

Publishable Qualitative Research Articles: State Of The Art

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Abstract

Writing a research article can be a daunting task, and often, writers are not certain what should be included and how the information should be conveyed. Fortunately, scientific and engineering journal articles follow an accepted format. A good research paper addresses a specific research question. The research question or study objective or main research hypothesis is the central organizing principle of the paper. Whatever relates to the research question belongs in the paper; The rest doesn't. This is perhaps obvious when the paper reports on a well planned research project. However, in applied domains such as quality improvement, some papers are written based on projects that were undertaken for operational reasons, and not with the primary aim of producing new knowledge. In such cases, authors should define the main research question a posteriori and design the paper around it. They contain an introduction which includes a statement of the problem, a literature review, and a general outline of the paper, a method section detailing the methods used, separate or combined results, discussion and application sections, and a final summary and conclusions section. Here, each of these elements is described in detail using examples from the published literature as illustration. Guidance is also provided with respect to style, getting started, and the revision/review process. New scholars frequently face an immense challenge in writing papers for publication. Qualitative research novices, in particular, experience frustration in getting peer-reviewed papers published in top-tier journals.

Key words

Research Writing, Methodology, Structure, Style, Format, Research Design, Guidelines, Quality and Quantity research.

Introduction

"I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?"~ Eminent Professor [James P. Spradley](#)

Writing research papers does not come naturally to most of us. The typical research paper is a highly codified rhetorical form. Knowledge of the rules some explicit, others implied goes a long way toward writing a paper that will get accepted in a peer reviewed journal. Writing papers for publication poses an immense challenge to new scholars. For those who embrace qualitative methods, the process of getting papers published can be even more daunting. After all, qualitative research is still marginalized in some fields, where it is not considered "legitimate" science; and publications based on qualitative research are often undervalued (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004). Conducting and publishing qualitative research requires the same principal skills as quantitative research. In addition, there may be special challenges for the qualitative researcher. She may have to overcome prejudice and communication barriers within the scientific community. In quantitative research the observations typically follow a systematic scheme where the classification of the observations is already determined to a large extent when the data collection starts. This makes it possible to gather large data sets for numerical analyses, but the understanding of the findings will be restricted by the concepts on which the collection of data was based. You can argue that in qualitative research, where the observations (e.g., texts, sounds, behaviour, images, etc.) are usually fewer, the researcher's preconception of a social phenomenon does not determine the research results to the same extent as in quantitative research (Sulkunen, 1987). Qualitative research is thus often used for the study of social processes, or for a study of the reasons behind human behaviour, or as Wikipedia puts it: the why and how of social matters, more than the what, where, and when that are often central to quantitative research. The topics dealt with in qualitative addiction research range from historical process to treatment outcomes.

Qualitative research is used increasingly to answer questions about alcohol and drug policy, including rapid assessment of policy developments (Stimson et al., 2004.). It is used to study program implementation and in the evaluation of various policy measures. And ethnographers have employed qualitative methods to increase the understanding of patterns of substance use in various population groups. (Lalander, 2003.) The purpose of this paper is to describe how to prepare a qualitative research paper. The paper discusses the crucial components for preparing a qualitative paper. This paper provides advice to authors who wish to publish their research in a peer review journal. The paper starts with some remarks on special characteristics of the processes of qualitative study that can have an impact on the reporting of the results. It continues by identifying the common criteria for good qualitative research. We then present general guidance for the writing and assessment of papers which present qualitative data and some evaluation principles used by editors and referees. Finally, we give practical advice for writing a research article and discuss where to publish your results.

Objectives, Methods and Materials

The present paper is an endeavor to highlight the state of the art in writing the research papers using Qualitative research methods. This paper is based on secondary data, primarily through literature, study of journals, articles and textual analysis and website. Overall this exploratory research tries to explore the existing condition of the variables and Contributions of Publishable Qualitative research articles. Qualitative research approaches and procedures have been applied to explore pertinent information for this study.

The Question of Quality

Qualitative research is a generic term for investigative methodologies described as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field or participant observer. It emphasizes the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found. Interaction between variables is important. Detailed data is gathered through open ended questions that provide direct quotations. The interviewer is an integral part of the investigation. This differs from quantitative research which attempts to gather data by objective methods to provide information about relations,

comparisons, and predictions and attempts to remove the investigator from the investigation.

Qualitative research involves the systematic collection, organization, and analysis of largely textual material. Phenomena and events are studied in their natural settings. The issue of quality in qualitative research has been receiving considerable attention in the literature (e.g., Dingwall, Murphy, Watson, Greatbatch, & Parker, 1998; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). In this regard, quality is a contested concept, often bound up with a debate about the nature of the knowledge produced by qualitative research (Mays & Pope, 2000). Despite this epistemological debate, there is some agreement at least among many qualitative research experts that quality research (i.e., good- or high-quality research) demonstrates rigor, trustworthiness, and relevance (Bergman & Coxon, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mays & Pope; Morse et al.), with findings that are applicable or transferable to other, similar settings or groups. Quality articles are produced by a scientific approach as distinguished from superficial conjecture. They report research results that break new ground and that can influence policy or be applied to professional practice. Quality articles reflect quality of content, style, and organization; they require meticulous preparation so they will be free from flaws. Such articles are coherent, comprehensible, and compelling. They engage readers, stimulate thought, and sometimes spur action. Evidently, quality articles depend, in large part, on quality research.

The Stages of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research unfolds in three stages: data collection, content analysis, and comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Hypotheses need not be stated in the beginning of a participant observation assessment, but will be generated throughout the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1992). Most qualitative researchers are not interested in forming universal generalizations, but in generating concepts or insights for future use. There are many ways of conducting qualitative research. Let's explore three stages of qualitative research:

1. Data collection is a process of recording an event and gathering pertinent information. Following are some suggestions for collecting data. Start by writing first impressions, making a space map, called a

socio gram, which requires following participant interactions and recording field notes to include dates and times, and dialogues and gestures among participants. Use both audio (and video) tape recording, as well as field notes, in case the electronic equipment fails. Photographs may add vividness to your research, but you also can sketch participants' artworks or art making in progress. Conduct a sociocultural profile by asking questions about the racial and economic background of the setting and its participants. Write to the local Department of Commerce for a community profile. Gather cultural documents; such as school mission statement, course of study, art curriculum, and art handouts for further interpretation. Reconstruct data that may be lacking; such as a curriculum sequence or lesson plan objectives.

2. Content analysis is a search for conceptual themes or patterns of meaning both scientific and emerging. Content analysis is a search for conceptual themes, writing data summaries, clustering data to form relationships, condensing information to the most significant meanings, and writing stories (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 429). Eisner (1991) states that features that count do not wear labels on their sleeves: they do not announce themselves. It is not a matter of checking behaviors, but rather of perceiving their presence and interpreting their significance. It is process of forming convincing suppositions, called propositions, from data and their content (Krippendorff, 1980). A supposition is a probable explanation. Some researchers borrow categories from previous research. Other categories emerge from the data in metaphoric forms. Content analysis is a stage of analysis used in discovering concepts (abstract ideas) and themes. Some concepts are simple, such as lecturing, while other concepts, such as teaching itself, are more complicated. A researcher must start the content analysis procedure by sorting categories. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggest the following starter categories: setting, participant views, process, activity, passages, stages, behaviors, and methods. These categories are conceptual clusters.

3. Comparative analysis is a process of interrelating findings or explanations in one class session or several class sessions to form [suppositions] propositional insights. Interrelation consists of both internal analysis (within your own study) and external analysis (comparisons with other cases and the related

literature). If you compare two or more of your observed, class sessions, you are using internal comparative analysis. When you include evidence from related research or local experts to support your interrelated findings, you are using external comparative analysis. Present your proposition and give an internal example (to refresh the reader's memory), and add external support. State that your findings are tentative, exploratory, incomplete, or working hypotheses.

Evaluation Criteria for Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

There are some differences between the evaluation of qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative methodology is the detailed description of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors, the use of direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts. Quantitative methods use numbers for interpreting data and distinguished by emphasis on numbers, measurement, experimental design, and statistical analysis. The replicability of a qualitative study cannot be formulated as a problem of reliability, and the accuracy of a qualitative interpretation cannot be compared to the explanatory power of a statistical model. In the following paragraphs we propose three main criteria for evaluating qualitative studies. Since in qualitative research the analyses and reporting are very closely intertwined, the following criteria are as relevant to researchers and authors as they are to reviewers and editors:

1. Significance of the data set and its social or cultural place:

The researcher should be prepared to argue that her data are worth analyzing. It is not easy to identify criteria for the significance of data. One precondition can, however, be presented: the researcher should carefully define the social and cultural place (contextualising) and the production conditions of her material.

2. Sufficiency of the data and coverage of the analysis:

For statistical studies we are able to calculate in advance the extent of data needed to estimate the parameters accurately enough for the purpose of the analysis. We have no similar methods for estimating the extent of qualitative data

required. We usually speak about data saturation: data collection can be terminated when new cases no longer disclose new features (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A proper coverage of the analysis means that the researcher does not base her interpretations on a few arbitrary cases or instances but on a careful reading of the whole material. Qualitative reports are often loosely impressionistic because the excessive amount of material has made it unfeasible to analyze it carefully enough.

3. Transparency and repeatability of the analysis:

Transparency of the analysis means that the reader is able to follow the researcher's reasoning, that he is given the necessary information for accepting her interpretations or challenging them. The repeatability of an analysis means that the rules of classification and interpretation have been presented so clearly that another researcher applying them will reach the same conclusions. We may identify three ways of improving the transparency and repeatability of qualitative analysis and the report:

- 1) Enumerating the data;
- 2) Dividing the process of interpretation into steps; and
- 3) Making explicit the rules of decision and interpretation.

Guidelines for Qualitative Research Papers

Qualitative research helps researchers address issues in a specific context in their research disciplines. There are a number of research approaches which are included under the umbrella of qualitative methods. The social science disciplines have different conventions on best practices in qualitative research. This paper describes the structure of a qualitative research manuscript which is suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. General principles of good practice for all research will also apply.

Before you start to write, you should spend some time thinking about the article content. At this stage, you should write down ideas in a free form, creating a general outline for the paper. You consider such questions as:

- What is the message of the paper?

- What is the new result or contribution that you want to describe?
- What do you want to convince people of?

If you have not already done so, you should conduct a thorough literature search to identify those important contributions that are related to your work. As you are ready to submit your article, it is always helpful to do one more search; including articles that were published just as you submit your paper will show that you are aware of the current work going on in your field (Russel & Morrison 2003). As you get ready to write, try to summarize these initial ideas into concrete bullets that will eventually become paragraphs. Start to organize these bullets into a logical structure

1. Methodology and methods

All papers must include a methods section that specifies the sample recruitment strategy, sample size, data collection, and data analysis procedure. Authors of qualitative papers should discuss whether they are sampling people, events, or cases and why they are being sampled. In terms of sample size, significance of findings, and generalizability of findings, there is no formally agreed-upon "significance level." There is no specific number of interviews or observations that should be conducted in a qualitative research. How many is enough depends on the question a researcher seeks to answer. Therefore, it is essential for authors to provide a justification for the sample size and its limitation. Researchers should remember that the aim of a qualitative study is not always to predict or to generalize study findings. In a qualitative study, more attention should be given to the quality of the dataset instead of the size of the sample.

2. Principles of selection

Qualitative research is often based on or includes non-probability sampling. The unit(s) of research may include one or a combination of people, events, institutions, samples of natural behaviour, conversations, written and visual material, etc.

- The selection of these should be theoretically justified e.g. it should be made clear how respondents were selected

- There should be a rationale for the sources of the data (e.g respondents/participants, settings, documents)
- Consideration should be given to whether the sources of data (e.g people, organisations, documents) were unusual in some important way
- Any limitations of the data should be discussed (such as non response, refusal to take part)

3. The research process:

In most papers there should be consideration of

- The access process
- How data were collected and recorded
- Who collected the data
- When the data were collected
- How the research was explained to respondents/participants

Writing Format of the Research Paper

In academic writing, how you present your information (technically) is often seen as important as the ideas you are putting forth. Properly format your Papers by using the styles and when to use them. Proper citing, quoting and referencing of source material allow you to convey your breadth of research in a language commonly shared by others in your discipline. Giving others a chance to review and compare your work under these established guidelines enables your instructors to better see the work on its own merits, opposed to getting sidetracked by technical inefficiencies.

You must follow the rules like every other student: this is not an area where you want to stand out for doing things your own way. Writing for any academic purpose carries with it certain expectations and formatting consistencies and a failure to properly understand how or why you cite your sources in a specific way can have negative effects on your written projects and communications. There are three main "Schools of Style" used to properly format an academic paper, referred to as APA, MLA, and CMS.

APA style:

These are the official guidelines put forth by the American Psychological Association, now in its sixth

edition. This is the preference of the social sciences, so if you are studying sociology, psychology, medicine, or social work you are going to know APA style.

MLA style:

The Modern Language Association provides guidelines you will be familiar with if you are focused on the Humanities: so artists, English majors, and theatre students will know MLA as they have used this style now for more than half a century.

CMS style:

These are the style guidelines put forth in the *Chicago Manual of Style*, now in its 16th edition. CMS style is predominantly seen in the humanities, particularly with literature students and those who study advanced segments of history and/or the arts.

While these formatting methods will share many characteristics such as margins and spacing, how they attribute references to source materials is the main differentiator. For example, APA lists "references" while MLA calls the same thing "works cited" - a small but important distinction that might actually affect your grade. Typically, you are going to use one style for most of your classes and communications, but there is certainly the possibility that you'll need to know how to use any one of these three common styles. The good news is it is not hard to get up-to-speed on any one of them and use them properly.

1. The American Psychological Association (APA) Writing Format is one of the most widely used formats in writing academic papers. The APA writing style has evolved through time and several changes have been adapted in response to the electronic information age. What follows are some useful pointers for those of you who're tasked to write a paper using the APA format.

General APA Guidelines:

- Your essay should be typed, double spaced on standardsized paper (8.5" x 11") with 1" margins on all sides.
- You should use a clear font that is highly readable. APA recommends using 12 pt. Times New Roman font.
- Include a page header (also known as the "running head") at the top of every page.

- To create a page header/running head, insert page numbers flush right. Then type “title of your paper” in the header flush left using all capital letters.
- The running head is a shortened version of your paper's title and cannot exceed 50 characters including spacing and punctuation.

2. The Modern Language Association (MLA) style is most commonly used to write papers and cite sources within the liberal arts and humanities.

General MLA Guidelines:

- Type your paper on a computer and print it out on standard, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper.
- Double-space the text of your paper, and use a legible font (e.g. Times New Roman). Whatever font you choose, MLA recommends that the regular and italics type styles contrast enough that they are recognizable one from another. The font size should be 12 pt.
- Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks. Set the margins of your document to 1 inch on all sides.
- Indent the first line of paragraphs one half-inch from the left margin. MLA recommends that you use the Tab key as opposed to pushing the Space Bar five times.
- Create a header that numbers all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.
- Use italics throughout your essay for the titles of longer works and, only when absolutely necessary, providing emphasis.
- If you have any endnotes, include them on a separate page before your Works Cited page. Entitle the section Notes (centered, unformatted).

3. The Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) covers a variety of topics from manuscript preparation and publication to grammar, usage, and documentation and has been lovingly called the “editors’ bible.” The material in this resource focuses primarily on one of the two CMS documentation styles: the Notes-Bibliography System (NB), which is used by those in literature, history, and the arts. The other documentation style, the Author-Date System, is nearly

identical in content but slightly different in form and is preferred in the social sciences.

General CMS Guidelines:

- Margins should be set at no less than 1” and no greater than 1.5”. Typeface should be something readable, such as Times New Roman or Palatino.
- Font size should be no less than 10 pt. (preferably, 12 pt.). Text should be consistently double-spaced, with the following exceptions: Block quotations, table titles, and figure captions should be single-spaced.
- A prose quotation of five or more lines should be blocked. A blocked quotation does not get enclosed in quotation marks. An extra line space should immediately precede and follow a blocked quotation. Blocked quotations should be indented 0.5” as a whole.
- Notes and bibliographies should be singled-spaced internally; however, leave an extra line space between note and bibliographic entries.
- Page numbers begin in the header of the first page of text with Arabic number 1. Subheadings should be used for longer papers.

Structure and Function of the Qualitative Research Articles

Recommended order of Writing:-

Title:

When considering a title for your article, do familiarise yourself with the types of titles in the target journal, analyse whether they are more general or very specific. The editors-in-chief may want the article titles to sell and gain clicks. This is why in some cases a more general title is better than an overly specific one. Avoid abbreviations in the title as well as unnecessary “and” words. Fundamentally, a very long title is not good as the reader may have difficulties in perceiving the content. Again, there are some journal and field specific differences in the types of titles, and following the practices of your target journal is the best approach. The suitable title length depends on whether your target journal favours indicative or informative titles. Journals favouring short indicative titles may, for example prefer titles with less than eight words. On the other hand, other journals may prefer long informative titles. However, researchers ought to attempt

simplifying their titles even when longer ones are allowed.

Abstract:

Most addiction journals require the authors to write very short abstracts, covering background, aims, data and methods, results and discussion. It is a good idea for the author of a qualitative article to write a preliminary abstract at an early stage of the writing process, to make sure that the text will be coherent and logical

Introduction:

The Introduction justifies the significance of the subject matter and connects your work to previous research. This chapter can also include a definition of the key terms, if necessary. In reality it is better to use a limited number of terms and be consistent in their use. One rarely needs to invent completely new terms even when discussing something totally new. It is essential for the author to understand the true meaning of the terms used and be able to communicate them clearly. Start the Introduction with sentences that are adequately general, and simple enough to understand even for those who are not experts in exactly the same topic as you. This way different type of readers can position your article into previous research more easily. Aim to motivate the reader and help them understand why your research topic is important. Utilise published journal articles, preferably recent ones, to point out the importance of your research by highlighting how it relates to them. This will please editors who want the scientific discussion to occur in their own medium.

Literature Review:

A good review of earlier research on the topic is essential for your claim that you are contributing something new. It also shows that you want to take your place in the research community, in serious dialogue with other researchers. If the referees find that you have over looked important literature, particularly if it is their own work (and since qualitative addiction research is a small field you will often have a referee that has contributed to your topic), or that you have misinterpreted them, they will read your study with skepticism. Do not limit yourself to literature from your own country, but be sure to cover what has been written from your own culture. When you have presented a good review of earlier research you will

also have defended your theoretical and methodological position and your choice of data.

Research method / process:

According to Drisko (2005), inadequate methods are among the most common reason for qualitative articles being declined by editors. It is important to justify the choice of methods. If you want to be really convincing, explain your choice in relation to alternative methodologies. If you use several methods, explain how they complement each other. For instance, it is not enough simply to state that you use focus group interviews and a post-structuralist text analysis: you should describe how and why you use them. Describe carefully each step in the analysis to make it possible for the reader to believe that your conclusions are correct or argue against them. A good rule is to present the analysis of one observation/item/response in detail. Describe your interpretations during the analysis in a systematic way, in small identifiable steps. Show the fruitfulness of your concepts. Show how you argued for saturation, and how you handled diversity and contradictions in the data. A thorough description of how the data were handled is also important. It should be clearly stated, for instance, how and whether the interviews were transcribed, coded mind grouped.

Results:

For the reader, the presentation of the results is easiest to follow if the structure is directly linked to the research question, moves in logical steps according to the theory and method, and consistently uses the concepts presented earlier in the article.

Discussion:

The structure of the discussion in a qualitative article can follow the same structure as in quantitative research reports. After a very short summary of your research question (check that it is the same as in the Introduction) and the motivation for your wish to explore it, you can repeat in one sentence the main result of your study (Including interpretation or implications of results).

Conclusions:

The Conclusions section, alongside the Abstract and Introduction, is one of the core elements

of a journal article. It is important to include the practical implications of your research in the Conclusions chapter; discussing what the implications are for practitioners, companies, etc. Novice researchers tend to concentrate purely on the results and forget about the implications. The Conclusions must be in line with the previous sections and should not present totally new results. The implications should, however, be discussed.

Acknowledgments:

The acknowledgments are given at the end of the research paper and should at a minimum name the sources of funding that contributed to the article. You may also recognize other people who contributed to the article or data contained in the article, but at a level of effort that does not justify their inclusion as authors. There is a growing trend to also acknowledge the contributions of the reviewers. This is a controversial issue. Since acknowledgment sections cannot be referenced or listed on curriculum vitae, this seems only a means of getting the reviewers to agree with a revision and accept the paper.

References:

All reference works cited in the paper must appear in a list of references that follow the formatting requirements of the journal in which the article is to be published. You may not include references that were not cited. Refereed journal articles, research monographs, and books are preferred over less stable or reliable sources, such as personal communications, unrefereed conference proceedings, or web-site addresses.

Conclusion

In this Paper we have emphasized the qualitative research is greater than doing and writing up quantitative reports. We have presented some quality criteria, particularly for qualitative research, discussed criteria for evaluation of journal articles and given some practical advice to authors. To publish qualitative research is as least as challenging as to get quantitative reports accepted. However, it is apparent that the addiction field as a whole is increasingly coming to realize the value of qualitative studies. We

believe that in the future there will be an even greater interest in good qualitative research, and a growing demand for mixed methods studies. Those who have dug themselves down into the qualitative or quantitative trenches will come out and start communicating, for their own and everybody's mutual benefit.

To sum up, this study's findings characterize the state of the art for publishable qualitative research articles of research methods, as a platform for seeing future research needs, for positioning future investigations, and for supporting the identification of relevant literature. Armed with a better understanding of research methods, along multiple dimensions described here, both practitioners and researchers can benefit. Finally, although writing for publication can be enormously frustrating, it can also be immensely fulfilling. The deepest fulfillment comes to us who publish what we write and see others cite what we publish.

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