

Dr Deborah Gabriel

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Methods and methodology



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📁 PhD / Research Methods

💬 39 Comments

👤 Deborah Gabriel



My PhD supervisor asked me what the difference between methods and methodology was several months ago and I did not know the answer. All I could muster in a pathetic response was a look of bewilderment. Thankfully, I was referred to a book by Peter Clough and Cathy Nutbrown called [A Student's Guide to Methodology](#), which I would recommend to all PhD students and candidates.

My problem, as I have since discovered is that I was too busy thinking about my literature review and undertaking all my reading under the misguided notion that methodology was something to be looked at later on. How wrong I was!

Having read Clough and Nutbrown I now acknowledge that methods and methodology should be right up there in terms of priority as a starting point for any PhD research project. Understanding the difference between methods and methodology is of paramount importance.

Method is simply a research tool, a component of research – say for example, a qualitative method such as interviews. Methodology is the justification for using a particular research method.

So if for example, like me, you want to understand the motivations and perceptions of a group of bloggers then you would most likely choose a qualitative, method as opposed to a quantitative one.

But as Clough and Nutbrown explain their book, decisions such as whether to interview, how many participants to interview and so on, “are often based on values and assumptions which influence the study, and as such therefore need to be fully interrogated in order to clarify the research decisions which are made.”

Having a clear idea on the methods and methodology for a PhD thesis can make the job of reviewing literature much more straightforward as you can more precisely target studies in your chosen topic area and critique the whole approach to similar studies, including the methods used.

In short: “A good methodology is more a critical design attitude to be found always at work throughout a study, rather than confined within a brief chapter called ‘Methodology.’”

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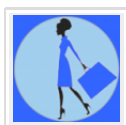


rita okoro

May 1, 2013 at 3:37 pm

It has helped me a great deal. Now I can differentiate the two but what do they have in common? Or better still their similarities?

reply to comment→



Deborah Gabriel

May 1, 2013 at 4:14 pm

Hi Rita, the most appropriate way to think about methods and methodology is in terms of the relationship and interconnectedness between the two. You should not start thinking about research methods for any study without

developing a methodology. Methodology is the consideration of your research objectives and the most effective methods and approach to meet those objectives. Methodology is the first step in planning a research project, so it is not a question of difference or similarity but of relationship.

reply to comment→



Dauda

October 11, 2015 at 6:11 pm

Hi Deborah, my wife and I were organizing a workshop for some postgraduate students on method and methodology and I happened to come across your post, it was most helpful. Thanks a lot.

reply to comment→



Deborah Gabriel

October 11, 2015 at 6:34 pm

You're very welcome!

reply to comment→

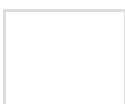


Mariya Razzaghian

June 5, 2013 at 6:04 pm

I think its an excellent writing. Short but meaningful, while many have failed to address these two terms in such a simple manner. However, I would like you to explain more about quantitative methods. Thanks 😊

reply to comment→



Taye Merga



June 8, 2013 at 8:58 am

method is the way of collecting data for a given purpose. But methodology is how to collect data for a given problem.

[reply to comment](#)→

Pingback: [Methodology of analysis in PhD projects | Oscar Eybers](#)



Sat

November 20, 2013 at 11:27 pm

So, method= e.g. interviews

Methodology= who, why, how many, etc.

is this right?

[reply to comment](#)→



Deborah Gabriel

November 21, 2013 at 8:15 am

Almost. Methodology is much broader than you have indicated. It encompasses your entire approach to the project; it is research questions, research objectives, reasons for selecting particular research methods, choice of theoretical framework, research approaches (e.g. critical) etc.

[reply to comment](#)→



Tracey

June 8, 2014 at 9:47 pm

Thank you for your explanation, Deborah. But what is a theoretical framework then? How is it presented in a thesis?

[reply to comment](#)→



Deborah Gabriel

June 10, 2014 at 7:43 pm

Hi Tracey, when designing a research project one of the first tasks to be undertaken is to consider what theories underpin the phenomena that you plan to investigate. A theoretical framework describes the process and outcome of grouping together related themes that frame the central topic. I recommend reading chapter three of Research

Design: <http://deborahgabriel.com/recommended-reading/>

reply to comment→



Modesta

January 20, 2015 at 6:08 pm

Would you then classify theoretical framework as a methodology?



Deborah Gabriel

February 1, 2015 at 12:55 pm

A theoretical framework is part of your methodology – that is, considering what approaches and research methods are appropriate for your research project in terms of answering your research questions.



LE

March 3, 2014 at 4:38 pm

Succint and perfect. Now all the other things I've been reading about the two make sense! Many thanks.

reply to comment→

Pingback: [the accidental technologist » Blog Archive » In conversation with the Troika \(Part 1\)](#)



marriam

March 18, 2014 at 5:25 am

Hi would you please give more examples to show the way of applying these two in research?

reply to comment→



Mary

March 27, 2014 at 12:18 am

You have helped. My methodology involves dramaturgy and the method to be used after the data is collected is narrative. It needs to work, thanks for the insight.

reply to comment→



Denise

April 18, 2014 at 9:59 pm

Thank you Deborah. I hope to find the Students' Guide to Methods and Methodology in the library. I tutor two graduate students and your information has been most informative.

Denise 😊

reply to comment→



Joseph Ayuen Majok

April 23, 2014 at 3:13 pm

Thank you very much Deborah, with your specification on method and methodology, I can differentiate them now as well explaining them clearly in my research and to others who are

interested in research. please have wonderful credit for that remark.

reply to comment→



Rob

December 9, 2014 at 9:35 pm

Dear Deborah, Thanks, this article has clarified my thoughts around these two confusing terms. Regards Rob

reply to comment→



bodhanand

February 24, 2015 at 5:13 pm

Really I understood, difference between methods&methodology

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Pingback: [In conversation with the Troika \(Part 1\) | Wayne Barry](#)

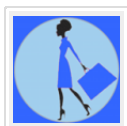


josephat aryatwijuka

March 30, 2015 at 10:50 am

Thank you Deborah, I can now differentiate methodology and methods, inductive and deductive, its very educative. I would like to know about conceptual frame work, how is it involved in research?

reply to comment→



Deborah Gabriel

March 30, 2015 at 5:51 pm

Hi Jospheh, here is a PowerPoint to help you: <http://deborahgabriel.com/2015/02/14/using-conceptual-frameworks-in-qualitative-research/>

reply to comment→



Vikram Paswan

May 10, 2015 at 1:54 am

Thank you so much Deborah for giving such a wonderful way of differentiating methods and methodology.

Could you provide any book or any thing else to have deeper understanding.

reply to comment→



Deborah Gabriel

May 16, 2015 at 6:01 pm

Yes: <http://deborahgabriel.com/recommended-reading/>

reply to comment→



Vikram Paswan

May 10, 2015 at 2:08 am

I have a confusion regarding research design. Could you please suggest any comment on that.

reply to comment→



Deborah Gabriel

May 16, 2015 at 6:00 pm

Yes – read <http://deborahgabriel.com/2015/02/14/using-conceptual-frameworks-in-qualitative-research/>

reply to comment→



Ruthie C

August 4, 2015 at 4:38 pm

Thank you for your clear explanation. I do have a chapter on on this but it's at Masters level.

[reply to comment→](#)



LB

August 14, 2015 at 3:29 pm

Thanks so much it's helpfull

[reply to comment→](#)



Lewis Gichaba

September 23, 2015 at 10:15 am

Thanks for your post...it has helped me though i still need more examples of methods and methodology

[reply to comment→](#)



Hope

October 24, 2015 at 11:18 am

Thank you very much for your clear explanation on the difference between methods and methodology.

[reply to comment→](#)



RK

April 17, 2016 at 2:52 pm

Thanks a lot. It's much helpful.

[reply to comment→](#)



Yves

July 1, 2016 at 8:38 am

This is very helpful. I really needed something practical and to

the point. Though I was thinking along the same lines, this post just gave me the reassurance that I needed. Thanks

reply to comment→



Muneer

July 14, 2016 at 8:22 am

Very helpful and timely!

reply to comment→

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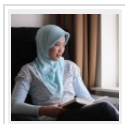


Peter Kurui

November 6, 2016 at 9:31 am

Thank you! Very helpful.

reply to comment→

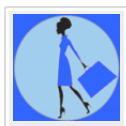


Annisa

January 9, 2017 at 5:31 am

Hi Deborah, thanks this is very useful! However, when we are doing our PhD, for instance we have four sub research questions, So it means that each of them will have their own methodology and methods, and then we also will have one GRAND methodology for our MAIN research questions. Is it right?

reply to comment→



Deborah Gabriel

January 9, 2017 at 10:09 am

Hi Annisa, There is one methodology that is applied to the entire research project – not one for each research question. When examining methodology you look at the project as a

whole.

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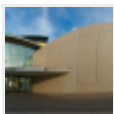
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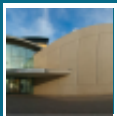
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