

George Mason University  
College of Education and Human Development

EDRS 812 Section 3  
QUALITATIVE METHODS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Credits: 3

Fall, 2013

Wednesdays, 4:30 pm-7:10 pm  
Music Theater Building Room 1002

**Instructor:** Stacia Stribling  
**Office:** Thompson Hall Rm. 2506  
**Office hours:** By appointment (generally available before class each week)  
**Phone:** 703-993-4337 (office)  
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**Prerequisites:** Successful completion (with a grade of B or higher) of EDRS 810, or equivalent coursework or experience.  
**Course Description:** Teaches how to apply qualitative data collection and analysis procedures in educational research, including ethnographic and other field-based methods, and unobtrusive measures.

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### General Information

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the fundamental concepts and techniques of qualitative research. Although the emphasis of this course is on qualitative research methods and methodology, there is considerable attention to the philosophy and theory of qualitative inquiry.

I suggest that you keep a **research journal** throughout this course to document questions and ideas about the process of qualitative research. Notes about class discussion should be included, but personal memos about methodology and questions for group-work are encouraged. This journal is for personal reflection only and will not be turned in or graded, but it can be used as a source of reflection and critique of the research process and materials.

Reading assignments are listed for the day on which they will be discussed. Also note assignment due dates. Contact me if you have questions or concerns about this material. I am available via e-mail to schedule appointments.

NOTE: When printing **non-graded assignments and general course materials**, I encourage you to print front and back and/or use recycled paper. Otherwise, please use APA standards for all papers.

FYI: The GMU administration suggests all University community members be familiar with

campus emergency procedures. (An emergency response poster is available in each classroom.) For more information or to register with the Emergency Alert System, visit the following link: <https://alert.gmu.edu/>

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## Course Objectives

- Understand the most important characteristics of qualitative research and the key ways in which this approach differs from other research strategies.
- Identify appropriate research designs for various forms of qualitative research.
- Identify appropriate methods of data collection and analysis, depending on purpose and design of a research project.
- Be able to use these understandings to evaluate published qualitative research.
- Design and carry out a small-scale qualitative study in order to practice data collection and analysis techniques.
- Situate your study in an appropriate literature base and field of study.
- Communicate publically and in writing on the design, process, and results of such a study.

## Course Structure

This class will be collaborative and interactive—be prepared for discussion! Questions are encouraged and expected, and alternative viewpoints are welcome. I value contributions to our discussions and ask you to speak up. However, I do expect you to support your assertions. Also, I expect all of us to create an educational climate of open debate that is **respectful and democratic**. Further, be familiar with the [GMU Honor System and Code](#). **Your participation as a class member will be evaluated, not by the *quantity* of your contribution, but by the *quality and integrity* of your contribution.**

There are four main components of the course:

1. A **class meeting** once a week. Part of each class will be devoted to mini-lectures on key topics, demonstrations, class exercises, and general discussion. Each class will encourage **discussion** of qualitative research theory and practice. We will use this time to explore the readings more deeply and critically, and we will consider alternative applications. I encourage you to participate *thoughtfully and deliberately* to this process.
2. The final hour or so of most classes will be structured as a support group for your research project, during which you will receive **consultations** from me and the rest of the class on your own project, and provide feedback to others on their projects. More information on consultations is provided below.
3. The **assigned readings** are an essential part of the course; they provide necessary preparation for class lectures, activities, and discussions, and in addition they cover important aspects of qualitative research, which there simply isn't enough time to discuss in detail in class. I expect you to come to class having thought about the readings assigned for that week and their implications for your research.
4. An individual (or collaborative) qualitative **research project**. General guidelines for this project are provided below; specific guidelines for the final project report, and for the assignments leading up to this report, will be given out in class and posted in Blackboard.

## Assignments

- ✓ **Research Project** You will develop and conduct a pilot study of your methods based on your research interests and program of study. This project results in a comprehensive paper that may be used toward your dissertation. Or this can be a “side” project to explore additional interests. The range of possible projects that you can conduct is extremely broad. The main requirement is that the project has to be genuinely qualitative in nature. (We will discuss in detail what this means in the first class.) Almost any setting, or set of participants, is a potential source of data for your research, including a setting or topic with which you have a prior role or involvement. There are five additional specific requirements for your research project.
1. **No covert research.** This is 1) ethically problematic, 2) too difficult to manage for someone just beginning to learn qualitative research, 3) restricts your research options, and 4) doesn't allow you to learn the key skill of negotiation with those you study. You must have the informed consent of the participants in your research. This does not necessarily require a signed consent form from participants, but it does require that you be open and candid about the purposes, nature, and possible consequences of the research. We will discuss this in more detail in connection with one of the assignments, developing a proposal for Human Subjects approval for your study (in most cases you will not need actual HSRB approval for your course project, unless you are collecting person- identifiable data from minors or plan to publish the results).
  2. **No primarily comparative studies.** Your main research question can't focus on a difference between two groups or settings or between two categories of people; if your main interest is in such a question, I will usually recommend limiting your study to *one* of these settings or categories. (Differences that *emerge* from your study *may* be a legitimate focus; check with me.) While explicitly comparative studies are a valid and important form of qualitative research, they are not a good way to *learn* how to do qualitative research. Comparison is likely to 1) push you toward more quantitative questions and modes of thinking, 2) reduce the depth of understanding you can gain of one group, setting, or category, and 3) make it more difficult for you to learn what is essential in qualitative research.
  3. **A minimum of a) 3 hours of interviews or b) 3 hours of observations of a single setting, plus at least one hour of interview data with one or more participants in that setting.** For an interview study, you will need to record your interviews (using either audiotape or videotape) and transcribe at least 3 hours of interview material. Normally, this will involve interviewing at least 3 different participants. In special circumstances, it may be possible to work with a single participant; check with me. For an observational study, you will need to do at least 3 hours of observations of your setting, taking written notes, and to reorganize, rewrite, and expand your rough notes to make them usable for analysis. Normally, this will involve at least 3 separate observations. The difference in the amount of material required for interview and observational studies is because interviews require more time to transcribe, and because they usually provide more material to work with for analysis. (Videotaped observations are a special case; if you plan to videotape some activity, talk to me about the amount of material required. Copies of your transcripts or rewritten observational notes must be handed in with your final report.

4. **Data collection must take place across the semester.** You can't rely mainly on previously collected data, or conduct all of your observations or interviews in a brief period (one week or less). You need to be able to learn from your experiences, and to make corrections to your study design and techniques as you proceed.
5. **You will need to share your work for feedback.** Any arrangements that you make with participants in your study must not prevent discussing your fieldnotes and interview transcripts (with names deleted if necessary) in class. (Class members will be required to respect the confidentiality of this information.) Sharing your work in class is the only way that I can really assess the actual process of your research, and is also an important *part* of that process. You can't do the work of this class in isolation.

If you are studying a setting where you have a prior role, or are interviewing people with whom you have a prior relationship, you need to **discuss with me the special issues that this raises before contacting potential participants**, and will need to address these issues in your final report. In addition, while getting an early start on selecting a setting and participants is desirable, you should not begin actual data collection before we've discussed your planned method (interviewing or observation) in class, except by special arrangement with me.

You are free to use as a setting for your research project the same site that you are using in work for another course or for an internship. However, *if* you do this, the amount of work involved must be appropriate for the total amount of credit--normally, you can't use the same work (e.g., turning in the same report) to get credit for two courses. In any case, if you are using the work to satisfy two different courses or requirements, you **must submit, both to me and to the other instructor or supervisor, a written description of how you will use your work in this setting to satisfy the requirements of both courses**, and get our signatures indicating our approval of your plans.

- ✓ **Written Assignments** A number of short *non-graded written assignments* reporting on your research project will be required during the course:
- Idea Memo
  - HSRB assignment
  - Researcher Identity/Research Questions Memo
  - Research Relationship and Data Collection Memo
  - Data Analysis and Conclusions Memo

I will return them to you with my feedback. These assignments are intended, in part, as preliminary drafts of pieces that, with revision, can be incorporated in your final project report. The final written assignment for the course is a 6000-7000 word (24-28 page) *project report* that describes your research process and results. Guidelines for all of these assignments will be posted on Blackboard and handed out in class. All assignments should be submitted at the start of class on the due dates indicated in the course outline.

If you don't complete the assignments on time, you won't be able to participate adequately in class discussions, and I will not be able to give you timely feedback that will help you with revising your project. For these reasons, **late assignments and reports will not be accepted without prior permission.**

- ✓ **Consultations** Beginning with the third class, the final hour or so of each class will be devoted to students' consultations with the entire class on their research project. These consultations will normally be 15-20 minutes long; everyone will have the opportunity for four consultations during the semester. The purpose of these consultations is for you to get feedback on what you are doing in your project, and advice on dealing with questions or problems that you have. The first round of consultations will deal mainly with your ideas for a course project, selecting a setting and/or participants, and negotiating research relationships. The following rounds will deal with data collection, data analysis, and writing up the research report.

These consultations are not *presentations*, but are considered part of your class participation. Their main purpose is to help you do a better job on your project, both through feedback in your own consultation and by learning from others' consultations. Try not to spend too much of your allotted time talking about your project; at least half of your time should be used for getting feedback. (I'll be a strict timekeeper, since any extra time you take will come out of someone else's consultation.) Bringing in short handouts (planned research questions, a draft interview guide, short excerpts from interview transcripts or observation notes, examples of your data analysis methods, tentative conclusions, etc.) is helpful. You may want to record your consultations so that you can listen to others' ideas and suggestions without having to try to write these down as they're given.

### Assessment

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>
Participation (Includes: Attendance and contributions to class discussions & consultations)	20
Research Paper (See note about written assignments leading up to the final paper)	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Grades on assignments turned in late (without prior permission from me) will be reduced 10%. Attendance is very important to class participation; one point will be deducted per class-hour absence. Other non-graded (NG) assignments are required for completion of the research paper. While they are not graded, they are foundational to your project and provide opportunity for feedback.

- ✓ **Evaluation Criteria (see Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)**
- 40% Reflection and Critique: avoids surface presentation and summary of topic; identifies and meets need relevant to discipline; provides neutral presentation of strengths and weaknesses of topic; evaluates strengths and weaknesses; states and supports position.
- 40% Integration and Support: provides comprehensive connections across course material (i.e., readings, discussions, previous learning, and personal experiences); balances theory and practice; provides appropriate and adequate support for ideas, facts, and propositions.

20% Technical Soundness: characterizes professionalism and scholarship; attends to audience composition and needs; exhibits drafting and editing appropriate for graduate-level work. Papers should conform to APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition.

✓ **Participation Criteria** Participation is not equivalent to attendance! The following criteria are expected in a professional program planning setting:

- Prepared for discussion and tasks. This includes reading material and material for assignments and consultations.
- Maintains balance between speaking and listening roles. I do not expect you to ‘time’ yourself; be aware, though, ‘strong’ personalities overpower a discussion. Monitor your team and classroom interactions!
- Listens attentively and offers constructive feedback. All contributions should be considered and negotiated.
- Accepts diversity in viewpoints and negotiates differences. You are not expected to agree with one another at all times! However, we will be respectful and professional.
- Shares leadership roles. While it is comfortable to let ‘managers’ and ‘organizers’ plan strategy, this will result in a vision defined by one person or group.

✓ **Grading Scale**

A = 95-100    A- = 90-94    B+ = 87-89    B = 83-86    B- = 80-82    C = 70-79    F = < 70

## Readings

✓ **Required Texts**

1. Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson.
2. Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
3. Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Newbury Park: Sage.
4. Weiss, R. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. NY: The Free Press.
5. Emerson, R., Fretz, R., & Shaw, L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

*Other readings as assigned! Please check Blackboard for additional required readings not included in these texts.*

✓ **Recommended Texts**

1. American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication style manual* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: APA.

2. Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

✓ **Suggested Readings (articles, chapters, blogs, etc.)**

I have noted below a set of readings to further your exploration of a topic. These are NOT REQUIRED! But I do encourage you to browse them for further discussion and understanding of a topic that interests or concerns you. Also, I've provided a specific set of QR examples across the course. Blackboard resources will provide offer even more opportunities to explore certain topics!

General/Comprehensive QR Texts

- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2005). *The handbook of qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Newbury Park: Sage.
- Gallagher, K. (Ed.). (2008). *Methodological dilemma: Creative, critical, and collaborative approaches to qualitative research*. London: Routledge.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Leavy, P. (Eds.) (2006). *Emergent methods in social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Denzin, N. K. (Eds.). (2003). *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief*. AltaMira Press.
- Pascale, C. (2010). *Cartographies of knowledge*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schram, T. H. (2006). *Conceptualizing and proposing qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle Rive, NJ: Pearson.

Philosophy and Theory of QR

- Bentz, V. M., & Shapiro, J. J. (1998). *Mindful inquiry in social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hammersley, M. (2008). *Questioning qualitative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: iSage.
- Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Voice in qualitative inquiry*. London: Routledge.
- Miller, G., & Dingwall, R. (Eds.). (1997). *Context and method in qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Grounded Theory

- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Clarke, A. E. (2005). *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2007). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Narrative and Phenomenology

- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Analyzing narrative reality*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Interview & Observation

- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (Eds.). (2008). *Inside interviewing: New lenses, new concerns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rose, G. (2007). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### Date Topic and assignments

#### **Aug. 28 Introduction to the Course and to Qualitative Research**

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We will review the syllabus and course requirements and discuss general philosophical and conceptual components of qualitative inquiry.

*We will preview the “Idea Memo”*

#### **Sept. 4 The Nature of Qualitative Research**

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Assigned:

Glesne (2011) Introduction and Chpts. 1 & 2  
Maxwell (2013) Chpts. 1 & 2  
Patton (2002) Chpt. 1

#### **Sept. 11 Choosing a Design Framework**

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Assigned:

Maxwell (2013) Chpts. 3 & 4  
Patton (2002), Chpts. 2-5

Suggested:

Charmaz (2004) QR Foundations (Blackboard)  
Agee (2010) Developing qualitative research questions (Blackboard)  
Reinharz (1997) Who am I? (Blackboard)

*Consultations:*

*“Idea Memo” Due*

#### **Sept. 18 Site and Participant Selection**

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Assigned:

Bogden & Biklen (2007) Fieldwork (Blackboard)  
Maxwell (2013) Chpt. 5  
Reybold et al. (2012) Selection (Blackboard)

Suggested:

Weiss (1994) Chpt. 2  
Alexander (2003) Black Barbershop ETH (Blackboard)  
Freeman (2000) Knocking on Doors (Blackboard)

*Consultations:*

*We will preview the HSRB assignment*

**Sept. 25 Research Relationships and Ethics**

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## Assigned:

Fine (1998) Working the hyphens (Blackboard)  
Glesne (2011) Chpts. 5 & 6

## Recommended:

Murphy (1999) Ethnographic ID (Blackboard)  
Starks & Trinidad (2007) Comparison of PH, DA, GT (Blackboard)  
McDermott & Madan (2012) Avoiding the Missionary (Dis)position (Blackboard)

*We will preview the “Researcher Identity/Research Questions Memo”*

**Oct. 2 Design Review & Observations/Documents Part 1**

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## Assigned:

Angrosino & Rosenberg (2011) Observations on OBS (Blackboard)  
Glesne (2011) Chpt. 3  
Patton (2002) Chpt. 6

## Recommended:

Goldring et al. (2003) Transition Leadership (Blackboard)  
Easton-Brooks (2012) The Conceptual Context of Knowledge (Blackboard)  
Koro-Ljungberg (2012) Methodology is Movement is Methodology (Blackboard)

***Consultations:***

***HSRB Assignment Due***

**Oct. 9 Interviewing**

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## Assigned:

Weiss (1994) Chpts. 1, 3, & 4  
Patton (2002) Chpt. 7

## Recommended:

Eder & Fingerson (2001) Interviewing children (Blackboard)  
Johnson (2001) In-depth interviewing (Blackboard)

***Consultations:***

*We will preview the “Research Relationship & Data Collection Memo”*

***“Researcher Identity/Research Questions Memo” Due***

**Oct. 16 Observations Part 2**

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## Assigned:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2011) Chpts. 1-4

## Recommended:

Kingsley (2009) Visual Methodology (Blackboard)

Quinlan (2008) Shadowing (Blackboard)

Ramos (2007) FotoDialogo (Blackboard)

Rose (2007) Visual Materials, chpts. 1, 11 (Blackboard)

**Oct. 23 Initial Analysis and Interpretation**

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## Assigned:

Glesne (2011) Chpt. 7

Maxwell & Miller (2008) Categorizing and connecting strategies (Blackboard)

Patton (2002) Chpt. 8

## Recommended:

Adair & Pastori (2011) Developing QR Codes (Blackboard)

Attride- Stirling (2001) Thematic Networks (Blackboard)

*Consultations:*

*We will preview the “Data Analysis and Conclusions Memo”*

*“Research Relationship and Data Collection Memo” Due*

**Oct. 30 More Analysis and Interpretation: Observations & Interviews**

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## Assigned:

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2011) Chpts. 5 & 6

Weiss (1994) Chpt. 6

## Recommended:

Gafford (2013) Community ID Black Middle Class (Blackboard)

*Consultations:*

**Nov. 6 Interpretive, Narrative, and Case Analysis**

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Assigned:

Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2002) Narrative Research (Blackboard)

Recommended:

Rogan & de Kock (2005) Chronicles from the Classroom (Blackboard)

Corbin & Strauss (1990) Grounded Theory (Blackboard)

***“Data Analysis and Conclusions Memo” Due***

**Nov. 13 Validity, Generalizability, and Quality**

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Assigned:

Flyvberg (2006) Five misunderstandings (Blackboard)

Maxwell (2013) Chpt. 6

Patton (2002) Chpt. 9

Recommended:

Hammersley (2000) Relevance of QR (Blackboard)

Palys & Lowman (2012) Defending Research Confidentiality (Blackboard)

Polkinghorne (2007) Validity in Narrative (Blackboard)

***Consultations:***

***We will preview the Final Research Paper & Peer Review Process***

**Nov. 20 Writing and Revising a Qualitative Study**

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Assigned:

deMarras (2004) Elegant Communications (Blackboard)

Glesne (2011) Chpts. 8-10

Maxwell (2013) Chpt. 7

Recommended:

ID QR articles that “match” your style. Why? Audience? Down the road?

***Deliver draft project report to your partner***

**Nov. 27 NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK**

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**Dec. 4 Feedback, Final Consultations, & Wrap up**

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*Return draft project report to your partner with feedback*

*Project Debrief*

*Course Evaluation*

**Dec. 9 Final Paper Due**

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*Submit your final paper to the assignment space on Blackboard by 11:59PM*

## COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

### *Student Expectations*

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code/>].
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>].
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>].
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

### *Campus Resources*

- The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].
- The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].

## CORE VALUES COMMITMENT

The College of Education & Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles: <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>

**For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, please visit our website [See <http://gse.gmu.edu/>].**