Part 1 is set up as a framework for doing qualitative research and for comprehending the later chapters in this book. Chapter 1 serves as a guide for the book, introducing its major parts. Then, it provides an orientation about why qualitative research has become particularly relevant in the last decades of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The book begins with an overview of the backgrounds of qualitative research. I will then move on to introduce you to the essential features of qualitative research (in general—Chapter 2). Chapter 3 introduces the relations of qualitative and quantitative research as well as the possibilities and pitfalls of combining both approaches. Chapter 4 outlines the ethical issues linked to qualitative researching. Together, these chapters offer a background to assist the research and utilization of qualitative methods, which are outlined and discussed in greater detail later in the book.
1 GUIDE TO THIS BOOK

CONTENTS

Approach of the Book  4
Structure of the Book   4
Special Features of the Book  8
How to Use this Book  10

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

• appreciate the organization of this book.
• locate various aspects of qualitative research in this book.
• identify which chapters to use for various purposes.
Approach of the Book

This book has been written with two groups of readers in mind: the novice and the experienced researcher. First of all, it addresses the novice to qualitative research, maybe even to social research in general. For this group, mostly undergraduate and graduate students, it is conceived as a basic introduction to the principles and practices of qualitative research, the theoretical and epistemological background, and the most important methods. Second, the researcher in the field may use this book as a sort of toolkit while facing the practical issues and problems in the day-to-day business of qualitative research. Qualitative research is establishing itself in many social sciences, in psychology, in nursing, and the like. As a novice to the field or as an experienced researcher, you can use a great variety of specific methods, each of which starts from different premises and pursues different aims. Each method in qualitative research is based on a specific understanding of its object. However, qualitative methods should not be regarded independently of the research process and the issue under study. They are specifically embedded in the research process and are best understood and described using a process-oriented perspective. Therefore, a presentation of the different steps in the process of qualitative research is the central concern of the book. The most important methods for collecting and interpreting data and for assessing and presenting results are presented and located in the process-oriented framework. This should give you an overview of the field of qualitative research, of concrete methodological alternatives, and of their claims, applications, and limits. This should enable you to choose the most appropriate methodological strategy with respect to your research question and issues.

The starting point in this book is that qualitative research, above all, works with text. Methods for collecting information—interviews or observations—produce data, which are transformed into texts by recording and transcription. Methods of interpretation start from these texts. Different routes lead towards the texts at the center of the research and away from them. Very briefly, the qualitative research process can be represented as a path from theory to text and as another path from text back to theory. The intersection of the two paths is the collection of verbal or visual data and their interpretation in a specific research design.

Structure of the Book

The book has eight parts, which aim at unfolding the process of qualitative research in its major stages.

Part 1 sets out the framework of doing qualitative research as discussed in Chapters 2 through 4:
• **Chapter 2** explores and answers the fundamental questions of qualitative research. For this purpose, the current relevance of qualitative research is outlined against the background of recent trends in society and in social sciences. Some essential features of qualitative research in distinction from quantitative approaches are presented. To allow you to see qualitative research and methods in their context, a very brief overview of the history of qualitative research in the United States and Europe is given.

• **Chapter 3** develops the relation between qualitative and quantitative research. Here, I take several points of reference for spelling out the possible links of qualitative and quantitative research. In the end, you will find some guiding questions for assessing the appropriateness of qualitative and quantitative research. This chapter allows you to identify various approaches and then decide which one is best for your research.

• **Chapter 4** focuses on a different framework for qualitative research—research ethics. The ethics of qualitative research deserves special attention, as you will come much closer to privacy issues and the day-to-day life of your participants. Reflection and sensitivity to privacy are essential before launching a qualitative study. At the same time, general discussions about research ethics often miss the special needs and problems of qualitative research. After reading this chapter, you should know the importance of a code of ethics before beginning your research as well as the need for ethics committees. Whether research is ethical or not depends as much on practical decisions in the field.

After setting out the framework of qualitative research, I focus on the process of a qualitative study. Part 2 takes you from theory to text:

• **Chapter 5** introduces the use of the literature—theoretical, methodological, and empirical—in a qualitative study. It addresses the use of and the finding of such resources while doing your study and while writing about it.

• **Chapter 6** addresses different theoretical positions underlying qualitative research. Symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and structuralist approaches are discussed as paradigmatic approaches for their basic assumptions and recent developments. From these discussions, the list of essential features of qualitative research given in Chapter 2 is completed. In the end, I will address two theoretical debates, which are currently very strong in qualitative research. Feminism and gender studies and the discussion about positivism and constructionism inform a great deal of qualitative research, in how to understand the issues of research, in how to conceive the research process, and in how to use qualitative methods.

• **Chapter 7** continues the discussions raised in Chapter 6, as well as outlining the epistemological background of constructionist qualitative research using text as empirical material.
6 AN INTRODUCTION TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

In Part 3 on research design we come to the more practical issues of how to plan qualitative research:

- Chapter 8 outlines the qualitative research process and shows that the single steps are linked much closer with each other than in the clear-cut step-by-step process in quantitative research.
- Chapter 9 addresses the relevance of a well-defined research question for conducting research and how to arrive at such a research question.
- Chapter 10 is about how to enter a field and how to get in touch with the participants of your study.
- Chapter 11 covers the topic of sampling—how to select your participants or groups of participants, situations, and so on.
- Chapter 12 offers an overview of practical issues of how to design qualitative research. It also covers the basic designs in qualitative research.

Part 4 introduces one of the major strategies of collecting data. Verbal data are produced in interviews, narratives, and focus groups:

- Chapter 13 presents a range of interviews, which are characterized by using a set of open-ended questions to stimulate the participants’ answers. Some of these interviews, like the focused interview, are used for very different purposes, whereas some, like the expert interview, have a more specific field of application.
- Chapter 14 outlines a different strategy leading to verbal data. Here the central step is the stimulation of narratives (i.e., overall narratives of life histories or more focused narratives of specific situations). These narratives are stimulated in specially designed interviews—the narrative interview in the first and the episodic interview in the second alternative.
- Chapter 15 explores ways of collecting verbal data in a group of participants. Focus groups are currently very prominent in some areas, while group discussions have a longer tradition. Both are based on the stimulation of discussions whereas group interviews are more about answering questions. Joint narratives want to make a group of people tell a story as a common activity.
- Chapter 16 summarizes the methods for collecting verbal data. It is intended to support you in making your decision between the different ways outlined in Part 4 by comparing the methods and by developing a checklist for such a decision.

Part 5 examines observation and mediated data, such as data-like documents or photos as well as the use of electronic data:

- Chapter 17 deals with non-participant or participant observation and ethnography. Other data collection strategies (like interviewing, using documents, etc.) are employed to complement observation itself.
- Chapter 18 focuses on visual data and on analyzing, studying, and using media like photos, film, and video as data.
- Chapter 19 explores the construction and analyzing of documents in qualitative research.
- Chapter 20 explores the Internet as a field of research and an instrument for conducting research. Here you will meet some methods again, which were dealt with in the previous chapters—like interviews, focus groups, and ethnography. But here they are described for their use in qualitative online research.
- Chapter 21 takes comparative and summarizing perspectives on observation and mediated data. This overview will help you decide when to choose which method and what the advantages and problems of each method are.

The first parts of the book concentrate on the collection and production of data. Part 6 deals with proceeding from text to theory—how to develop theoretically relevant insights from these data and the text produced with them. For this purpose, qualitative methods for analyzing data are the focus of this part:

- Chapter 22 discusses how to document data in qualitative research. Field notes and transcriptions are presented in detail in their technical and more general aspects and in examples.
- Chapter 23 covers methods using coding and categories as tools for analyzing text.
- Chapter 24 continues with approaches that are more interested in how something is said and not only in what is said. Conversation analysis looks at how a conversation in everyday life or in an institutional context works, and which methods people use to communicate any form of context. Discourse and genre analyses have developed this approach further in different directions.
- Chapter 25 explores narrative analysis and hermeneutics. These approaches examine texts with a combination of content and formal orientations. Here, a narrative is analyzed not only for what is told, but also for how the story is unfolded when it is told and what that reveals about what is told.
- Chapter 26 discusses the use of computers and especially software for qualitative data analysis. Principles and examples of the most important software are presented. This chapter should help you to decide whether to use software for your analysis and which package.
- Chapter 27 gives a summarizing overview of the approaches to analyzing text and other material in qualitative research. Again, you will find a comparison of the different approaches and a checklist, both of which should help you to select the appropriate method for analyzing your material and advance from your data to theoretically relevant findings.

Part 7 goes back to context and methodology and addresses issues of grounding and writing qualitative research:

- Chapter 28 discusses the use of traditional quality criteria in qualitative research and their limits. It also informs about alternative criteria, which have been developed for qualitative research or for specific approaches. In the end it shows why
answering the question of the quality of qualitative research is currently a major expectation from outside of the discipline, and a need for improving the research practice at the same time.

- **Chapter 29** continues with this issue, but explores ways of answering the question of quality in qualitative research beyond the formulation of criteria. Instead, strategies of quality management, of answering the question of indication, and triangulation are discussed for this purpose.

- **Chapter 30** addresses issues of writing qualitative research—reporting the results to an audience and the influences of the way of writing on the findings of research. The chapter finishes with a look at the future of qualitative research oscillating between art and method.

The final part, Part 8, aims at developing a synoptic approach to the diversity that was unfolded in the preceding chapters and gives an integration and outlook:

- **Chapter 31** unfolds a specific research perspective in an integrative way. For this purpose, it describes grounded theory research, which has been mentioned as an example in many of the previous chapters. Here it will be shown how this research perspective works when its elements are brought together.

- **Chapter 32** approaches the idea of integration from a different angle: triangulation means to combine several methodological approaches in one study and in one design.

- **Chapter 33** gives an overview of the state of the art in qualitative research. It outlines schools of qualitative research and discusses recent and future trends in qualitative research in different contexts.

**Special Features of the Book**

I have included several features to make this book more useful for learning qualitative research and while conducting a qualitative study. You will find them throughout the following chapters.

- **Chapter Objectives**
  At the beginning of every chapter, you will find an orientation through the single chapter, which consists of two parts. First, there will be an overview of the issues covered in the chapter. Second, you will find a list of chapter objectives, which define what you should have learnt and know after reading the chapter. These should guide you through the chapter and help you to find topics again after reading the chapter or the whole book.
• Boxes
Major issues are presented in boxes. These boxes will have different functions: some summarize the central steps of a method, some give practical advice, and some list example questions (for interview methods, for example). They should structure the text, so that it will be easier to keep an orientation while reading it.

• Case Studies
Case studies found throughout the text examine methods and prominent researchers’ applications of them. The collections of case studies showcase the practice of principles on special occasions. They should help you to think about how things are done in qualitative research, and about which problems or questions come to mind while reading the case studies and the like. Many of the case studies come from published research of key figures in qualitative research. Other case studies come from my own research and in several case studies you will meet the same research projects which have been used before to illustrate a different issue.

• Checklists
Checklists appear in various chapters, particularly in Chapters 12, 16, 21, and 27. Many of the checklists offer a decision-making process for selecting methods and lists for checking the correctness of a decision.

• Tables
In Chapters 12, 16, 21, and 27, you will also find tables comparing the methods described in detail in the previous chapters. These tables take a comparative perspective on a single method that permits its strengths and weaknesses to be seen in the light of other methods. This is a particular feature of this book and is intended again to help you to select the “right” method for your research issue.

• Key Questions
The methods, which are presented here, are evaluated at the end of their presentation by a list of key questions (e.g., what are the limitations of the method?). These key questions come up repeatedly and should make orientation and assessment of the single method easier.

• Cross-referencing
Cross-referencing offers the linking of specific methods or methodological problems. This facilitates the placing of information into context.

• Key Points
At the end of each chapter, you will find a list of key points summarizing the chapter’s most important points.

• Exercises
The exercises at the end of a chapter act as a review in assessing other people’s research and planning future research.

• Further Reading
At the end of a chapter, the list of references offers an opportunity to extend the knowledge presented in the chapter.
How to Use this Book

There are several ways you can use this book, depending on your field specialty and experience in qualitative research. The first way of reading the book is from the beginning to the end, as it guides you through the steps of planning and setting up a research project. These steps lead you from getting the necessary background knowledge to designing and conducting research to issues of quality assessment and writing about your research. In the event that you use this book as a reference tool, the following list highlights areas of interest:

- Theoretical background knowledge about qualitative research is found in Chapters 2 through 7, which offer an overview and the philosophical underpinnings.
- Methodological issues of planning and conceiving qualitative research are spelled out in Part 3, where questions of designing qualitative research are discussed. Part 7 refers to this conceptual level when examining the quality issues in research.
- Issues of how to plan qualitative research are presented on a practical level in Part 3, where you find suggestions for how to sample, how to formulate a research question, or how to enter a field.
- Parts 4 through 6 reveal practical issues relevant for doing qualitative research where a range of methods is described in detail.
- Part 8 finally ties the different threads (areas and approaches) together in an integrative perspective.