Physiotherapy Canada
Guide for Appraisal of Qualitative Manuscripts

General Orientation of the Guide

Qualitative research comes in numerous different forms, is grounded in various disciplinary, theoretical and scientific traditions, takes an ‘interpretive’ approach to knowledge and the research process, and adopts methods that are typically not highly standardized or procedure-based. For these reasons, there is no one ‘right’ way of doing qualitative research, and assessment of quality cannot be arrived at through conventional check-list tools tallying the presence or absence of a fixed set of ‘best’ methodological practices.

These Guidelines have been specially developed to accommodate the particular nature of qualitative research. Importantly, they presume that reviewers are themselves experienced qualitative researchers who understand such research. The guidelines pose a number of general questions with a brief accompanying text that suggests certain elements of effectiveness that the editors are particularly interested in hearing about. This approach seeks to elicit rigorous review and critique without imposing a template that cannot accommodate the nature of qualitative inquiry and the particular varieties of topic, context, purpose, circumstance, theory and method that may be at play in the paper.

Key Questions for Reviewers

1. How well is the purpose and focus of the paper expressed?
We appreciate comments about the extent to which the authors articulate a clearly defined purpose for their paper and offer a focused discussion of a distinguishable core concern.

2. What is the quality of the argument made in the paper?
Please comment on the clarity, consistency and coherence of the paper’s argument and the extent to which it is successfully supported by the analysis of research findings.

3. How effectively has the paper’s study been designed and conducted?
Please comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the research methodology. We are particularly interested in your sense of whether the author’s description of the study design permits readers to situate and assess the analysis of data and the findings, and whether the authors have successfully realized the key features (and potential) of the particular research methodology they claim to have used (e.g. institutional ethnography, grounded theory). Please also note whether the authors reported institutional research ethics approval (or explained its absence) in compliance with national (or international) guidelines, and comment on ethical issues throughout the study/paper.

4. How successfully do the authors analyze their data?
Please comment on the quality of the data analysis provided in the paper. We are particularly interested in your thoughts on how well the authors have analyzed and interpreted their data and distinguished their own analytic voice from the voices of the research participants or texts.

5. How effectively do the authors engage theory in their research and in the paper?

Please comment on the success with which authors theorize their research and the findings. We are interested in how effectively they articulate the theoretical/conceptual footing of the project and engage theory in interpreting their data.

6. What contribution does the paper make?

Please comment on the nature of the paper’s contribution to public health, whether to scholarship, policy, practice, theory, discipline, or other area.

7. Further Comments

Please add any other observations (positive and/or critical) that you would like to make regarding the quality and value of the paper. We are especially interested in any comments that reflect your particular area of expertise – methodological or substantive.