

A to Z

...of qualitative methods and techniques

Ipsos MORI's qualitative team bring people and policymakers together, giving you insights which spring from a real understanding of people's lived experience. Our creative research helps drive the social and policy agenda and enables our clients to make better decisions.

CONTACT

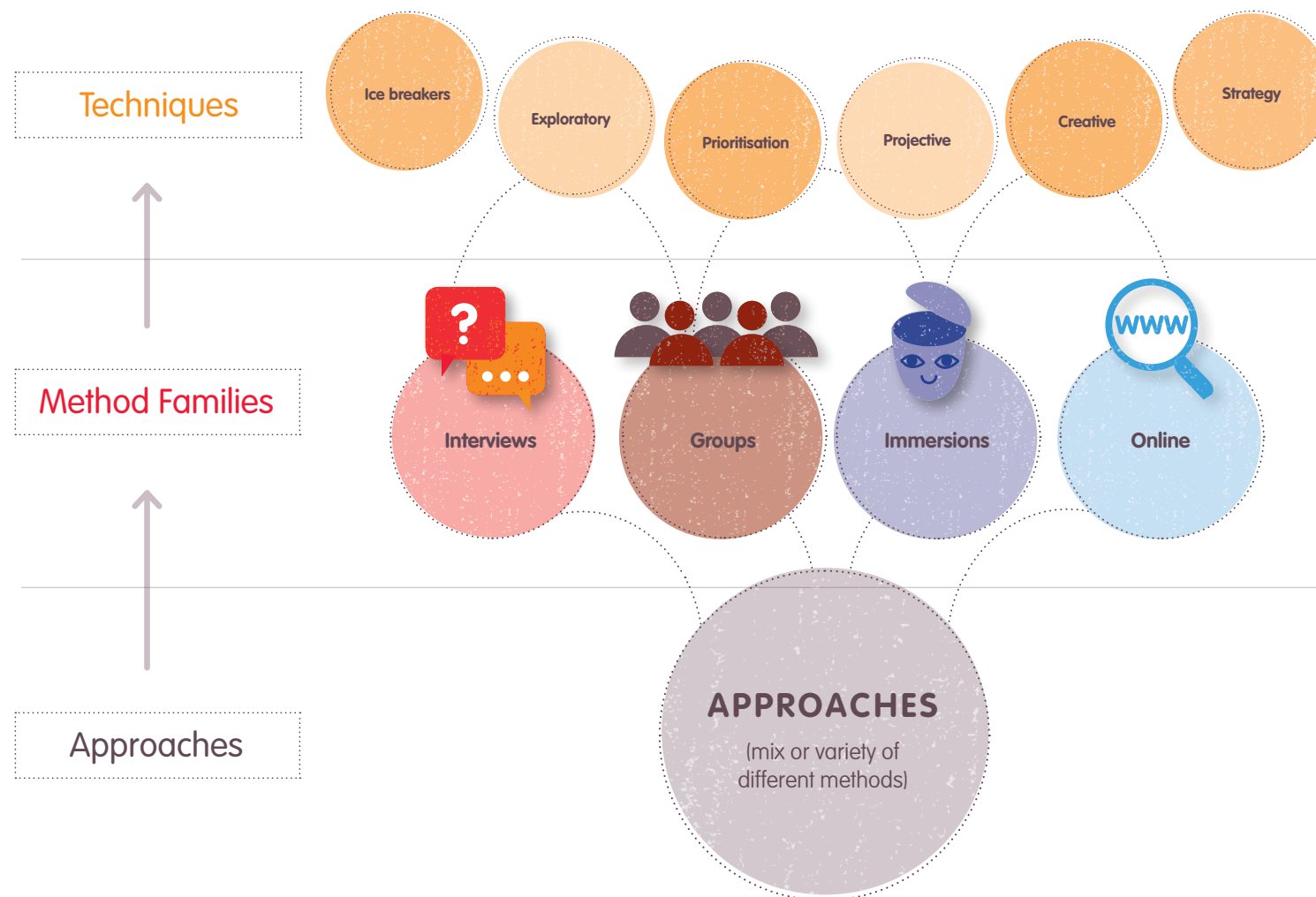
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Overview

This A-Z provides a short guide to the range of qualitative research methods we use at Ipsos MORI. We hope it gives a taste of the wide variety of options that are available for our clients to draw on, ultimately helping people make important decisions and understand how qualitative research can add value.

At Ipsos MORI we think about qualitative methods in terms of four main families: Interviews, groups, immersions and online. Within each family there are several variations of these methods and a host of techniques we can use to facilitate discussion and provide insight.

We mix different methods to create specific research approaches that suit our clients' audience and needs.



Method families

INTERVIEWS

- Contextual
- Cognitive
- Dyad/ Paired
- Episodic
- Ethnographic
- Extreme User
- Expert/ Stakeholder
- Factual
- Family
- Friendship Pair
- Narrative
- Photo
- Sensitive issues
- Tele Depth
- Vox Pop

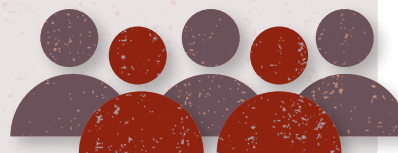


Often referred to as a 'depths', interviews are often used to explore subjective viewpoints, personal experiences, meaning and private accounts in order to give insight into behaviours and attitudes. Typically interviews take the form of two people talking one-on-one in a fairly informal environment. Good for niche audiences and senior stakeholders.

Interviews can often be a good option for research among niche audiences and senior stakeholders.

GROUPS / WORKSHOPS

- Action Planning Workshop
- Affinity
- Bi-Focal
- Citizens Jury Workshop
- Conflict
- Deliberative Workshop
- Friendship
- Mini
- Public Dialogue Workshop
- Reconvened
- Rolling
- Triad
- Unfocus



Groups reveal aspects of experiences and perspectives that would be less accessible without group interaction. They give researchers access to the interpretations and arguments that participants are willing to present in group situations which they may not express alone.

Groups are particularly appropriate for encouraging creativity or idea generation. They may also offer reassurance in discussions around sensitive topics and/or with vulnerable groups. Typically they are conducted with 6-10 participants sitting in a circle, interacting with each other and responding to pre-prepared stimulus while discussion is facilitated by a researcher. Groups range from smaller, shorter discussion groups that last 2-3 hours to larger, longer workshops that last up to 6 hours.

IMMERSIONS

- In-context Immersion
[needs name change]
- Shadowing
- Video Ethnography



Immersion involves participant observations in order to try and understand culture, context, behaviour and the difference between what people say and what they do. Immersion gives rise to ethnographies whether written or visual. They can differ in length and intensity to suit the needs of each project.

ONLINE

- Online Bulletin Board / Forums
- Online Discussion Groups
- Online Depth
- Social Listening
- Webcam Interviewing
- Interviewing



Online methods often provide more flexible ways to conduct research, combining the principles of depth interviews and group discussions with the convenience and innovation of the online world. Online methods can also be useful for understanding the nature of online conversations, exploring the views expressed on blogs and other types of online media.

Technique families: tools for discussion

Ice breakers

Warm up exercises, useful for breaking down personal and emotional barriers involved in research.

Exploratory

Exploratory techniques - core methods, used in most qualitative sessions. They enable researchers to engage with participants and the subject, generate deep insights and come to a rich understanding.

Prioritisation

Prioritisation techniques help individuals and groups make sense of large amounts of information and facilitate decision making.

Projective

Projective techniques are designed to let someone respond to ambiguous stimuli in order to reveal underlying or subconscious motives, urges or intentions which cannot be done through direct questioning. By projecting their own attitudes and feelings unconsciously onto the subject under study, participants are able to express their attitudes without personal embarrassment.

Creative

Creative techniques can help participants and researchers approach an issue from a fresh angle, find new ways of framing it and unlock new solutions.

Strategy

Strategy techniques are usually appropriate for a group or workshop setting and are designed to help people think constructively and creatively about the future - usually in order to develop or inform policy strategy.

A-Z of qualitative approaches

Method/technique	Description
A Accompanied interaction	<p>Participant is accompanied by a researcher who asks the participant to explain what s/he is thinking, feeling, doing etc. This can involve anything from web browsing, shopping or using a service.</p> <p>Useful for understanding how people use information material.</p>
Affinity groups	<p>Conducted with participants who already know each other. The first participant is recruited, and further recruitment is through snowballing the first participant's contacts.</p>
Audience segmentation	<p>Splitting and defining sections of audiences by attitude, behaviour, demographic etc. to form different targets.</p> <p>Useful for understanding different types of service user or consumer; enables clients to tailor services and products to their users and work towards behaviour change.</p>
B Bi-focal groups	<p>Two sets of participants with different perspectives take part - one group watches the other in discussion, then they are reversed. It finishes with both groups in discussion together.</p>

Method/technique	Description
C Citizens' Juries	<p>A small panel of members of the public examine an issue in detail and deliver a consensus 'verdict' on a way forward.</p> <p>Useful for discussing issues where there are several hypothetical scenarios for going forward.</p>
Co-creation workshops	<p>Describes jointly creating products and services with service users</p>
Conversation Cafes	<p>Informal hosted discussions with small groups of people.</p> <p>Generally used when discussion is an end in itself rather than a means to an end.</p> <p>Particularly good for understanding peer group dynamics and how members of a group (who are already known to one another) may interact.</p>
Customer Journey Mapping	<p>A way of researching and evaluating user services by evaluating each stage of interaction in that service, identifying key touchpoints from a user perspective.</p> <p>Useful for creating more customer / user-centred services and products.</p>

Method/technique	Description
D Depth interviews	<p>Can be one-to-one or paired, face to face or by telephone or email. When face to face they tend to be conducted in home or in a public place eg a cafe.</p> <p>Useful for busy participants such as senior stakeholders and politicians.</p> <p>Good for detailed exploration of issues. Paired depth interviews are good when interviewing two people from the same organisation or family members, friends and carers.</p>
Deliberative Workshops	<p>Dialogue based events focused on group deliberation, particularly about policy. Usually involving a minimum of 15 people and a maximum of 1000.</p> <p>Useful for observing the evolution of views as a result of deliberation and receipt of information. Often they involve convening stakeholders together with general public audiences, allowing participants to air questions and be directly informed by key decision-makers.</p>
Diaries	<p>Participants are asked to keep a diary for a period of time recording their actions/thoughts/experiences on a particular topic for future discussion or to feed into research findings. Texts, photos or video journals can also be used to give insight into peoples' lives.</p> <p>Diaries are usually used as a pre-task before an interview or group event. They can act as a good introduction to a research subject and provide the basis for further discussion.</p>
Discovery days	<p>Participants recruited on the spot in the street to join group discussions held in public venues. The day can include group discussions, depth interviews and stakeholder / expert input. Discovery days are often complemented with vox pops inside or outside the venue.</p> <p>The day can be based in public venues such as a library, council office, cultural or community centre. Useful when the conversation itself is as important as the research findings and when local area or context is relevant to the research.</p>

Method/technique	Description
D Discourse analysis	<p>A way of analysing research outputs looking at how people tell their own stories / experiences and using this to identify categories and themes that may be relevant for understanding the research question. The aim is to explore how people interact with an issue that is under study and how they construct their own narrative of events.</p> <p>Useful for understanding the psychological relationship people have with companies and services.</p>
E Enabling techniques	<p>Used within discussions to help explore more subconscious or sensitive thoughts and feelings – eg third person projections, collages.</p> <p>Useful for broaching topics that people may not be familiar talking about with others.</p>
Ethnography Interview	<p>Based on participant observation, meaning that the researcher is in the subject's environment, observing actual behaviour, for an extended length of time.</p> <p>Useful for understanding people's real experiences and how personal context impacts behaviour. Particularly good for studies which involve an 'accompanied element' to the research.</p>
Experience based design	<p>Brings service users and service providers / product developers together to share the role of improving service delivery and products through re-design.</p> <p>Can involve an element of co-creation or joint redesign between users and providers.</p>

Method/technique	Description
F Family interview	Where a family group interview would give a more accurate account of the subject under scrutiny such as healthy eating among young people. Useful for understanding family relationships, interactions and some day-to-day decision-making.
Forums	On or offline space where people meet for period of time to discuss a subject. Useful for busy participants who lack the time to meet for face-to-face interviews, such as senior stakeholders and captains of industry.
Friendship cells	Mini groups with sets of friends, most often used with children and teenagers. Useful for speaking with groups who may prefer peer support e.g. recent immigrants and/or young people.
K Krisis	Conflict group using three sets of three participants each with a conflicting view. Useful for getting beyond a consensus view and understanding what lies behind more opposing and extreme viewpoints.
M Mapping	Useful for identifying gaps in provision of services or an unmet consumer need. Participants at discussion groups/workshops can be asked to map their thoughts/feelings/experiences relating to an issue.
Market stalls	Series of information stands set out at a location so participants can wander around and look at different presentations, services or products. Experts or facilitators may also be present to aid participants. Useful for exploring alternative service design or new product development.

Method/technique	Description
M Mini groups	Same as discussion groups but with 4-5 people. Useful for addressing more sensitive, emotive issues and/or where participants may be harder to recruit. Particularly good for testing communications materials and where participants are being asked to think in-depth around a subject.
Mobile phone research	We can use mobile technology to undertake basic ethnography, asking participants to let us know what they are doing and what they think about an issue/area/service using SMS, supporting this with multimedia such as photos and videos. Technology dependent, we can also "geotag" respondents and track their location, and/or use "MobiTrace", whereby we can track all activities on their phone. Useful for gaining ongoing qualitative feedback from panel members. Particularly good for gathering feedback from audiences in-situ i.e. receiving their views at the point at which they interact with a product or service.
N Netnography	See Social Listening
O Observation	Spending time in a location observing (but not talking to or interviewing) research subjects in situ
Online Bulletin Board	Online space where people can contribute to discussion, respond to stimulus etc, not done in real time so different from an online group. Useful for testing communications materials.

Method/technique	Description
O Online Communities	<p>An online space open to participants for an ongoing period of time. Differs to a panel in that members interact with each other over time and develop a community feel. Can include forums, blogs, discussion groups, individual discussions, idea generation, as well as quantitative surveys.</p> <p>Useful as a way of hosting an ongoing consultation with participants on a range of subjects.</p> <p>Good for gaining quick feedback from an pre-engaged group of people.</p>
Online depth interview	<p>Could use webchat and/or webcams. Can show stimulus material, test concepts etc by placing images etc online.</p> <p>A cost effective alternative to face-to-face depth interviews.</p> <p>Good for engaging participants living in remote locations or those with access issues.</p>
Online group	<p>8-10 people convened to meet at a specific time online to take place in a moderated discussion via their computers.</p> <p>A cost effective alternative to face-to-face group discussions.</p> <p>Good for engaging participants together who live in remote locations or those with access issues.</p>

Method/technique	Description
P Participatory budgeting	<p>Involves citizens in deliberating budget-related decisions.</p> <p>Useful for public sector bodies to consult the public on future budget and priority setting.</p>
Peer research	<p>Members of the public are recruited to conduct research with people in their peer group.</p> <p>Useful for researching hard to reach groups.</p>
Photo walks (individual or accompanied)	<p>People are given disposable or Polaroid cameras to take photos of points of interest.</p> <p>Useful for capturing views on a particular location or experience. Helpful for understanding the user/consumer perspective and areas in need of development.</p>
Planning for real style research	<p>Often used by local authorities to explore local planning issues.</p> <p>Local people's detailed knowledge is used to plan development of local areas and create a sense of ownership among residents as they play an active role in development plans.</p>
Pre- and post-tasking	<p>Participants have a task to complete either before or after the fieldwork, such as filling in a diary, taking photos or doing preliminary reading.</p> <p>Useful for getting participants to start thinking about issues that they are likely to be asked to explore further during subsequent discussions/interviews.</p>

Method/technique	Description
P Projective techniques	Technique rooted in psychology, a way of getting people to 'project' their thoughts or feelings onto a third party, thereby making them less personal and easier to express. Good for use in research with children, vulnerable or cared for groups.
Public Dialogue	A deliberative process employing experts as part of informal discussion with the public. Often incorporates reconvened sessions, pre and post tasking. Useful for helping the public to engage in complex or technical subjects such as issues relating to science.
R Real world exercises	Similar to scenario testing, exploring what might happen in certain circumstances, eg pandemic flu outbreak. Good for future forecasting and hypothesising on public reactions to both planned and unforeseen events.
Reconvened groups	Discussion groups meeting on two or more separate occasions with some activity in between. Good for use in tracking service users'/consumers' journeys and understanding their experiences of different points in that journey, for example pregnant women accessing health care services or those applying for social housing etc.
Rolling groups	A successive series of continuous short discussions where people are recruited on the spot to participate. Cost effective alternative to focus groups as these are held back to back in the same venue. Good if you want to hear from as many people as possible in a short amount of time. Good when the profile of the respondents is less important and does not require recruitment to take place in advance.

Method/technique	Description
S Scenario testing	Hypothetical story used to help a person think through a complex problem or system.
Semiotic analysis	Analysis process which looks at cultural signs within texts or other research outputs, particularly the use of analogy, metaphor, signification and communication, signs and symbols.
Site visits	A group of people are taken together to a site relevant to the research, eg an environmentally sustainable house, a waste facility. Works well in conjunction with group discussions, either as a follow-up or preliminary visit to inform future discussion. For example, participants could be taken to visit a local waste facility as part of an educative process where they are informed about the logistics of waste collection and processing. The visit then acts as context allowing them to make more informed decisions in follow-up discussions around the issue.
Social Listening	Using an online tracking tool, we can take an ethnographic approach to understanding unmoderated conversations in social media and a range of online forums. Good for finding out what is being said online about a communication campaign, a recent industry development or major service change.
Social Spaces	See Online Communities

Method/technique	Description
V Vox Pops	<p>Very short filmed interviews with random members of the public who are stopped on the street/at a location and asked for their opinion on a given topic.</p> <p>Good for getting top-of-mind and spontaneous views. Particularly useful where the context of the research is relevant, for example when asking people about a site-specific issue or an actual experience they are having in real time.</p>
W Workshops	<p>Opportunity to explore people's views over a longer period of time, introduce new ideas and stimulus materials for discussion.</p> <p>Good for engaging members of the public in discussion of complex issues. For example, a workshop could involve convening expert scientists / economists / energy advisors and members of the general public to tackle sophisticated problems over the course of a whole day, exploring different areas of discussion and aiming to arrive at consumer/user-generated solutions.</p>