

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)

making sense of evidence

10 questions to help you make sense of qualitative research

This assessment tool has been developed for those unfamiliar with qualitative research and its theoretical perspectives. This tool presents a number of questions that deal very broadly with some of the principles or assumptions that characterise qualitative research. It is *not a definitive guide* and extensive further reading is recommended.

How to use this appraisal tool

Three broad issues need to be considered when appraising the report of qualitative research:

- **Rigour: has a thorough and appropriate approach been applied to key research methods in the study?**
- **Credibility: are the findings well presented and meaningful?**
- **Relevance: how useful are the findings to you and your organisation?**

The 10 questions on the following pages are designed to help you think about these issues systematically.

The first two questions are screening questions and can be answered quickly. If the answer to both is “yes”, it is worth proceeding with the remaining questions.

A number of italicised prompts are given after each question. These are designed to remind you why the question is important. Record your reasons for your answers in the spaces provided.

The 10 questions have been developed by the national CASP collaboration for qualitative methodologies.

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Screening Questions

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes

No

Consider:

- *what the goal of the research was*
 - *why it is important*
 - *its relevance*
-

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Yes

No

Consider:

- *if the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants*
-

Is it worth continuing?

Detailed questions

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Appropriate research design

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Write comments here

Consider:

- *if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which methods to use?)*
-

Sampling

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Write comments here

Consider:

- *if the researcher has explained how the participants were selected*
 - *if they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study*
 - *if there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)*
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Data collection

5. Were the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Write comments here

Consider:

- if the setting for data collection was justified
- if it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc)
- if the researcher has justified the methods chosen
- if the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews were conducted, did they use a topic guide?)
- if methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why?
- if the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc)
- if the researcher has discussed saturation of data

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Reflexivity (research partnership relations/recognition of researcher bias)

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Write comments here

Consider whether it is clear:

- if the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during:
 - formulation of research questions
 - data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location
- how the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design

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Ethical Issues

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Write comments here

Consider:

- if there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained
- if the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e. g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
- if approval has been sought from the ethics committee

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Data Analysis

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Write comments here

Consider:

- if there is an in-depth description of the analysis process
- if thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data?
- whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process
- if sufficient data are presented to support the findings
- to what extent contradictory data are taken into account
- whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

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Findings

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Write comments here

Consider:

- if the findings are explicit
- if there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments
- if the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst.)
- if the findings are discussed in relation to the original research questions

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Value of the research

10. How valuable is the research?

Write comments here

Consider:

- if the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature?)
- if they identify new areas where research is necessary
- if the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used