

Step Four

Assess the Validity of Your Findings — *Qualitative Methods*

As with surveys, you will need to assess the validity of your interview data. Qualitative researchers use the word “trustworthiness” instead of validity, but the concept is the same. Validity actually refers to the accuracy of the data collection instrument. In interviewing, you as the interviewer are the “instrument,” so you need to assess the steps you took to guarantee that the interview data you collected is as thorough, accurate, inclusive of all viewpoints, and unbiased as possible. Following some of the steps listed below will help you assess the validity of your findings:

- Be sure you can articulate the rationale behind your sample.
- As you identify themes and patterns, seek information that does *not* support your findings. For instance, if you are interviewing participants from an online resource training project and getting glowing responses, seek out some interviewees who did not seem to get as much from the training.
- Use multiple methods of data collection and look for consistency. This is called “triangulation.” When you interview, you should use at least one other source of data and see if the sources corroborate one another. For instance, you may compare your data to some focus group data from the same project. You do not have to triangulate with other qualitative data. In evaluation, it is not unusual to compare interview findings with survey data.
- Have more than one person code and analyze the data. Both coders should work independently at first, then come together to compare and discuss findings. The coders are not likely to have identical findings. However, there will be some overlap in concepts and the dissimilarities are likely to provide a more thorough interpretation.
- Ask participants to read your interpretations. They can tell you if you are representing their views thoroughly and accurately.
- Get an outsider to review your evaluation data, data collection processes, and methods to see if he or she agrees with your conclusions.

You can find more information about validating your qualitative data in the references listed at the end of Step 3 [8,10,11].