Whitehead (2010)	worth 3% due 23 May
CLASS 7 (27 May): Unobtrusive Research	methods: Chapter 8 empirical: Messner et al. (2000) empirical: Combellick (2023)	worth 5% due 28 May
CLASS 8 (29 May): Ethics & Research Proposals	methods: Chapter 4 empirical: Thorne 1980	worth 1% for attending
CLASS 9 (3 June): Take-Home Test	no readings	no tutorial
CLASS 10 (5 June): Data Analysis	methods: Chapter 9	no tutorial
CLASS 11 (10 June): Student Presentations	no readings	worth 15% total
CLASS 12 (12 June): Student Presentations & Closing Remarks	no readings	

COURSE POLICIES

PREREQUISITES: To take SOC204H1, you must have completed SOC100H and SOC150H. Please note that students without these prerequisites will be removed from the course without notice.

ONLINE COMMUNICATION: Please check Quercus regularly for important course updates. All announcements posted there will also be sent via email for your convenience. If you need to contact the instructor or TAs, please use Quercus only—emails sent directly to our UofT accounts will be redirected. When reaching out, treat your email as professional communications: be respectful, clear, and formal in tone. We will aim to respond to all inquiries within 48 hours (excluding weekends and holidays). For complex questions, please email the instructor to arrange office hours.

MISSED DEADLINES: Due to the condensed and scaffolded nature of this course, late Prompt and Tutorial submissions will not be accepted. For the Take-Home Test and Research Proposal, a late penalty of 10% per day (including weekends) will apply. Students who miss a deadline will receive a mark of zero unless the reason is beyond their control. In such cases, you must contact the instructor within three days to request consideration and submit one of the following forms of documentation: Absence Declaration via ACORN, UofT Verification of Illness or Injury Form, College Registrar's letter, or Letter of Academic Accommodation from Accessibility Services. If you miss a deadline due to personal or family reasons, please ask your College Registrar to email the instructor directly to confirm.

ONLINE RECORDING: All lectures and tutorials will be recorded to support my ongoing development as an instructor. By attending class, you consent to be recorded. As this is a synchronous course, online recordings will not be made available for remote viewing; however, lecture slides will be posted to Quercus after each class. All course materials are the intellectual property of the instructor and may not be recorded, copied, shared, or distributed without explicit written permission. Students are not permitted to make their own audio or video recordings of any class content.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Academic integrity is integral to the well-being of UofT and the scholarly community writ large. To understand how nuanced plagiarism can be, as well as the severity of its consequences, please consult: <https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/>.

ACCESSIBILITY: UofT is committed to fostering equity and inclusion, and students with diverse learning needs and styles are welcome in this course. If you have a disability or medical condition requiring accommodation, please contact me and/or [Accessibility Services](#) early in the term so we can work together to support your success.
