

Prompts Approach

Source: M Dixon-Woods, R L Shaw, S Agarwal and J A Smith. The problem of appraising qualitative research *Qual. Saf. Health Care* 2004;13;223-225.

Box 1 Prompts for appraising qualitative research

- **Are the research questions clear?**
- **Are the research questions suited to qualitative inquiry?**
- **Are the following clearly described?**
 - sampling
 - data collection
 - analysis
- **Are the following appropriate to the research question?**
 - sampling
 - data collection
 - analysis
- **Are the claims made supported by sufficient evidence?**
- **Are the data, interpretations, and conclusions clearly integrated?**
- **Does the paper make a useful contribution?**

Exhaustive Approach (Excerpt)

Source: Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A framework for assessing research evidence. A Quality Framework. Liz Spencer, Jane Ritchie, Jane Lewis and Lucy Dillon. National Centre for Social Research. http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/a_quality_framework_tcm6-38740.pdf

Full report entitled: 'Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A framework for assessing research evidence', ISBN: 07715 04465 8. August 2003. Government Chief Social Researcher's Office.

III APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

Framework built on a set of **principles** around which to frame and structure **appraisal questions** to be asked of a piece of work in order to critically assess its quality. In each case, a set of **quality indicators** is listed – features to help form a judgement about how well appraisal question has been addressed. Further questions may be added depending on the purpose of the research and the approach it uses. Then assessor to judge overall merit, based on questions and indicators most relevant to the evaluation concerned.

Guiding principles

Four central principles underpin content of Framework. All based on themes highly recurrent in the literature and in the interviews conducted for the study. Research should be:

- **contributory** in advancing wider knowledge or understanding about policy, practice, theory or a particular substantive field;
- **defensible in design** by providing a research strategy that can address the evaluative questions posed;
- **rigorous in conduct** through the systematic and transparent collection, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data;
- **credible in claim** through offering well-founded and plausible arguments about the significance of the evidence generated.

Principles are presented at a sufficiently high level of abstraction to apply to a diversity of qualitative approaches. Most are simply emblems of sound and logical enquiry, whatever its form or purpose.

Appraisal questions

Guiding principles used to identify 18 appraisal questions to aid an assessment. Questions are listed in column a) of the framework. Between them, cover all key features and processes involved in qualitative enquiry. They begin with assessment of the **findings**, move through different stages of the research process (**design, sampling, data collection, analysis and reporting**) and end with general features of research conduct (**reflexivity and neutrality, ethics and auditability**).

Suggested that Findings of the enquiry are given attention first, even though not a logical procedural order because the nature of the evidence presented will help to assess features of the research process (for example, the quality of the data collected, the visibility and logic of the analytic process). However, if readers prefer to look at research design and conduct before considering the evidence, they will need to return to Qs 6–18 before completing the assessment.

FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING QUALITATIVE EVALUATIONS (Excerpt)

Study being appraised:

	a) Appraisal questions	b) Quality indicators (possible features for consideration)
FINDINGS	Q1. How credible are the findings?	<p>Findings/conclusions are supported by data/study evidence (<i>i.e. the reader can see how the researcher arrived at his/her conclusions; the 'building blocks' of analysis and interpretation are evident</i>)</p> <p>Findings/conclusions 'make sense'/have a coherent logic</p> <p>Findings/conclusions are resonant with other knowledge and experience (<i>this might include peer or member review</i>)</p> <p>Use of corroborating evidence to support or refine findings (<i>i.e. other data sources have been used to examine phenomena; other research evidence has been evaluated: see also Q14</i>)</p>
FINDINGS	Q4. Scope for drawing wider inference – how well is this explained?	<p>Discussion of what can be generalised to wider population from which sample is drawn/case selection has been made</p> <p>Detailed description of the contexts in which the study was conducted to allow applicability to other settings/contextual generalities to be assessed</p> <p>Discussion of how hypotheses/propositions/ findings may relate to wider theory; consideration of rival explanations</p> <p>Evidence supplied to support claims for wider inference (<i>either from study or from corroborating sources</i>)</p> <p>Discussion of limitations on drawing wider inference (<i>e.g. re-examination of sample and any missing constituencies: analysis of restrictions of study settings for drawing wider inference</i>)</p>
DESIGN	Q6. How defensible is the research design?	<p>Discussion of how overall research strategy was designed to meet aims of study</p> <p>Discussion of rationale for study design</p> <p>Convincing argument for different features of research design (<i>e.g. reasons given for different components or stages of research; purpose of particular methods or data sources, multiple methods, time frames etc.</i>)</p> <p>Use of different features of design/data sources evident in findings presented</p> <p>Discussion of limitations of research design and their implications for the study evidence</p>
SAMPLE	Q7. How well defended is the sample design/ target selection of cases/documents?	<p>Description of study locations/areas and how and why chosen</p> <p>Description of population of interest and how sample selection relates to it (<i>e.g. typical, extreme case, diverse constituencies etc.</i>)</p> <p>Rationale for basis of selection of target sample/ settings/ documents (<i>e.g. characteristics /features of target sample/ settings/ documents, basis for inclusions and exclusions, discussion of sample size/number of cases/setting selected etc.</i>)</p> <p>Discussion of how sample/selections allowed required comparisons to be made</p>

DATA COLLECTION	Q9. How well was the data collection carried out?	<p>Discussion of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who conducted data collection • procedures/documents used for collection/ recording • checks on origin/status/authorship of documents <p>Audio or video recording of interviews/ discussions/ conversations (<i>if not recorded, were justifiable reasons given?</i>)</p> <p>Description of conventions for taking field notes (<i>e.g. to identify what form of observations were required/to distinguish description from researcher commentary/ analysis</i>)</p> <p>Discussion of how fieldwork methods or settings may have influenced data collected</p> <p>Demonstration, through portrayal and use of data, that depth, detail and richness were achieved in collection</p>
ANALYSIS	Q10. How well has the approach to, and formulation of, the analysis been conveyed?	<p>Description of form of original data (<i>e.g. use of verbatim transcripts, observation or interview notes, documents, etc.</i>)</p> <p>Clear rationale for choice of data management method/ tool/ package</p> <p>Evidence of how descriptive analytic categories, classes, labels etc. have been generated and used (<i>i.e. either through explicit discussion or portrayal in the commentary</i>)</p> <p>Discussion, with examples, of how any constructed analytic concepts/typologies etc. have been devised and applied</p>
REPORTING	Q15. How clear and coherent is the reporting?	<p>Demonstrates link to aims of study/research questions</p> <p>Provides a narrative/story or clearly constructed thematic account</p> <p>Has structure and signposting that usefully guide reader through the commentary</p> <p>Provides accessible information for intended target audience(s)</p> <p>Key messages highlighted or summarised</p>
REFLEXIVITY & NEUTRALITY	Q16. How clear are the assumptions/ theoretical perspectives / values that have shaped the form and output of the evaluation?	<p>Discussion/evidence of the main assumptions/ hypotheses/theoretical ideas on which the evaluation was based and how these affected the form, coverage or output of the evaluation (<i>the assumption here is that no research is undertaken without some underlying assumptions or theoretical ideas</i>)</p> <p>Discussion/evidence of the ideological perspectives/ values/philosophies of research team and their impact on the methodological or substantive content of the evaluation (<i>again, may not be explicitly stated</i>)</p> <p>Evidence of openness to new/alternative ways of viewing subject/theories/ assumptions (<i>e.g. discussion of learning/concepts/ constructions that have emerged from the data; refinement/restatement of hypotheses/theories in light of emergent findings; evidence that alternative claims have been examined</i>)</p> <p>Discussion of how error or bias may have arisen in design/data collection/analysis and how addressed, if at all</p> <p>Reflections on the impact of the researcher on the research process</p>

ETHICS	Q17. What evidence is there of attention to ethical issues?	<p>Evidence of thoughtfulness/sensitivity about research contexts and participants</p> <p>Documentation of how research was presented in study settings/to participants (<i>including, where relevant, any possible consequences of taking part</i>)</p> <p>Documentation of consent procedures and information provided to participants</p> <p>Discussion of confidentiality of data and procedures for protecting</p> <p>Discussion of how anonymity of participants/sources was protected</p> <p>Discussion of any measures to offer information/ advice/ services etc. at end of study (<i>i.e. where participation exposed the need for these</i>)</p> <p>Discussion of potential harm or difficulty through participation, and how avoided</p>	
AUDITABILITY	Q18. How adequately has the research process been documented?	<p>Discussion of strengths and weaknesses of data sources and methods</p> <p>Documentation of changes made to design and reasons; implications for study coverage</p> <p>Documentation and reasons for changes in sample coverage/data collection/analytic approach; implications</p> <p>Reproduction of main study documents (<i>e.g. letters of approach, topic guides, observation templates, data management frameworks etc.</i>)</p>	

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