

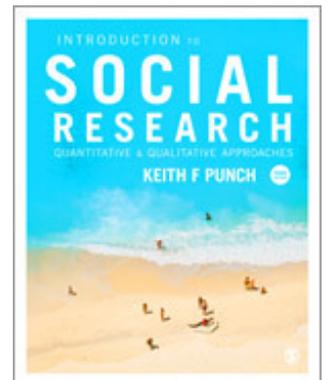
Book Review: Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches, Third Edition, by Keith F Punch

*In **Introduction to Social Research**, Keith F. Punch wants to ‘demystify’ and ‘simplify’ the research process, in an attempt to show that quality research can always be achieved. With its straightforward language, an intuitive structure, and well-defined learning objectives, this book does just that, finds **Sophie Lecheler**. This third edition features a number of interesting updates, such as chapters on research ethics and conducting research online.*

Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative & Qualitative Approaches. Third Edition. Keith F Punch. Sage. February 2014.

Find this book:

Like others offering university students a guide to undertaking research (e.g., [Bryman](#) or [Gilbert](#)), [Keith F. Punch](#) structures his book to mirror the steps of the entire research process. This alone makes *Introduction to Social Research* a useful source for both students on methods courses and for those writing a thesis or research paper. Following an overview of how to formulate research questions (Chapter 4), Punch gives us a chapter on linking research questions to data (Chapter 5), followed by insights into literature reviews (Chapter 6, new in third edition), research design (Chapters 7-8, 10-11 and 14), data analysis (Chapters 9 and 12), and research writing (Chapter 15).





This third edition has a new improved chapter structure, with each chapter starting with a number of learning objectives (e.g., Chapter 7 on ‘Qualitative Research Design’ has as one of its objectives “Describe the main components of research design, and how questions, designs and data are connected” (p. 114)). This gives the reader an excellent idea of what to expect from each chapter. A summary and a list of key terms that have emerged throughout the chapter are listed at the end of each, and there are new exercises and study questions as well as some very helpful literature references. Most importantly, within most chapters, examples of existing research studies help to illustrate the research process (e.g., in Example 10.1, p. 212, various examples of experiments such as [Asch conformity experiments](#)).

The book covers both qualitative and quantitative social science research methods, with Punch delivering clear definitions and examples of what data looks like in either research tradition (‘numbers’ vs. ‘not-numbers’). In Chapter 2, which is also new in this third edition, the author explains which research topics warrant either quantitative or qualitative research methods.

For students who might read this book in preparation for conducting their own quantitative research project, Chapter 4 provides a short and very handy explanation of when to formulate hypotheses rather than research questions. This is relevant for students using quantitative methods such as experimentation, where testing of a narrow set of hypotheses is often the standard. In Chapter 10, the terms independent, dependent, control variable, and causality are neatly defined, and a description of experimental and survey designs is given – again, all useful for novice readers. The chapter does not, however, provide information on other methodologies common within the social sciences, such as content analysis. There are some important tips on how to formulate survey questions and other measurement aspects in Chapter 11, and Chapter 12 gives an introduction to a range of data analysis techniques (e.g., ANOVA, regression analysis). While there is a reference to software packages used to analyse quantitative data, the book does not provide a step-by-step guide for how to use SPSS, STATA or other software.



Credit: [Kun-chia Wu](#) CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

This book remains very informative when it comes to qualitative research. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 cover common research strategies, such as case studies, ethnography, and grounded theory. The book focuses on the qualitative interview as the “most prominent data collection tool in qualitative research” (p. 144). Chapter 8 also provides a very detailed overview of different sampling techniques in qualitative research (Table 8.1, p. 162), which should be very useful to teachers aiming to explain sampling in qualitative (student-run, small-scale) studies.

Students are often confused by the question of how to actually analyse qualitative research data. As elsewhere in the book, Punch takes a practical and very sensible approach: in Chapter 9, he first explains that there is indeed great complexity in the field of qualitative data analysis, and then focuses on a number of easy-to-follow techniques which can be used to interpret qualitative data. This also means that this chapter only touches upon techniques such as discourse analysis or semiotics (there are literature suggestions on pages 202-204).

Another new aspect of the third edition of is a chapter on research ethics (Chapter 3). A number of hypothetical examples (e.g., page 51) illustrate the conundrum students can face when setting up their own research study. The new Chapter 13 on research and the internet, contributed by Wayne McGowan, provides a short outline of how the internet may change social research. The chapter neatly explains some of the main challenges. However, given the growing number of student research projects using cheaper online participant panels or crowdsourcing techniques such as [Amazon Mechanical Turk](#), as well as the very common use of web-based survey tools, more information will be required in future editions as to how the internet continues to change social research.

All in all, this book is incredibly well-structured and free from jargon and overcomplication. It is a joy to read, and it guides the reader step-by-step towards understanding what social research is all about. Keith Punch certainly achieves what he set out to do, namely to write a book that is the perfect accompaniment to social research methods courses “before any methodological specialisation”, but which still offers enough “tangible and practical understanding of issues, methods and techniques to get a project under way” (p. 2).

Dr Sophie Lecheler is a Marie Curie Research Fellow at the Department of Government at the LSE and an Assistant Professor of Political Communication at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR) at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Her [research](#) focuses on political journalism in the EU and the effects of journalistic news on citizens’ political attitudes and behaviour. She is currently working on a project on the role of emotions in European political communication. She tweets at [@Sophelpoffel](#). [Read reviews by Sophie.](#)

Related

[Book Review: Doing Research in the Real World by David E. Gray](#) In "Christina Dobson"

[Book Review: Introducing Qualitative Research: A Student's Guide, 2nd Edition, by Rose Barbour](#) In "Christina Dobson"

[Book Review: Visualizing Social Science Research: Maps, Methods and Meaning by Johannes Wheeldon & Mauri K. Ahlberg](#)In "Methodology and Research book reviews"

- Copyright 2013 LSE Review of Books