

Developing a research question for a qualitative study

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The importance of a research aim

*'It is not the answer which enlightens,
but the question'*

(Ionesco cited in Haynes, 2006)



The value of a research question

- What do you want to find out?
- Important for planning
- Orient the study
- Link to purpose
- Help select appropriate methods
- Provides a framework

What kinds of research qs are appropriate for qualitative research?

- Research questions which investigate:
 - Subjective, human experiences
 - Describe or observe complex processes
 - C.f. causal hypothesis
- Holistic, naturalistic approach
- Understanding of social context

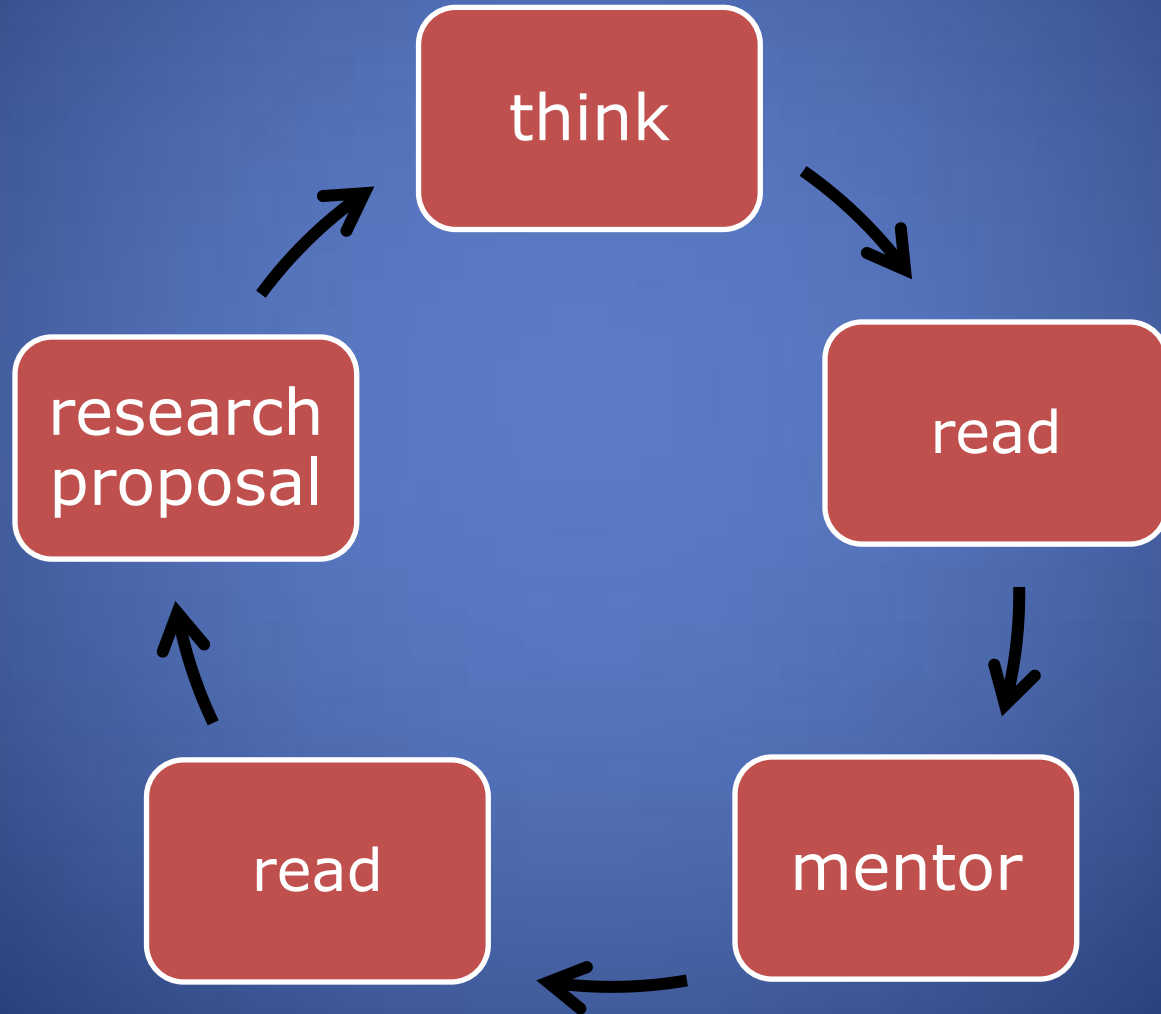
Differences between qualitative & quantitative research

	Qualitative	Quantitative
Aim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of participants' meaning and understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Causal explanations, hypotheses, control
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad focus • Process-orientated • Context bound, generally natural setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow focus • Product-orientated • Context free/artificial setting
Data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-standardised, flexible • Textual analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardised • Numbers oriented
Outcome/variable of interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description; story, theory • 'Unquantifiable' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measurable
Generalisability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transferability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistical generalisability

Essential elements: developing a research idea

- **Describes what it is you want to find out****The research aim**
- **Explain why you are bothering to it find out****The value**
- **Describe how this research is going to find it out****The method**

Developing a research idea & question



Research idea

- Often stems from clinician's experience and observations
- Identified from gap in evidence
- Relevant to work or study
- Passion and knowledge



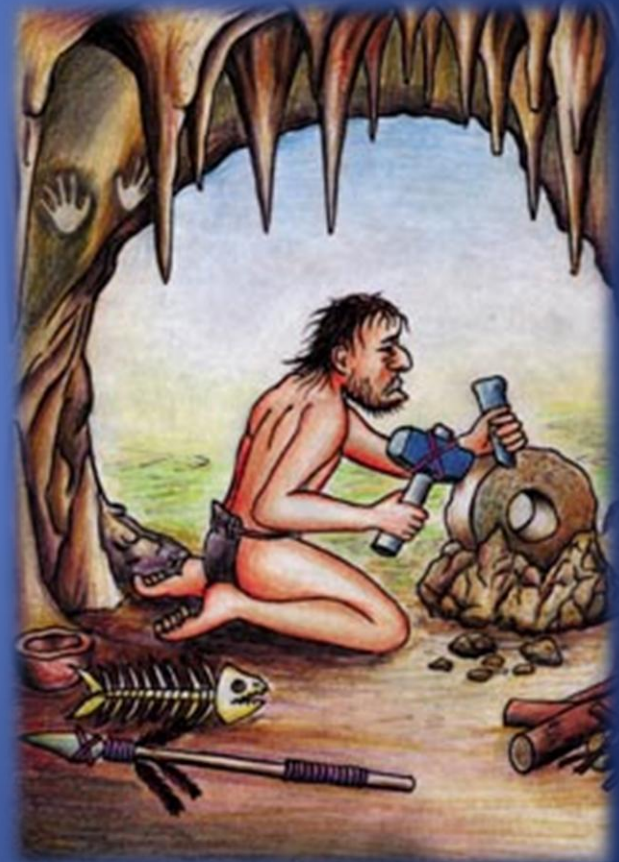
An essential first question to ask yourself

Does the proposed problem/issue/question warrant doing the research?



Is the research really needed?

- Don't reinvent the wheel
- Search the research literature
- This can take time
- Identify gaps in evidence:
 - no studies
 - inconclusive studies
 - inappropriate designs



What is the value of the research idea?

Write a summary:

- State the problem with reference to gaps in the evidence identified through a review of the literature
- Provide the logic, rationale and justification for the proposed research
- State the value of your proposed research



Is the research really needed?

Clinical network study

- Literature review showed lack of studies on what stakeholders (clinicians; senior policy-makers) think are important outcomes of clinical networks
- Information needed to inform a larger evaluative study

Clinical facilitators study

- No Australian literature on what contribution clinical facilitators can make to the successful transition of CALD nursing students into practice
- Views of CFs will help to inform strategies to assist with successful transition

Research Aim

- What is it you are trying to find out?
 - Specific, clear
- Can be phrased as questions
 - What are nurses' perceptions of euthanasia? ✓



The importance of an aim

A research project can fail if aims are poorly focused and underdeveloped
(Farrugia et al. 2010)

- Aims related to choice of method
- Compass/anchor

Examples qualitative research aims

- To examine barriers and facilitators to physical activity and exercise among ethnically diverse older adults who have fallen (Belza et al 2004)
- To understand how strategic stakeholders understand and respond to the UK Safer Patients initiative?
(Dixon-Woods et al 2010)
- To understand how clinical staff on medical wards identify, classify, narrativise and orient to patient safety risks
(Dixon-Woods et al 2009)
- To explore the psychosocial consequences of falling and views on falls prevention of older people hospitalised after a fall (Kong et al 2001)

Good questions identify topic of interest

What are the **views** of key stakeholders on desirable outcomes of NSW clinical networks?



Good questions identify topic of interest

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Influences method and design

What are the **views.....**

- Depth rather than breadth required
- Rich data in participants' language
- 'Ground up' approach required without imposing researcher's own ideas/views

Influences method and design

What are the **views.....**

- Patient satisfaction surveys - consistently high level of satisfaction
- Qualitative studies (should) allow a process of reflection
- Methods of inquiry should access opinion and thereby often more negative and 'untransformed' responses to healthcare experiences.

Qualitative methods

- Interview (semi-structured or unstructured)
 - Individual
 - Focus group
- Observational methods
 - Ethnography
- Document or speech analysis

Qualitative research question examples

- To examine barriers and facilitators to physical activity and exercise among ethnically diverse older adults who have fallen (Belza et al 2004) (focus groups)
- To understand how strategic-level hospital stakeholders understand and respond to the UK Safer Patients initiative? (Dixon-Woods et al 2010) (semi-structured telephone interviews)
- To understand how staff on medical wards identify, classify, narrativise and orient to patient safety risks (Dixon-Woods et al 2009) (ethnography - observational)
- To explore the psychosocial consequences of falling and views on falls prevention of older people hospitalised after a fall (Kong et al 2001) (semi-structured face-to-face interviews)

Good questions identify the sample

What are the views of **clinicians and senior policy-makers** on desirable outcomes of clinical networks?



Good questions identify the sample

- Purposive sampling
 - Participants have the necessary knowledge
 - Conceptual generalisability
- Sample size
 - trade off between breadth and depth



Qualitative research question examples

- To examine barriers and facilitators to physical activity and exercise among ethnically diverse older adults who have fallen (Belza et al 2004)
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Other considerations

Balance between 'idea' & 'feasibility':

- Feasibility of the design
 - Timelines
 - Collaborators
 - Mentors
-
- Resources – money and personnel



Conclusion

- A well-developed aim is the foundation to successful and feasible research
- Don't reinvent wheel
- Allocate time to think, draft and plan
- Seek advice and feedback



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