

9-1-2003

The Five-Question Method For Framing A Qualitative Research Study

Mark L. McCaslin

University of Idaho, markm@uidaho.edu

Karen Wilson Scott

University of Idaho, Karen@if.uidaho.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

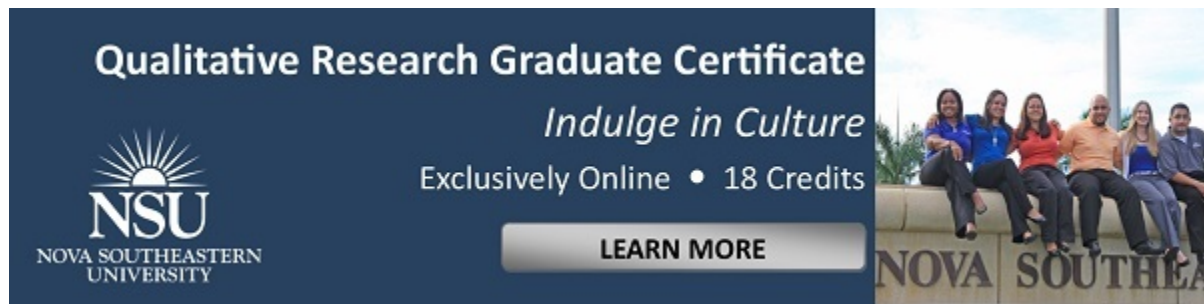


Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

McCaslin, M. L., & Scott, K. W. (2003). The Five-Question Method For Framing A Qualitative Research Study. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(3), 447-461. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2003.1880>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



The Five-Question Method For Framing A Qualitative Research Study

Abstract

The Five-Question Method is an approach to framing Qualitative Research, focusing on the methodologies of five of the major traditions in qualitative research: biography, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. Asking Five Questions, novice researchers select a methodology appropriate to the desired perspective on the selected topic. The Method facilitates identifying and writing a Problem Statement. Through taking a future perspective, the researcher discovers the importance and direction of the study and composes a Purpose Statement. The process develops an overarching research question integrating the purpose and the research problem. The role of the researcher and management of assumptions and biases is discussed. The Five-Question Method simplifies the framing process promoting quality in qualitative research design. A course outline is appended.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Five-Question Method, Biography Research, Phenomenology Research, Grounded Theory Research, Case Study Research, Ethnography Research

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

The Five-Question Method For Framing A Qualitative Research Study

Mark L. McCaslin

University of Idaho, Idaho Falls, Idaho, USA

Karen Wilson Scott

University of Idaho, Idaho Falls, Idaho, USA

The Five-Question Method is an approach to framing Qualitative Research, focusing on the methodologies of five of the major traditions in qualitative research: biography, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. Asking Five Questions, novice researchers select a methodology appropriate to the desired perspective on the selected topic. The Method facilitates identifying and writing a Problem Statement. Through taking a future perspective, the researcher discovers the importance and direction of the study and composes a Purpose Statement. The process develops an overarching research question integrating the purpose and the research problem. The role of the researcher and management of assumptions and biases is discussed. The Five-Question Method simplifies the framing process promoting quality in qualitative research design. A course outline is appended. Key words: Qualitative Research, Five-Question Method, Biography Research, Phenomenology Research, Grounded Theory Research, Case Study Research, and Ethnography Research

Introduction

Planning a qualitative study for the first time tends to be an intimidating venture for graduate students just entering the field. Even armed with a topic of interest, for a novice in qualitative research, identifying the problem can seem highly problematic in and of itself. "Students often enter a doctoral-level course with little or no previous preparation in qualitative research" (Cobb & Hoffart, 1999). We view graduate students' general lack of exposure to and experience with qualitative research as a major issue to be addressed in any entry-level qualitative course of instruction.

A second major hurdle for the novice qualitative researcher, and perhaps for others, is how to determine the appropriate tradition and then how to construct a canvas and frame upon which a study can be effectively and artistically painted. Creswell (1998) suggests that the tradition of qualitative inquiry selected by a researcher can shape the design of the study. He carefully provides text and tables comparing five major qualitative traditions: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study in six phases of research design (1998). We have found Creswell's approach to be highly beneficial and included several aspects of it in our own instruction of qualitative design. One of the six phases Creswell (1998) compared across his five selected traditions, "formation of the purpose and

research questions,” (p. 2) in practice fell short of our goal to assist graduate students in constructing a solid research frame. One of us was the instructor of an introductory course on qualitative design and the other a doctoral student in the course struggling with the design of a first qualitative study. The crux of the difficulties appeared to lie in developing a proper frame for the study canvas: forming a problem statement, forming a purpose statement, and finally developing a grand tour question. The answer came in the form of five simple questions, which grew into our Five-Question Method. Addressing these difficulties via the Five-Question Method is the second major thrust of our curriculum.

Creswell (1998) suggests that “the best studies have a strong inquiry procedure” (p. 27). He and others claim that courses of instruction in qualitative research design should be similarly inquiry-based (Cobb & Hoffart, 1999; Creswell, 1998; and Wolcott, 1994). Wolcott (1994) structures his qualitative research courses, whether survey or advanced, to be “hands-on” inquiry. While conducting the course as inquiry-oriented is a key issue in building a design, we also believe that the primary colors of that design must be intricately blended as a holistic mural, rather than merely assembled side by side in a paint-by-number fashion. Page (1997) emphasizes that with meaning-making as a concept that orients course offerings of interpretive research, students should “encounter a holistic, rather than hodge-podgish or hierarchically arranged array of knowledge” (p. 172). It was with holistic discovery in mind that we structured our inquiry-based course on framing a qualitative study.

Course Design

Our curriculum is delivered as a full-semester course. Appendix A depicts an outline of a typical graduate level course. The target audience is any graduate student interested in an introduction to qualitative research design. The offering should be considered for a graduate student just entering the qualitative field. Our course has five learning objectives:

1. Students will gain a broad overview of five major traditions in qualitative research.
2. Students will conceptualize a Research Problem using the Five-Question Method
3. Through a perspective gained through thinking backward, students will determine what Purpose the study data are to serve.
4. Students will develop a Grand Tour Study Question integrating the Research Problem and the Study Purpose.
5. Students will begin to discover the Role of the Researcher in their studies.

The course begins with an overview description of qualitative research and a specific focus on the five qualitative traditions Creswell (1998) compared: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. We describe all five traditions and provide a synopsis of each that includes foci on tradition, discipline of origin, data collection methods, data analysis methods, and narrative form. We lean heavily on Creswell for much of the general data, and then go to the primary authors of each tradition for specific information.

Biography is described as the study of a single individual and his or her experiences as told to the researcher or as found in the documents and archival materials (Denzin, 1989). We allow biography to broadly include biographies, autobiographies, life histories, and oral histories. The researcher investigates the life of one individual, often collecting data primarily through interviews and documents of many types (e.g., diaries, family histories,

newspaper articles). Analysis typically takes the form of stories, epiphanies, and historical content to yield a vivid picture of the life of the individual in question (Creswell, 1998).

Phenomenology is described as the study of the shared meaning of experience of a phenomenon for several individuals. "The understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the context of a particular situation is the primary target of phenomenological knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 14). The researcher reduces data gathered as lengthy interviews describing the shared experiences of several informants to a central meaning, or "essence" of the experience.

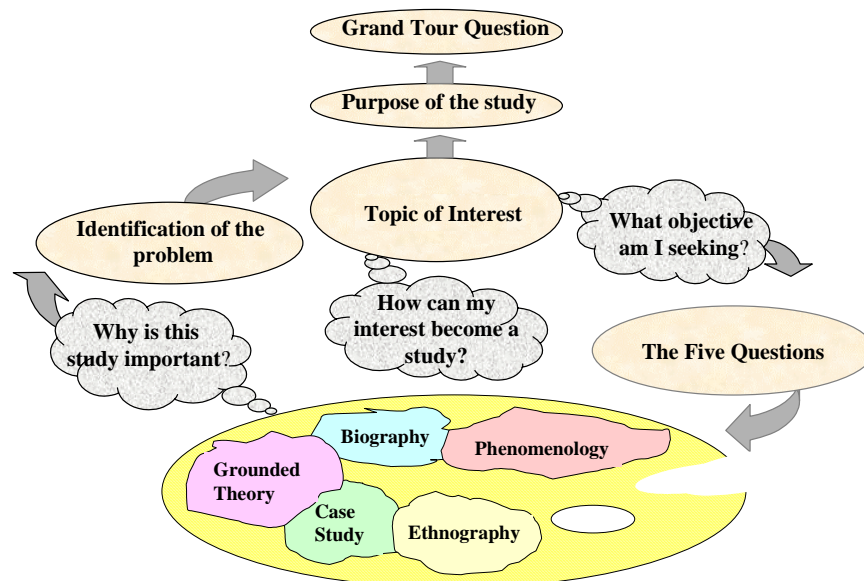
In grounded theory, the researcher generates an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, a theory that explains some action, interaction, or process. This analysis occurs primarily through collecting interview data, making multiple visits to the field (theoretical sampling), attempting to develop and interrelate categories of information via constant comparison, and writing a substantive or context-specific theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Ethnography is described a study of an intact culture or social group (or an individual or individuals within a group) based primarily on observations and a prolonged period of time spent by the researcher in the field. The ethnographer listens and records the voices of the informants with the intent of generating a cultural portrait (Thomas, 1993; Walcott, 1994).

Finally, case studies in qualitative research are investigations of "bounded systems" with the focus being either the case or an issue illustrated by the case(s) (Stake, 1995). A qualitative case study provides an in-depth study of this "system," based on a diverse array of data collection materials. The researcher situates this system within its larger "context" or setting.

"If we are all self-styled researchers, then the teaching/training issue has more to do with how to provide a basic orientation and overall sense of what is involved than with trying to devise a list of minimum essential techniques with which every fieldworker ought to be acquainted" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 390). We designed our Five-Question Method depicted in Figure 1, to serve as that orienting guide to which a novice in qualitative research design can return during the framing of a study design.

Figure 1. The Five Question Method for framing a qualitative research design.



Notice that to frame the study canvas a student would begin in the center of the guide with a loosely formed topic of interest in mind. Proceeding clockwise, the student begins a sketch by asking the question, “What objective am I seeking with my study?” Wolcott suggests that students must learn to “think backward,” to mentally move into a future state, gaining a sense of what intention they hold for their finished painting. Then from the perspective of that future position, students view their imagined finished painting to “think about the data they will need and how they will want to use it” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 387). Gaining that futuristic view develops depth of focus on the topic.

Continuing clockwise the next step of this introspective inquiry is the key to our method, answering the Five Questions. The students’ answers identify colors and designs. As their selections of colors from the choices on the palette correspond to qualitative traditions, the students are by extension also determining the appropriate methodology for analysis and interpretation for their study. An integrated problem statement, research purpose, and grand tour question create a coherently colored study framework, different for each tradition.

Answering the Five Questions

In our course, students are asked to individually answer the five questions in Table 1, each corresponding directly to one of the five major traditions discussed by Creswell (1998): biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, or case study.

Table 1. **Five-Questions to select the “color” to paint a qualitative design**

Question to Act to Discover Preferred Approach	Associated Tradition
1. If I could discover the meaning of one person’s lived experience, I would ask _____ (individual) about _____.	Biography
2. If I could discover the shared lived experiences of one quality or phenomenon in others, I would want to know about _____.	Phenomenology
3. If I could experience a different culture by living/ observing it, I would choose to experience _____.	Ethnography
4. If I could discover what actually occurred and was experienced in a single lived event, that event would be _____.	Case Study
5. If I could discover a theory for a single phenomenon of living as shared by others, I would choose to discover the theory of _____.	Grounded Theory

Notice that it is possible to answer multiple questions with different perspectives of a single topic of interest, each with a differently colored research frame. In other words, an

artist can capture the same subject five different ways by selecting different colors and applying them from different vantage-points or with different media, necessitating other techniques and brush strokes. Encouraging open discussion concerning how research problems differ with each tradition allows students to begin to gain an understanding of the importance of Wolcott's (1994) concept of thinking backward prior to entering a path of study. Having a sense of the intention for the art work, the reason for painting it, can provide you as a student with the appropriate tradition (perspective, medium, color), and thereby methodology (technique and style), on the canvas of your investigation.

Forming the Problem Statement: the Issue of Importance

"As with qualitative research itself, teaching the subject proceeds most purposefully if the problem is set properly" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 375). Your objective, your reason for conducting your study, derives from some issue of importance to you that can be substantiated through a body of evidence from the literature. Once you recognize what that issue is, you have a rudimentary problem statement. A well-written problem statement will have an opening sentence or phrase that stimulates interest as well as conveys an issue to which a broad readership can relate. The problem statement should address a central issue that establishes a strong rationale or need to conduct the study and indicate why the problem is important. The imagination and insight that goes into defining the research problem usually determines the ultimate value of a research study more than any other factor (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

Students should select as a topic of interest and future objective the most personally compelling single answer of the five answers to the Five Questions. Next, students should compose a problem statement for their chosen topic of interest. Our experience has demonstrated that small groups, which we call committees, work well as supportive sounding boards for students as they frame their investigations. Therefore, every student is a member of a three or four-person committee. Working in their committees, students should be encouraged to share their problem statements with each other. As our students are composing their problem statements, we provide examples of useful problem statements. We find drawing upon well-written studies of recent graduates to be particularly informative and engaging for doctoral students.

Returning to our beacon, the Five-Question Method graphic (Figure 1), notice that we have stepped through answering the Five Questions, which led to selecting an appropriate tradition and consequently a suitable methodology, and we have identified a problem statement. We have traveled full circle back to our topic of interest. With all of the information we have gathered, it is appropriate to once again move to a future state and regain a sense of the objective we are seeking (how we intend to use the resultant data of our painting) in order to determine the overall purpose of this study.

Forming the Purpose Statement

Purpose answers the question, Why is this study important? The Purpose Statement establishes the direction for your study. In other words, it provides a specific synopsis of the overall aim of your study. Creswell provides a useful template for writing an effective purpose statement, (Creswell, 1998). In our course, we incorporate a modified version of

Creswell's template that parenthetically suggests words that might appropriately be selected. We suggest using words such as purpose, intent, and objective to call attention to this statement as the central controlling idea in a study. We use words that convey an emerging design because of the inductive mode of the research process in qualitative design. Such words as describe, understand, develop, interpret, analyze, and discover convey this sense. Finally, we suggest including the method of inquiry to be used in data collection, description, analysis, and interpretation. It is also useful to include the corresponding unit of analysis (e.g., individual, group, culture) or research site (e.g., classroom, organization, program, and event) for study. We offer for consideration two example purpose statements taken from successful studies conducted by graduate students who used our Five-Question Method:

1. "The purpose of this biographical study is to discover how the implementation of a professional development school site, as one effort towards teacher education reform, affects a cooperating teacher's perceptions of teaching and teacher preparation" (Birdsong, 2001).
2. "The dual purpose of this study was, first, to understand the lived experiences of highly self-efficacious adults persevering in new challenging life pursuits; and second, to discover the central theory for the processes, beliefs, and strategies of high self-efficacy and perseverance in self-selected pursuits at a time when their cohorts are viewing their age as an obstacle to capabilities" (Scott, 2002).

We have just taken a future position a second time, finding a perspective from which we can think backward about the overall intention of our study. Taking that long view, a student can construct an answer to the question, "Why is this study important?" At this point in our course we ask our students to write a Purpose Statement for their proposed studies and to share them with their committees.

Weaving Problem and Purpose into the Grand Tour Question

Research is conducted to answer a question. Orienting to the Five-Question Method beacon (Figure 1) a final time, notice that as a student you have determined an intention for your topic, which allowed you to first identify why the topic is important and write a problem statement, and second to establish the direction of your study and write a purpose statement. Now it is time to ask, "What overall question might I ask to discover the data that both serve the purpose intended and effectively address the research problem?" Many students appear to have difficulty in both identifying a grand tour question and in writing one (Stallings, 1995). While preparing her proposal, one of us (Scott) began with the rather muddy grand tour question: How are self-efficacy and personal control experienced by late-life adults who successfully achieve self-assigned unfamiliar projects? As originally written, it was unclear whether this was to be a phenomenology focused on the lived experience of self-efficacious adults or a grounded theory of the process of successfully maintaining personal control.

That overarching grand tour question should blend together the primary colors of the problem statement and the purpose of the study in a harmonious composition. Typically, the grand tour question is written in the language of a tradition of inquiry (Creswell, 1998). We ask our students to work in their committees to create individual synthesizing grand tour questions. Composing a mural defined by the three harmoniously created primary colors: problem statement, purpose statement, and grand tour question on the palette of an appropriate methodology, can provide a strong, integrated sketch from which a work of art

can emerge and evolve. My grand tour question emerged as a clear blend of the two colors, phenomenology and grounded theory: “What is the deep, rich, lived experience of persevering in new life pursuits for an adult population over age 50; and what is the central theory that explains how high self-efficacy and perseverance are experienced and exercised by adults committed to new challenging life pursuits after age 50?” (Scott, 2002).

We encourage our students to consider one other primary color in their mural, their principal investigative research instrument: themselves as the artists holding their palettes and applying every stroke to their paintings.

Exploring the Role of the Researcher

Behind the theory, method, analysis, ontology, epistemology, and methodology of qualitative research “stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 18). Just as the artist is the primary instrument in painting, the researcher is the primary research instrument in qualitative investigation. Therefore, it is of no small matter for the reader to have an understanding of the relationship the researcher has with the subject. As the researcher, you must identify and describe your perspective and recognize and deal with the biases you might hold on the subject. The Role of the Researcher needs to be understood by the researcher and conveyed to the reader in order to provide as clear a window as possible to the research (description, analysis, and interpretation).

Merriam (1991) poses six assumptions generally accepted by qualitative researchers. While we strongly embrace all of her assumptions, our course specifically addresses the first and the third. We employ them as a starting point from which to explore via open discussion the numerous facets and implications for each individual taking on the role of qualitative researcher.

In her first assumption, Merriam asserts that qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with process, and only secondarily with outcomes or products. Whether of primary or secondary interest, Wolcott (1994) claims that “students must learn to ‘think backward’ from an intended end product to guide their thinking about the data they will need and how they will want to use it” (p. 387). As we discussed earlier, through thinking backward, we are able to identify the purpose of our study. We suggest that is important not to confuse purpose with specific outcomes. Recall that purpose answers the question, “Why is my study important?” Further, purpose defines the direction of the study. Once that direction is established, we agree with Merriam, that the focus should reside with the process allowing the data to emerge as they may.

Merriam’s third assumption suggests that the qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines. The human element, complete with assumptions, biases, and blinders, can cause researchers to fail to observe data even though they are present. As a means of managing that hazard, Page (1997) suggests that any curriculum of qualitative research should teach students that “the same theory, methods, and analyses that one uses in fieldwork should be applied to both scholarly texts and self” (p. 172). In other words, investigations should be as rigorous of the self as researcher and any scholarly texts, including those written by the researcher, as analyses applied to data gathered from the field. Our course supports that concept allocating time to examination of the role of

the researcher. Throughout the course, we interject topics such as Wolcott's (1994) query of "whether bias is a qualitative researcher's friend or foe" (p. 388). The ensuing discussion stimulates thinking that tends to linger with our students, later nudging them to step back and take a fresh view of their research and themselves. We concur with Rubin and Rubin (1995) that "a rich study keeps on asking and answering questions like when, why, how, and under what circumstances," (p.265) about the subject, the data, and the researcher.

Recommendations

We recommend that our Five-Question Method of Qualitative Research Design course be offered as a semester course with two instructors (one instructor might be a graduate student who has proficiency with qualitative design). An ideal group size is 20 students in committees of four people each. Augmenting the course with example studies in each of the five major traditions helps convey the nature of each methodology and how each has been successfully applied. During the semester, development of an actual study proposal is encouraged. In that scenario, the committees function to assist proposal development and serve as advisors for each other. We suggest that the culminating activity for a semester course be defense of proposals, with each committee conducting the proposal defenses for their team members. Such a robust course falls well in line with Cobb and Hoffart (1999) and Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), who recommend that doctoral students begin research skill-building activities early in order to implement their studies as soon as possible.

Beginnings of Discovery

The Five-Question Method is designed solely to frame a study. For me (Scott), the Five-Question Method was essential to designing a solid frame from which to paint a coherent picture. Other students report similar experiences...

We have just touched on the methodologies of five of the major traditions of qualitative research. We have not discussed who our informants might be for our studies and where we might seek them. Nor have we discussed conducting a literature review and verifying a significant "gap" in the literature our study will address, or data collection, or data analysis – all of great importance to our studies and all different depending upon the tradition employed. While those important topics were beyond the scope of this discussion, which we limited to designing a frame for our study canvas, we do include their colors in our course to increase depth and dimension.

We have discussed a new method of framing Qualitative Research, the Five-Question Method. Those elements are the beginnings of discovery. They frame our individual perspectives of inquiry-based research. Harmonizing the four primary colors, the triad of problem statement, purpose statement, and grand tour question, augmented by an understanding of the role of the researcher, provides a bold sketch on a well-framed canvas upon which the vivid colors of a qualitative research study can creatively emerge.

References

- Birdsong, J. R. (2001). *The professional and personal growth of a cooperative teacher in the midst of reform: A qualitative biographical study*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID, 2001).

- Cobb, A. K., & Hoffart, N. (1999). Teaching qualitative research through participatory coursework and mentorship. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 15(6), 331-339.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive biography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *A handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gall, M. D., Borg, W. R., & Gall, J. P. (1996). *Educational research: An introduction* (6th ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Merriam, S. (1991). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Page, R. N. (1997). A thought about curriculum in qualitative research methods. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 10(2), 171-173.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Scott, K. W. (2002). *High Self-Efficacy and Perseverance in Adults Committed to New Challenging Life Pursuits After Age 50: A Grounded Theory Study*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID, 2002). *Dissertations Abstract International*, 63(04), 2101B.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stallings, W. M. (1995). Confessions of a quantitative educational researcher trying to teach qualitative research. *Educational Researcher: a Publication of the American Educational Research Association*, 24(3), 31-32.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing critical ethnography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendix A

Five Question Method: Survey of Qualitative Research Design

Course Objectives:

1. Students will identify which of the five major qualitative traditions was applied to given research.
2. Students will discuss when and why a researcher might do a qualitative study versus a quantitative study and the limitations to the study in either option.
3. Students will broadly compare and contrast five major qualitative traditions and the applications of each (according to Creswell).
4. Students will demonstrate application of one of the five major qualitative traditions by:

- Identifying a research topic appropriate for a qualitative study
- Selecting a tradition well-suited to the topic chosen
- Conducting preliminary research along the topic as appropriate in the selected tradition
- Writing a brief proposal in the selected topic tradition
- Defending the proposal before a committee of peers.

Week 1: Introduce Qualitative Research & the Five Major Traditions

Discussion: What is qualitative research? [Discuss specific studies.]

Activity: Brainstorm what current event topics would make good qualitative studies? List the suggested topics & discuss what a researcher might want to do to collect data in each suggested topic. [Introduce generally the five major traditions.]

Discussion: How could the selected topics be researched quantitatively? What might the researcher desire in a study to select either a quantitative or qualitative paradigm?

Assignment: Reading from text and decide on a topic to research qualitatively for this course.

Week 2: Get Acquainted with the Five Major Qualitative Traditions

Discussion: Compare & contrast the five major traditions as defined in reading. Return to current events list from Week 1. Group the topics in the five major traditions. Now, discuss what the topics might be like if recast into another tradition.

Share: Students selected research topics for this course.

Discussion: What might be/ought to be the benefits of a Committee when preparing a research proposal?

Committee: Select committees of four students each. Break into committees for 30 minutes to work on topic selection. How can each topic be described in two minutes or less to a 10-year-old child?

Discussion: [Return to large group] What were the learnings in the exercise of selecting a research topic?

Assignment: Reading & write one page description of selected topic as it relates to the student. Think about what tradition might be most appropriate for the selected topic.

Week 3: Importance of Thinking Backward – What Do You Want From Your Data?

Discussion: Previous Week's Text Readings

Discussion: Return to current event topics and discuss who and how many informants might be selected for one topic listed under each of the five traditions. How might you go about selecting them?

Share: Experiences related to selecting a tradition for student's own topic.

- Committee: Break into committees and share one-pages as relates to student. What do you want from your data? Which tradition will get you what you want to have from your data? Who might your informants be?
- Discussion: [Return to large group] What were the learnings in the exercise of selecting a research tradition and research informants?
- Assignment: Individual: Readings & outline study using one of the outlines in text or own outline. Group: Each committee prepare “Thumbnail Sketch” of one of the Traditions

Weeks 4 & 5: Focus: Definitions, Delimitations, & Limitations

- Discussion: Previous Week’s Text Readings
- Discussion: Return to current event topics and discuss definitions (what terms should be defined for the reader), delimitations (put a fence around the study), limitations (generalizability, credibility, advantages, disadvantages of the study) for one topic listed under each of the five traditions.
- Share: Experiences, articles, readings related to your tradition or topic.
- Committee: Break into committees and share outlines. Discuss how you might introduce your topic. Write a first sentence or paragraph. Prepare for the “Thumbnails” due on weeks 5 and 6.
- Discussion: [Return to large group] What were the learnings in the exercise of introducing your topic?
- Assignment: Individual: Readings & write introduction for your study using your outline. Group: Committees continue preparations for “Thumbnail Sketches” of the Traditions

Weeks 5 & 6: Perspective: Role of the Researcher

- Discussion: Previous Week’s Text Readings
- Discussion: Return to current event topics and discuss the following for one topic listed under each of the five traditions. Perspective (1st Person, 2nd Person, 3rd Person; Reflective, Reflexive), Voice (whose voice do you want heard), Role of the Researcher (who are you regarding your topic; what biases might you hold and should they be disclosed to the reader? If so, how?)
- Share: Experiences, articles, readings related to your tradition or topic. First two Committees to teach the traditions as “Thumbnail Sketches”
- Committee: Break into committees and share and discuss introductions. Discuss definitions, delimitations, and limitations for your topic. Make a list of the terms you will want to define. Discuss possible delimitations and limitations for your study. Prepare for the “Thumbnails” due on week 6.
- Discussion: [Return to large group] What were the learnings in the exercise of sharing your introductions and identifying definitions, delimitations, and limitations for your study?
- Assignment: Individual: Readings & write introduction for your study using your outline. Include Definitions, Delimitations and Limitations sections. Group: Committees continue preparations for “Thumbnail Sketches” of the Traditions

Week 7: Quality in Qualitative Research: Generalizability & Credibility

- Discussion: Previous Week's Text Readings
- Discussion: Return to current event topics and discuss how a researcher might ensure quality for one topic listed under each of the five traditions. How might data collection and analysis help ensure quality? (Triangulation, etc.) How might a researcher ensure generalizability in credibility a study? What limitations might exist?
- Share: Experiences, articles, readings related to your tradition or topic. Remaining committees present "Thumbnail Sketches" of Traditions
- Committee: Break into committees and share introductions. Discuss how you might introduce yourself as the researcher. Write a paragraph describing the role you see yourself playing as the researcher.
- Discussion: [Return to large group] What were the learnings in the exercise of discussing and writing about your role as the researcher?
- Assignment: Individual: Readings & write Methodology chapter, including the Role of the Researcher for your study using your outline. Group: Begin to think about helping each other prepare for Proposal Defenses

Week 8: Interplay: Problem, Purpose, and Grand Tour Question

- Discussion: Previous Week's Text Readings
- Discussion: Return to current event topics and brainstorm possible Problem Statement, Purpose Statements, and Grand Tour Questions for one topic listed under each of the five traditions. How should Problem, Purpose, and Grand Tour be interrelated?
- Share: Experiences, articles, readings related to your tradition or topic.
- Committee: Break into committees and share methodology sections. Discuss whether you have and/or how you might interrelate your study Problem Statement, Purpose Statement, & Grand Tour Question.
- Discussion: [Return to large group] What were the learnings in the exercise of sharing methodologies and discussing interrelating Problem, Purpose, and Grand Tour?
- Assignment: Individual: Readings & review Problem Statement, Purpose Statement, and Grand Tour weaving an interrelationship for your study using your outline. Group: Committees continue preparations for Proposal Defenses for Weeks 13, 14, & 15.

Week 9 & 10: Theoretical Sensitivity – Excursions into the Literature

- Discussion: Previous Week's Text Readings
- Discussion: Return to current event topics and discuss how a researcher might gain theoretical sensitivity for one topic listed under each of the five traditions. What literature might a researcher want to examine? How much of an

- excursion into the literature does each tradition call for? When in the duration of the study should one venture into the literature?
- Share: Experiences, articles, readings related to your tradition or topic.
- Committee: Begin to read and comment on each other's proposals.
- Discussion: What were the learnings in the in the discussion on theoretical sensitivity?
- Assignment: Individual: Readings & write outline of a chapter on theoretical sensitivity for your study as it pertains to your selected tradition. Group: Committees continue preparations for Proposal Defense.

Week 11: Ethics & Honor: Walking the High Road

- Discussion: Previous Week's Text Readings
- Discussion: Return to current event topics and discuss definitions (what terms should be defined for the reader), delimitations (put a fence around the study), limitations (generalizability, credibility, advantages, disadvantages of the study) for one topic listed under each of the five traditions.
- Share: Experiences, articles, readings related to your tradition or topic.
- Committee: Begin creating proposals and committee questions for each proposal.
- Discussion: What ethical issues should be anticipated for each selected topic?
- Assignment: Individual: Readings & complete U of I Human Subjects Application. Group: Committees continue preparations for Proposal Defense. Selected Committee for Week 12 Demonstration Dissertation Defense: Read dissertation and create appropriate questions for the candidate

Week 12: Light at the End of the Tunnel: a Demonstration Proposal Defense

- Discussion: Previous Week's Text Readings
- Share: Experiences, articles, readings related to your tradition or topic.
- Guest: Doctoral student ready to defend (preferred) or recently successfully defended dissertation provides mock defense either as preparation for the impending event or as a demonstration of a successful event. Selected Committee serves dissertation committee role.
- Discussion: What was the learning of the dissertation defense?
- Committee: Practice & polish proposals and committee questions for each proposal.
- Assignment: Group: Committees continue preparations for Proposal Defense. First two proposals to be delivered Week 13.

Week 13 & 14: Final Preparation & Defense of Proposals

- Discussion: Previous Week's Text Readings
- Discussion: Return to current event topics and discuss definitions (what terms should be defined for the reader), delimitations (put a fence around the study), limitations (generalizability, credibility, advantages, disadvantages of the study) for one topic listed under each of the five traditions.
- Share: Experiences, articles, readings related to your tradition or topic.
- Committee: Committees present proposal defenses, two committees per week.

Discussion: What were the learnings in the proposal defenses?
Assignment: Committees continue preparations for Proposal Defense.

Week 15: Inquiry, Discovery & Learning: Stepping Back to See the Big Picture

Discussion: Previous Week's Text Readings & Human Subjects Application
Committee: Remaining Committees for Proposal Defense.
Discussion: Return to the idea of looking backward regarding your study. Should you actually conduct the studies you have proposed, do you think the data you will get will give you what you want to have when the study is concluded? What might you want to do with the results beyond the study?
Share: Experiences, articles, readings related to your tradition or topic.
Discussion: What learnings of the course will you take with you?
Assignment: Complete course evaluation

Author's Note

Dr. Mark McCaslin is an Assistant Professor of Adult Counselor and Technology Education at the University of Idaho, Idaho Falls Center. Dr. McCaslin earned both Baccalaureate and Masters Degrees from the University of Wyoming. Dr. McCaslin conducted his doctoral work in Adult Education at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. His doctoral dissertation and several subsequent investigations and publications have focused on leadership via qualitative methodologies. Dr. McCaslin has taught high school and served as both instructor and administrator in higher education. Other areas of emphasis are interpersonal communication, community action, and qualitative research methods. Dr. McCaslin has recently designed a new data analysis approach with specific applications for the Grounded Theory tradition and co-designed a metagological approach to teaching and learning. Dr. Mark McCaslin may be contacted at the University of Idaho, Division of Adult Counseling and Technology Education, 800 Park Boulevard, Idaho Falls, ID 83402; Telephone: (208) 282-7719; E-mail markm@uidaho.edu

Dr. Karen Wilson Scott, a Visiting Assistant Professor for the University of Idaho in the Division of Adult Counseling, Technology, and Education, joined the Idaho Falls Center from the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, bringing with her 25 years of experience in corporate communications and instruction. Dr. Scott earned her Baccalaureate degree in Communications from Linfield College in Oregon. She conducted both Masters and Doctoral work in Education with a major in Adult Education at the University of Idaho. Her dissertation and continuing research focuses on congruous autonomy in older adults committed to challenging pursuits. Other areas of emphasis and research include the psychology of learning, interpersonal communication, group dynamics, persistence and learning, and development of qualitative research methods. Dr. Scott has designed two Grounded Theory analysis instruments. Dr. Karen Wilson Scott may be contacted at the University of Idaho, Division of Adult Counseling and Technology Education 1776 Science Center Drive, Idaho Falls, ID, 83402; Telephone: (208) 282-7967

E-mail: Karen@if.uidaho.edu

Copyright 2003: Mark McCaslin, Karen Wilson Scott, and Nova Southeastern University

Author's Citation

McCaslin, M. & Wilson Scott, K. (2003). The five question method for framing a qualitative research study. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(3), 447-461. Retrieved [Insert date], from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR8-3/mccaslin.pdf>
