

Example 2: A Contemporary Qualitative Research Proposal

Unlike a traditional qualitative research proposal, a contemporary proposal might take various forms. It might be written in a dynamic manner, utilizing hypertext links that might lead the reader in one of several ways. It might be presented as a poem or play. Or it might be written in a less academic style. The research plan might be quite sketchy rather than presented in detail. Much leeway would be left to taking the approach in various ways. In some approaches (particularly a feminist approach) the researcher acknowledges the co-researcher aspect of the study and makes efforts to empower the participants rather than operate in a hierarchical manner. Style of writing would be important and the researcher might suggest that the final presentation would take on a non-traditional approach.

Abstract. Preparing an abstract is a great exercise. It forces you to think through your plan, but state it in a cogent manner. If possible, I would recommend writing an abstract for your proposal.

In a traditional proposal that I described above, the four questions you might address are:

What are the issues surrounding your study?

What do you plan to do?

Why is it important?

How will you do it?

To the extent possible, you might try to address these questions.

First Part. Most research proposals do set out what you plan to study and why it is important.

Often the researcher does not address the related literature or build a conceptual framework until

much later in the process. Some qualitative researchers believe that you should not become too immersed in the related literature lest it might sway you to look for certain things rather than to enter into a situation with an open mind. If you take that position, then you would not address the related literature in your proposal.

Second Part. Here the researcher might address some important issues in the field. If you take a feminist position, you might address issues of power, giving voice to women, reflexivity, and collaboration. Another important component is the relationship of those being studied and those who do the studying. Finally you might address ownership of the knowledge. In my experience the researcher might write about only a few of these issues. Of course, other assumptions might guide the researcher. He or she might choose to make them explicit in the proposal or not address them until the final product.

Third Part. Since the research is seen as dynamic, it is possible that you might not have clear parameters for the details about the conduct of the research. As such, making explicit how participants will be selected – including how many – might not be possible. You might speak about the use of snowball sampling in terms of choosing participants for the study. While you might plan to interview participants, you might have only a very general notion of the questions to be asked. Here you might discuss the final form of the study. Some researchers chose to use alternative styles of presentation. — For example a play, poetry, or even film. It would take a special circumstance and institution to support such an alternative approach.

Appendix. All institutions are required by federal legislation to review research on human subjects. Most institutions have an Institutional Review Board (IRB). Some qualitative researchers have experienced considerable difficulties with these IRBs, especially when they prepare a proposal that does not follow a traditional stance. I refer you to Chapter 4, pp 65-66 for some problems you might face.