Mandatory assignments for IN5000 Spring 2022

Introduction

There are five individual assignments to be submitted. The first three assignments (1-3) are an opportunity to practice different qualitative methods, and to reflect on them in discussions with course instructors and other students. The last two assignments (4-5) are iterations on writing a research proposal. It is an advantage to build on assignments 1-3 in your research proposals.

Since these assignments are individual, you can choose to relate the topic for interviews and observations to your master project. If this is not possible, however, you can choose a different topic for your interview and observation. While not a formal requirement, the individual form on the assignments provides a good opportunity to use this coursework in planning your master project.

You are of course free to cooperate as you wish, but you will all have to turn in our own individual assignments.

Deadlines and feedback

Assignment	Delivery	Feedback
1: Interview	Fri February 4th, 12 noon	Feb 8th
2: Observation	Fri March 4, 12 noon	March 8th
3: Reflections on qualitative research methods	Fri March 18th, 12 noon	March 22nd
4: First draft of RP	Fri April 8th, 12 noon	Written feedback
5: Final draft of RP	Fri May 6th, 12 noon	To be decided

Assignment 1 — Semi-structured interview

The purpose of this assignment is to work with and reflect on interviews as a qualitative research method. You have probably conducted interviews earlier in your education as part of gaining insight in a design process. However, in this course interviews will be more directed toward reflecting about what can be learned (or not learned) through the different data gathering methods. In other words, you will not be interviewing “a user”, but rather “an informant” about their life or expertise within a certain field.

a) Fieldwork

Arrange an interview with a person you consider relevant for your master project. If you do not have a clear vision of your project yet, you can use this assignment as an opportunity to explore at least one of the directions you envision your project might take. While it would of course be most useful for your project to find “the perfect” person to interview, this might not be so easy. We encourage you to attempt to contact people relevant for your topic, however it is also fine to interview someone you know, as a fellow student, a friend, a family member, or a professional acquaintance. However, remember that you should be able to argue for your choice of informant, so they should be relevant for your topic or be knowledgeable about the specific field of research or use context.

The form of a semi-structured interview means that you will prepare a list of questions but not necessarily ask all of them or ask them in the order they appear in the list. Consider first what you might want to learn from this person about something related to your master project. Based on these reflections, prepare a list of questions you would like to ask them. This kind of interview should resemble a conversation, where the informant’s responses will guide which questions you will ask. Try to keep the interview as non-directive as possible: Listening and seeking to understand the informant’s perspective is key to this kind of interview.

We encourage you to conduct this interview digitally, as we believe it is valuable to practice such an approach to data gathering. You can use Zoom or similar platforms (if you choose other platforms than Zoom, please consider privacy concerns such as data logs). However, you can do the interview physically if both you and your informant are comfortable with that.

You have to ensure that you have the informant’s informed consent before you start the interview. See guidelines at the Data Protection Official’s webpage (Personvernombudet for forskning): http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvernombud/index.html The interview should not be audio recorded (if your masters project has been approved for audio recorded interviews, you can of course record it, however this audio should not be considered a part of the coursework and we ask you not to transcribe the interview until after this assignment). Instead, bring pen and paper, and jot down key terms and phrases during the interview.

The interview should last at least 30 minutes.

b) Delivery

Write a document that sums up your interview notes and any reflections you might have about using this method. You should include a brief introduction of your theme and why you chose this person for your interview, and what you expected you might learn by talking to them (please note that the introduction should be no longer than one paragraph of approximately 150-250 words).

Further, you should give a brief summary of this kind of interview as a research method. What might be learned, and what cannot be learned. This might help you reflect more on what *you* learnt or did not learn. If you did the interview via Zoom, you may also reflect on how this is different from doing physical interviews.

The document should be approximately 1000 words (between 1,5-2 pages of text), and should include minimum one reference from the curriculum.

Assignment 2 — Observation

The purpose of this assignment is to practice observation and note-taking, and to reflect on observation as a research method. You are free to choose which type of observation you want to conduct, i.e., passive or participant observation.

a) Fieldwork

Go to a setting (a public setting or a place relevant for your master project) and carry out a one-hour observation. If you cannot go to a place that is relevant for your master project, you can go to any other place where information and communication technology of some kind is present (e.g., ticket machines, cell phones, computers, digital artefacts). Observe and record movements, interactions, sights, sounds, spatial arrangements, and anything else that strikes you. Write as much as you can about the setting and take notes of what you see. After the observation, write up your notes in a more coherent document.

b) Delivery

Write a document that sums up your field notes and any reflections you might have about using this method. If you wish, you may give a brief description of your project or research theme, however this should be no longer than 100-150 words. You should include the type of setting, the date and time of your observations, why you chose this setting, and a rough map of the setting. Further, your document should include a description of what you saw, heard, or otherwise noticed. Did you see any patterns, or deviations from patterns? Are some people acting differently than others? Do you believe some of your observations are more significant than others? Explain how.

The document should be approximately 1000 words (between 1,5-2 pages of text), and should include minimum one reference from the curriculum.

Assignment 3 — Reflections on qualitative research

The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on your own experiences in the course thus far and discuss using the curriculum. Each subtask should be approximately 600 words (400 if you choose to also do subtask c) and include 1-3 references from the curriculum. In total, the document should be approximately 1200 words (around 2 pages of text).

a) Reflect

First, you should reflect over your experiences from Assignments 1 and 2, and give a brief analysis/summary of your topic.

To help you get started, you can ask yourself questions such as:

- Did I experience or learn anything new during the interview and observation? Either before, during or after the interview.
- What did I think about interview / observation as a method earlier this semester, and what do I think about it now?
- What do I know after doing an observation and an interview that I did not know before?
- Have I tried these methods before? Have I learned anything new about them?
- What have I learned about qualitative research?

b) Discuss

In this subtask, you should reflect critically on your role as a researcher and discuss this using the curriculum.

To help you get started, you can ask yourself questions such as:

- Have I acted as an “objective” researcher? How?
- Did I make any patterns from the observation / interview?
- What can I “actually” know / learn during interviews / observations, and what are assumptions I make?
- How do I manage to differentiate between what I observe and what I assume that I observe? What does this mean for the material gathered?
- Which methods are appropriate for different situations?
- Which methods are more or less appropriate for gathering different kinds of material?

c) Diary study (optional)

In this subtask you will be both researcher, observer and subject / informant. The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on how you experience the world, and how this might influence your research, both data gathering and analysis.

Write a diary every afternoon / evening for 3-4 days. After this, choose 1-2 situations or incidents and reflect on how you experienced these.

To help you get started, you can ask yourself questions such as:

- What do I think about this experience?
- Why did I think or react the way I did?
- Does previous experiences have any consequence for how I now experience the events in my own everyday life?
- What do I remember now about this experience?
- Does it feel different now than it did when it happened?

Research Proposal (Assignments 4-5)

A research proposal is a document proposing **a plan** for a research project. The research proposal should make clear what research question(s) will be addressed and how the researcher(s) will address them. Further, they include a brief description of previous research, what you expect to learn, etc. For the last two assignments, you will write a research proposal for your master project, i.e., you will plan your project using the (things) you have learned in this course.

While the aim of the previous assignments was to experience using different research methods and reflect on them, the aim of writing a research proposal is to use these experiences and reflections to plan a research project. Please note that you do not have to do the activities you plan for in this research proposal: You can plan for your dream project and adapt your activities later.

It is an advantage to build on the previous assignments when you write the research proposal. Your exploration of a topic during the semester can enable you to argue why your chosen topic is interesting or relevant. You can refer to the observations and interviews to argue for choices in different sections of the research proposal. If building on the previous assignments proves difficult or you chose a different topic than your master topic, this is no problem. In that case, you can refer to relevant empirical studies done by others to support your choices of topic, case or field, and methodology.

Assignment 4 — Research proposal: first draft

- 3-5 pages (1500-2500 words)
- 1,15 line space
- Times New Roman font size 12 (or similar)

Assignment 5 — Research proposal: final draft

- 5-7 pages (2500-3500 words)
- 1,15 line space
- Times New Roman font size 12 (or similar)

Suggestions on how to structure your research proposals

Front-page: Title of report, name, course, year, and affiliation

Table of content: list of the sections + page numbers

1. Introduction. Give the reader a short and precise presentation of the content of your report: What is this piece of work about? Describe the motivation for your proposed study: What will you explore and why is this interesting to a larger audience? Shortly describe what you intend to accomplish with the study. *Please note that your introduction should not exceed 100-150 words.*

2. Position your work. Present your purpose statement: Why do you want to do the study? What do you intend to accomplish? Depending on what you plan to study, you can argue that this phenomenon has received little previous attention from researchers (a gap in the research literature), that the phenomenon is of general societal importance or interest, or that an increased understanding of this phenomenon will contribute to the work of particular groups (for instance policy makers, designers/developers, or particular organizations).

You might want to position your work in relation to existing literature. If so, do a brief literature review where you state what is the related research or relevant findings in your area of interest, and state how your research will contribute to this.

You can also draw on the four group assignments to formulate your purpose statement. Did your observations and interview raise questions you would like to explore further?

Please note that this part should not exceed more than 10% of the total text volume (150-250 words for Assignment 4 and 250-300 words for Assignment 5).

3. Research question. From the broad purpose statement, you narrow the focus to one or a few research questions to be answered. In qualitative studies, “research question” is more appropriate than “objective” (specific goals) or “hypothesis” (predictions that involve variables and statistical tests). The research question should guide data gathering. It is a key question that the researcher will ask her/himself in the observational procedure or during semi-structured interviews. Use questions starting with ‘how’ or ’what’. Questions starting with ‘why’ suggest cause and effect, for which a quantitative approach is usually more appropriate.

3. Present the case or the field. Where will you go to answer your research questions? Who and what will be included in your study? Describe the field setting in terms of where, what, who, when, how long, and why.

4. Methodology. Here you describe how you will generate empirical material to answer your research question. What kind of data will you generate, and what is your strategy for generating them?

Present which paradigm you are working within. Describe the methodology you have chosen, and the methods you plan to use. Justify your choices. Why did you choose this methodology and not another? Why are the chosen methods appropriate for generating the data you need

to answer your research question? Could you have chosen differently? What would be the consequences?

5. Analysis. Describe in brief how you will analyse your data.

6. Ethical considerations. How will you protect your informants' privacy? How will you ensure informed consent from those who participate in your study? Do your case, field site, or methods raise particular ethical concerns? How will you address them?

7. Conclusion. Write a brief summary of the text.

8. References. Alphabetic listing of all the texts referred to. For information about correct citing and referencing, see link to the website "Search and Write" mentioned above.