
TOP TIPS FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

1. Identify whether the question is suitable for this approach.

- Qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of experiences, perspectives and histories.
- It explores the understanding of individuals within their social contexts.
- The methods may appear unstructured but are not but they should be sensitive to the social context of the study.
- This may be about patient perspectives but may also explore professional perspectives too.
- The methods are iterative rather than deductive
- The data will be detailed, rich and complex
- Basically if you want to answer „what is“, „how“ or „why“ questions a qualitative approach will work well.
- Do not use qualitative methods to avoid using statistics!

2. Has the work been done before?

- Do a literature search to determine what is already out there
- You may find similar work in another population
- Is your population expected to have very different views and why?
- Remember to look at what is said and how it is said
- Careful reading provides evidence for the significance of your study for practice and policy
This will also help with the next point

3. Focus the question

- In general
 - Make sure the research will be
 - Contributory (advance wider knowledge or understanding)
 - Defensible (in its design by providing a strategy that can address your question)
 - Rigorous (systematic collection analysis and interpretation of data)
 - Credible (will provide plausible well-founded arguments about significance)
 - Involve patients in development of the question
- If you are generating your own area for research
 - Ensure your question is clear and justified
- If you are reacting to a funding call read the brief in minute detail to ensure
 - You understand the question
 - You are answering the question
 - Then make sure your question is clear and justified

4. Don't adopt a theoretical perspective or framework that you don't understand or can't justify.

While you may have been doing well so far this is where inexperience will show especially in a proposal.

5. Justify your sample

- Purposive or theoretical sampling
 - The purpose of the sampling
 - Characteristics of potential types of persons, events or processes to be sampled
 - How decisions about sampling will be made.
- Sample size
- Estimates provided based on previous experience,
 - pilot work, etc.
 - Access and recruitment
 - The point is you don't just go out and talk to people!
 - It is also worth bearing in mind that people often forget or avoid looking at cultural diversity and engaging with social disadvantage

6. Make sure you understand the ethical implications of the work you want to do.

- Sometimes the types of questions qualitative research poses are difficult or uncomfortable
- This does not mean they should not be asked and people often enjoy the chance to explore such areas.
- What is important is to demonstrate that you have thought about any problems or difficulties that may arise from this.
- Are the population you propose to work with particularly vulnerable?
- There are problems for clinicians interviewing their own patient populations

7. Make sure you are fully aware of the potential costs involved

- Qualitative methods are not a cheap option
- The projects are time consuming in their recruitment, conduct and analysis
- Make sure you have costed in researcher time, travel, software, equipment, transcription etc
This is another area where inexperience shows.
- Experts will spot a naïve application as they often underestimate the work and costs involved.

8. Identify your analytical approach

- Make sure you have a clear choice of data management
- Analysis methods vary depending on qualitative
- Approach
- Add DETAILS and MORE DETAILS about how data will be gathered and processed
(procedures should be made transparent, not magical)
- How will data be kept organized and retrievable?
- How will data be “broken up” to see something new?
- Convince the reader that you and your team are sufficiently knowledgeable about qualitative analysis and have the necessary skills.
- Ask the experts! A lot of proposals fail as they give an inadequate account of how they are going to analyse and present their data.

9. Get an expert on board as soon as possible

- You wouldn't attempt multi-level modelling or a cost-effectiveness analysis without support
- Think of qualitative research in the same way
- Experts can help you construct a convincing case and ensure you don't underestimate cost, timing or complexity of the work.

10. Identify your dissemination plans

- Once you have all this rich, detailed information and assimilated your findings how and who will you disseminate it to.
- There are obvious routes but remember that it is good practice to disseminate your findings to participants.
- Don't forget practitioners, commissioners and policy makers as well as the academic routes of conferences and papers.
- This is another area where experienced qualitative researchers can help.
- Distilling qualitative research findings into a journal word limit is a real skill!