

Other Criteria

In addition to the criteria discussed above, several others suggested in the literature should be considered:

Meaningful. Clearly, unless a study addresses a meaningful problem or issue, it is not worth doing. This holds true for all research, not just qualitative inquiry. There should be a rationale providing justification for the study. Deciding whether a problem is meaningful or not is a subjective process; but the inquirer can provide evidence and logic to support his or her decision. And the readers can judge quality of the argument independently.

Qualitative inquiry appropriate. Obviously, not all inquiry is or should be qualitative. If the information needs call for it and the inquirer can justify the application of a qualitative or interpretational approach to the research situation, then the qualitative inquiry activities discussed in this book are appropriate. Proposals to conduct qualitative inquiry should present this justification.

Natural conditions. The study should be conducted under the most natural conditions possible. Manipulation of the participants through random assignment, submission to unnatural measurement instruments, or exposure to unnatural treatments should be avoided. The inquirer should be as unobtrusive as possible so participants are acting essentially as they would if the inquirer were simply another participant in the setting and not also conducting inquiry.

Ethical treatment. Participants in the inquiry should be treated ethically. They should be given the opportunity to react to the data record and have their disagreements with the inquirer's interpretations taken seriously. They should be given anonymity in any reports. There should be no indications that participants were treated with disrespect or cruelty.

Reports should be well written to include description, analysis, and synthesis, and to reveal the author. Attempts to share what the inquirer is learning should be communicated clearly. The descriptions should develop a sense of "being there" for the reader. The analyses should be logically presented. The audience for the report should be identified and the report should address the concerns of that audience. The grammar and use of language should be of the highest quality.

Although the balance between description, analysis, and synthesis will vary depending on the length of the report and the purposes of the inquiry, readers need to have some raw description of scenes from the research site to use in judging the conclusions that are reached and to make their own conclusions independently. They also should see some syntheses of results by the inquirer in which all contradictions in findings are analyzed and/ or resolved. Although there are paradoxes in the world, a report that presents conflicting pieces of evidence without discussing them and trying to discern their nature (whether it is a true paradox or whether one side of the issue is erroneous) needs to be improved.

Relevant characteristics of the inquirer should be clearly revealed so the reader can understand the context from which the study emerged more completely. This may be done either *explicitly* in an appendix, in the forward, or in the body of the text. Or it may be done *implicitly* in the text as the inquirer describes his or her methods, decisions, reasons for doing the study, and so on.



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