**Lesson Plan: Research Paradigms**

Chapter 2 — Interactive Workshop Session

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From: Research Literacy & Design Interactive Web App (2026)

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| **Duration** | 2 hours (120 minutes) |
| **Audience** | Humanities & Social Science postgraduate students (mixed experience: from beginners to PhD-funded scholarship students) |
| **Prerequisites** | Chapter 1: Philosophical Foundations (ontology, epistemology, axiology) |
| **Materials** | Slides, Student Worksheet, Research Scenario Cards, Chapter 2 Interactive Module (online), Flip chart/whiteboard |

# Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, students will be able to:

* Define what a research paradigm is and articulate why paradigm choice matters
* Identify and distinguish between six major research paradigms
* Recognise how paradigms combine philosophical assumptions into coherent frameworks
* Match different types of research questions to appropriate paradigmatic approaches
* Evaluate paradigmatic coherence in research designs

# Differentiation Strategy

This session accommodates mixed experience levels through:

### For Beginners

* Clear visual aids with consistent colour-coding for each paradigm
* Relatable analogies (paradigm as 'lens', GPS metaphor)
* Structured worksheet with scaffolded activities
* Mixed-ability groupings where experienced students can support peers

### For Advanced Students (Stretch)

* Coherence analysis challenges (identifying paradigmatic incoherence)
* Cross-paradigm integration discussion (critical realism + interpretivism)
* Leadership roles in group activities
* Extension questions on worksheet marked with ★

# Session Structure

## Segment 1: Foundations (25 minutes)

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| **Time** | **Activity** | **Content/Instructions** | **Resources** |
| 0-5 min | **Warm-up Discussion** | Ask: 'When you think about research, do you believe there is one truth to discover, or multiple truths depending on perspective?' Brief pair discussion, then a few shares. | N/A |
| 5-15 min | **What is a Paradigm?** | Present definition using the 'lens' metaphor. Emphasise paradigm = coherent framework combining ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods. Use slides 2-4. Check understanding: 'Why can't we mix any ontology with any method?' | Slides 2-4 |
| 15-25 min | **Six Paradigms Overview** | Quick visual tour of all six paradigms (slide 5). Introduce colour coding that will be used throughout. Students complete Activity 1 on worksheet: initial self-assessment. | Slide 5, Worksheet Act. 1 |

## Segment 2: Deep Dive into Paradigms (35 minutes)

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| **Time** | **Activity** | **Content/Instructions** | **Resources** |
| 25-40 min | **Three Paradigm Pairs** | Present paradigms in contrasting pairs: (1) Positivism vs Interpretivism — the classic divide; (2) Constructivism vs Critical Realism — both engage with 'constructed' but differently; (3) Critical Theory vs Pragmatism — values-driven but with different goals. Use slides 6-11. After each pair, ask students to identify ONE key distinction. | Slides 6-11 |
| 40-50 min | **Think-Pair-Share** | Students complete Activity 2 on worksheet (paradigm characteristic matching). Then pair up to compare answers and discuss disagreements. Share one interesting point per pair with class. | Worksheet Act. 2 |
| 50-60 min | **Myths & Misconceptions** | Address common confusions (slide 13): quant≠positivist, mixed methods≠pragmatism, critical theory≠activism. Ask: 'Which myth surprised you most?' Discuss how these myths cause problems in actual research design. | Slide 13 |

## BREAK (10 minutes): 60-70 min

## Segment 3: Application & Practice (35 minutes)

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| **Time** | **Activity** | **Content/Instructions** | **Resources** |
| 70-75 min | **Selection Guide** | Present the question-to-paradigm mapping (slide 14). Emphasise that research questions often 'lean' toward certain paradigms but the researcher's philosophical commitments matter too. | Slide 14 |
| 75-95 min | **Group Scenario Analysis** | Divide into groups of 3-4. Each group receives a research scenario (Activity 3 on worksheet). Tasks: (1) Identify paradigm fit; (2) Justify using the selection guide; (3) Consider what a different paradigm would change. Mix experience levels in each group. Advanced students lead discussions. | Worksheet Act. 3, Slide 17 |
| 95-105 min | **Group Presentations** | Each group shares their scenario, chosen paradigm, and key justification (2 min max per group). Facilitator highlights good reasoning and gently corrects misunderstandings. | Flip chart |

## Segment 4: Synthesis & Reflection (15 minutes)

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| **Time** | **Activity** | **Content/Instructions** | **Resources** |
| 105-110 min | **Coherence Check** | Present slide 15 on paradigmatic coherence. Stress that coherence matters more than paradigm choice itself. Quick class discussion: 'What makes something incoherent?' | Slide 15 |
| 110-115 min | **Personal Reflection** | Students complete Activity 4 on worksheet: 'Considering my own research interests, which paradigm(s) feel most aligned with how I see the world?' Optional: share with neighbour. | Worksheet Act. 4 |
| 115-120 min | **Key Takeaways & Close** | Review slide 16 key takeaways. Direct students to the Chapter 2 Interactive Module for self-paced consolidation (Paradigm Explorer, Paradigm Matcher, Progressive Quiz). Preview Chapter 3 (validity strategies). Remind students to complete worksheet Activity 5 (extension) before next session. | Slides 16, 18, Chapter 2 Module |

# Facilitator Notes

### Anticipated Challenges

* **Confusion between interpretivism and constructivism:** Both are relativist, but interpretivism focuses on individual meaning-making while constructivism emphasises collective/social construction. Use the example: 'How a person experiences grief' (interpretivist) vs 'How society constructs the concept of grief' (constructivist).
* **Students want to know the 'right' paradigm:** Emphasise that fitness for purpose matters more than correctness. Each paradigm illuminates different aspects. The question is: what does YOUR research question need?
* **Critical realism seems complicated:** Use the iceberg metaphor: we see events (tip), but mechanisms are below the surface. CR asks 'what must be true for this to happen?'

### Relatable Analogies

* **Paradigm as GPS:** Different GPS systems (walking, driving, cycling) give different routes to the same destination — none is wrong, each is optimised for different purposes.
* **Paradigm as camera lens:** Wide-angle vs macro lens both capture 'reality' but reveal completely different things. Neither is more real.
* **Coherence as outfit:** Mixing a ball gown with hiking boots isn't wrong per se, but it's incoherent for most purposes!

### Supporting Beginners

* Check in during activities — sit with struggling groups
* Use the comparison table (slide 12) as a reference anchor
* Encourage students to focus on 2-3 paradigms most relevant to their discipline first
* Reassure that it takes time — understanding deepens with practice

# Formative Assessment

Throughout the session, assess understanding through:

* Warm-up responses (gauge starting positions)
* Think-pair-share discussions (Activity 2)
* Group scenario presentations (Activity 3)
* Muddiest point: Before closing, ask 'What's still unclear?' — address briefly or note for follow-up

# Extension & Follow-up

### Chapter 2 Interactive Module (Required)

Direct students to complete the online Chapter 2 Interactive Module for self-paced consolidation. The module includes:

* **Paradigm Explorer:** Click-to-explore cards for each paradigm with detailed information
* **Paradigm Matcher Game:** 8 scenarios to practice identifying appropriate paradigms
* **Progressive Quiz:** 10 questions from foundation to advanced with instant feedback

### Additional Follow-up

* Worksheet Activity 5: Analyse a published paper for paradigm coherence
* Essential readings: Crotty (1998), Guba & Lincoln (1994)
* One-to-one drop-in sessions for students wanting to discuss their own research positioning

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