Qualitative researchers must engage in reflexivity—at all stages of the qualitative research process. They must recognize their beliefs and assumptions, acknowledge their relationship to the research topic and participants, and consider how these influence their study. Below, we describe two categories of reflexivity: personal and epistemological. For each category, we suggest key strategies that researchers can adopt to improve the quality and rigor of their research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Epistemological</th>
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<tr>
<td>Researchers reflecting on how their own beliefs and assumptions influence their study and on how the study, in turn, affects the researchers themselves.</td>
<td>Researchers reflecting on their approach to knowledge generation. (The <strong>positivist</strong> approach is based on empiric observation, deduction, and hypothesis testing; the <strong>constructivist</strong> approach is based on interactions between researchers’ and participants’ beliefs and experiences; and the <strong>pragmatist</strong> approach is based on practice.)</td>
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</table>

**Sampling strategies**

- Researchers should include extreme, critical, and maximally diverse cases (to garner opposing, unique but important, and variable opinions) and not just typical cases (that would generate commonly held opinions).
- Researchers should welcome participants with different perspectives on the subject and participants from multiple realities—even if their views contradict existing knowledge.

**Data sources and collection: Questions to ask**

- Is the inquiry open-ended? Is a power differential or hierarchy inhibiting expression of alternative perspectives? Are any questions or data being overlooked because of personal beliefs and opinions?
- Is data collection triangulated (i.e., from multiple data sources) so that investigator interpretations of findings are justified and to allow for discovery of new concepts linked to study questions?

**Data analysis and interpretation**

- Researchers immerse themselves in the data, actively look for complementary and divergent opinions, code using participants’ words, and use memos to document assumptions.
- Multiple investigators undertake independent analysis, ensuring that data interpretation is based on participants’ narratives; then they verify their interpretation with participants (i.e., engage in member checking).

**Findings and story**

- Researchers report how their preconceptions, beliefs, values, assumptions, and position may have influenced the research process.
- Researchers report how participants’ voices raised awareness of existing knowledge of the central concept, allowed discovery of new concepts, and influenced the storyline.

**Notably, the dichotomy between personal and epistemological reflexivity is not absolute; the two categories overlap in many areas. The strategies here constitute a framework, not a set of rules, since the design for each qualitative study must ultimately be guided by the study questions.**

**Further reading:**

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