

Research methods in social sciences

[Science](#), [Anthropology](#)



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University, Australia, for providing additional material to strengthen the
international perspectives in this chapter. Key features of research in the
social sciences Bridget Somekh Research in the social sciences draws on
various long-established traditions. Its origins might, for example, be said to
lie with the Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, who developed ways of
conceptualizing and categorizing knowledge, truth and human experience
during the fourth century BC. Fundamentally, social science research is
concerned with people and their life contexts, and with philosophical
questions relating to the nature of knowledge and truth (epistemology),
values (axiology) and being (ontology) which underpin human judgements
and activities. Empirical social science research — that is research which
involves the collection of data about people and their social contexts by a
range of methods — draws heavily upon the traditions and practices of
disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, history and creative
arts. Anthropology contributes a tradition of participant observation and
interviews, field note-taking and heuristic interpretation of culture. For

example, from Geertz we learn the importance of reading the cultural meanings in details of behaviour such as winks, and writing about research using ‘thick description’ to give readers the experience of ‘being there’ (Geertz, 1973). From sociology, we learn how social relations are formed and reproduced. Psychology provides us with an understanding of human behaviour. History contributes a tradition of document analysis (the weighing of evidence in the light of the likely biases of the informant) and accords importance to contemporary records, including personal testimony in letters and note books. The creative arts contribute a tradition of aesthetics (discernment and judgement of worth) and accord importance to creativity and imagination in