

8 TIPS FOR QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

The following are 8 tips to guide you through a qualitative inquiry from beginning to end. Documents throughout the toolkit will be able to assist with any particular steps that you may want further information about.

1. Choose your topic carefully and give yourself time to prepare. It is important to give yourself proper time when preparing for qualitative research. You want to be able to cope with ambiguity, be interested in new questions that will arise and willing to evolve as needed. You will need to determine your purpose.

2. Decide on and then refine the question(s) you want to study. A good research question needs to be clear, specific and achievable. To do qualitative research, your question should explore reasons for why people do things or believe in something. Make sure your questions are open-ended, giving participants the ability to think outside of the box. Ask other teachers how they would develop questions and use their examples.

3. Consult the existing research. Reviewing recent literature – from research to blogs, can help you find out what others have found about your question. Doing this may help you to focus your question more specifically. It will also help you to become better informed about the topic you are choosing and help you to determine if there is a need for your question to be answered.

4. Choose an approach. There are a range of choices available to you, consider the history and facets of each approach to determine which one will best suit your research needs and provide credible evidence to your audiences. Identify which approach suits your context.

5. Collect your data. Consider aspects of voice, access and representation when you are collecting your data. Whose perspectives are you including/excluding? Identify participants for your research; make sure you can explain your sample selection and processes transparently.

6. Analyse your data. Use a coding process to organize and sort your data. A code is a word or short phrase that captures a portion of data. Code more extensively in second and third round coding processes, read and reread data. Categorize your codes, search for patterns – pay attention to language and meanings of human experience. Ask yourself, “What stands out?”

7. Communication. Go beyond just reporting – delivering a report does not satisfy all communication requirements. How can you connect with the participants from the study, stakeholders, and audiences? Consider how data visualization can improve your communication plan. Engage others in a discussion about the inquiry process or findings, establish new questions people care about.

8. Prepare your report and communication strategies. Use your report to tell a story. Audiences will need to be able to see, feel, and hear aspects of your inquiry. Find ways to collapse and consolidate ideas – this can be achieved by using tables, charts, images, text boxes, and graphics. Focus on lessons learned, implications, considerations or next steps. Present your report as a draft and get feedback from trusted users.