



11 Articles on the
Total Quality Framework
Qualitative Research Proposal

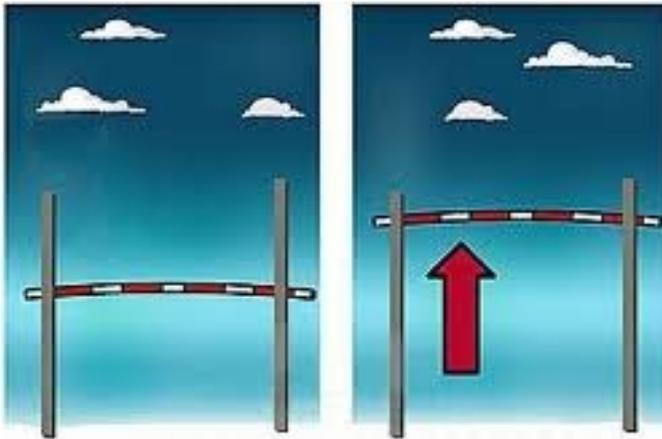
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The contents of this compilation include a selection of 11 articles appearing in [Research Design Review](#) from 2013 to early 2022 concerning the Total Quality Framework qualitative research proposal. Excerpts and links may be used, provided that the proper citation is given.

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Raising the Bar in Qualitative Research Proposals



Back in 2011, a post in *Research Design Review* described a quality framework that is recommended as a guide to researchers in their qualitative research designs. This post – [“Four Components of the Quality Framework for Qualitative Research Design”](#) – talks about the benefits of grounding qualitative design in a framework by which the researcher can “judge the efficacy”

as well as “examine the sources of variability and establish critical thinking in the process of qualitative research design.” The four components of the quality framework (QF) revolve around the idea that all qualitative research must be: credible, analyzable, transparent, and ultimately useful.

In the current post, qualitative researchers are encouraged to put the QF to work in a very important applied arena – i.e., the crafting and evaluating of research proposals. For instance, a QF approach to qualitative research deserves prominence in: (a) the proposals written by graduate students working towards their theses and dissertations; (b) proposals written by researchers in the academic, government, not-for-profit, and commercial sectors responding to clients’ requests for proposal (RFPs); and (c) proposals written for grants. Taking a quality perspective in the research proposal raises the bar on the critical thinking skills utilized by researchers in the preparation of qualitative research proposals, as well as the criteria by which proposal guidelines and RFPs are written, and the processes by which these proposals are evaluated by reviewers.

A research proposal guided by a quality framework (QF) differs from other research proposal formats in one overarching way – quality-design issues play a central role throughout the proposal and in any evaluation of the proposal. For example, from the outset, a QF proposal couches the introductory discussions concerning research objectives and the significance of the proposed research around the component of Usefulness and its emphasis on new insights, next steps, and transferability about which the researchers, clients, and other users can be confident. Among other purposes, the literature review section of a QF research proposal discusses past research in the literature from the point of view of the four framework components, highlighting how the proposed new research will improve on earlier work by incorporating a fundamental quality assessment of the reliability

and accuracy of previous studies being reviewed. In the method section, a QF research proposal elaborates on the discussion of data collection from the standpoint of the Credibility component – where population coverage and measurement issues such as interviewer bias or inter-observer reliability play important roles – and data analysis in terms of the Analyzability component, where the focus is on the critical areas of processing (e.g., transcriptions) and verification (e.g., peer debriefings and triangulation). And, unlike most qualitative research proposals, a QF research proposal includes a section specific to Transparency with an emphasis on the final deliverables, how the researcher plans to provide complete disclosure (“thick description”) in the research report document, and a rundown of the supporting materials that will also be included, e.g., the reflexive journal, interview guide, and the like.

A QF research proposal may very well result in a lengthier proposal than is now typical but the result is a more complete and compelling document that more fully informs the person reviewing the proposal and, as importantly, forces the qualitative researcher to think carefully about each aspect of the research from the standpoint of credibility, analyzability, transparency, and its ultimate usefulness.

A Quality Approach to the Qualitative Research Proposal

The articles in *Research Design Review* are largely devoted to issues of “quality research design”; specifically, how to build sound research techniques and principles into the design of qualitative and quantitative studies. Creating designs that lead to useful, actionable outcomes is the ultimate goal of research, yet most meaningful research would not get off the ground without a well-reasoned, well-written research proposal. This is why a quality approach to developing the research proposal is essential among researchers in the academic, government, not-for-profit, and commercial sectors responding to RFPs; researchers in search of grant funding; as well as graduate students working toward their theses and dissertations.



A quality approach is particularly important with respect to the *qualitative* research proposal. While quantitative proposals typically incorporate any number of discussions on quality issues that directly or indirectly justify the proposed study, attention is less frequently given to these considerations in the qualitative proposal.

Preparing a qualitative research proposal around pertinent quality issues requires critical thinking skills aided by a basis with which to examine aspects that potentially may impact the quality of outcomes. One such basis is the [Total Quality Framework](#) (TQF) which offers the qualitative researcher various design parameters to consider related to Credibility (data collection), Analyzability (analysis), Transparency (reporting), and Usefulness (next steps). What differentiates the TQF proposal from other proposal formats is the central role that quality design issues play *throughout* the proposal.

There are eight sections to the TQF proposal.

1. Introduction: A brief overview that sets the stage for the proposed approach, including the topic and particular research question(s) being addressed, how the proposed study will advance thinking in this area, the fundamental methodological

approach(es), and, importantly, the priority that will be given to incorporating quality measures via the TQF.

2. Background & Literature Review: A discussion of the population segment of interest as well as earlier research that has been conducted by the sponsoring organization (if appropriate) and research published in professional literature and/or presented at professional conferences. Importantly, the literature review should weigh heavily the reliability and validity of compatible research, i.e., the quality standards that were integrated into the research design. A “Literature Review Reference Summary Evaluation Table”^{*} – that organizes past studies and lays out the strengths and limitations of each as it relates to the TQF – can be very useful for this purpose. This section is essential to providing the necessary context for the researcher’s proposed approach.

3. Research Questions or Hypotheses: The proposal author not only states the specific questions or hypotheses that are the objectives of the research but also explains *why* these questions/hypotheses merit investigation. Based on the review of earlier research in section #2, these questions/hypotheses may be both substantive and methodological, whereby the proposed research is expected to avoid the quality flaws (as defined by the TQF) of prior studies.

4. Research Design: A detailed account of each aspect of the research design from a quality perspective. Because every key aspect of the design has some role in the quality of research outcomes, the proposal should explicitly discuss elements of the TQF throughout this section. The broad areas covered are: method and mode, scope and data gathering, analysis, ethical considerations, and dissemination of findings.

5. Research Team: A discussion of the researcher and other members of the research team. This consists of: each team member’s name (if appropriate), title, and affiliation; the basis by which each team member was chosen, including his/her experience and knowledge of the subject matter and/or population segment as well as skills; the role each team member will play in conducting the research; and the principal researcher’s philosophical or theoretical orientation (as appropriate) and its impact on how the study will be conducted. Importantly, this section highlights how the research team will ensure credibility in the data collected, completeness and accuracy of the data analysis and interpretation, the transparency of the final deliverables, and usefulness of the research outcomes.

6. Research Deliverables: A description of the documents and details that will be included at the conclusion of the proposed research. An example of what this might include is discussed in [25 Ingredients to “Thicken” Description & Enrich](#)

[Transparency in Ethnography](#). This section emphasizes the value in transparency as a fundamental component of the TQF and how the documents/details that will be included in the final deliverables will provide the users of the research with a clear and accurate account of what occurred.

7. Limitations of the Proposed Research: A critique of the proposed research from a quality standpoint, i.e., a TQF perspective. By acknowledging the imperfections in the proposed study, the author takes the “high road” and strengthens the idea that the proposed approach is the “best” one given the available resources, and demonstrates that the researcher will fully account for these limitations when drawing final interpretations of the data.

8. Research Schedule & Cost Estimate: The proposed schedule and cost estimate are outlined with special mention given to the necessary time and costs associated with the TQF research approach. This section outlines the scheduling and cost considerations related to such matters as: obtaining quality lists to sample participants, the ease or difficulty in gaining cooperation from participants, training (e.g., for data collection and analysis), verification procedures, and compiling the final deliverables.

The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Background & Literature Review



The following is a modified excerpt from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 336-337).

The second section of the [Total Quality Framework \(TQF\) research proposal](#) is Background and Literature Review. This section of the research proposal gives the reader the necessary context in which to situate the relevance of the proposed study. Here, the proposal author provides background details about the particular target population (e.g., in a study concerning cancer patients' consultations with their doctors, information regarding the participating oncologists and the medical facility where they practice and conduct patient consultations), past research efforts among this population (e.g., with similar types of physicians and/or their patients), and a discussion of pertinent research published in professional literature and presented at professional conferences.

In conducting the review of earlier research (either internal research with the same target population or others' research in the literature), the author of the proposal should pay particular attention to not only the compatibility of the subject matter but also the quality standards that were utilized in the design of each prior study. In fact, if the review of a past study finds it lacking from a TQF perspective, it is possible the proposal author will not cite it at all or, if it is cited, its shortcomings should be duly noted. To the extent that earlier research is cited, the researcher should identify the ways in which these studies included appropriate steps to maximize [Credibility](#) (e.g., coverage of key population segments as well as valid data gathering), [Analyzability](#) (e.g., accurate processing and verification of the data), and [Transparency](#) (e.g., full disclosure and thick description in the final

document), as well as the [Usefulness](#) of the research in terms of making a valuable contribution to the subject matter. In this regard, the proposal should also discuss the author’s assessment of these earlier studies, emphasizing the strengths and limitations of that research from a TQF perspective.

It is recommended that the researcher include a Literature Review Reference Summary Evaluation Table (see below) in the proposal. This table allows the researcher to organize relevant past studies and to lay out the considerations of each as it relates to the TQF, giving proposal readers an encapsulated way to view compatible studies along with the researcher’s comments on their strengths and weaknesses from a TQF perspective.

Literature Review Reference Summary Evaluation Table				
Reference	Study Design Considerations from a TQF Perspective			Usefulness
	Credibility	Analyzability	Transparency	
Forbat, White, Marshall-Lucette, & Kelly, 2012 <i>Discussing the Sexual Consequences of Treatment in Radiotherapy and Urology Consultations with Couples Affected by Prostate Cancer</i>	Purposive sampling to explore a range of patient types, 60 observations of consultations in clinics	Processing and verification procedures not documented	Provides details of the observations, including excerpts from field notes as well as site and patient information	Tackles a topic not widely found in the literature and identifies opportunities to enhance conversations about sexual function
López, A., et al., 2012 <i>What Patients Say About Their Doctors Online: A Qualitative Content Analysis</i>	Purposive sampling from two rating websites to obtain a range of reviews of primary care physicians, 445 reviews of primary care physicians	Thorough content analysis process utilizing deductive & inductive reasoning, gives examples of codes/themes	Detailed discussions of the method and the content analysis process, as well as the limitations of the study	Internet reviews provide unfiltered insights from patients who can remain anonymous & give input that may ultimately improve the physician-patient relationship

*Total Quality Framework. Table adapted from: *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Qualitative Approach* (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015)

Forbat, L., White, I., Marshall-Lucette, S., & Kelly, D. (2012). Discussing the sexual consequences of treatment in radiotherapy and urology consultations with couples affected by prostate cancer. *BJU International*, 109(1), 98–103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-410X.2011.10257.x>

López, A., Detz, A., Ratanawongsa, N., & Sarkar, U. (2012). What patients say about their doctors online: A qualitative content analysis. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 27(6), 685–692. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-011-1958-4>

Evaluating Quality Standards in a Qualitative Research Literature Review



A December 2015 article in *Research Design Review* discusses [“A Quality Approach to the Qualitative Research Proposal.”](#) The article outlines the eight sections of a “TQF proposal,” i.e., a proposal whereby quality design issues – specifically, related to the four components of the [Total Quality Framework](#) – play a central role throughout the writing of each proposal section. This approach enables the researcher to be mindful of the

considerations that go into developing, implementing, and reporting a qualitative research study that is built on quality standards. The TQF proposal can then live on beyond the proposal phase to inform the researcher as he/she goes about executing the proposed design.

The second section of the TQF proposal is called “Background and Literature Review” and is devoted to giving the reader the context in which to situate the relevance of the proposed study as well as details of the target population and past research efforts with the population segment and/or research topic. When conducting a literature review for a TQF proposal, it is worthwhile for the researcher to use a reference table or matrix that helps to evaluate each relevant study according to the steps that were taken to maximize Credibility (e.g., representativeness of the sample, validity of the data), Analyzability (i.e., completeness and accuracy of the data processing and verification), Transparency (i.e., completeness and disclosure of the study details), and Usefulness (i.e., the ability to do something of value with the outcomes).

This literature review evaluation table is predicated on the idea that not all qualitative research studies are equally reliable and valid. In addition to keeping track of the relevant research unearthed in his/her investigation, the literature review table allows the researcher to efficiently evaluate the quality standards that were employed in these studies, along with their strengths and limitations from a quality standpoint, and determine which studies to cite in the proposal.

Further, a revised table comprised of just those references actually cited in the proposal is a useful addition to the proposal itself. This table provides proposal readers with a convenient way to view cited references in conjunction with the

researcher's comments related to each study's strengths and limitations from a TQF perspective.

An example of a partial Literature Review Reference Summary Evaluation Table for a proposed study on physician-patient relations is shown below.

Literature Review Reference Summary Evaluation Table				
Reference	Study Design Considerations from a TQF[*] Perspective			
	Credibility	Analyzability	Transparency	Usefulness
Forbat, White, Marshall-Lucette, & Kelly, 2012 <i>Discussing the Sexual Consequences of Treatment in Radiotherapy and Urology Consultations with Couples Affected by Prostate Cancer</i>	Purposive sampling to explore a range of patient types, 60 observations of consultations in clinics	Processing and verification procedures not documented	Provides details of the observations, including excerpts from field notes as well as site and patient information	Tackles a topic not widely found in the literature and identifies opportunities to enhance conversations about sexual function
López, A., et al., 2012 <i>What Patients Say About Their Doctors Online: A Qualitative Content Analysis</i>	Purposive sampling from two rating websites to obtain a range of reviews of primary care physicians, 445 reviews of primary care physicians	Thorough content analysis process utilizing deductive & inductive reasoning, gives examples of codes/themes	Detailed discussions of the method and the content analysis process, as well as the limitations of the study	Internet reviews provide unfiltered insights from patients who can remain anonymous & give input that may ultimately improve the physician-patient relationship

*Total Quality Framework. Table adapted from: *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Qualitative Approach* (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015)

Image captured from: <https://a2ua.com/quality.html>

The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Research Questions & Hypotheses



The following is a modified excerpt from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 338).

The [background and literature review section](#) of the [Total Quality Framework \(TQF\) proposal](#) provides the context for the research question(s) and/or hypotheses that the proposed research is designed to address. In this section, the proposal author must not only put forth the questions/hypotheses under study, but provide support as to why these are the ones that merit investigation. In doing this, the author should rely on the TQF to bolster the logical arguments that are advanced in support of these research questions/hypotheses.

The extent to which the research questions revolve around quality-design issues will depend, in part, on the results of the literature review and the nature of the research topic. For example, a proposal to study physician–patient consultations might state the primary research question as “What are the main factors that appear to contribute to the frequency and type of conversations concerning cancer patients’ sexual functioning among a representative sample of a clinic’s oncology physicians?” The researcher may or may not harbor a hypothesis along with the research question. However, depending on the literature review, the researcher might enter into the research hypothesizing, for example, that the frequency and substance of physician–patient conversations concerning sexual function are associated with how closely the physician’s demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, and race) match those of the patient. Or, a proposal on this topic may focus on methodological, rather than substantive, hypotheses such as noting TQF flaws in past research and hypothesizing that the author’s proposed methods for the new

study will avoid the problems of earlier research (which the researcher may believe led to biased findings and ill-advised recommendations) and thereby result in outcomes that are more credible and therefore more useful.

Careful, thoughtful attention needs to be paid to this section of the proposal. It is the research questions and/or hypotheses that the researcher describes here that will play a large role in guiding the next section of the TQF proposal, [the design of the research study](#).

The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Credibility of Design

A [Total Quality Framework](#) (TQF) approach to the qualitative research proposal has been discussed in articles posted elsewhere in *Research Design Review*, notably [“A Quality Approach to the Qualitative Research Proposal”](#) (2015) and [“Writing Ethics Into Your Qualitative Proposal”](#) (2018). The article presented here focuses on the Research Design section of the TQF proposal and, specifically, the Credibility component of the TQF. The Credibility component has to do with Scope and Data Gathering. This is a modified excerpt from *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach* (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 339-340).



Scope

A TQF research proposal clearly defines the target population for the proposed research, the target sample (if the researcher is interested in a particular subgroup of the target population, e.g., only African American and Hispanic high school seniors in the district who anticipate graduating in the coming spring), how participants

will be selected for the study, what they will be asked to do (e.g., set aside school time for an in-depth interview [IDI]), and the general types of questions to which they will be asked to respond (i.e., the content areas of the interview). In discussing Scope, the researcher proposing an IDI study with African American and Hispanic high school students would identify the list that will be used to select participants (e.g., the district’s roster of seniors who are expected to graduate); the advantages and drawbacks to using this list (e.g., not everyone on the roster may consider themselves to be African American or Hispanic); the systematic (preferably random) procedure that will be used to select the sample; and the number of students that will be selected as participants, including the rationale for that number and the steps that will be taken to gain cooperation from the students and thereby ideally ensure that everyone selected actually completes an interview (e.g., gaining permission from the school principal to allow students to take school time to participate in the IDI, and from parents/guardians for students under 18 years of age who cannot give informed consent on their own behalf).

Data Gathering

The data-gathering portion of the Research Design section of the proposal highlights the constructs and issues that will be examined in the proposed research. This discussion should provide details of the types of questions that will be asked, observations that will be recorded, or areas of interest that will be listened for in a participant's narrative. If possible, the researcher will include a draft of the research instrument (e.g., the interview or discussion guide, observation grid) in the proposal.

Importantly, the researcher needs to address the potential for biases in the data collection process, particularly potential researcher effects and participants' inability or reluctance to be forthright in their responses. The proposal author should acknowledge the step(s) in the process most susceptible to bias from a TQF perspective, the potential source of the bias, and measures that will be taken to try to mitigate the threat of bias. In the IDI study of minority high school students, for example, the researcher might discuss the potential for inaccurate or incomplete responses from the minority students if African American and Hispanic interviewers are not selected to conduct the interviews. This researcher should also discuss the steps that will be taken to maintain interviewer consistency across all interviews, specifically the interviewer training that will be conducted to ensure a consistent approach. The researcher should also acknowledge the potential for the integrity of the data to be jeopardized and explain what techniques will be used to address this potentiality. So, for example, the proposal for the IDI study of African American and Hispanic students would likely emphasize the importance of building rapport in the early stages of the interviewer–interviewee interaction in order to later gain complete and candid responses. Along with this, the proposal author should outline the rapport-building tactics that will be used in the research (e.g., preliminary communication with the students prior to the IDI and active listening skills that include exhibiting interest in the interviewee's comments and using words of encouragement during the entire interview).

Throughout the Scope and Data Gathering subsections, the elements of the TQF should be explicitly and implicitly woven into the text and used to organize the particulars about the data collection methods the researcher proposes to use.

The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Method & Mode



As discussed in [“A Quality Approach to the Qualitative Research Proposal,”](#) one of the eight sections of the [Total Quality Framework](#) (TQF) proposal is Research Design. Within this section of the proposal, there are six areas to be covered by the researcher:

- Method and Mode
- Scope and Data Gathering
- Analysis
- Ethical Considerations
- Dissemination of Findings
- Summary of the Research Design

The following is a modified excerpt from Roller & Lavrakas (2015, pp. 338-339) describing the Method and Mode area of the Research Design section:

The proposal author should identify the method(s), and the mode(s) within the method(s), that will be used to contact study participants, gain their cooperation, and gather data for the proposed study. The proposal should go on to support the selection of the methods and modes by outlining the strengths—alone and in comparison to other approaches—with the acknowledgment of the limitations of the proposed design.

As an example, a researcher proposing a face-to-face and phone in-depth interview (IDI) study of African American and Hispanic high school students in a particular school district would discuss the advantages of the IDI method in terms of the

ability to establish rapport and develop a strong interviewer–interviewee relationship, thereby reducing the potential for bias (e.g., distortion in the interviewees’ responses) and increasing the credibility of the data. This researcher would elaborate by linking the choice of method and modes to the research objectives. For instance, the researcher would explain that the goal of understanding the deep-seated factors that impact academic performance requires a research approach that is both personal in nature and creates a trusting environment wherein the interviewer can gather detailed, meaningful responses from the students to potentially sensitive questions, such as disruptive influences outside of school (e.g., family life).

The researcher would then explain that no other qualitative method (or quantitative method) could effectively gain the depth of information sought by the proposed IDI study, but also acknowledges that the success of the study will hinge on well-thought-out techniques for sampling participants and gaining cooperation from the target population (examples of which should be included in the proposal). And finally, the researcher would note that the face-to-face IDI method costs more and adds time to the study completion compared to other IDI modes, stating that this is one of the reasons that some of the IDIs will be conducted via phone.

For a discussion of the Scope and Data Gathering area of the Research Design section, see [“The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Credibility of Design.”](#)

Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

Writing Ethics Into Your Qualitative Proposal

A qualitative research proposal is comprised of many pieces and parts that are necessary to convey the researcher's justification for conducting the research, how the research will be conducted (including the strengths and limitations of the proposed approach), as well as what the sponsor of the research can expect in terms of deliverables, timing, and cost.



The eight sections of the Total Quality Framework (TQF) proposal are discussed briefly in [this 2015 post](#) in *Research Design Review*. One of the sections in the TQF proposal is Design. This is where the researcher discusses the research method and mode along with Scope and Data Gathering (consistent with the [TQF Credibility component](#)), and analysis (including aspects of processing and verification as described by the [TQF Analyzability component](#)). Another important part to the Design section is a discussion of the ethical considerations associated with the proposed research.

Every research proposal for studying human beings must carefully consider the ethical ramifications of engaging individuals for research purposes, and this is particularly true in the relatively intimate, in-depth nature of qualitative research. It is incumbent on qualitative researchers to honestly assure research participants their confidentiality and right to privacy, safety from harm, and right to terminate their voluntary participation at any time with no untoward repercussions from doing so. The proposal should describe the procedures that will be taken to implement these assurances, including gaining informed consent, gaining approval from the relevant Institutional Review Board, and anonymizing participants' names, places mentioned, and other potentially identifying information.

Special consideration should be given in the proposal to ethical matters when the proposed research (a) pertains to vulnerable populations such as children or the elderly; (b) concerns a marginalized segment of the population such as people with disabilities, same-sex couples, or the economically disadvantaged; (c) involves covert observation that will be conducted in association with an ethnographic study; or (d) is a narrative study in which the researcher may withhold the full true

intent of the research in order not to stifle or bias participants' telling of their stories.

Furthermore, the researcher should pay particular attention to ethical considerations when writing a proposal for a focus group study. The focus group method (regardless of mode) brings together (typically) a number of strangers who are often asked to offer their candid thoughts on personal and sensitive topics. For this reason (and other reasons, e.g., the moderator may be sharing confidential information with the participants), it is important to gain a signed consent form from all participants; *however*, the reality is that there is no way the researcher can totally guarantee confidentiality. These and other associated ethical considerations should be discussed in the Design section of the focus group proposal.

The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: The Research Team



The [Total Quality Framework](#) (TQF) is built around the idea that a quality approach to qualitative research is strengthened by a host of essential critical thinking skills developed by the researcher and the research team. Indeed, the central goal of the TQF is to aid in the development of researchers' critical thinking skills as they go about the design and implementation of their qualitative research studies. The TQF encourages researchers to stop and think about data collection considerations — such as sampling, mode, and interviewer bias — as well as the integrity of the theme-constructing process during analysis, and the ultimate interpretations and usefulness of the research outcomes. In this way, the TQF is squarely focused on

“bringing greater rigor to qualitative research without stifling or squelching the creative approaches and interpretations that skilled qualitative researchers properly embrace, practice, and celebrate.” (Roller & Lavrakas, p. 3)

The TQF research proposal has been discussed in other articles posted in *Research Design Review*. A general overview of the TQF proposal sections is discussed in [“A Quality Approach to the Qualitative Research Proposal,”](#) the Design component of the TQF proposal is discussed in three articles — [“The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Credibility of Design,”](#) [“The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Method & Mode,”](#) and [“Writing Ethics Into Your Qualitative Proposal”](#) — and the Literature Review section of the TQF proposal is discussed in this article, [“The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Background & Literature Review.”](#)

The following is a modified excerpt from Roller & Lavrakas (2015, pp. 342-343) describing the Research Team component of the TQF research proposal:

The principal researcher and the other people making up the research team (e.g., interviewers, moderators, observers, coders) that will be working on the proposed research are critical to the [credibility](#) of the data collected, the completeness and accuracy of the data [analysis and interpretation](#), the [transparency](#) in the final documents, and ultimately the [usefulness](#) of the research. This is why a TQF research proposal includes a section that briefly: (a) identifies members of the team (either by name, if appropriate, or at least by job title and affiliation); (b) states the basis by which team members have been (or will be) chosen; (c) describes their knowledge of the subject matter or target population central to the proposed research; (d) identifies the particular philosophical or theoretical orientation of the principal researcher(s), as appropriate, and the effect this will have on how the study is conducted¹; and (e) highlights the particular skills team members bring to the study.

For example, a researcher might propose a study for the state agency in charge of water resources involving in-person group discussions with environmental “activists” concerning environmental issues related to water use in the state. At the time of proposal writing, the researcher may not have determined the individuals who will be on the research team; however, the researcher might specify that there will be three members on the team, including the proposal author and two other researchers who (1) have 10 years’ experience (each) conducting qualitative research, generally, and focus groups, specifically; (2) have worked with this particular state agency in the past and are familiar with the agency’s operations; (3) have worked in the area of environmental issues for many years and, specifically, on issues related to water resources; and (4) bring unique skills to the proposed research (as discussed below).

The researcher might discuss team members’ particular skills in terms of the roles they will play in conducting the study and the capabilities associated with those roles. Using the focus group study with environmental activists as an example, the person selected to moderate these group discussions could be described as someone who (a) is highly experienced in moderating focus groups and has particular experience moderating discussions with topic enthusiasts or activists; (b) understands the issues of primary importance to the state agency; (c) has been fully trained on how to minimize potential bias due to the moderator’s behavior or inconsistency; and (d) possesses all the interpersonal skills of a good interviewer as well as the unique ability to manage group dynamics and effectively use enabling techniques in a group setting to gain deeper insights. Likewise, the individuals who will work on the proposed focus group analyses might be described as researchers

who not only know the subject matter but are also experienced at (a) analyzing qualitative data on environmental issues, (b) identifying themes and patterns in the manifest and latent content of group discussions, (c) looking for outliers in the data that serve to support or refute preliminary interpretations, and (d) working closely with other researchers and the client to conduct debriefings that provide useful input in the analysis.

[Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. \(2015\). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. New York: Guilford Press.](#)

The TQF Qualitative Research Proposal: Limitations



The following is a modified excerpt from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 344).

The Total Quality Framework (TQF) research proposal has been discussed in several articles appearing in *Research Design Review*. In [“A Quality Approach to the Qualitative Research Proposal,”](#) the importance of critical thinking in proposal writing and the essential eight sections of the TQF research proposal — built around the central role of quality design — are introduced. Three articles in *RDR* focus on the Design section of the proposal — one article discussing [Scope and Data Gathering](#) (i.e., the Credibility component of the TQF), another article reflecting specifically on [method and mode](#), and a third article concerning the [ethical considerations](#) of the proposed study. Beyond the Design section, *RDR* also includes articles on the [Background & Literature Review](#) and [Research Team](#) sections of the TQF proposal.

Another section of the TQF research proposal is devoted to Limitations. In this section, the proposal author will methodically apply the TQF to produce a critique of the proposed research design in ways that are consistent with what has been discussed in the Design section of the proposal. That is, the Limitations section will contain subsections on [Credibility](#) (Scope and Data Gathering), [Analyzability](#) (Processing and Verification), [Transparency](#), and [Usefulness](#). In each of these subsections the researcher will acknowledge the likely limitations of the study design that is being proposed, and briefly opine on the likely implications of these limitations to the overall usefulness of the research.

No qualitative (or quantitative) research study is perfect (with only strengths and no drawbacks). By readily (and unhesitatingly) acknowledging that there are limitations in the proposed design, the proposal writer takes the “high road” and thereby strengthens the case that the proposed design is the best one possible, given the funding, time, and other resources that are available to support the study. It also demonstrates that the researcher will be cognizant of these limitations in formulating conclusions and making recommendations based on the study’s findings.

Evaluating Proposals Using the Total Quality Framework

The following is a modified excerpt from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 345-346)



In addition to using the [Total Quality Framework](#) (TQF) to structure [more rigorous and comprehensive research proposals](#), the TQF can be used by anyone who is evaluating a proposal for a research study that will use qualitative methods (e.g., members of a thesis or dissertation committee, funders at a granting agency or foundation, clients in the commercial sector). A TQF approach to evaluating research proposals effectively holds the proposal author(s) accountable for doing research that is likely to be accurate and, in the end, useful. The TQF provides a comprehensive system to methodically think about the strengths and limitations of the proposed study design and helps the reviewer ascertain whether there are outstanding threats to the quality of the proposed research that have been ignored or remain unanticipated by the researcher(s).

In essence, the TQF is a reminder to proposal evaluators that research integrity built around fundamental principles is equally important in *qualitative* as it is in *quantitative* research design.

The TQF criteria to be considered in the proposal review, within each of the four TQF components, are the following:

Credibility

- How the target population has been defined.
- How the list representing the target population will be created.
- How the sample of participants will be chosen from the list(s) that will be used.
- How many participants the researcher proposes to gather data from or about and the justification that is provided for this number, including its adequacy for the purposes of the study; a discussion of how the researcher will monitor and judge the adequacy of this number while in the field should also be included.
- How the researcher will gain cooperation from, and access to, the sampled participants.
- How the researcher will determine if those in the sample from whom data was not gathered differ in critical ways on the topics being studied from those participants

who did provide data.

- What the researcher will do to account for the potential bias that may exist because not everyone in the sample participated in the research (i.e., no data was gathered from some individuals).
- The extent to which the relevant concepts that will be studied have been identified.
- How the researcher has operationalized these concepts in order to effectively collect data on them in the research approach.
- How the researcher has articulated and supported the research objectives and questions.
- How the data collection method(s) will be pilot-tested and revised as necessary.
- The precautions that will be taken to minimize (or at least better understand) the potential biases and inconsistencies that might be created in the data by those involved in data collection.
- The precautions that will be taken to assure high ethical standards throughout the entire study.

Analyzability

- How the researcher will process the gathered data for analysis.
- How the data analyses will be carried out to make sense and interpret the data.
- The particular verification procedures that will be used to assess the reliability and validity of the findings from the analyses.

Transparency

- How the researcher will make the methods and details of the research transparent and accessible to all who seek such information about the study.

Usefulness

- The extent to which the researcher has identified the value of the proposed study and built a compelling case that the findings will advance the state of knowledge on the topic, provide actionable next steps, and/or enable the research to be transferred to other comparable contexts.