

San José State University
Department of Sociology and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences
SOC 105: Qualitative Research Methods
SPRING 2025 Course Syllabus



“I tell my students, ‘When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game.’” - Toni Morrison

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and are mindful that San Jose State University sits on the land of the Ohlone and the Muwekma Ohlone people, who trace their ancestry through Missions Dolores, Santa Clara, and San Jose. We remember their connection to this region and give thanks for the opportunity to live, work, learn, and play on their traditional homeland.

Course and Contact Information

Professor: Dr. Yolanda Wiggins (she/her/hers)

Email: yolanda.wiggins@sjsu.edu

Class Days/Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30PM-2:45PM

Location: Sweeney Hall, Room 315

Course Prerequisites: SOCI 1, SOCI 100W SOCI 101, Upper Division Standing

Course Description

This course is an immersive, hands-on introduction to qualitative research methods in sociology. Students will learn how to design, conduct, analyze, and present original qualitative research projects. Through readings, in-class activities, and collaborative exercises, students will develop the skills to collect and interpret data in ethically sound and analytically rigorous ways. The course emphasizes reflexivity, creativity, and sociological imagination.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course you will be able to:

1. Formulate a qualitative research question that is clear, sociologically grounded, and researchable.
2. Apply qualitative data collection methods (e.g., interviews, participant observation, content analysis) effectively.

3. Analyze qualitative data through coding, theme development, and memo writing.
4. Produce a final research report that communicates findings to both scholarly and public audiences.
5. Critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of qualitative research.

Course Philosophy

Qualitative research is more than a method—it's a way of seeing. In this class, you will not just “learn about” qualitative research; you will do it. We will experiment, collaborate, problem-solve, mirroring the messiness and creativity of real-world research.

Required Materials

All readings will be available on Canvas. Readings are primarily peer-reviewed research articles.

Expectations and Guidelines for Success

- **Engage actively:** Our discussions and activities depend on your preparation and participation.
- **Complete readings before class:** Jot down key points, questions, and observations. You don't have to “master” the reading before class, but you do have to be ready to think and talk about it.
- **Respect all perspectives:** Take issue with ideas, not people. Practice curiosity and thoughtful engagement.
- **Honor deadlines:** Major assignments have clear due dates.
Late work will not be accepted. No exceptions.
- **Care for yourself and others:** This course addresses personal and sometimes sensitive topics. You are never required to disclose personal experiences, and alternative arrangements can be made when necessary.

Course Components & Grading

The assignments in this course are designed to immerse you in hands-on sociological research methods while helping you communicate findings to diverse audiences. You will learn to analyze, synthesize, and present sociological insights using qualitative research approaches. Each major project builds towards your “Final Synthesis Portfolio,” which integrates and reflects on your work across the semester.

1. Op-Ed for a Public Audience (20%)

Students select a contemporary social issue and write an original 800-1000 word Op-ed aimed at a public audience, using credible sociological research to strengthen their argument. The piece should be engaging, accessible, and persuasive, while accurately representing research evidence.

Purpose: Strengthens students' ability to communicate complex ideas for the public, bridging scholarship and civic discourse.

Deliverables:

- 1-paragraph pitch with preliminary sources (Week 4)
- Final op-ed with reference list (Week 6)

2. Interview Quest: Stories in Conversation (25%)

Students will conduct two mini interviews (20 minutes each) with people connected to their research interest. They will upload audio recordings, write two 1-2 paragraph narrative portraits, and produce a 2-page thematic brief analyzing emerging patterns.

Purpose: Gives hands-on experience in qualitative interviewing, ethical considerations, and thematic analysis in a fun, exploratory format.

Deliverables:

- Interview guide + consent form (Week 7)
- Audio files + narrative portraits + thematic brief (Week 10)

3. Method in Action: Group Facilitation (20%)

Beginning in Week 4, small groups will facilitate class by applying one of the week's readings/methods to a real-world example or mini case study. Each group will:

- Create 3-4 discussion prompts or applied exercises
- Connect the activity to the assigned readings and qualitative method(s)
- Submit facilitation outline + reflection (due 48 hours after facilitation)

Purpose: Encourages collaborative learning, creativity, and deeper engagement with methods in practice.

4. Final Synthesis Portfolio (35%)

Students revise and compile their major work from the semester (op-ed, interview quest, method in action materials) into a cohesive portfolio. They will write a 3-4 page analytical introduction and conclusion explaining how their work demonstrates growth in qualitative research skills and how these skills transfer to careers or public life.

Purpose: Fosters reflection, revision, and synthesis; shows students the big picture of their learning.

Full revised portfolio with introduction & conclusion (Finals Week)

5. 3-2-1 Reading Engagements (10%)

Each week (except on your assigned facilitation week), you will post a brief response to the assigned readings on Canvas by Tuesday at 11:59PM. Your post should include:

- 3 key takeaways - main insights, arguments, or findings
- 2 questions - points you want clarified, challenged, or discussed further in class
- 1 connection - a link to a current event, real-world example, personal experience, or another course concept

Purpose: This exercise ensures you are actively engaging with the material and prepared for class discussions. It also provides useful input for your peers who are leading the week's facilitation.

Course Outline

WEEK 1: AUGUST 21 & 26

- Topic: Introduction to Qualitative Research & Course Overview
- Overview of syllabus, assignments, and grading
- Why qualitative methods matter in sociology & beyond
- Assignments:
 - **No 3-2-1 due this week**

WEEK 2: AUGUST 28 & SEPTEMBER 2

- Topic: History of Qualitative Research & Ethics in Practice
- From early ethnographies to contemporary approaches
- Belmont Report, IRB, and ethical dilemmas in qualitative research
- Assignments:

- **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due Tues 9/2 by 11:59PM**

WEEK 3: SEPTEMBER 4 & 9

- Topic: Research Design & Asking Good Questions
- Matching methods to research questions
- Assignments:
 - **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due Tues 9/9 by 11:59PM**

Week 4: SEPTEMBER 11 (NO CLASS) & SEPTEMBER 16

- Topic: Observation & Fieldnotes
- How to see like a sociologist
- Thick description & analytic memos
- Assignments:
 - **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due Tues 9/16 by 11:59PM**
 - **First Method in Action Group Facilitation - Thurs 9/16**

Week 5: SEPTEMBER 18 & SEPTEMBER 23 (No Class)

- Topic: Interviewing Fundamentals
- Building rapport, crafting interview guides
- Ethical and practical considerations
- Assignments:
 - **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due Tues 9/23 by 11: 59PM**
 - **Method in Action Facilitation - Thurs 9/18**

Week 6: SEPTEMBER 25 (No Class) & SEPTEMBER 30

- Topic: Advanced interviewing & recording data
- Active listening, probing for depth
- Recording & transcription best practices
- Assignments:
 - **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due 9/30 by 11:59PM**
 - **Method in Action Group Facilitation - Thurs 9/30**

Week 7: OCTOBER 2 & OCTOBER 7

- Topic: Coding & Analyzing Qualitative
- Assignments:
 - **Op-Ed with Sociological Research due Sun 10/5 by 11:59PM**
 - **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due Tues 10/7 by 11:59PM**
 - **Method in Action Group Facilitation - Thurs 10/7**

Week 8: OCTOBER 9 & OCTOBER 14

- Topic: Content & Discourse Analysis

- Assignments:
 - **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due 10/14 by 11:59PM**
 - **Method in Action Group Facilitation - Thurs 10/14**

Week 9: OCTOBER 16 & OCTOBER 21

- Topic: Reflexivity & Positionality
- Assignments:
 - **Mini Interview Project due Sun 10/19 by 11:59PM**
 - **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due Tues 10/21 by 11:59PM**
 - **Method in Action Group Facilitation - Thurs 10/21**

Week 10: OCTOBER 23 & OCTOBER 28

- Topic: Case Studies & Comparative Approaches
- Assignments:
 - **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due Tues 10/28 by 11:59PM**
 - **Method in Action Group Facilitation - Thurs 10/28**

Week 11: OCTOBER 30 & NOVEMBER 4

- Topic: Visual & Digital Methods
- Assignments:
 - **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due Tues 11/4 by 11:59PM**
 - **Method in Action Group Facilitation - Thurs 11/4**

Week 12: NOVEMBER 6 & NOVEMBER 11

- Topic: Participatory & Community-Based Research
- Assignments:
 - **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due Tues 11/11 by 11:59PM**
 - **Methods in Action Group Facilitation - Thurs 11/11**

Week 13: NOVEMBER 13 & NOVEMBER 18

- Topic: Writing for Public & Academic Audiences
- Assignments:
 - **3-2-1 Reading Engagement due Tues 11/18 by 11:59PM**
 - **Method in Action Group Facilitation - Thurs 11/18**

Week 14: NOVEMBER 20 & NOVEMBER 25

- Topic: Peer Review & Revision Workshop

- Assignments:
 - **No 3-2-1 this week**
 - **Bring draft of Final Synthesis Portfolio to class**
 - **Method in Action Group Facilitation - Thurs 11/20**

Week 15: DECEMBER 2 & DECEMBER 4

- Topic: Course Wrap-Up & Final Reflections
- Reflecting on transferable skills from qualitative research
- In class celebration & key takeaways
- Assignments:
 - **No 3-2-1 this week**
 - **Final Synthesis Portfolio due Sun 12/7 by 11:59 PM**