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# Whetting Beginning Qualitative Researchers' Appetites: A Review of Green and Thorogood's Qualitative Methods for Health Research

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## Whetting Beginning Qualitative Researchers' Appetites: A Review of Green and Thorogood's Qualitative Methods for Health Research

### **Abstract**

Selecting texts for introductory qualitative research courses can be a challenge given the depth, breadth, and variety of contemporary qualitative inquiry. The new edition of Green and Thorogood's *Qualitative Methods for Health Research* presents a great choice for professors teaching courses across the health care spectrum due to its authors' ability to give students a diverse buffet designed to whet appetites and increase hunger for more qualitative research nourishment.

### **Keywords**

Qualitative Research, Qualitative Research Design, Health Research, Introductory Texts

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**Whetting Beginning Qualitative Researchers' Appetites:  
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*Selecting texts for introductory qualitative research courses can be a challenge given the depth, breadth, and variety of contemporary qualitative inquiry. The new edition of Green and Thorogood's *Qualitative Methods for Health Research* presents a great choice for professors teaching courses across the health care spectrum due to its authors' ability to give students a diverse buffet designed to whet appetites and increase hunger for more qualitative research nourishment. Key Words: Qualitative Research, Qualitative Research Design, Health Research, and Introductory Texts*

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I find selecting the main text for any course a challenge. Each time I am asked to teach a course I always start with a blank slate when it comes to selecting the readings including the main text. Even if I just taught the course the previous semester I still reflect on what went well in the course and what did not work so well before I select the book or books for the class; and in some cases whether or not I will dispel with texts and go with articles only for a course. I also feel the need to keep looking for what new resources have been published since I made these choices the year or semester before. It is an exciting time to be in qualitative research because great new materials seem to come out weekly (which is fortunate for those trying to publish reviews of new materials each week), but it is also challenging to keep up with new releases trying to get the best materials in front of our students each semester.

So, with each course I appraise learning materials by asking questions such as "What book will capture the essence of the concepts to be learned in the course and provide the essential reading material to help students master the main learning objectives?" "Will students find the reading level of the text to be overly simplistic or abstract?" "Does the structure of the book fit well with the episodic structure of a semester which emphasizes a weekly or module style of material presentation?" "Can the book provide the bulk of the reading material or will I need to use additional texts and articles to cover the main ideas for the course?"

I especially struggle with these questions and selection process when it comes to teaching an introduction to qualitative research course. The breadth, depth, and diversity of contemporary qualitative research can be totally overwhelming to teacher and student alike. Do I focus on qualitative research in a generic sense; cover the common concepts that connect various designer methodologies; focus on the unique methodologies; explore the scientific, artistic, critical, and the change-oriented variations of each methodology; and how much to balance "learning about" qualitative research with "learning to do" qualitative research? Do I select text whose author has taken a single disciplinary focus

(e.g., those that stress that the work is about qualitative research in education or psychology or nursing) or a neutral-disciplinary approach (e.g., those who present the focus on qualitative inquiry without specifying a disciplinary home)?

Adding to the complexity is the context of the course in the student's overall degree program. Is this course an introduction for students to learn how to be critical consumers of research? Is the course the one major learning experience to prepare students to conduct their own research project be it capstone, thesis, or dissertation? Is the course the first in a one, two, or more sequence culminating in a major independent research project such as the doctoral dissertation?

I also have to share that I am quite fortunate to be able to help students from a variety of disciplines learn qualitative research each year. For example, this year I have taught classes for family therapy, conflict resolution, nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and education, as well as those students taking our qualitative research graduate certificate program. This multidisciplinary teaching helps me to learn important differences that seem to exist within these disciplinary nests and to note those patterns which transcend any one field.

Knowing that I may be teaching in these or other disciplines each year keeps me looking for quality introductory qualitative research texts regardless of the discipline or focus of the authors. In this pursuit I have come across the second edition of Judith Green and Nicki Thorogood's (2009) *Qualitative Research for Health Research*, a book which I think can most certainly serve as that critical main text in an introductory qualitative research course across the range of health-focused disciplines because I find that Green and Thorogood seem to understand the learning styles of contemporary students by the way they have structured each chapter. They employ the classic "tell them what you are going to tell, tell them, and tell them what you have told them" learning style by providing

- Detailed chapter table of contents to make it easier to locate particular points
- Chapter summaries to help readers grasp the main ideas conveyed in each major section of the book
- Boxes in which the authors emphasize lists of key points
- Chapter ending lists of key points the authors covered in the preceding text
- Exercises learners can try to actively learn the concepts portrayed
- Further readings faculty can use to complement the basic text or sources beginning researchers can access to expand their knowledge
- A glossary presenting simple definitions of the key terms used in the book

They also share two case examples per chapter in the form of illustrative examples drawn from a published qualitative research article on a health topic. Besides being a good way to convey key concepts in the book, Green and Thorogood's format can be utilized by faculty to create an assignment for their own students. In such a scenario learners could be asked to find additional articles illustrating other points in the book and compose similar case studies of their own.

Green and Thorogood take a generic qualitative research approach in presenting what qualitative research is in terms of design, ethics, and practice. They also weave in specifics of the “name-brand” methodologies when they explain important differences between grounded theory, narrative analysis, and other analytical approaches. Some faculty may want more methodology specificity, but Green and Thorogood take the appetizer approach to whet our qualitative research appetites and then direct us to excellent follow-up readings which can serve nicely as our main courses. I think this approach is fine since at the point when students take an introduction course they are often in the “buffet” mode of consuming these new ideas so a little bit of a lot of tasty morsels of knowledge certainly helps those students with experimenting palates to begin to learn what they like and of which they may want to sample more.

By going with this tapas or small plate approach Green and Thorogood are able to cover a greater variety of qualitative research concepts than what I have found in other similar texts especially when it comes to discussing designs, a particular interest of mine. I say this because I am sensitive to authors who discuss designs of primary qualitative research only. Of course this is the typical type of qualitative research consumers will encounter and investigators will conduct, but I also think we will see a rise in secondary analysis of qualitative data, mixed-methods, and meta-studies such as qualitative meta-syntheses of qualitative research findings. Knowing about these other types of designs is especially critical for clinical professionals working from evidence-based practice models because they will need to search for recurring patterns of findings across the collective consciousness of studies and studies about studies. As this landscape of primary, secondary, and meta-studies takes shape and is facilitated by the inter-connected webs of knowledge both digital and human we will want our creator and consumers of qualitative research to be aware of the range of designs populating this emerging consciousness.

Another area of strength with Green and Thorogood’s text is their emphasis on the contexts within which researchers will be conducting their research. They help readers to understand what role research plays in policy making, practice decision-making, and the theory building and the many ways basic and applied, qualitative and quantitative, and primary and meta-study research builds upon and complements each other within the health care system of practice and knowledge. This “big picture” stance helps students to situate the course within their larger degree program and to grasp how they will contribute to the betterment of their particular health discipline of practice whether as clinician, researcher, or policy maker.

I also like the authors’ last chapter, “Reading and Appraising Qualitative Output,” because Green and Thorogood encourage their readers to be critical and fair in their reading of qualitative research. In addition they give a balanced account of the pro’s and con’s for using appraisal tools. In doing so they cover some of the best appraisal tools available today including the very helpful from CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Program, 2001), “10 Questions to help You Make Sense of Qualitative Research,” a tool I have used often in the introductory courses I teach (Chenail, 2008).

You too can sample Green and Thorogood’s new edition by visiting their [book’s page at Sage](#) and downloading their chapter one. This “amuse-bouche” may excite the reader’s taste buds for a quality introductory “entrée” for a first course in qualitative research. Bon Appétit!

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## Author Note

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