

Positivism & Interpretivism

Sociology

Two research traditions, and what each treats as good evidence.

Positivist

- Social facts external and measurable
- Seeks patterns, rates and causes
- Prefers surveys and official data
- Values reliability and replication
- Aims at generalisation to a population

Interpretivist

- Reality built through shared meaning
- Seeks understanding, not law-like rules
- Prefers interviews and ethnography
- Values validity and depth of account
- Aims at transferable insight, not averages

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Most working sociology is mixed. The split matters most for what counts as a good enough answer.

Realist positions reject both poles: structures can be real and unobserved, known through their effects.