Prior to conducting your study your proposal (which is generally shorter than a quantitative study) can be accomplished in two ways. Your description can follow two approaches:

1. One approach is to conduct some fieldwork prior to writing the proposal. Anselm Strauss (1997) states, "No proposal should be written without preliminary data collection and analysis" (p. 286). After spending some time in the field, you are in a much better position to discuss what your plans are and what might be in your data. You can discuss design and emergent themes in more detail. You will not be sure of the outcome of your study or exactly how you will proceed with the rest of the study, but you are in a better position to make educated guesses with more concrete background and descriptions to satisfy the interests of your proposal readers of both your scholarly ability and the credibility of your research plans.

2. A second approach is to write a proposal without preliminary observations and interviews. Such a proposal is necessarily highly speculative and how you plan to proceed and what issues to examine. This type of proposal is more of an exercise to show those who read it that you are conversant with the qualitative research literature and are imaginative and scholarly in your thinking about the issues than an actual concrete description of what you are actually going to do. This kind of proposal provides an opportunity to review theory and methods literature, but may not be helpful in conceptualizing the study. This is for proposal readers who understand qualitative design.

To demonstrate intellectual credibility and external accountability you should ask and answer these five questions about the "essence" of your inquiry (Mason, 1996).

- Can you articulately describe the scope and purpose of the research to those involved?
- What is the nature of the phenomenon, entities, or social realities you wish to investigate?
- What might represent knowledge or evidence of entities or social realities you’re exploring?
- What topic or broad substantive area is the research concerned with?
- What is the intellectual puzzle? What do you wish to explain? What are your research questions?
- What is the purpose of your research?

Proposals for qualitative studies differ significantly from quantitative ones, but there are commonalities:

a. What are you going to do?
b. How are you going to do it?
c. Why are you doing it?
d. How does what you are going to do relate to what others have done?
e. What are the ethical issues involved in your study and how will you handle them?
f. What is the potential contribution (to basic research and/or practice) of your work?

References consulted in preparing the proposal include:
1. Provide *theory and methods references* as indicated in your study design or intentions for the
design as well as terminology used (e.g., grounded theory, case study, biography, ethnography,
phenomenology, thick description, lived experiences, etc).

2. You will, as well, *cite authors of works* representing the themes, concerns, topics, or issues
related to your study. This proposal is not a blue print, it is a direction to follow that helps you and
your proposal readers understand the process and how to proceed!

**CONSTRUCTING THE QUALITATIVE PROPOSAL**

**Two Themes: Design Flexibility and Proposal as Argument**

* Project a specific design which preserves flexibility; discuss contingencies and how future design
decisions will be made.
* Think of your proposal as an argument.
* Move from generic outline (above) to detailed proposal by building this argument:
  1. Show that research is substantive and will contribute to field.
  2. Show appropriateness of qualitative methods for your study.
  3. Show study’s feasibility and your ability to carry it out.
  4. Conceptualize audience as non-specialists on your topic. Clarify and justify.

**Creswell’s (1994) Format for Qualitative Proposal**

**Introduction (The “What” and the “Why”)**

- Statement of the Problem
- Purpose of the Study
- The “Grand Tour” Questions and Subquestions
- Study’s Relation to Theory and Literature
- Definitions
- Limitations of the Study
- Significance of the Study

**Procedure (The “How”)**

- Assumptions and Rational for a Qualitative Design
- The Type of Design Used
- The Role of the Researcher
- Data Collection Procedures
- Data Analysis Procedures
- Methods for Verification

**Maxwell’s (1996) Format for Qualitative Proposal**

**Introduction**

- Purpose
- General Overview of Main Research Questions

**Research Context (Lit Review)**

- How Your Research Will Fit In and Make a Contribution
- Explanation of Study’s Theoretical Framework
Pilot Study (may be separate section, below)

Research Questions
Relation of Your Questions to Prior Research, Theory, Your Own Research, and to Your
Purpose
Clarification of Coherent Focus of Questions

Research Methods
Justification of Qualitative Methods for this Research
Setting/Social Context of Research
Researcher Relationship with Participants
Data Collection
Data Analysis

Validity
Threats to Validity and How They Will be Deal With

Preliminary Results (if any, from pilot study)

Implications
Answer to “So What?” Questions


Introduction (Conceptual Body of the Proposal)

Problem and Significance

Focus and Research Questions

Review of Literature

Research Design and Methods

• Overall Approach and Rationale

• Site and Sample Selections

• Researcher’s Role

• Data Collection Techniques

• Data Management

• Data Analysis Strategies

• Trustworthiness Features

• Management Plan

Sources: Creswell (1997). Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches: Lincoln & Guba
Maxwell (1996), Qualitative research design; An interactive approach.