



## 040085 SE Qualitative Research Methods (MA) | 2026SS

---

Chair of International Business: <https://international-business.univie.ac.at/>

Information about the course:

### Course Details

4.00 ECTS (2.00 SWS) | compulsory attendance | continuous assessment | course format: on site | SPL 4 - Wirtschaftswissenschaften | Language: English

Course# 040085 | Start: Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> May, 09:45

Course Instructor: Univ.-Prof. Maria Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki,

**Contact:** [e.plakogiannaki@univie.ac.at](mailto:e.plakogiannaki@univie.ac.at)

Office hours for students: by appointment only

For all inquiries, please contact Ms. Viktoria Kiss, Email: [viktoria.kiss@univie.ac.at](mailto:viktoria.kiss@univie.ac.at)

Student Assistant on the course: Finlay Lawerentz, Email: [finlay.lawerentz@univie.ac.at](mailto:finlay.lawerentz@univie.ac.at)

### Course objectives

This course is designed to provide Master's students with a rigorous and in-depth understanding of qualitative research and its role in contemporary international business scholarship. It aims to equip participants with the conceptual foundations and methodological competencies necessary to design, evaluate, and conduct high-quality qualitative research projects.

The course is particularly relevant for students intending to write a Master's thesis employing qualitative methods. It introduces students to the ontological underpinnings of qualitative inquiry and familiarizes them with the distinctive logic, strengths, and limitations of qualitative research as a mode of theorising. Emphasis is placed on understanding qualitative research not merely as a set of techniques, but as a coherent research approach that integrates philosophical assumptions, research design decisions, and analytical practices.

Throughout the course, students are guided through key methodological decisions in qualitative research, including selecting research designs, cases, participants, and data sources, as well as collecting, analysing, and interpreting rich qualitative material, with a firm-level analytical focus on international business phenomena that foregrounds firms as central actors in cross-border strategies, organizational processes, and internationalisation dynamics.

The course adopts a balanced pedagogical approach that integrates theory and practice, as well as action and reflection. Through systematic engagement with seminal and contemporary literature, students develop the ability to critically assess qualitative research and make informed methodological choices aligned with their research objectives.

### Course content

The course addresses core issues that must be considered and decided upon when designing and conducting qualitative research. It is structured around eight interrelated thematic modules that

collectively cover the qualitative research process from epistemological foundations to evaluation of research quality:

1. **Introduction to qualitative research**  
Conceptual foundations of qualitative inquiry, its distinctive characteristics, and its theorising potential in management and international business research.
2. **Different types of qualitative research**  
Overview of qualitative research designs and approaches, including their purposes, assumptions, and domains of application.
3. **Qualitative case study research**  
Case study logic, theory-building and theory-elaborating objectives, and the role of context in qualitative research.
4. **Sampling in qualitative research**  
Case and participant selection, units of analysis, sampling strategies, and sources of evidence in qualitative studies.
5. **Qualitative interviews**  
Design and conduct of qualitative interviews, including reflexivity, access, and the role of key informants.
6. **Focus group and observations (if time permits)**  
Principles, strengths, and limitations of focus groups as a qualitative data collection method.
7. **Qualitative data analysis**  
Approaches to analysing qualitative data, including coding, interpretation, and abductive reasoning.
8. **Criteria for assessing rigor, quality, and trustworthiness in qualitative research**  
Criteria for assessing rigor, quality, and trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Each module is grounded in the critical discussion of exemplary empirical studies and supported by targeted pre-readings from the core literature.

***Acquired competences upon course completion:***

- A thorough understanding of the role and value of qualitative research in academic scholarship, particularly in management and international business.
- The ability to define and critically evaluate qualitative case study research and to understand the theoretical objectives it serves.
- An advanced understanding of sampling in qualitative research, including the specification of units of analysis, selection of appropriate sampling strategies, and identification of relevant sources of evidence.
- The capacity to design and conduct qualitative data collection through interviews and, where applicable, focus group research.
- A solid understanding of qualitative data analysis and the interpretive processes involved in theorising from qualitative material.
- The ability to apply and critically assess criteria for evaluating the quality and rigor of qualitative research.
- The competence to develop a coherent and well-structured methodology chapter for a Master's thesis employing qualitative methods, grounded in sound methodological reasoning.

## Course Policies

The course has “*prüfungsimmanenten Charakter*”. Attendance is compulsory throughout the semester. Absence from two course units is possible. A course unit is a 90-minute session. Further absences will automatically result in a “fail” grade. Attendance is compulsory during assessment (e.g. presentations etc.).

Both the course and the assessment are held in English. During the course active participation is required during all lessons.

Students wishing to take this course must register via [u:find/u:space](#) (with points) during the registration period. The maximum number of participants is 24.

Registered students who, for whatever reason, are not able to take the course must de-register electronically by the 04<sup>th</sup> of May 2026, 23:59:00. Students who decide to drop the course after this dead-line will be graded with 5 (failed).

---

*It is absolutely essential that all registered students attend the first session on 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2026. As failure to do so will result in their exclusion from the course.*

---

## Course Structure

This course is delivered in a **blocked format** over four full lecture days. Lectures take place **from 09:45 am to 14:45 pm** on **04 May, 05 May, 11 May, and 12 May**. Sessions are conducted on site; details regarding seminar rooms are provided in the course schedule below. A lunch break is scheduled approximately between **12:00 and 13:00**.

The course combines instructor-led lectures with intensive discussion of exemplary qualitative studies drawn from leading academic journals. Each session integrates conceptual input with critical analysis of empirical research, thereby fostering a close link between methodological theory and research practice. Active participation is expected throughout the course, as discussions are a central component of the learning process.

The pedagogical design of the course emphasises **analytical engagement, reflexive thinking, and methodological decision-making**. Students are encouraged to critically evaluate qualitative research choices and to reflect on how these choices inform and shape their own Master’s thesis projects. All additional organisational information, readings, and announcements are provided via Moodle.

## Assessment

Students’ performance in this course is assessed through **continuous assessment**, reflecting both individual engagement and applied methodological competence. Assessment is based on the following components:

- **Participation in class discussion** – 10%
- **Group presentation** – 45%
- **Skeleton of the Methodology Chapter of the Master’s Thesis** – 45%

A minimum of **50% of the total points** must be attained in order to pass the course.

### Participation in Class Discussion (10%)

Active and informed participation during all course sessions is expected. Students are assessed on the

quality of their contributions to class discussions, including their ability to critically engage with the literature, comment on empirical examples, and reflect on methodological issues raised during lectures.

### Group Presentation: Analysis of an Empirical Qualitative Article (45%)

The group presentation requires students to **present and critically discuss an empirical article that employs qualitative research methods**. The objective of this assignment is to develop students' ability to analyse and evaluate methodological choices in published research and to relate these choices to their own Master's thesis projects.

#### Task and focus

Each group selects an empirical qualitative article published in a **top-tier academic journal** (e.g. *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Organization Studies*, *Strategic Management Journal*). The presentation should:

- Explain the qualitative research design and methodological choices adopted in the article.
- Critically assess these choices with reference to course concepts and literature.
- Discuss how the selected article has influenced, or could influence, the methodological decisions in the students' own Master's thesis projects.

#### Organisation and submission

Groups are announced on the first day of the course. Presentations take place on the **last day of the course (12 May 2026)**. Presentation materials must be submitted via email to [finlay.lawerentz@univie.ac.at](mailto:finlay.lawerentz@univie.ac.at) by **11 May 2026, 11:00 am**.

### Skeleton of the Methodology Chapter of the Master's Thesis (45%)

This individual written assignment requires students to prepare a **structured skeleton of the methodology chapter** of their Master's thesis. The aim is to translate course content into a coherent and well-justified methodological design.

#### Task and scope

The skeleton should include all main sections of a qualitative methodology chapter, accompanied by a short paragraph for each section outlining what will be discussed and justified. The assignment should demonstrate methodological coherence and clear alignment between research objectives, design, data collection, and analysis.

#### Formal requirements

- Length: **4 pages**, excluding references
- Submission deadline: **29 May 2026, 12:00 pm (noon)**
- Submission format: Email to [finlay.lawerentz@univie.ac.at](mailto:finlay.lawerentz@univie.ac.at)

### Grading scheme

Final grades are assigned according to the following scale:

88% - 100% | 1

75% - 87% | 2

63% - 74% | 3

50% - 62% | 4

## Dates & Schedule

<i>Session</i>	<i>Agenda</i>	<i>Reference Readings</i>
(1) <b>04 May 2026</b> 09:45–14:45 SR 6	<b>Course introduction and foundations of qualitative research</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course organisation, structure, and assessment overview</li> <li>• What is qualitative research?</li> <li>• Role of qualitative research in academic inquiry</li> <li>• Defining qualitative research: characteristics and forms of qualitative data</li> <li>• The theorising potential of qualitative research: different paradigmatic positioning</li> </ul>	Doz (2011) Welch et al. (2011)
(2) <b>05 May 2026</b> 09:45–14:45 SR 6	<b>Qualitative case study research</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to qualitative case study research: logic and purposes</li> <li>• Units of analysis and the role of context</li> <li>• Discussion of exemplary qualitative case study papers in International Business illustrating different paradigmatic positioning</li> <li>• Sampling in qualitative case study research</li> </ul>	<b>Class examples:</b> Coviello (2006) Yousfi (2014)
(3) <b>11 May 2026</b> 09:45–14:45 SR 6	<b>Qualitative interviewing as a qualitative research method</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative interviewing: purposes, forms, and reflexivity</li> <li>• Sampling and access in qualitative interview research</li> <li>• Interviewing in practice: Kvale’s seven stages of the interview inquiry</li> <li>• Criteriology in qualitative research based on different philosophical assumptions</li> <li>• Discussion of an empirical qualitative interview study with a focus on methodological choices</li> </ul> <b>Qualitative data analysis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to qualitative data analysis using interview protocols</li> <li>• Illustrative examples of coding and interpretation</li> </ul>	Alvesson (2003) Williams et al. (2023)  <b>Class examples:</b> Stoian et al. (2018) Welch & Piekkari (2017)
(4) <b>12 May 2026</b> 09:45–14:45 SR 13	<b>Student group presentations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation and discussion of empirical qualitative research articles</li> <li>• Other approaches to qualitative research</li> <li>• Discussion of methodological choices and implications for Master’s thesis research</li> <li>• Course synthesis and concluding reflections</li> </ul>	

## Registration/De-Registration

<https://ufind.univie.ac.at/>

### Literature

#### Qualitative research

- Chidlow, A., Plakoyiannaki, E., & Welch, C., 2014. "Translation in cross-language international business research: Beyond equivalence", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 5, pp. 562-582.
- Doz, Y., 2011. Qualitative research for international business. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42(5), pp. 582–590.
- Plakoyiannaki, E. and Budhwar, P. 2021. "From convention to alternatives rethinking qualitative research in management scholarship", *British Journal of Management*, 32(1), pp. 3-6.
- Welch, C., Plakoyiannaki, E., Piekkari, R., and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, E., 2013. "Legitimizing diverse uses for qualitative research: A rhetorical analysis of two management journals", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 245-264.
- Welch, C., & Piekkari, R., 2017. "How should we (not) judge the 'quality' of qualitative research? A re-assessment of current evaluative criteria in International Business", *Journal of World Business*, 52(5), pp. 714–725.

#### Qualitative case study research

- Dyer, W.G. and Wilkins, A.L (1991): "Better stories, not better constructs, to generate better theory: A rejoinder to Eisenhardt", *Academy of Management Review*, 16 (3): pp. 613-619.
- Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989): "Building theories from case study research", *Academy of Management Review*, 14 (4): pp. 532-550.
- Fletcher, M. and Plakoyiannaki, E.: "Case study selection in international business: key issues and common misconceptions", forthcoming in *Piekkari, R. and C. Welch (eds), Case Study Research for International Business*, Edward Elgar.
- Fletcher, M., Zhao, Y., Plakoyiannaki, E., and Buck, T. (2018): "Three pathways to case selection in international business: A twenty-year review, analysis and synthesis", *International Business Review*, Vol. 27, No 4, pp. 755-766.
- Ji, J., Plakoyiannaki, E., Dimitratos P., and Chen, S. (2019): "The qualitative case study research in international entrepreneurship: A state of the art and analysis", *International Marketing Review*, 36(1), pp. 164-187.
- Leppäaho, T., Plakoyiannaki, E., and Dimitratos, P. (2016): "The case study in family business: An analysis of current research practices and recommendations", *Family Business Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 159-173.
- Piekkari, R., Plakoyiannaki, E. & Welch, C. (2010): "Good' case research in industrial marketing: Insights from research practice", *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39: pp. 109-117.
- Plakoyiannaki, E., Wei, T., Prashantham, S. (2019): "Rethinking qualitative scholarship in emerging markets: Researching, theorizing, and reporting", *Management and Organization Review*, 15(2): pp. 217-234.
- Poulis K., Poulis, E., and Plakoyiannaki, E. (2013): "The role of context in case selection: an International Business perspective", *International Business Review*, 22 (1), 304-314.

- Stake, R.E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Welch, C. Piekkari, R., Plakoyiannaki E. and Paavilainen-Mantymaki, E. (2011): "Theorising from case studies: Towards a pluralist future for International Business research", *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42 (6), 740-762.
- Welch, C., Piekkari, R., Paavilainen-Mantymäki, E. and Plakoyiannaki, E. (2022): "Reconciling theory and context: How the case study can set a new agenda for IB Research", *Journal of International Business Studies*, 53(1), pp. 1-23.
- Yin, R. (2018): "Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods", Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, USA.

### **Qualitative interviews**

- Alvesson, M. (2003): "Beyond neopositivists, romantics and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research", *Academy of Management Review*, 23(1): pp. 13-33.
- Boje, D. M. (2001): "Narrative Methods for Organizational & Communication Research". Sage Publications Ltd: London.
- Coviello, N. E. (2006): "The Network Dynamics of International New Ventures", *Journal of International Business Studies*, 37(5), 713–731.
- Huber, G. P. and Power, D. J. (1985): "Retrospective reports of strategic-level managers: guidelines for increasing their accuracy", *Strategic Management Journal*, 6: pp. 171–80.
- Kumar, N., Stern, N. and Anderson, J (1993): "Conducting interorganizational research using key informants", *Academy of Management Journal*, 36(6): pp. 1633-1651.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Interviewing*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- Stoian, M.C., Dimitratos, P., and Plakoyiannaki, E. (2018): "SME internationalization beyond exporting: A knowledge-based perspective across managers and advisers", *Journal of World Business*, 53(5): pp. 786-779.
- Welch, C., Marschan-Piekkari, R., Penttinen, H. and Tahvanainen, M. (2002): "Corporate elites as informants in qualitative international business research", *International Business Review*, 11(5): pp. 611-628.
- Williams, N., Plakoyiannaki, E., & Krasniqi, B. A. (2023): "When Forced Migrants Go Home: The Journey of Returnee Entrepreneurs in the Post-conflict Economies of Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo", *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 47(2): pp. 430–460.
- Yousfi, H. (2014): "Rethinking Hybridity in Postcolonial Contexts: What Changes and What Persists? The Tunisian case of Poulina's managers", *Organization Studies*, 35(3): pp. 393 - 421.

### **Other Qualitative methods**

#### **Archival Data**

- Welch, C. (2000): "The archaeology of business networks: The use of archival records in case study research", *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 8: pp. 197-208.

### **Focus groups**

- Calder, B. (1977): "Focus groups and nature of qualitative marketing-research", *Journal of Marketing Research*, 14(3): pp. 353–364
- Kitzinger, J. (1995): "Qualitative Research: Introducing focus groups", *BMJ*, 311 (7000): pp. 299–302.
- Morgan, D. L. (1996): "Focus Groups", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22(1): pp. 129–152.
- O'Connor, H., & Madge, C. (2003): "Focus groups in cyberspace": using the Internet for qualitative research", *Qualitative Market Research*, 6(2): pp. 133–143.
- Reed, J., & Payton, V. R. (1997): "Focus groups: issues of analysis and interpretation", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 26(4): pp. 765–771.
- Stewart, D. W., Shamdasani, P. N., & Rook, D. W. (2007): "Conducting the focus group". In *Focus Groups*, 2nd ed., pp. 89-107. SAGE.

### **Observation**

- Spradley, J. (2016): "*Participant Observation*", Waveland Pr Inc; Reissue edition.
- Kathleen M. DeWalt (2010): "*Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*", AltaMira Press; Second Edition edition.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

- Dubois, A. and Gadde, L-E. (2002): "Systematic Combining: An Abductive approach to case research", *Journal of Business Research*, 55, pp. 553-560.
- Gioia, D., Corley K. G. and Hamilton, A. (2013): "Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research", *Organizational Research Methods*, 16 (1), pp. 15-31.
- Sinkovics, R.R., Elfriede, P. and Ghauri, P. (2005): "Analysing textual data in international marketing research", *Qualitative Research and International Journal*, 8 (1): pp. 9-38.
- Spiggle, S. (1994): "Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2: pp. 491-503.