**Writing Good Qualitative Research Questions**

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Got a great handout a while back that I stumbled over today, hopefully it’s as helpful to you as it was to me. Here are the steps for writing good (mass communication of course) qualitative research questions:

Specify the research problem: the practical issue that leads to a need for your study.

**Complete these sentences:**

* “The topic for this study will be…”
* “This study needs to be conducted because…”

**How to write a good qualitative purpose statement:** a statement that provides the major objective or intent or roadmap to the study. Fulfill the following criteria:

* Single sentence
* Include the purpose of the study
* Include the central phenomenon
* Use qualitative words e.g. explore, understand, discover
* Note the participants (if any)
* State the research site

**A good place to start:** The purpose of this \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, case, etc.) study is (was? will be?) will be to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (understand, describe, develop, discover) the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (central phenomenon of the study) for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (the participants) at (the site). At this stage in the research, the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (central phenomenon) will be generally defined as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (a general definition of the central concept).

**Research questions serve to narrow the purpose.** There are two types:  
Central

* The most general questions you could ask

Sub-questions

* Subdivides central question into more specific topical questions
* Limited number

**Use good qualitative wording for these questions.**

* Begin with words such as “how” or “what”
* Tell the reader what you are attempting to “discover,” “generate,” “explore,” “identify,” or “describe”
* Ask “what happened?” to help craft your description
* Ask “what was the meaning to people of what happened?” to understand your results
* Ask “what happened over time?” to explore the process

Avoid words such as: relate, influence, impact, effect, cause

**Scripts to help design qualitative central and sub-questions:**  
Central question script (usually use only one):

* “What does it mean to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (central phenomenon)?”
* “How would \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (participants) describe (central phenomenon)?”

Sub-question script:

* “What \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (aspect) does \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (participant) engage in as a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (central phenomenon)?”

**Sources**

1. Cresswell. J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
2. Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. Principles of qualitative research: Designing a qualitative study PPT.

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