

# The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies

## Methodology

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There are two ways in which to grasp the concept of methodology. The first and technically more sound route is to understand the term as referring to the philosophical investigation of the techniques of inquiry adopted by any given discipline. As such, methodology is a branch of epistemology. However, it is common place, if somewhat misguided, to also use the term methodology to refer to the specific techniques employed by a discipline to acquire and manage data. Here, the concept is being used to refer to research methods.

The main methodological/epistemological debate within cultural studies has been between representationalism (realism) and anti-representationalism (poststructuralism, postmodernism and pragmatism). The realist argument is that a degree of certain knowledge about an independent object world (a real world) is possible even though methodological vigilance and reflexivity need to be maintained. In contrast, writers influenced by poststructuralism, postmodernism and pragmatism do not think that an objective and accurate picture of an independent object world is possible. Here, knowledge is not a question of discovering objective and accurate truth but of the construction of interpretations about the world which are 'taken to be true'.

The standard methodological distinction regarding research methods is between quantitative and qualitative approaches. That is, between, respectively, methods that centre on numbers and the counting of things (for example, statistics and surveys) and those that concentrate on the meanings generated by actors gathered through participant observation, interviews, focus groups and textual analysis. Cultural studies has not paid much attention to the classical questions of research methods but has for practical purposes favoured qualitative methods with their focus on cultural meaning. Thus, work in cultural studies has centred on three kinds of research methods:

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