20 Questions to Ask During Research Design

This worksheet, developed by the Prescott College Institutional Review Board, is intended to help researchers become aware of their research orientation and to surface and question any underlying assumptions or contextual frameworks.

Point of View and Research Approach
1. Why are you doing research?
2. What are you assuming about your research?
3. What is the nature of objectivity and subjectivity for you?
4. What do you hope to learn from your research?
5. What moral and ethical considerations are important to your research?
6. What’s your bias? Have you already decided what your research conclusions are?
7. What assumptions might your cultural, racial, language, class, gender, species bring to your research?
8. How has your personal background influenced your research (e.g., choice of topic, review of literature, choice of methods or instruments, choice of participants)?

Characteristics of Participants (Co-Researchers)
9. What beings (and systems or entities) might be involved in your research?
10. What assumptions are implicit in the strategies you choose to use in selecting participants?
   a. Is your research designed to be accessible to multiple cultures?
   b. How can your research be more inclusive?
   c. Is your language gender neutral and accessible to literate and non-literate populations? Why is this important?
   d. What issues of class is your research sensitive toward? Does your research assume middle-class access to resources or discourses (e.g., access to the Internet; access and comfort with crayons and colored pencils; comfort asserting their internal knowledge and preferences)?
   e. Is your research inclusive of different learning styles, modes, and preferences? What are these and what are omitted? Why?
   f. How is your research inclusive of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (GLBTQQ) populations?
   g. How can your research respect and include multiple ways of being and knowing?
11. Are you working with vulnerable populations (such as children, prison populations, elder persons, endangered species)? If yes, what special considerations have you taken into account in designing your research?

Impact of Research
12. Discuss what ethical issues, relating to any living beings or organic systems (human or other than human) were considered as you designed this project.
13. What are three examples of the long-term intended and unintended consequences of this research? (e.g., psychological consequences? consequences for an ecosystem? impact upon a community?)
14. Will your research be productive for the participants, for broader society, for the environment?
a. Is your research motivated by an active social justice intention? Please explain this intention.
b. Does your research take a project/action-based approach? Please explain what this is and how it may impact living beings participating in your research.
c. Is there a service outcome? To what and for whom? Could it? Why or why not?

15. How could your research be embedded in communities (personal, biocultural, ecological) and increase connections?

16. How might your research risk or avoid cultural appropriation? If your research involves other cultures or indigenous peoples, what are you doing to balance the research design so that it benefits the group with whom you are researching?

Methods and Design

17. Do you recognize an alignment with a particular philosophy about research? What are some of the limitations this might bring to your research? (e.g., Feminist? Queer? Critical race?)

18. Reflect on different lenses through which you will conduct research. For example, do these lenses include any of the following: anthropocentric (human-centered), biocentric (life-centered), or ecocentric (ecologically-centered) approaches to research? How would these different lenses influence your research design?

19. What each of us considers to be the nature of reality is what is often called our ontological assumptions. What are your ontological and epistemological assumptions in relation research? In other words, in your research, what are your assumptions about the nature of being, existence, “reality”, and knowing? How do these truths that you hold influence how you define basic categories of being and their relations?
   a. What counts as knowledge?
   b. How is knowledge acquired?
   c. How do we know what we know?
   d. What are your reflections on the epistemology that is informing your research?

20. How does your research design value and honor the uniqueness of individuals (humans or expressions of life) in your research? What does quantification do to the unique valuing of life? (I need some help to figure out this one – what are we trying to get at?)

21. How does your research provide for ways of “fumbling and tumbling” knowledge to create wisdom? Do you have process checkpoints or pauses where you roll initial findings into modifying later research activities?