

Positivism vs Interpretivism - The Cheat Sheet

View of society: Society is made up of social facts that exist outside individuals	View of research: Research should be objective, neutral and detached	View of society: Society is created through meanings and interactions	View of research: Research should understand people's experiences and viewpoints
Is it scientific? Yes – should copy the natural sciences (physics, biology)	Main aim: To find patterns and causes of behaviour	Is it scientific? No – humans are different from objects and must be interpreted	Main aim: To understand why people behave as they do
Focus: Structure (class, gender, institutions)	Reliability vs validity: High reliability (replicable) but lower validity	Focus: Social action (meanings, motives, identity)	Reliability vs validity: High validity (verstehen) but low reliability
Level of analysis: Macro (large-scale patterns and trends)	Typical methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires • Structured interviews • Official statistics • Experiments 	Level of analysis: Micro (small-scale interaction and daily life)	Typical methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstructured interviews • Participant observation • Case studies • Personal documents
Type of data: Quantitative (numbers, statistics)	Positivist Theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functionalism (Durkheim, Parsons) • Marxism (sometimes) • New Right 	Type of data: Qualitative (words, meanings, experiences)	Interpretivist Theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactionism • Phenomenology • Ethnomethodology • Some feminism/neo-Marxism

