

Seminar in Qualitative Communication Research

COM 473 -- Fall, 2026 --Sec Wed 6:30-9:20 P. M. Fell 116

John Baldwin—[School of Communication--Illinois State University](#)

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Required Texts:

- Lindlof, T.R., & Taylor, B.C. (2017). *Qualitative communication research methods* (4th ed.). Sage. ISBN: 9781452256825
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. ISBN: 9780761903437
- Additional readings will be available on-line on Canvas.

Catalog Description:

Introduction to qualitative research methods including open-ended questionnaire, in-depth interview, conversation/ discourse analysis, rhetorical research, media analysis, and ethnography of communication.

Course Objective:

This course is designed to provide you with knowledge and skills necessary to evaluate qualitative research as it appears in scholarly writing and to perform qualitative research in the academic or organizational context with the rigor appropriate to that context. You will read sources detailing a variety of methods and conduct original research, both in class exercises and as part of a major research project. Some methods have their own form of data analysis and write-up. However, since content analysis, journaling, and grounded theory are relevant to many of the areas, we will study these in more detail after covering the methods themselves.

Specific Student Objectives:

 By end of course, you should be able to:

- Understand, apply, and evaluate scholarly qualitative research
- Explain your own place in the research process (your values, biases, and intuition)
- Explain the main purposes, issues in each of several types of qualitative research
- Apply the concepts above to specific communication issues and questions
- Explain ethical implications at each stage of research
- Perform the various types of research at an introductory level
- Plan and execute an investigation of a communication question involving at least one of the methods introduced in class, demonstrating a greater knowledge of that area

Course Texts and Readings:

This relies heavily on class readings as well as textbooks. You will utilize these to understand specific methods and see how authors describe their use of the methods as well as how they right up results from each method. Readings are in Canvas modules for the week when we cover the reading. This class has a reputation of having *lots* of reading, but that it is a lot of fun at the same time. Anticipate approximately 100 pages of reading per week. Some weeks we will have more, some less. An important skill in graduate school is to learn to pick up the main points and read quickly, sometimes not reading word for word. We will have a collaborative class—that is, you will be responsible for presenting portions of the readings in class and discussing and evaluating them. This will allow you to read those portions in more detail.

Learning Activities and Evaluation

You will learn the issues of qualitative research (paradigms, differences between methods, role of researcher to participants and data, ethical and evaluation issues) through in-class discussion of class readings and student presentation of abstracts and final projects.

Hands-On Exercises: Some class work will include in- and out-of-class short methodological assignments to practice each of the methods. You will choose **any three** of the following. Your choice should **not** include a method that you utilize in your final term project.

- Grounded-theory evaluation (in pairs)
- On-site observation with typed observation notes
- Content analysis of open-ended questionnaire, interview or other data
- Conversation or discourse analysis (detailed transcription and interpretation)
- Rhetorical/critical analysis (deconstruction of media text)
- Personal/Research-related journal

If you choose *the reflective journal* as **one** of your hands-on exercises, you can use it to investigate topics and think about your role in the research project, as well as to theorize about the findings of the research. You may turn in the first 2 or 3 for feedback (to make sure our pictures of the assignment are similar), then turn in the entire journal as one document (hand-written or typed) with the final paper. Typical journal entries/in-class exercises might include:

- Self-reflection, bracketing (required)
- A discussion of your metatheoretical/theoretical approach to research (required)
- Ethical considerations for your project (required)
- Journal memos (observation, procedural, theoretical), coding notes, etc.
- Reflections on the process as you go (e.g., summary of interview and your affective reaction)
- Notes on journal articles/class readings as they pertain to your project

Abstracts: Abstracts are summaries of chapters or journal articles, with appropriate divisions between main sections. For this class, you will summarize two articles of *primary* research studies and evaluate the method using standards for doing rigorous qualitative research. One article you review should use the method that you will use in your final project; the other should use a different method. You may revise the first abstract.

Final Research Paper: You will conduct original research, alone or in groups, during the course of the semester. You will then produce a conference-ready paper that shows rigor in the understanding, execution, evaluation, and write-up of qualitative research. That is, final papers are expected to be submissible to an academic professional organization (regional or national) for presentation at their annual meeting. Final papers will be worth about 45% of the total grade.

Extra Credit: You may take part in research through the School of Communication Research Announcement Board (<https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies>) for extra-credit (5 pts for each ½ study). Be sure to keep a screen shot of last page of each study you complete. Should there be no viable studies or you seek other extra-credit possibilities, I will provide—or you may suggest—reasonable extra credit alternatives.

Grading

Grading will be based on the following. Abstracts and exercises are due on day the topic they address is being discussed.

Assignment	Due Date (latest)	Points Possible
Abstracts (2 x 50) 1. Obs, interview, FG, OEQ 2. CA/DA, rhet/media	9/2/26 10/7/26	____ / 100
Hands-On Exercises (Choose 3) ➤ <i>Observation notes + memo</i> ➤ <i>Thematic Analysis + memo</i> ➤ <i>Grounded Theory Eval</i> ➤ <i>CA/DA + memo</i> ➤ <i>Media Analysis</i> ➤ <i>Journal (min 10 well-developed entries)</i> • <i>Overview of a project</i> • <i>Metatheoretical perspective</i> • <i>Ethics of project</i> • <i>Sample of article application</i> • <i>Sample of coding notes</i>	09/25/26 Fri 10/23/26 Tue 10/30/26 Tue 11/06/26 Tue 11/20/26 Tue At final exam (with project)	____ / 150
Final Research Project	At final exam	/ 200
TOTAL		/ 450

Policies

1. **Punctuality:** Turn in work on time, unless arrangements are made.
2. Work ahead, especially on final project; have instructor review early drafts
3. **Ethics:** Do not plagiarize. Plagiarized work will result in F for the assignment, with possible further repercussions, such as failure of the class or expulsion from the university. *The same applies to papers deemed to have a high amount of AI-constructed text.* You will receive one warning for either issue, with chance for revision. After that, papers will receive a zero.
4. **Format:** Final paper should be in APA format (unless otherwise approved), 7th ed. Other assignments will have specified formats. See class examples and descriptions. Please submit documents in MS-Word compatible format (not PDFs or links to your drive).
5. **Technology:** If we go “digital,” **do not record** sessions without permission, according to [FERPA guidelines](#). If you have tech-based issues, contact the Technology Support Center (<https://ithelp.illinoisstate.edu/>). The center can also work if you have issues related to financial need.
7. **Syllabus changes:** The instructor reserves all rights to make changes to this syllabus. Any changes regarding due dates of assignments or dates of tests will be carried out only by class consensus. In effect, the syllabus is our "contract." We usually stay close on target with syllabus. If there are updates to schedule, I will post notifications in Canvas announcements. *You are responsible* for keeping up with readings and due dates of assignments.

Useful contacts:

- Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 308 Fell Hall, Office Phone (309) 438-5853, Video Phone (309) 319-7682 or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu
- Student Counseling Services: 438-3655
- **Redbirds Keep Thriving:** A website to help with anxiety, isolation, grief, financial difficulties, physical health (especially in the time of COVID)
- Julia Visor Learning Center/Univ College: 438-7100 <https://universitycollege.illinoisstate.edu/help/>

Course Syllabus: Topics and Readings

Updated 6 Aug 2025

Key: R = J = Journal Entry; OX= Out-of-Class Exercise, IX = In-Class Exercise. [Bracketed = optional];
 OL: On-line reading (Canvas); A/B: First and 2nd part of weekly coverage (e.g., A:Tue/B: Thu).

Wk	Topic	Readings/Assignments
1: Aug 19	INTRO: What is qualitative research? Why does it matter?	A: Introductions B: L&T Chapter 1 (Optional: Potter Ch. 3, Burrell & Morgan Chs. 1, 3)
2: Aug 26	UNIT 1: Ethical & Theoretical Issues <i>Metatheoretical issues:</i> - Paradigms - Intellectual fights in academia - Roots of Qualitative Research <i>Verstehen</i> and all that stuff - Phenomenology, hermeneutics and other Very Exciting Things	A: OL Denzin & Lincoln (5 “moments”): Optional: L&T 2 B: L&T 3: <i>Verstehen</i> and all that stuff. See assignments on Canvas J1: reflection; imagine a project Research Paper topic due
3: Sept 2	UNIT 2: Practical Issues: Setting up the Study - project evaluation - ethical issues	A: Lincoln & Guba 11: Trustworthy Research (Optional: OL: Tracy, 2010) B: OL: Smith, Goodall OR House IX: Create open-ended Q OEQ examples (in class) J2: metatheoretical stance Abst 1 due: Obs, interviews, FGs, OEQs
4: Sept 9	- Practical issues - Access - Sampling, etc.	A: Meet at The Rock: L&T 4 & 5: Out-of-class exer B: OL: Lincoln & Guba, Ch. 8 (pp. 187-220) J3: ethical issues FRI: IRB content due
5: Sept 16	UNIT 3: F2F Methods & Analysis <i>Ethnography (of Comm)</i> - Speech codes theory/Ethnog of comm - Critical & postmodern approaches	A: L&T 6 [Observation exercise first 30 minutes of class—see Canvas] B: OL: Philipsen (1989) (pp. 258-268) Conquergood (1991) (pp. 179-194) OX: Collect open-ended questionnaire
6: Sept 23	- Auto-ethnography; visual & photo ethnography - Material culture	A: Readings TBA B: L&T 8; Guest lecture: Jessica Rick Observation exercise due Fri midnight
7: Sept 30	<i>In-depth Interviews</i>	A: L&T 7 B: Narrative interviews; Reading TBA/guest speaker? IX: Practicing interviews
8: Oct 7	<i>Focus Groups; Case Studies</i>	A: Morgan (whole book). See Canvas for assignments B: IX: Focus Group practice (we need a volunteer facilitator!) Abst 2: CA/DA, rhetorical/media analysis Tue
9: Oct 14	Data Analysis 1: Coding & theorizing	A: L&T 9: OL (Optional: Braun & Clarke) B: L&T 10 (Optional: Baxter, 1991) IX: Practicing data analysis (OEQ); determining reliability; Bring a calculator!

10: Oct 21	Data Analysis 2 Grounded Theory	A: Strauss & Corbin, Chs 6-9 Thematic analysis due Fri midnight B: Practicing with GT
11: Oct 28	<i>Analysis of Conversational Discourse</i> • Conversation analysis • Discourse analysis	A: OL: Ten Have Ch. 6 (pp. 101-128); opt: Clayman and Gill). Look at: OL: Atkinson, & Heritage, 1984 (pp. ix-xvi); Discourse. (pp. 179-196). B: OL: Blum-Kulka, (1997, pp. 38-63) Grounded Theory Evaluation due Fri midnight
12: Nov 4	<i>Rhetorical/Media Analysis</i> ❖ Review: Paradigms, sources ❖ Analyzing Texts • Cultural thematic analysis • Semiotic analysis	A: OL: Turner, 1990, Ch.1 OR TBA B: OL: Berger, Semiotics, Ch. 1; IX: Media Analysis: website; Pokémon!? Conversation/Discourse Analysis due Fri midnight
13. Nov 11	▪ Postmodern analysis ▪ Rhetorical analysis	OL: Connor (PM), Chs 6-7 or TBA OL: Reading TBA IX: Ad/website OR mat culture analysis
14. Nov 18	UNIT 4: Writing & Practice From "text" to "text" QL research in the workplace Critique & Convergence	A: Tracy 12-13 B: OL: Tracy 12-13 Media or Internet analysis due Sat midnight
Nov 25	Thanksgiving Break	
15 Dec. 2	Work Week!	Work on final projects, ask Baldwin Qs

Final: Presentations of Research: TBA

Final projects and reflective research journals are due on the day of the final