

**The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Sociology**

**SOCI 3231 Qualitative Research
Term 2, 2025 – 2026**

Date: On Thursday
Time: 14:30 – 16:15
Venue: Lecture Theater 3, Esther Lee Building (ELB LT3)
Mode of teaching: Face-to-face

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Course Overview :

This course aims to provide students with a foundation in the fundamental principles and procedures of empirical research in sociology. It will introduce various major types of qualitative research methods. Students will learn about various strategies for collecting (e.g. in-depth interview/focus-group discussion, participant observation/ethnography, and unobtrusive methods) and analyzing qualitative data (e.g. analyses of textual data as well as grounded theory). They will also familiarize themselves with the ethical issues about conducting research in contemporary times.

Learning outcomes:

Upon the completion of the course, students are expected to be able to:

- (1) understand the logic of scientific inquiry and the steps in social research
- (2) describe and explain the essential characteristics of major qualitative research methods
- (3) compare and evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of major qualitative research methods
- (4) design and implement qualitative research project to address research questions
- (5) evaluate quality of a qualitative research project
- (6) reflect on the ethical issues related to qualitative research

Reading materials

There is no textbook designated for this course. The following are some of the major references on qualitative research methods.

Major references

Babbie, E. R. (2021). *The Practice of Social Research* (15th ed.). Boston, Massachusetts: Cengage Learning.

Clark, T., Foster, L., Sloan, L., & Bryman, A. (2021). *Bryman's social research methods* (6th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Flick, U. (2022). *An introduction to qualitative research* (7th ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Hennink, M. M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2020). *Qualitative research methods* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Brand.

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2020). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Tracy, S. J. (2019). *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Assessment Plan

1. Research project report (40%)

Students are expected to form into groups in your tutorial class for your group assessment. The number of students per group will depend on the size of the tutorial class (usually 3 – 4 persons per group as a reference). Each group will conduct a research project that uses **qualitative research design and method** for a topic of interest to the students and submit a report of the research project.

Students should formulate a clear research question and develop an appropriate **qualitative research design and method** in order to answer that question. While there is no single format of research report that would fit all circumstances, students may follow the following suggested format:

- a) Introduction – Background, clear articulation of research question and explanation of the significance of the research
- b) Literature Review – A brief review of the existing literature on this question, and how your research would help answer or extend our understanding of the question. This is not only a summary of what has been done but also your critical assessment of the past literature.
- c) Research Design/Method – A clear plan of how you will collect and analyze data. How you would investigate the question (description of method of data collection and analyses), why you have chosen this way of investigation (justification), what are the shortcomings of this way of investigation (limitation). It may also include what remedies you will undertake in order to overcome those shortcomings.
- d) Findings – A summary of the key results of your data analyses, whether and how the results answer the research question, whether there are unexpected findings that deserve special attention
- e) Discussion – explore the theoretical and practical significance of the research findings, how it may contribute to extend the sociological understanding of the social phenomenon
- f) Conclusion – A brief summary of your key points

Due date: **15th April 2026 (Veriguide Assignment Number 1)**
Word limit (maximum): English 3,600 – 4,000 words (excluding end-of-text reference list)
中文 5,400 – 6,000 字 (不包括文末參考書目)
Format: Font size 12 and double-line spacing

Important notes for the submission of written assignments are as follows:

1. Please submit the soft copy of the assignment to **Veriguide** system on or before the due date.
2. Please rename the assignment file in the following format before you make your submission to the system: Surname + first name + assignment number (e.g. Chan_Ho_Man_1)

3. Late submission will be subject to penalty. The grade of the submission will be lowered by one subgrade for each day of late submission (e.g. late for one day, from B+ to B; submission late for less than a day will also be treated as a submission late for one day).
4. Please submit the soft copy of the signed Veriguide receipt for the assignment to the submission portal on Blackboard on or before the due date.
5. Please rename the Veriguide receipt file in the following format before you make your submission to the system: Surname + first name + assignment number + receipt (e.g. Chan_Ho_Man_1_receipt)
6. If students have used AI tools to assist to complete the assignment, they are required to **acknowledge** all functional uses (e.g. checking grammar and generating some ideas for the content) and **cite** it when they incorporate (e.g. by paraphrasing and direct-quoting) materials generated by the AI tool into their assignments. The **acknowledgement** should be submitted together with the assignment as an appendix; the **citation** should comply with the most updated version of citation adopted by American Sociological Association (ASA), or American Psychological Association (APA).
7. Your assignment must include proper **in-text citation** and **end-of-text reference list**. The accepted **citation styles** for this course are the most updated versions adopted by the **American Sociological Association (ASA)** or the **American Psychological Association (APA)**. Your attention is drawn to the following documents:
 - Honesty in Academic Work: A Guide for Students and Teachers:
[https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_hm_files_\(2013-14\)/p03.htm](https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_hm_files_(2013-14)/p03.htm)
 - Guideline for proper citation format by Department of Sociology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong:
<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/soc/citation.pdf>
 - Guidelines and Best Practices for Using AI Tools
https://libguides.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/AI_Education_and_Research
8. Please make sure that your assignment has a **cover page** with the following information: **course code, course name, your full name, student identification number, and a word count (excluding end-of-text reference list and cover page)**

2. Tutorial Presentation and Participation (20%)

In addition to lecture, this course comprises interactive tutorial, which are managed by the Teaching Assistant(s) of the course. The purpose of the tutorial is to guide the students to prepare and complete the research project report. At the last tutorial session, students will conduct an oral presentation of their research project. This provides a valuable opportunity to ask questions and receive feedback from fellow students and the teaching assistant(s) in order to enhance the understanding of qualitative research. Further details will be announced during the first tutorial session.

Tutorials are an integral part of the learning experience. Attendance is compulsory and students are expected to actively participate and contribute in the tutorials. Please consult the teaching assistant(s) as early as possible for signing up into tutorial classes.

3. Closed-book in-class Quiz (20%)

A closed-book in-class quiz will be held in the last lecture (Please refer to the Schedule and Topic of Lecture for the tentative date). Students will be asked to demonstrate their critical understanding of the materials learned throughout the course. Please note that alternative arrangement will only be considered on medical ground and/or very special circumstances with relevant supporting document and approval. The detailed format of the quiz will be announced to all students toward the end of the term.

4. Lecture participation (20%)

For the sake of encouraging participation and contribution to creating an interactive learning environment during lecture, participation points will be awarded to those who actively participate and contribute to lecture activity and discussion. Further details will be announced during the first lecture session.

Guide to Grading System

Elaborated Grade Descriptors

- A Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes, including:
- Sufficiently clear, concise, and organized in articulating the logic of scientific inquiry and the steps in social research
 - Sufficiently clear, integrated, and organized in describing and explaining the essential characteristics of major qualitative research methods
 - Sufficiently clear, comprehensive, and organized in comparing and evaluating the relative strengths and weaknesses of major qualitative research methods
 - Sufficiently clear, competent, and organized in designing and implementing qualitative research project to address research questions
 - Sufficiently clear, thorough, and organized in evaluating quality of a qualitative research project
 - Sufficiently clear, critical, and organized in reflecting on the ethical issues related to qualitative research
- A- Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes, including:
- Sufficiently clear, concise, and organized in articulating the logic of scientific inquiry and the steps in social research
 - Sufficiently clear, integrated, and organized in describing and explaining the essential characteristics of major qualitative research methods
 - Sufficiently clear, comprehensive, and organized in comparing and evaluating the relative strengths and weaknesses of major qualitative research methods
 - Sufficiently clear, competent, and organized in designing and implementing qualitative research project to address research questions
 - Sufficiently clear, thorough, and organized in evaluating quality of a qualitative research project
 - Sufficiently clear, critical, and organized in reflecting on the ethical issues related to qualitative research

Elaborated Grade Descriptors

- B Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance, including:
- Substantially clear, concise, and organized in articulating the logic of scientific inquiry and the steps in social research
 - Substantially clear, integrated, and organized in describing and explaining the essential characteristics of major qualitative research methods
 - Substantially clear, comprehensive, and organized in comparing and evaluating the relative strengths and weaknesses of major qualitative research methods
 - Substantially clear, competent, and organized in designing and implementing qualitative research project to address research questions
 - Substantially clear, thorough, and organized in evaluating quality of a qualitative research project
 - Substantially clear, critical, and organized in reflecting on the ethical issues related to qualitative research
- C Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses, including:
- Satisfactorily clear, concise, and organized in articulating the logic of scientific inquiry and the steps in social research
 - Satisfactorily clear, integrated, and organized in describing and explaining the essential characteristics of major qualitative research methods
 - Satisfactorily clear, comprehensive, and organized in comparing and evaluating the relative strengths and weaknesses of major qualitative research methods
 - Satisfactorily clear, competent, and organized in designing and implementing qualitative research project to address research questions
 - Satisfactorily clear, thorough, and organized in evaluating quality of a qualitative research project
 - Satisfactorily clear, critical, and organized in reflecting on the ethical issues related to qualitative research

Elaborated Grade Descriptors

- D Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, including:
- Barely satisfactory in clarity, conciseness, and organization in articulating the logic of scientific inquiry and the steps in social research
 - Barely satisfactory in clarity, integration, and organization in describing and explaining the essential characteristics of major qualitative research methods
 - Barely satisfactory in clarity, comprehensiveness, and organization in comparing and evaluating the relative strengths and weaknesses of major qualitative research methods
 - Barely satisfactory in clarity, competence, and organization in designing and implementing qualitative research project to address research questions
 - Barely satisfactory in clarity, thoroughness, and organization in evaluating quality of a qualitative research project
 - Barely satisfactory in clarity, criticalness, and organization in reflecting on the ethical issues related to qualitative research
- F Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements, including:
- unsatisfactorily clear, concise, and organized in articulating the logic of scientific inquiry and the steps in social research
 - unsatisfactorily clear, integrated, and organized in describing and explaining the essential characteristics of major qualitative research methods
 - unsatisfactorily clear, comprehensive, and organized in comparing and evaluating the relative strengths and weaknesses of major qualitative research methods
 - unsatisfactorily clear, competent, and organized in designing and implementing qualitative research project to address research questions
 - unsatisfactorily clear, thorough, and organized in evaluating quality of a qualitative research project
 - unsatisfactorily clear, critical, and organized in reflecting on the ethical issues related to qualitative research

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

- In the case of group projects, all members of the group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible and liable to disciplinary actions, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the problematic contents.
- For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment.
- Students are fully aware that their work may be investigated by AI content detection software to determine originality.
- Students are fully aware of the AI approach(es) adopted in the course. In the case where some AI tools are allowed, students have made proper acknowledgment and citations as suggested by the course teacher.

Assignments without a properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers.

Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submissions. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

The copyright of the teaching materials, including lecture notes, assignments and examination questions, etc., produced by staff members/ teachers of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) belongs to CUHK. Students may download the teaching materials produced by the staff members/ teachers from the Learning Management Systems, e.g. Blackboard, adopted by CUHK for their own educational use, but shall not distribute/ share/ copy the materials to a third-party without seeking prior permission from the staff members/ teachers concerned.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Use of some AI tools is allowed (i.e. Approach 2 – use only with prior permission)

Students may use some AI tools in some learning activities and/or assessments on the following conditions:

1. The AI tools to be used are restricted to the following tools:
 - those selected and adopted by the University central, e.g. Information and Technology Services Centre (ITSC) (see AI Hub@CUHK);
 - those selected and adopted through collaboration between ITSC and individual units/teachers; and
 - those selected and adopted by individual units, teachers and/or students;
2. The specified AI tools will only be allowed for the following types of learning activities and/or assessments:
 - all assessment components except the closed-book in-class quiz;
3. Collaboration of AI tools is only allowed for the following purposes/tasks:
 - students are allowed to use AI tools for their **functional uses** (e.g. grammar checking, information searching, and/or generating idea for content) and for **incorporation of AI-generated materials in their assignments** (e.g. to paraphrase, direct-quote, or in any way incorporate any AI-generated materials), provided that they make **explicit acknowledgement** about those **functional uses** and make **proper citation** about those **incorporations** according to guidelines of our university and of professional association (e.g. APA);
4. The **input contributed by the AI tools** are properly **acknowledged** and **cited**; and
5. The **input together with the prompts** used to elicit the AI responses should be **highlighted or included as appendices** wherever appropriate.

In case of queries, students should seek advice from the course teacher.

Acknowledging support from AI tools

Students are required to acknowledge all functional uses of a generative AI tool and cite it when they paraphrase, quote, or incorporate into their own work any content (whether it is text, image, data, or other format) that was created by it.

- i. An example of acknowledgement

'I acknowledge the use of (name of AI tool – e.g. ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com/>)) to (specify the support, e.g. plan my essay, generate some ideas for the content, ask for examples of data collection instruments, get the dates of historical events, etc.).

- ii. An example of citation

OpenAI. (2023). *ChatGPT* (Mar 20 version). <https://chat.openai.com/chat>

(Students are reminded that due to the rapid developments of generative AI tools, some citation formats may be updated regularly.)

- iii. An example of including texts generated by an AI tool in their work

"The following text was generated by an AI tool / language model (ChatGPT):"

[Insert the text generated by ChatGPT here.]

- iv. An example of including texts generated by an AI tool and the prompts that were used to elicit the text from the AI tool

"[The prompt], as generated by an AI language model (ChatGPT):"

[Insert the text generated by ChatGPT in response to the prompt.]

Students are reminded to learn and use the AI tools responsibly and ethically and be aware of the limitations.

Improper/unauthorized use of AI tools in learning activities and assessments will constitute acts of academic dishonesty which will be handled in accordance with the University's Procedures for Handling Cases of Academic Dishonesty.

Students are reminded to clarify with the course teacher and obtain permission if necessary when in doubt.