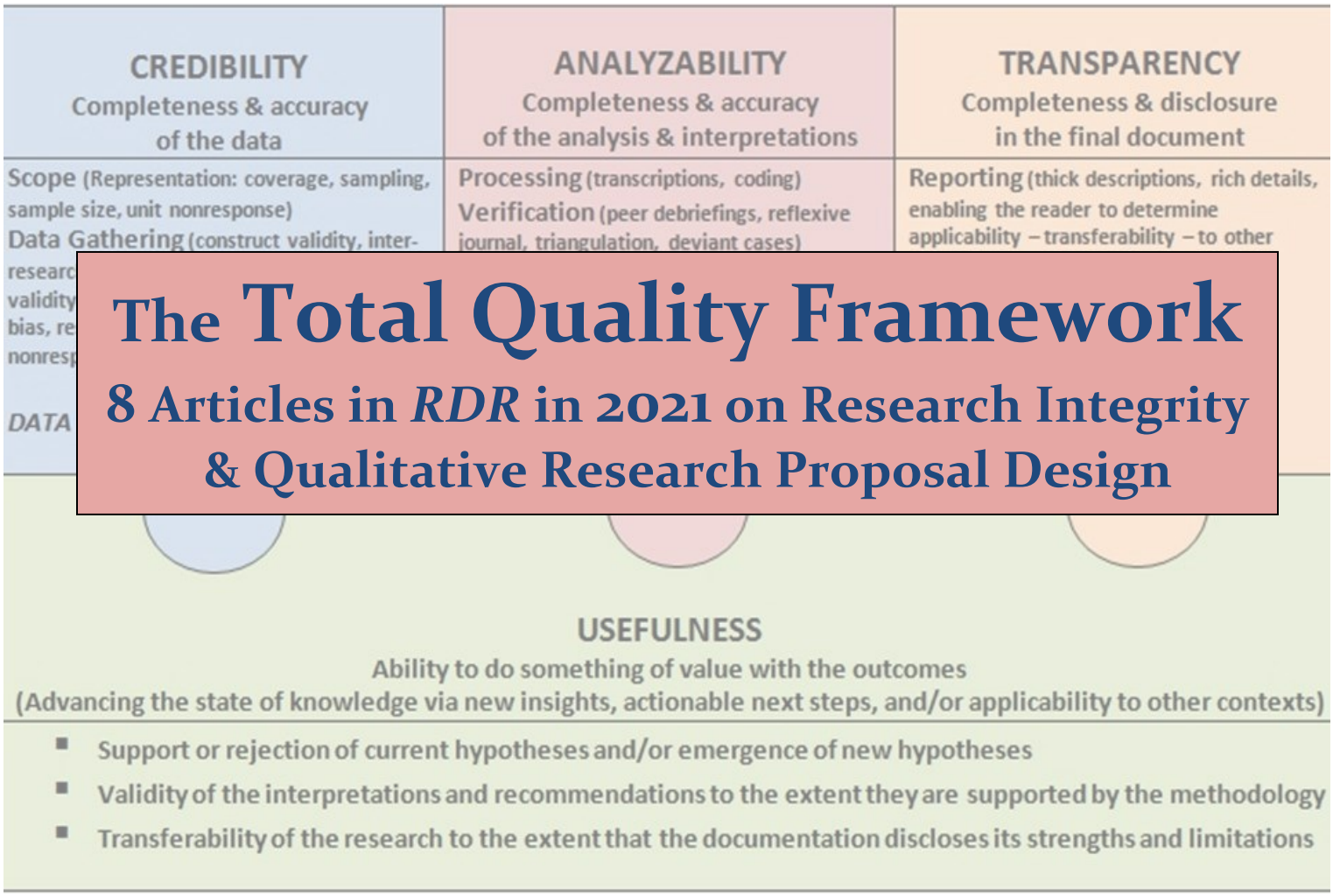

Margaret R. Roller MA

Research Design Review – www.researchdesignreview.com– is a blog first published in November 2009. RDR currently consists of approximately 270 articles, has more than 875 subscribers and well over one million views. Although many articles in RDR discuss some aspect of the Total Quality Framework, 8 articles published in 2021 were devoted to two specific areas relevant to the Total Quality Framework, i.e., research integrity and the qualitative research proposal. These 8 articles are included in this document.

Additional compilations of RDR articles – covering a wide assortment of topics associated with qualitative research methods, analysis, and methodology – are available for download. These include: ***The In-depth Interview Method: 12 Articles on Design & Implementation***, ***The Focus Group Method: 18 Articles on Design & Moderating***, ***Qualitative Data Analysis: 16 Articles on Process & Method***, ***Qualitative Research: Transparency & Reporting***, ***Reflexivity: 10 Articles on the Role of Reflection in Qualitative Research***, *and* ***Methodology***.

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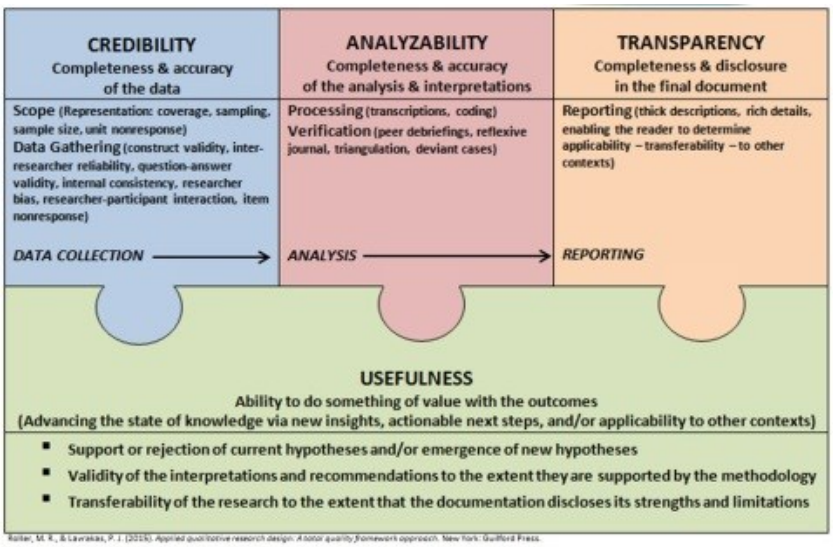
Quality Frameworks in Qualitative Research

The following is a modified excerpt from Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 20-21)



Many researchers have advanced strategies, criteria, or frameworks for thinking about and promoting the importance of "the quality" of qualitative research at some stage in the research design. There are those who focus on quality as it relates to specific aspects—such as various validation and verification strategies or "checklists" (Barbour, 2001; Creswell, 2013; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Maxwell, 2013; Morse et al., 2002), validity related to researcher decision making (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010) and subjectivity (Bradbury-Jones, 2007), or the specific role of transparency in assessing the quality of outcomes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). There are others who prescribe particular approaches in the research process—such as consensual qualitative research (Hill et al., 2005), the use of triangulation (Tobin & Begley, 2004), or an audit procedure (Akkerman, Admiraal, Brekelmans, & Oost, 2006). And there are still others who take a broader, more general view that emphasizes the importance of "paying attention to the qualitative rigor and model of trustworthiness from the moment of conceptualization of the research" (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 154; see also, Bergman & Coxon, 2005; Whittemore et al., 2001).

The strategies or ways of thinking about quality in qualitative research that are most relevant to the Total Quality Framework (TQF) are those that are (a) paradigm neutral, (b) flexible (i.e., do not adhere to a defined method), and (c) applicable to all phases of the research process. Among these, the work of Lincoln and Guba (e.g., 1981, 1985, 1986, and 1995) is the most noteworthy. Although they profess a paradigm orientation "of the constructionist camp, loosely defined" (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 116), the quality criteria Lincoln and Guba set forth more than 35 years ago is particularly pertinent to the TQF in that it advances the concept of trustworthiness as a major criterion for judging whether a qualitative research study is "rigorous." In their model, trustworthiness addresses the issue of "How can a [qualitative researcher] persuade [someone] that the findings of a [study] are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). That is, what are the criteria upon which such an assessment should be based? In this way, Lincoln and Guba espouse standards that are flexible (i.e., can be adapted depending on the research context) as well as relevant throughout the research process.

These standards put forth the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is the extent to which the findings of a qualitative research study are internally valid (i.e., accurate). Credibility, or the lack thereof, is established through (a) prolonged engagement, (b) persistent observation, (c) triangulation, (d) peer

debriefings, (e) negative case analysis, (f) referential adequacy, and (g) member checks. Transferability refers to the extent to which other researchers or users of the research can determine the applicability of the research design and/or the study findings to other research contexts (e.g., other participants, places, and times). Transferability, or the lack thereof, is primarily established through thick description that is "necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Thick description and transferability are key elements of the TQF Transparency component. Dependability is the degree to which an independent "auditor" can look at the qualitative research process and determine its "acceptability" and, in so doing, create an audit trail of the process. To that end, the Transparency component of the TQF deals directly with the idea of providing the user of the research with an audit trail pertaining to all aspects of the research in the final research document. And, confirmability refers to utilizing the same dependability audit to examine the evidence in the data that purportedly supports the researcher's findings, interpretations, and recommendations.

Like the Lincoln and Guba model, an important facet of the TQF is its focus on maintaining the integrity of qualitative research design. By acknowledging the unique attributes of qualitative research while also applying core research principles, quality frameworks such as the TQF hold qualitative researchers accountable and ultimately produce outcomes that are useful.

Akkerman, S., Admiraal, W., Brekelmans, M., & Oost, H. (2006). Auditing quality of research in social sciences. *Quality & Quantity*, *42*(2), 257–274. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-006-9044-4

Barbour, R. S. (2001). Checklists for improving rigour in qualitative research: A case of the tail wagging the dog? *BMJ (British Medical Journal)*, *322*(7294), 1115–1117.

Bergman, M. M., & Coxon, A. P. M. (2005). The quality in qualitative methods. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *6*(2, Art. 34).

Bradbury-Jones, C. (2007). Enhancing rigour in qualitative health research: Exploring subjectivity through Peshkin's I's. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *59*(3), 290–298. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04306.x

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, *29*(2), 75–91.

Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E. N., Hess, S. a., & Ladany, N. (2005). Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *52*(2), 196–205. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.196

Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2010). Validity, responsibility, and aporia. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *16*(8), 603–610. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410374034

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, *30*(1), 73–84.

Lincoln, Y. S. (1995). Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *1*(3), 275–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049500100301

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *1*(2), 13–22.

Thomas, E., & Magilvy, J. K. (2011). Qualitative rigor or research validity in qualitative research. *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing*, *16*(2), 151–155. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6155.2011.00283.x

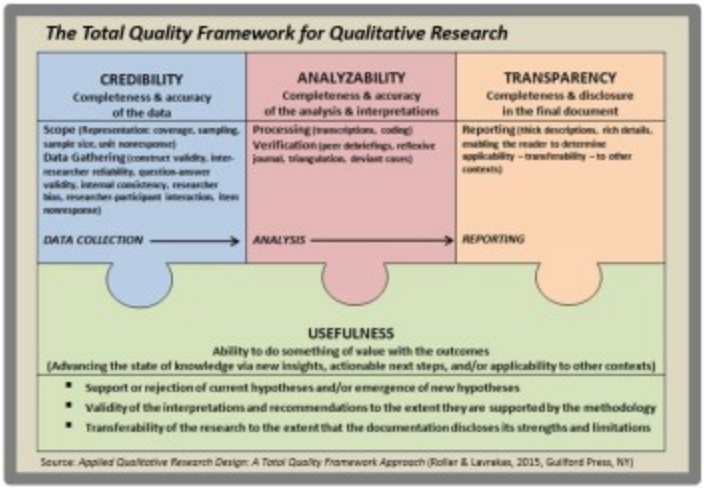
Tobin, G. A., & Begley, C. M. (2004). Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *48*(4), 388–396. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2004.03207.x

Whittemore, R., Chase, S. K., & Mandle, C. L. (2001). Validity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, *11*(4), 522–537. Retrieved from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11521609

Elevating Qualitative Design to Maximize Research Integrity

The following is a modified excerpt from Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 9-10).

All research that is aimed at understanding how people think and behave requires a principled approach to research design that is likely to maximize data quality and to instill users' confidence in the research outcomes. This is no less so in qualitative than it is in quantitative research; and, in fact, the **distinctive attributes and underlying complexities in qualitative research** necessitate a quality approach to qualitative research design. This approach requires qualitative researchers to build certain principles into their research studies by way of incorporating and practicing fundamental research standards.

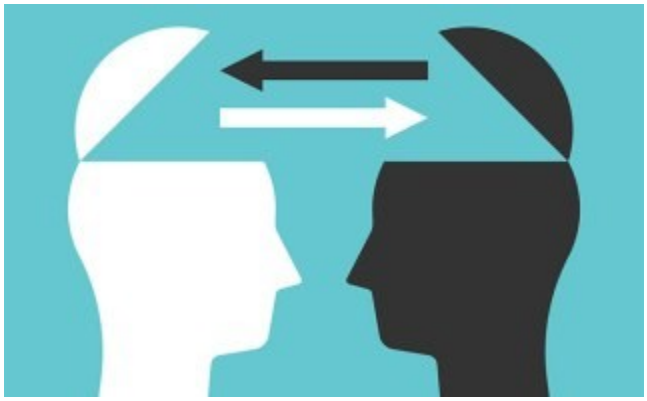


To that end, the **Total Quality Framework** (TQF) was devised to provide a basis by which researchers can develop critical thinking skills necessary to the execution of qualitative designs that maximize the integrity of the research outcomes. This framework is *not intended to prescribe a formula* or specific procedure by which qualitative researchers should conduct qualitative inquiry. Rather, the TQF provides researchers with a flexible way to focus on quality issues, examine the sources of variability and possible bias in their qualitative methods, and incorporate features into their designs that mitigate these effects and maximize quality outcomes. Integral to the TQF is the idea that all qualitative research must be **Credible, Analyzable, Transparent,** and **Useful.** These four components are fundamental to the TQF and its ability to help researchers identify the strengths and limitations of their qualitative methods while also guiding them in the qualitative research design process.

By holding the quality of qualitative research design to a deep level of scrutiny when applied across the diverse, multidisciplinary fields utilizing qualitative methods — e.g., education; psychology; anthropology; sociology; nursing, public health, and medicine; communication; information management; business; geography and environmental science; and program evaluation — the discussion of qualitative research is significantly elevated and enables students, faculty, and practitioners to design and interpret qualitative research studies based on the quality standards that are the hallmark of the TQF.

Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

Research Integrity & a Total Quality Framework Approach to Qualitative Data Sharing



The September 2021 issue of *Monitor on Psychology* from the American Psychological Association includes an article "Leading the Charge to Address Research Misconduct" by Stephanie Pappas. The article discusses the various circumstances or "pressures" that may lead researchers towards weak research practices that result in anything from "honest" mistakes or errors (e.g., due to insufficient training or oversight) to deliberate "outright misconduct" (e.g., falsifying data, dropping outliers from the analysis and reporting). The article goes on to talk about what psychologists are doing to tackle the problem.

One of those psychologists is James DuBois, DSc, PhD at Washington University School of Medicine. Dr. DuBois and his colleague Alison Antes PhD direct the P.I. (professionalism and integrity in research) Program at Washington University. This program offers one-on-one coaching to researchers who are challenged by the demands of balancing scientific and compliance requirements, as well as researchers who have (or have staff who have) been investigated for noncompliance or misconduct. The P.I. Program also conducts an On the Road Workshop which is an onsite session for researchers "doing empirical research in funded research environments" covering such areas as decision-making strategies, effective communication, and professional growth goals.

Another approach to the problem of misconduct and the goal of research integrity is transparency by way of sharing data (and other elements of design), allowing other researchers the opportunity to examine research practices and substantiate the reported results. Dr. DuBois and his co-authors discuss this and other advantages to sharing *qualitative* data in their 2018 article "Is It Time to Share Qualitative Research Data?" The authors assert that allowing other researchers to assess supporting evidence and "comprehensiveness by examining our data may improve the quality of research by enabling correction and increasing attention to detail" (p. 384).

In response to DuBois et al., Roller and Lavrakas (2018) published a commentary expressing a resounding "yes," it is time to share qualitative research data, stating further:

We believe that the greatest advantage to sharing qualitative data is the promise it holds of raising the bar on methodological rigor in the qualitative research community [and] its ability to bring quality issues to the forefront, leading to scholarly discussions and more explicit and critical self-evaluation, as well as new quality approaches to the design, implementation, and reporting of qualitative research. (p. 396)

Roller and Lavrakas (2018) go on in their commentary to discuss "a comprehensive and consistent way to think about *what* information to share about a qualitative study" through the lens of the Total Quality Framework (TQF). For instance, the types of information related to the Credibility (or data

collection) component of the TQF that might be shared are: how the appropriate methods and modes for the research design were evaluated; how study participants were chosen, e.g., using a list; the strategies that were used to gain access to and cooperation from the research participants; copies of the data collection instruments, e.g., interview or discussion guide; the actual data gathered (to the extent that confidentiality and privacy of participants are fully protected); and the researchers' reflexive journals (to the extent that confidentiality and privacy of participants are fully protected). With respect to the Analyzability (or analysis) TQF component, it is recommended that researchers share details of the data transcription process as well as explanations of how the unit of analyses were chosen and codes were derived, the coding process, the rationale by which categories, themes, and interpretations of the data were obtained, and a discussion of the verification process including how the results of this process were applied to the data analysis.

Archiving and sharing qualitative data is one approach towards raising methodological and ethical conduct in qualitative research, and it is suggested here that a consistent and comprehensive strategy to sharing will enhance this effort. As Roller and Lavrakas (2018) state

> We fully support [the sharing of qualitative data] for the principal reason that it will hold qualitative researchers to a higher standard and raise the quality of qualitative methods, while also furthering researchers' understanding of the lived experience related to myriad human conditions and issues…[And] by utilizing the TQF to bring consistency and comprehensiveness to data sharing, qualitative researchers will be rewarded with heightened attention to quality designs that serve to deepen the usefulness of their research outcomes. (p. 400)

Dubois, J. M., Strait, M., & Walsh, H. (2018). Is it time to share qualitative research data? *Qualitative Psychology*, *5*(3), 380–393. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/qup0000076

Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2018). A Total Quality Framework approach to sharing qualitative research data: Comment on DuBois et al. (2018). *Qualitative Psychology*, *5*(3), 394–401. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000081

The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Background & Literature Review

The following is a modified excerpt from Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 336-337).

Adapted from Roller, M. R. & Lavrakas P.J. (2015). *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

The second section of the Total Quality Framework (TQF) research proposal is Background and Literature Review. This section of the research proposal gives the reader the necessary context in which to situate the relevance of the proposed study. Here, the proposal author provides background details about the particular target population (e.g., in a study concerning cancer patients' consultations with their doctors, information regarding the participating oncologists and the medical facility where they practice and conduct patient consultations), past research efforts among this population (e.g., with similar types of physicians and/or their patients), and a discussion of pertinent research published in professional literature and presented at professional conferences.

In conducting the review of earlier research (either internal research with the same target population or others' research in the literature), the author of the proposal should pay particular attention to not only the compatibility of the subject matter but also the quality standards that were utilized in the design of each prior study. In fact, if the review of a past study finds it lacking from a TQF perspective, it is possible the proposal author will not cite it at all or, if it is cited, its shortcomings should be duly noted. To the extent that earlier research is cited, the researcher should identify the ways in which these studies included appropriate steps to maximize Credibility (e.g., coverage of key population segments as well as valid data gathering), Analyzability (e.g., accurate processing and verification of the data), and Transparency (e.g., full disclosure and thick description in the final document), as well as the Usefulness of the research in terms of making a valuable contribution to the subject matter. In this regard, the proposal should also discuss the author's assessment of these earlier studies, emphasizing the strengths and limitations of that research from a TQF perspective.

It is recommended that the researcher include a Literature Review Reference Summary Evaluation Table (see below) in the proposal. This table allows the researcher to organize relevant past studies and to lay out the considerations of each as it relates to the TQF, giving proposal readers an encapsulated way to view compatible studies along with the researcher's comments on their strengths and weaknesses from a TQF perspective.

Literature Review Reference Summary Evaluation Table				
	Study Design Considerations from a TQF* Perspective			
Reference	Credibility	Analyzability	Transparency	Usefulness
Forbat, White, Marshall-Lucette, & Kelly, 2012 *Discussing the Sexual Consequences of Treatment in Radiotherapy and Urology Consultations with Couples Affected by Prostate Cancer*	Purposive sampling to explore a range of patient types, 60 observations of consultations in clinics	Processing and verification procedures not documented	Provides details of the observations, including excerpts from field notes as well as site and patient information	Tackles a topic not widely found in the literature and identifies opportunities to enhance conversations about sexual function
López, A., et al., 2012 *What Patients Say About Their Doctors Online: A Qualitative Content Analysis*	Purposive sampling from two rating websites to obtain a range of reviews of primary care physicians, 445 reviews of primary care physicians	Thorough content analysis process utilizing deductive & inductive reasoning, gives examples of codes/themes	Detailed discussions of the method and the content analysis process, as well as the limitations of the study	Internet reviews provide unfiltered insights from patients who can remain anonymous & give input that may ultimately improve the physician-patient relationship

*Total Quality Framework. Table adapted from: *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Qualitative Approach* (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015)

Forbat, L., White, I., Marshall-Lucette, S., & Kelly, D. (2012). Discussing the sexual consequences of treatment in radiotherapy and urology consultations with couples affected by prostate cancer. *BJU International*, *109*(1), 98–103. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-410X.2011.10257.x

López, A., Detz, A., Ratanawongsa, N., & Sarkar, U. (2012). What patients say about their doctors online: A qualitative content analysis. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, *27*(6), 685–692. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-011-1958-4

The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Credibility of Design

A Total Quality Framework (TQF) approach to the qualitative research proposal has been discussed in articles posted elsewhere in *Research Design Review*, notably "A Quality Approach to the Qualitative Research Proposal" (2015) and "Writing Ethics Into Your Qualitative Proposal" (2018). The article presented here focuses on the Research Design section of the TQF proposal and, specifically, the Credibility component of the TQF. The Credibility component has to do with Scope and Data Gathering. This is a modified excerpt from *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach* (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 339-340).

Adapted from Roller, M. R. & Lavrakas P.J. (2015). *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

Scope

A TQF research proposal clearly defines the target population for the proposed research, the target sample (if the researcher is interested in a particular subgroup of the target population, e.g., only African American and Hispanic high school seniors in the district who anticipate graduating in the coming spring), how participants will be selected for the study, what they will be asked to do (e.g., set aside school time for an in-depth interview [IDI]), and the general types of questions to which they will be asked to respond (i.e., the content areas of the interview). In discussing Scope, the researcher proposing an IDI study with African American and Hispanic high school students would identify the list that will be used to select participants (e.g., the district's roster of seniors who are expected to graduate); the advantages and drawbacks to using this list (e.g., not everyone on the roster may consider themselves to be African American or Hispanic); the systematic (preferably random) procedure that will be used to select the sample; and the number of students that will be selected as participants, including the rationale for that number and the steps that will be taken to gain cooperation from the students and thereby ideally ensure that everyone selected actually completes an interview (e.g., gaining permission from the school principal to allow students to take school time to participate in the IDI, and from parents/guardians for students under 18 years of age who cannot give informed consent on their own behalf).

Data Gathering

The data-gathering portion of the Research Design section of the proposal highlights the constructs and issues that will be examined in the proposed research. This discussion should provide details of the types of questions that will be asked, observations that will be recorded, or areas of interest that will be listened for in a participant's narrative. If possible, the researcher will include a draft of the research instrument (e.g., the interview or discussion guide, observation grid) in the proposal.

Importantly, the researcher needs to address the potential for biases in the data collection process, particularly potential researcher effects and participants' inability or reluctance to be forthright in their responses. The proposal author should acknowledge the step(s) in the process most susceptible to bias from a TQF perspective, the potential source of the bias, and measures that will be taken to try to mitigate the threat of bias. In the IDI study of minority high school students, for example, the

researcher might discuss the potential for inaccurate or incomplete responses from the minority students if African American and Hispanic interviewers are not selected to conduct the interviews. This researcher should also discuss the steps that will be taken to maintain interviewer consistency across all interviews, specifically the interviewer training that will be conducted to ensure a consistent approach. The researcher should also acknowledge the potential for the integrity of the data to be jeopardized and explain what techniques will be used to address this potentiality. So, for example, the proposal for the IDI study of African American and Hispanic students would likely emphasize the importance of building rapport in the early stages of the interviewer–interviewee interaction in order to later gain complete and candid responses. Along with this, the proposal author should outline the rapport-building tactics that will be used in the research (e.g., preliminary communication with the students prior to the IDI and active listening skills that include exhibiting interest in the interviewee's comments and using words of encouragement during the entire interview).

Throughout the Scope and Data Gathering subsections, the elements of the TQF should be explicitly and implicitly woven into the text and used to organize the particulars about the data collection methods the researcher proposes to use.

The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Method & Mode

As discussed in "A Quality Approach to the Qualitative Research Proposal," one of the eight sections of the Total Quality Framework (TQF) proposal is Research Design. Within this section of the proposal, there are six areas to be covered by the researcher:

- Method and Mode
- Scope and Data Gathering
- Analysis
- Ethical Considerations
- Dissemination of Findings
- Summary of the Research Design

Adapted from Roller, M. R. & Lavrakas P.J. (2015). *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

The following is a modified excerpt from Roller & Lavrakas (2015, pp. 338-339) describing the Method and Mode area of the Research Design section:

The proposal author should identify the method(s), and the mode(s) within the method(s), that will be used to contact study participants, gain their cooperation, and gather data for the proposed study. The proposal should go on to support the selection of the methods and modes by outlining the strengths—alone and in comparison to other approaches—with the acknowledgment of the limitations of the proposed design.

As an example, a researcher proposing a face-to-face and phone in-depth interview (IDI) study of African American and Hispanic high school students in a particular school district would discuss the advantages of the IDI method in terms of the ability to establish rapport and develop a strong interviewer–interviewee relationship, thereby reducing the potential for bias (e.g., distortion in the interviewees' responses) and increasing the credibility of the data. This researcher would elaborate by linking the choice of method and modes to the research objectives. For instance, the researcher would explain that the goal of understanding the deep-seated factors that impact academic performance requires a research approach that is both personal in nature and creates a trusting environment wherein the interviewer can gather detailed, meaningful responses from the students to potentially sensitive questions, such as disruptive influences outside of school (e.g., family life).

The researcher would then explain that no other qualitative method (or quantitative method) could effectively gain the depth of information sought by the proposed IDI study, but also acknowledges that the success of the study will hinge on well-thought-out techniques for sampling participants and gaining cooperation from the target population (examples of which should be included in the proposal). And finally, the researcher would note that the face-to-face IDI method costs more and adds time to the study completion compared to other IDI modes, stating that this is one of the reasons that some of the IDIs will be conducted via phone.

For a discussion of the Scope and Data Gathering area of the Research Design section, see "The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Credibility of Design."

Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: The Research Team

Adapted from Roller, M. R. & Lavrakas P.J. (2015). *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

The Total Quality Framework (TQF) is built around the idea that a quality approach to qualitative research is strengthened by a host of essential critical thinking skills developed by the researcher and the research team. Indeed, the central goal of the TQF is to aid in the development of researchers' critical thinking skills as they go about the design and implementation of their qualitative research studies. The TQF encourages researchers to stop and think about data collection considerations — such as sampling, mode, and interviewer bias — as well as the integrity of the theme-constructing process during analysis, and the ultimate interpretations and usefulness of the research outcomes. In this way, the TQF is squarely focused on

"bringing greater rigor to qualitative research without stifling or squelching the creative approaches and interpretations that skilled qualitative researchers properly embrace, practice, and celebrate." (Roller & Lavrakas, p. 3)

The TQF research proposal has been discussed in other articles posted in *Research Design Review*. A general overview of the TQF proposal sections is discussed in "A Quality Approach to the Qualitative Research Proposal," the Design component of the TQF proposal is discussed in three articles — "The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Credibility of Design," "The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Method & Mode," and "Writing Ethics Into Your Qualitative Proposal" — and the Literature Review section of the TQF proposal is discussed in this article, "The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Background & Literature Review."

The following is a modified excerpt from Roller & Lavrakas (2015, pp. 342-343) describing the Research Team component of the TQF research proposal:

The principal researcher and the other people making up the research team (e.g., interviewers, moderators, observers, coders) that will be working on the proposed research are critical to the credibility of the data collected, the completeness and accuracy of the data analysis and interpretation, the transparency in the final documents, and ultimately the usefulness of the research. This is why a TQF research proposal includes a section that briefly: (a) identifies members of the team (either by name, if appropriate, or at least by job title and affiliation); (b) states the basis by which team members have been (or will be) chosen; (c) describes their knowledge of the subject matter or target population central to the proposed research; (d) identifies the particular philosophical or theoretical orientation of the principal researcher(s), as appropriate, and the effect this will have on how the study is conducted1; and (e) highlights the particular skills team members bring to the study.

For example, a researcher might propose a study for the state agency in charge of water resources involving in-person group discussions with environmental "activists" concerning environmental issues related to water use in the state. At the time of proposal writing, the researcher may not have determined the individuals who will be on the research team; however, the researcher might specify that there will be three members on the team, including the proposal author and two other researchers who (1) have 10 years' experience (each) conducting qualitative research, generally, and focus groups, specifically; (2) have worked with this particular state agency in the past and are familiar with the agency's operations; (3) have worked in the area of environmental issues for many years and, specifically, on issues related to water resources; and (4) bring unique skills to the proposed research (as discussed below).

The researcher might discuss team members' particular skills in terms of the roles they will play in conducting the study and the capabilities associated with those roles. Using the focus group study with environmental activists as an example, the person selected to moderate these group discussions could be described as someone who (a) is highly experienced in moderating focus groups and has particular experience moderating discussions with topic enthusiasts or activists; (b) understands the issues of primary importance to the state agency; (c) has been fully trained on how to minimize potential bias due to the moderator's behavior or inconsistency; and (d) possesses all the interpersonal skills of a good interviewer as well as the unique ability to manage group dynamics and effectively use enabling techniques in a group setting to gain deeper insights. Likewise, the individuals who will work on the proposed focus group analyses might be described as researchers who not only know the subject matter but are also experienced at (a) analyzing qualitative data on environmental issues, (b) identifying themes and patterns in the manifest and latent content of group discussions, (c) looking for outliers in the data that serve to support or refute preliminary interpretations, and (d) working closely with other researchers and the client to conduct debriefings that provide useful input in the analysis.

Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

Evaluating Proposals Using the Total Quality Framework

The following is a modified excerpt from Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 345-346)

In addition to using the Total Quality Framework (TQF) to structure more rigorous and comprehensive research proposals, the TQF can be used by anyone who is evaluating a proposal for a research study that will use qualitative methods (e.g., members of a thesis or dissertation committee, funders at a granting agency or foundation, clients in the commercial sector). A TQF approach to evaluating research proposals effectively holds the proposal author(s) accountable for doing research that is likely to be accurate and, in the end, useful. The TQF provides a comprehensive system to methodically think about the strengths and limitations of the proposed study design and helps the reviewer ascertain whether there are outstanding threats to the quality of the proposed research that have been ignored or remain unanticipated by the researcher(s).

In essence, the TQF is a reminder to proposal evaluators that research integrity built around fundamental principles is equally important in *qualitative* as it is in *quantitative* research design.

The TQF criteria to be considered in the proposal review, within each of the four TQF components, are the following:

Credibility

• How the target population has been defined.
• How the list representing the target population will be created.
• How the sample of participants will be chosen from the list(s) that will be used.
• How many participants the researcher proposes to gather data from or about and the justification that is provided for this number, including its adequacy for the purposes of the study; a discussion of how the researcher will monitor and judge the adequacy of this number while in the field should also be included.
• How the researcher will gain cooperation from, and access to, the sampled participants.
• How the researcher will determine if those in the sample from whom data was not gathered differ in critical ways on the topics being studied from those participants who did provide data.
• What the researcher will do to account for the potential bias that may exist because not everyone in the sample participated in the research (i.e., no data was gathered from some individuals).
• The extent to which the relevant concepts that will be studied have been identified.
• How the researcher has operationalized these concepts in order to effectively collect data on them in the research approach.
• How the researcher has articulated and supported the research objectives and questions.
• How the data collection method(s) will be pilot-tested and revised as necessary.
• The precautions that will be taken to minimize (or at least better understand) the potential biases and inconsistencies that might be created in the data by those involved in data collection.
• The precautions that will be taken to assure high ethical standards throughout the entire study.

Analyzability

• How the researcher will process the gathered data for analysis.
• How the data analyses will be carried out to make sense and interpret the data.
• The particular verification procedures that will be used to assess the reliability and validity of the findings from the analyses.

Transparency

• How the researcher will make the methods and details of the research transparent and accessible to all who seek such information about the study.

Usefulness

• The extent to which the researcher has identified the value of the proposed study and built a compelling case that the findings will advance the state of knowledge on the topic, provide actionable next steps, and/or enable the research to be transferred to other comparable contexts.