Observation is a qualitative data collection method using our senses. It's not just looking or listening. Observations are systematic and planned.

Settings for Observations

Observations can be conducted in:

- **artificial settings**: Controlled environments like laboratories or specially arranged rooms.
- **natural settings:** Real-world environments like parks or public places.

Types of Observation

You can be an observer in different ways:

1. **Complete Observer**: You sit in a place like a coffee shop, airport, or park, and watch without the subjects knowing they are being observed.
2. **Observer-as-Participant:** You introduce yourself to a group and observe them while partially participating in their activities.
3. **Participant-as-Observer:** You are already part of the group's activities, and they know you are observing them.
4. **Complete Participant:** You fully engage in the group's activities without them knowing you are observing. This is like acting as a spy.

Your role and the type of observation depend on your research purpose, the data you need, and how familiar you are with the group. Always consider the ethics of your observation strategy and get consent from your subjects whenever possible.

Designing Instruments for Recording Observational Data

Planning an observation involves several steps. Start with informal observations to understand the environment and community. Once familiar, decide what to observe and how to record it.

Example: Observing Lunch Habits at School

Begin with informal observations to note different aspects:

- Settings: Canteen, student lounge, playground
- Actors: Students of various grades, canteen staff
- Actions: Buying food, unpacking home-prepared food, eating salads or fast food
- Relationships: Sharing food, ordering together, buying similar items
- Time/Frequency: Eating during different parts of the break

After this exploratory stage, create a structured observation protocol to record information. For example, if observing in the student lounge over one week, record:

- Day and number of students having lunch
- Number of students with food from home
- Number of students buying food from the canteen
- Number of students ordering off-campus

Date	Total # of Students	Brought Food from Home	Bought Food from Canteen	Ordered Off-Campus
20.04.2024				
21.04.2024				
22.04.2024				

Narrowing down the observation categories helps to accurately record data. Observing people in changing settings is challenging due to people's unpredictable actions. Make sure to consider your data along with other information you have before coming to conclusions.