

Example 1: A Traditional Qualitative Research Proposal

A traditional qualitative research proposal often follows the general pattern of a quantitative study. The sequence flows in a logical manner. To the extent possible, the plan is developed in advance. The researcher tries to anticipate questions and concerns that a committee might raise regarding qualitative research. As such, the researcher develops a proposal that follows the logic of what might be written for a quantitative study. Such a proposal consists of 3-4 parts. It often includes an abstract.

Abstract. Its purpose is to cogently outline the argument for doing the research you propose.

Try to answer these four questions briefly.

What are the issues surrounding your study?

What do you plan to do?

Why is it important?

How will you do it?

While you may not be required to include an abstract, if you write one you will be able to clarify your own ideas. This section will be tremendously helpful to you. You should limit yourself to no more than one page; preferably you should be able to write your abstract in one paragraph. The key here is to be concise.

First Part. The purpose of this section is to make explicit the first three questions from above.

Often your purpose is to describe or understand something. What are the issues related to the study you propose? You might need to provide some history into the problem. You usually will

need to explain what we know from other research related to the problem you address. Some people might call this the conceptual framework. Moving from the general to the specific, you will need to develop a rationale for your particular study. I think about narrowing things to a point where you arrive at a specific issue or area. That then becomes the purpose of the study you propose. The section will conclude with the specific research questions. NOTE. Qualitative research does not have hypotheses that you test.

A standard introduction to include research literature about the problem area

Builds into an argument for the specific purpose of the study

A listing of 2-3 specific research questions

Second Part. The purpose of this section is to make explicit some of the issues related to qualitative research. Many readers do not have a background in the field and it is your role to provide information about the field. You will need to make explicit some of the assumptions of qualitative research. You might want to address studying humans in natural settings. If you have chosen a specific qualitative research approach, you can describe it here. It is also helpful to include some related literature on the approach or on qualitative research in general. It is here that you might discuss some of the assumptions about qualitative research such as the role of the researcher as the instrument through which data are gathered and analyzed; your own interest or motivation for doing the work (the reflexive quality of the experience) as well as your own experience and training

Information about qualitative research assumptions in general

Description of the qualitative research approach to be used (e.g. ethnographic, case study)

Brief literature review on research approach

Role of the researcher

Third Part. In this part you will make explicit, to the extent possible, how you plan to do your study. If you already know whom you will study, you can describe the participants. If you do not know, you can discuss how you plan to identify whom or what you will study. Similarly you will outline the kind of data you plan to collect and how you will do it. The more specific you are here—in this traditional type of proposal—the more others can judge your rationale and follow the path you propose.

Information about participants, including how identified and how many

Information about how information will be collected. If interviews, sample questions but not necessarily a complete questionnaire. If observations, strategies for how they will be done

Information about how data will be analyzed. If using computer software, brief description of how researcher has achieved (or will achieve) competency. If no software, brief description of plans for coding

Fourth Part (note—this might be incorporated under Part Two above). Since you are proposing a type of research that might be unfamiliar to reviewers, it is important to address potential issues that might be considered ethical dilemmas. For example, if you are going to study minors, what will you do about confidentiality? If you are going to study teachers in a school system, how will you keep information from administrators? Another important consideration is to address the issues raised relating to worth or quality. What will you do about truthfulness? How can you integrate your own thoughts and beliefs?

Potential ethical issues

Procedures to assure quality

Appendix. It is usually a good idea to include an appendix with the information stated below. If you have already conducted a pilot study, you might describe what you did, how you did it, and what you found. Most universities require students to submit a packet of material for approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). You can save time by having this ready. If you plan to interview individuals, you might need to have them sign consent forms. You can prepare these in advance. You might develop a brief outline with guidelines for conducting interviews, doing focus groups, or observing.

Pilot study results (if you have done one)

IRB form

Consent form for participants. Special form if participants are minors

Questionnaire packet with guidelines