

# 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

**Is it scientific?**  
Yes – should copy the natural sciences (physics, biology)

**Main aim:**  
To find patterns and causes of behaviour

**Focus:**  
Structure (class, gender, institutions)

**Reliability vs validity:**  
High reliability (replicable) but lower validity

**Level of analysis:**  
Macro (large-scale patterns and trends)

**Typical methods**

- Questionnaires
- Structured interviews
- Official statistics
- Experiments

**Type of data:**  
Quantitative (numbers, statistics)

**Positivist Theories**

- Functionalism (Durkheim, Parsons)
- Marxism (sometimes)
- New Right

**View of society:**  
Society is created through meanings and interactions

**Is it scientific?**  
No – humans are different from objects and must be interpreted

**Focus:**  
Social action (meanings, motives, identity)

**Level of analysis:**  
Micro (small-scale interaction and daily life)

**Type of data:**  
Qualitative (words, meanings, experiences)

**View of research:**  
Research should understand people's experiences and viewpoints

**Main aim:**  
To understand why people behave as they do

**Reliability vs validity:**  
High validity (verstehen) but low reliability

**Typical methods**

- Unstructured interviews
- Participant observation
- Case studies
- Personal documents

**Interpretivist Theories**

- Interactionism
- Phenomenology
- Ethnomethodology
- Some feminism/neo-Marxism

