

Developers guidance

Qualitative research: collecting data on your digital technology

Downloaded on September 17th, 2025

This is **best practice guidance**

Although not legally required, it's an essential activity.

From:

- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

This Guide covers:

- United Kingdom

Last reviewed: 11 October 2024



Qualitative research will give you a much richer understanding of how a user interacts with your digital technology.

Benefits of qualitative research

Collecting qualitative data is an important part of [doing user research](#).

Qualitative data helps you:

- understand how health and social care staff would interact with data produced by your technology
- identify any barriers to using the data for clinical decision-making

Users may have a lack of trust in technology. This is a common barrier to the successful implementation of digital technology. For example, patients and staff may not understand AI decision-making. That's why qualitative data on user acceptance is particularly important for AI technologies.

Qualitative research definition

Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical subjective data. You do this by using methods like interviews and field studies. This helps you understand a user's attitudes, thoughts and beliefs.

Qualitative research can give you a richer explanation of what is happening when someone uses your technology.

Difference between qualitative and quantitative research

Quantitative research can describe:

- patterns of disengagement with an app
- what demographic factors predict disengagement

Qualitative research can describe **why** a user stopped using the app.

How to do qualitative research

Determine if qualitative research would be useful. For example, you should do qualitative research if you need an in-depth understanding of a user's thoughts and experiences.

Compare different qualitative study designs and choose an appropriate method. See guidance on [qualitative studies](#) from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.

Analyse the data. The most common method is thematic analysis. See guidance on how to [analyse qualitative data](#) from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.