

# CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF QUALITATIVE STUDIES



Rationale for research: Does the paper describe an important clinical problem and is the question clearly formulated?

If yes, continue with the form below.

If no, find another paper!

## Was a qualitative approach appropriate?

### What should I look for?

Is the question being asked seeking to further understanding of people's views, opinions and/or experiences in relation to a specific setting/scenario/circumstance?

### Where do I find the information?

The Title, Abstract and Introduction/Background should tell you whether a qualitative approach was appropriate for the question being asked.

### In this paper

Yes

No

Unclear

Comment:

## Was the sampling strategy appropriate for the approach?

### What should I look for?

How were the participants/setting(s) selected? Does the sample include a range of experiences (maximum variation sample), where all relevant 'variables' are accounted for, e.g. gender, age, geographical location, severity of condition, social support, socio-economic background, access to services, ethnicity?

A convenience sample is seldom a good sampling choice.

### Where do I find the information?

The Methods should tell you how patients were recruited and selected.

### In this paper

Yes

No

Unclear

Comment:

## What were the data collection methods?

### What should I look for?

Are data collection methods described in sufficient detail to allow you to repeat the study? Are they transparent and appropriate? E.g. Interviews are useful to explore individual experience(s); Focus groups are useful to explore views of a particular group or elicit information that is generated during group discussions.

### Where do I find the information?

Look in the Methods section for data collection information, including interview guides and field notes.

### In this paper

Yes

No

Unclear

Comment:

## How were data analysed and how were these checked?

### What should I look for?

Was the data analysis approach appropriate for the methodology used? E.g. A grounded theory study needs to include constant comparison. Are the analytical steps explained in detail (are they transparent)? Are the steps to ensure 'quality control' described? E.g. Double coding, research team discussion of identified item, respondent validation.

### Where do I find the information?

The Methods section should provide sufficient information about how data were analysed.

### In this paper

Yes

No

Unclear

Comment:

## Is the researcher's position described?

### What should I look for?

It is ideal that the researcher(s) clearly state their position in relation to the research question. For example – their background, gender, and existing knowledge or personal experience of the topic to be researched.

### Where do I find the information?

Look in the Methods/Results/Discussion section(s) to see if there is some mention of the researcher's position as part of the research process.

## In this paper

Yes

No

Unclear

Comment:

## What were the results?

### Do the results make sense?

#### What should I look for?

Do the results answer the question, do they make sense and are they credible? (Credibility).

Are the themes/theoretical concepts presented credible and do they relate to the research question?

#### What does it mean?

Look in the findings/results section: Have the authors provided a range of data (quotes) to support their interpretation (themes/ theoretical concepts) of data? Are the quotes indexed so they could be traced back to the original data set? For example: patient/participant #2.

Have authors provided 'negative cases' i.e. narratives that do not fit the identified themes/ theoretical framework. For example where some participants' experiences differ from the main findings (think outliers!)

Have the authors provided context (background to participant) for quotes in order to interpret meaning? This should be relevant to the findings discussed, for example age and gender/ length or severity of condition, socio economic background, educational background, etc.

## In this paper

Yes

No

Unclear

Comment:

## Are the conclusions drawn justified by the results?

### What should I look for?

How well does the analysis explain why people behave in the way they do?  
How comprehensible would this explanation be to a thoughtful participant from the setting (can participants/ patients 'see' themselves in the interpretation of data)?  
How well does the explanation fit with what we know already and if not why not?

### Where do I find the information?

Look in the Discussion/Conclusion sections of the paper (although some predominately qualitative journals merge findings and discussion).

Check whether the authors draw on examples of data when providing explanations.

Look for references to previous research in this area and existing theory and whether these are discussed in relation to findings and explanations offered by authors.

Does the paper offer a 'so what' recommendation?

### In this paper

Yes

No

Unclear

Comment:

## Are the finding transferable to other clinical settings?

### What should I look for?

This may not be applicable to all studies using qualitative methods (e.g. exploratory, pilot studies). However, research using maximum variation sampling and particularly theoretical sampling needs to demonstrate that the findings are transferable to other settings. E.g. A study aims to explore experiences of breathlessness in COPD and a true theoretical/ maximum variation sample has been recruited then the findings are transferrable to other clinical settings with a similar context, E.g. includes a range of illness experiences, age, gender, socio-economic background, illness severity. However if the sample includes only white, middle class men in their 50's, then this is not maximum variation sampling and cannot be transferred to other settings.

### Where do I find the information?

Check the sampling information in the Methods section. Then compare the sampling strategy mentioned with the actual participant sample recruited in the Findings section. Did the authors recruit the sample they set out to recruit?

In the Discussion/Conclusion section check whether the authors discuss the transferability of the findings. If not check if the authors have outlined whether the findings are limited to a particular context as part of the limitations of the study.

True theoretical sampling as described in Grounded Theory Methodology is guided by emerging themes during constant comparative analysis. This is particular to this methodology so does not apply to all other qualitative methodologies. If this methodology is used, steps to illustrate how theoretical sampling has been followed in the research process should be described throughout the Methods section.

## In this paper

Yes

No

Unclear

Comment:

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## Reference

Adapted from Greenhalgh, T and Taylor, R. How to Read a Paper: Papers That Go beyond Numbers (Qualitative Research). *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, Vol. 315, No. 7110 (Sep. 20, 1997), pp. 740-743

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