

COMPS QUESTIONS JANUARY 2025

1. *"The first principle is that you must not fool yourself – and you are the easiest person to fool."* - Richard Feynman. Consider the idea of 'confirmation bias' and the 'sunk cost fallacy'. Explain briefly what they are, and discuss their implications for your approach to your research and what you may do to counter their possible negative effects.
2. Consider the conceptual sense- and decision-making Cynefin framework proposed by David John Snowden. Briefly explain the 5 domains (clear, complicated, complex, chaotic and confused) and comment on the different domains in terms of disciplinary approaches. Finally, consider how your research may fit into and be informed by the framework.
3. Consider the differences between approaching an organization as a machine versus as a living organism. Explain the difference between the two analogies / conceptual models, touching on their advantages and limitations, and make sure to mention how the living organism (ecological) model can enrich our understanding. Briefly write about which, if either, apply to your research, or, if neither, explain their irrelevance.
4. Consider the following claim from Lakoff & Johnson (1999): "As embodied, imaginative creatures, we never were separated or divorced from reality in the first place. What has always made science possible is our embodiment, not our transcendence of it, and our imagination, not our avoidance of it." Expand on your interpretation of it, and explain the implications of this for science in general, and more specifically for your research.
5. Explain how sense-making advocates plausibility rather than accuracy. Human experience is captured and transformed in narratives which create "realities" for community members. Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
6. Explain how the illusion of understanding describes our views of the world and our expectations with regard to the future. Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
7. Explain how you can work with secondary data in the problem solving process. In particular, choose one of the three approaches, and discuss in detail within the context of your own study: archival and documentary study; re-analyzing primary data collected by others; meta-analysis. Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
8. Explain individual values, group norms and organizational culture and the way these define our behaviour. Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
9. Explain Polányi's famous manifesto, "we know more than we can tell," as the basis of tacit knowledge. Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
10. Explain the basic concepts of emergence ("The whole is more/other than the sum of the parts"). Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
11. Explain the basic concepts of fractals patterns, their repetition at different scales and how they seem to apply to reality. Explain how and why you can or cannot apply this knowledge in your dissertation.
12. Explain the claim: "Metaphors and figurative expressions are pathways for the human understanding of the world, although not with strict truth-values attached to them. They are compressed wisdoms or shortcuts for cognitive processes". Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?

13. Explain the data collection of an interview-based study, assuming a semi-structured interview. How would you determine the topics? What do you need to pay attention to during the interviews? Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
14. Explain the definition of definition: how is it different from a description? Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
15. Explain the difference between “folk theory” and “expert theory” and argue which one dominates in guiding our cognition. Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
16. Explain the difference between multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary approaches and how certain approaches might affect your research, focusing on why a transdisciplinary approach is likely most appropriate for it.
17. Explain the meaning of “cultural conceptualizations” and how knowledge about them can enhance cross-cultural communication and, at the same time, how lack of knowledge about them can result in cross-cultural misunderstandings. Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
18. Explain the meaning(s) of Lakoff’s “embodiment hypothesis”. What evidences of the “embodied mind” can be found in linguistic and non-linguistic representation? Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
19. Explain the tentative process of (creative) problem solving following Popper's approach. Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
20. Explain the validity of the assertion “Understanding complex, real-life problems derive from the act of meaning-creation leading to the understanding of the way we think and act in our social environments”. Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
21. It has long been recognized that "correlation does not imply causation." However, often we are left with observational studies with no chance of carrying out randomized controlled experiments. Are we doomed or is there a chance to get some adequate causal explanations of non-experimental or quasi-experimental data? Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?
22. The formulation of a problem is already an act of sense-making, as there are no “problems” “out there” independent of interpretation. Expand on the idea of what “makes” a problem a problem, in other words, how we come to formulate and view them as such (e.g. values, goals, narratives, etc.), and consider the implications of this for your research, especially with regards to possible pitfalls.
23. Using the “Iceberg metaphor” as a starting point, consider the difficulties, challenges and problems in converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge, and how this may relate to your research.
24. What is the role of conceptual metaphors in social discourse? Specify how you can apply this knowledge in your research? And if not, why not?