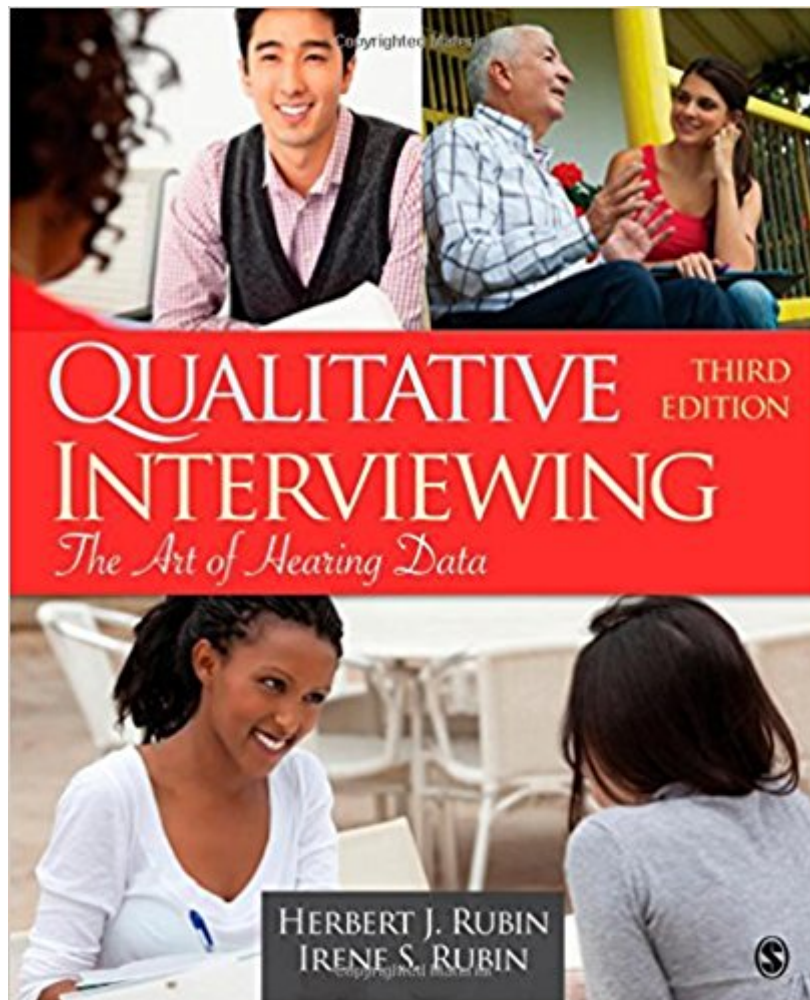




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# Qualitative Interviewing: The Art Of Hearing Data



## Synopsis

Using in-depth qualitative interviews, authors Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin have researched topics ranging from community redevelopment programs to the politics of budgeting and been energized by the depth, thoroughness, and credibility of what was revealed. They describe in-depth qualitative interviewing from beginning to end, from its underlying philosophy and assumptions to project design, analysis and write up.

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**Introduction and Stated Aims of the Book** Having published many books and articles that rely on in-depth, qualitative interviewing, Professors Emeriti Herbert and Irene Rubin (husband and wife) have written a third edition of their book, *Qualitative Interviewing: The art of hearing data*. This edition had been cited 8,381 times on Google Scholar and 3,359 times on ERIC at the time of this writing. Rubin and Rubin state that with the book, they wanted to share their model of responsive interviewing (hereafter RI), and to share the "exhilaration" they have felt as they used the techniques.

**Overview of the Chapters** To help readers appreciate and understand the history from which the authors developed their RI technique, they provide an overview of the various perspectives and approaches in research, giving a history of positivism and its descendants, and compare and contrast qualitative and quantitative paradigms. Chapters 1 and 2 discuss the strengths of in-depth interviewing, highlight differences between it and everyday conversations. They describe how the RI model fits in with the two major social research paradigms (positivism vs. naturalism). In Chapter 3 the authors more thoroughly define RI. It is characterized by a respectful relationship of trust, a supportive tone, flexible design and questions. It accepts the complexity and ambiguity of life, and that researchers' and conversational partners' personalities will influence the interviews. They also discuss naturalistic data-gathering techniques. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss designing research for quality, using the RI model. Chapters 6 and 7 discusses building and maintaining conversational partnerships. Researchers should begin by examining themselves and their own biases. RI uses and extends skills from quotidian conversations. Chapters 8 through 10 discuss the structure of the RI: main questions, probes, and follow-ups, and what to consider while writing them. The authors describe four patterns of interviews to help researchers balance the RI structure in different scenarios. In Chapter 11, added for this edition, Rubin and Rubin impart their wisdom regarding coping with interviewing in unusual circumstances (e.g.: cross-cultural, cross-language, and multiparty interviews) and with specialized populations (e.g. technical experts,

elites, prisoners, the elderly, and children). Chapter 12 takes readers through the multi-iterative data analysis process, from transcription through coding, sorting, weighing and integrating, generating a theory, and generalizing findings. Chapter 13 discusses sharing the results through various forms of publication. They end the book with their reflections on how working with RI has impacted them, particularly the joy it has brought them.

### Strengths and Weaknesses

This book has many strengths, and the one that stands out most is both authors' combined wealth of experience. Readers of this book get access to the combined (and collaborated) wisdom, experience, and advice of two highly respected researchers. Rubin and Rubin frequently illustrate their points with anecdotes from their decades of research. In this way, the authors practice what they preach regarding establishing credibility: they use the data to support the major conclusions, and logically lead the reader to the same conclusion that the authors made. Readers may get qualitative data-gathering experience of their own as they read the collection of anecdotes, in addition to being able to learn directly from Rubin and Rubin's imparted wisdom and advice. The authors mention problems and challenges commonly encountered, and usually follow up immediately with a way to address or ameliorate the problems. Additionally, the authors often offer snippets of dialogue that prospective interviewers might use, such as to make a transition, to broach a touchy subject, or to ask for clarification. These aren't provided to put words in the student's mouth, but to give concrete examples especially where further description about the technique would not be helpful. The lines have presumably worked for Rubin and Rubin, but can be adapted to one's own style and scenario. Perhaps therefore the strengths of the book could be subsumed under one heading: applicable wisdom.

This 256-page volume stands ready for classroom use, complete with references, and indices by author and subject. Important terms are bolded next to their in-text definitions. Its tone in the second person maintains an accessible conversation with the reader. The book is written for novice qualitative researchers, but journalists-in-training could also benefit. Its wealth of advice from two seasoned professionals also makes it noteworthy for experienced researchers who wish to do (more) responsive interviewing in their studies. In the third edition Rubin and Rubin have included even more of their own anecdotes, while still incorporating the existing literature. Those stories, the new Chapter 11, plus the 2012 discussion on computer-assisted qualitative data analysis make the 3rd edition superior to the 2nd.

The book is gender-aware and seems to be gender-balanced, offering both Irene's and Herb's viewpoints on a given topic. One chapter states that women are more likely to give two messages at the same time. Another points out that men and women may think of marriage differently (responsibilities and sexual intimacy vs. emotional support and communication), and therefore should be coded separately. The book certainly achieved the first of its aims. Rubin

and Rubin shared thoroughly detailed information about the RI technique, why to do it, how to go about it, and what to expect. I felt like I vicariously added to my own journalistic interviewing experience. They achieved the second objective, but therein lies my only complaint. They took too long to get to openly sharing the joy of RI. They hinted at it in the Preface, and then the exhilaration got put on hold for the lesson on the history of research paradigms. They waited to open the gates until Chapter 14. I wanted to be sold earlier and more often on the joy of doing RI, so I wish they had included it more strongly during the body. Perhaps it could have been woven into more chapter introductions and/or conclusions. Still, this was a minor drawback. I enjoyed reading the book, and I highly recommend it.

I am reading this book for a summer intensive class on Qualitative Research Methods & having had switched my major from Psychology to Sociology after wanting to quit school all together after their statistics class, I was not expecting to like this book or this course - however this book is CRAZY EASY to read & is actually not even boring. I am already on chapter 10 (first week of class too!) and it is by no means a chore to read this. I can't say the same for some of the other books I have read with other classes even outside psychology (or for the other book we read three chapters from for this course) - its really a very interesting and well written book.

This book covers not only the foundations of Interviewing, but also the methodology in detail. I enjoyed this book very much because the author suggests the way how the interviewers exercise interviewing. Very well organized.

Good reference book to support other books on interviewing skills and use of interviews in case studies and for qualitative research.

Very helpful techniques and structure are provided

book was in perfect shape

I had the previous edition of this book and I am happy also with the new one. Best of its kind.

Excellent book for some one who is doing qualitative research or narrative writing.

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