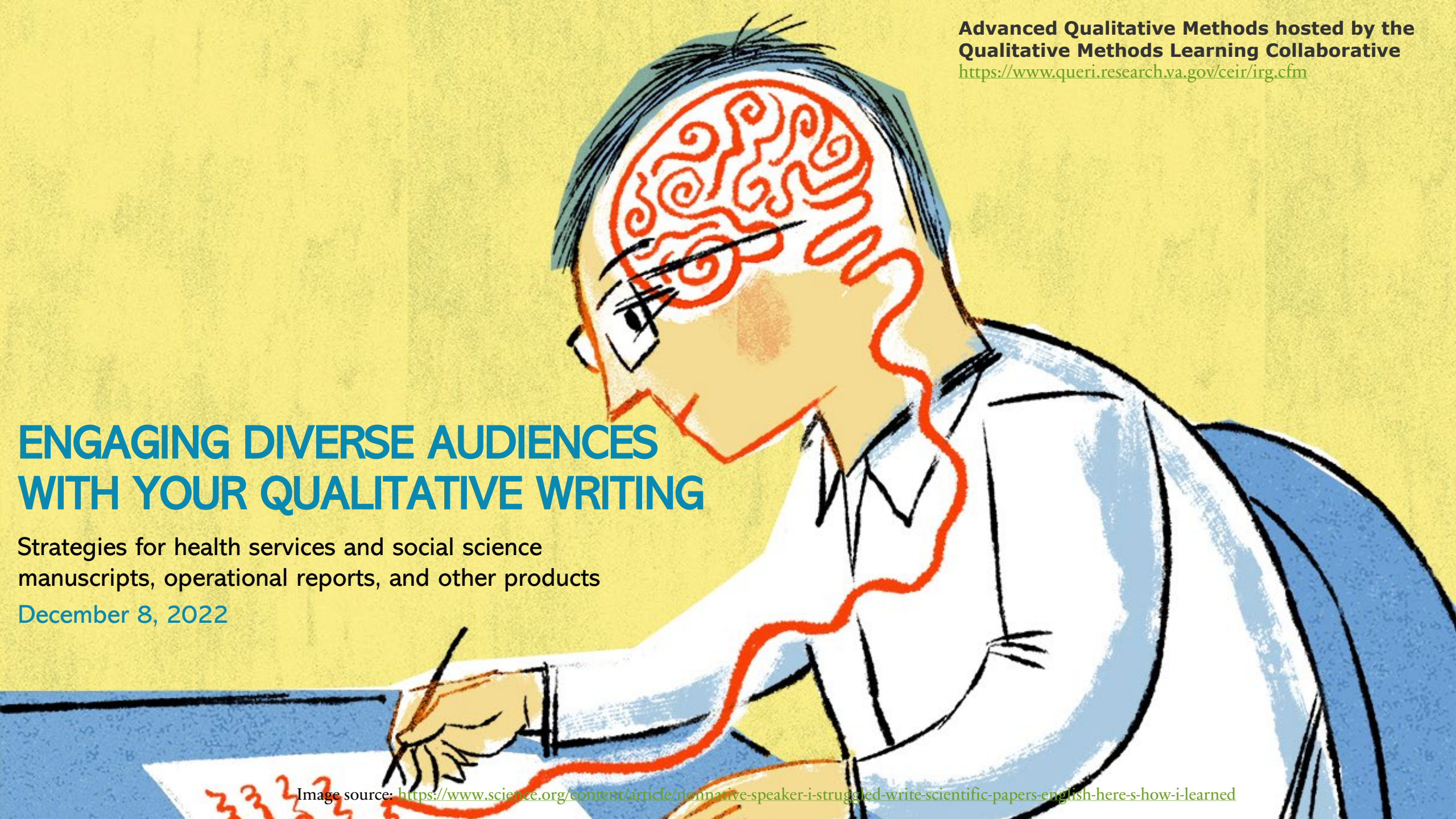


ENGAGING DIVERSE AUDIENCES WITH YOUR QUALITATIVE WRITING

Strategies for health services and social science
manuscripts, operational reports, and other products

December 8, 2022



Disclosures & Acknowledgments

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VA QUERI Center for Evaluation
and Implementation Resources



Learning Objectives

- Understand the needs and interests of different audiences (clinicians, operational partners, and social scientists)
- Develop strategies to write for diverse groups
- Learn how to report methods and findings, based on audience



Agenda

Writing for different audiences that may be unfamiliar with qualitative methods

- Operational partners
- Academic audiences

Challenges across the qualitative writing trajectory & how to address them

- Getting started
- Common analytic problems
- Journal submission

Areas of ongoing conversation

Poll #1

In what setting do you work? (check all that apply)

- ✓ Research
- ✓ Evaluation
- ✓ Operations
- ✓ Other

Poll #2

In what journals have you published qualitative data?
(check all that apply)

- ✓ Health services research
- ✓ Clinical
- ✓ Social science
- ✓ Evaluation
- ✓ Implementation science
- ✓ Help me find a journal!



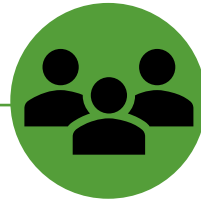
Writing for Operational Partners

Products for Operational Audiences



What are they?

- Technical reports
- White papers
- Slide decks
- Manuscripts



Who are they for?

- VHA program offices
- Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs)
- VA medical facility leadership
- Legislators



Why write them?

- Respond to policy requirements (e.g., PACT Act)
- Satisfy program reporting requirements
- Improve program functioning (e.g., program implementation, impact, effectiveness)

Types of Products

White papers/data briefs

- Brief report or guide about a specific topic

Technical reports

- Formal report that describes the process, progress, or results of technical or scientific research or evaluation
- May include recommendations

Briefing slide sets

- Slide proposal, project update, or summary related to the research or evaluation topic

Manuscripts

- Published research or evaluation findings or protocols
- Considerations: to what extent does the operational partner want to be involved? Is there a clearance process?

Considerations when working with operational offices

- Who is your audience(s)?
- What is your audience's level of qualitative knowledge?
- What are the operational partner's needs?
- What type of product(s) is the operational partner looking for?
- How will the operational partner use the findings?
- Does the operational partner want both findings AND recommendations?

These questions will help determine the type of qualitative product and level of detail to include

Sample Evaluation Report Template

- Title page
- Executive summary
- Introduction and program background
- Evaluation purpose and objectives
- Evaluation methodology*
- Findings
- Conclusions & limitations
- Recommendations
- References
- Appendices

*It can be appropriate to include discussion of advanced methods in an appendix

Lessons Learned

Emphasize “bottom line up front” messaging

Don’t assume partner knows what qualitative methods can/can’t speak to (e.g., not representative)

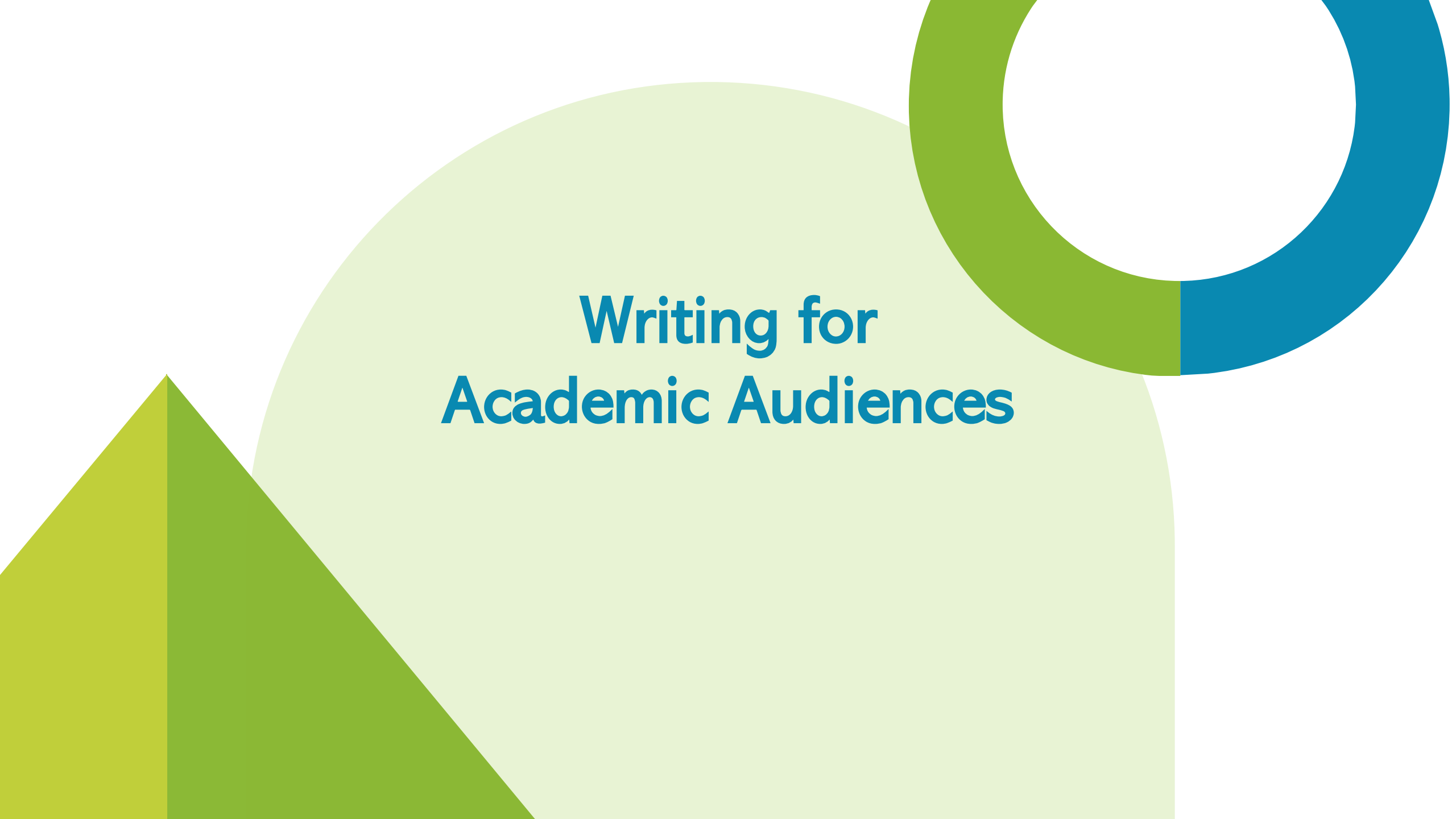
Draw on strengths of qualitative data

- Qualitative data is well-suited to capturing the voice of participants
 - Use exemplar quotations to illustrate key themes
- In mixed methods studies, qualitative findings can contextualize quantitative findings
 - Showcase open-ended survey data beside closed-ended data

Visualizations can be a great way to tell your story, especially when your audience may want a quick summary of your work

- Illustrative diagrams, word clouds, timelines (to track how a program or initiative unfolds over time)

Dependent on your audience, consider including complex methods in a footnote or in an appendix

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Writing for Academic Audiences

Manuscripts for Academic Audiences



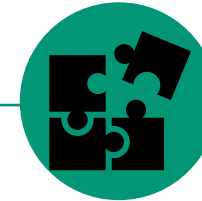
What is the structure?

- Word count often in the 3000-5000 word range
- Probably has these sections: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion



Who are the readers?

- Team: Qual analysts, the PI, co-authors
- Think about how others will find the paper and how they might use it
- Audiences are likely interdisciplinary (e.g., limit jargon)



Why write it?

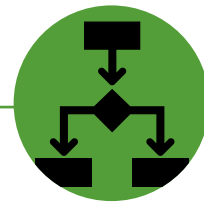
- Analysis continues through writing
- Pushes analysis forward
- Complements findings from other studies and/or contributes new knowledge

Methods



Setting & Participants

- What do readers need to know about the context?
- Who did you talk to?
- Why did you talk to them?



Data Collection

- Start small – what did you do, day to day?
- Categorize those daily activities – did these tasks relate to interviewing? Observations?
- How do those categories relate to the larger study?



Data Analysis

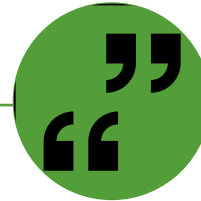
- Describe your coding – inductive, deductive, both?
- Describe how you organized the codes
- Codebook ≠ manuscript

Results



First paragraph

- This paragraph links Introduction and Results through the Methods
 - Use codes to talk about themes, BUT codes \neq themes
- It is an important paragraph, and hard to write. Do it after you write the themes paragraphs



Themes paragraphs

- Themes = categories that bound key elements of the story
- Each theme should be a sub-heading. Add quotes!
- Before each quote, preview what will be said
- After each quote, summarize (& interpret) what was said



Results \neq Discussion

- You'll want to start to tell the reader *why* a quote matters...resist! Save it for the discussion
- Instead, just tell the reader what the quotes say
- When you can, highlight the connections between quotes

One way through...

1. Start with the methods section.
2. Write the results
 - Themes paragraph
 - Wrap up paragraph
 - Write one sentence for each theme
 - Intro paragraph
 - Keep it rough – be ready to mirror paragraph 1d in the introduction
 - Reference each theme in the last sentence
3. Open a new document and make an annotated bibliography for your key literature
4. Write the introduction
 - Paragraph 1d should mirror the intro paragraph in the results
5. Write the discussion
6. Write the strengths, limitations and conclusion

- 1) **Introduction**
 - a) *Background: Largest context. Whole pie.*
 - b) *Big Idea 1: One thread of conversation. Still broad. Half pie.*
 - c) *Big Idea 2: Second thread of conversation. More specific. Quarter pie.*
 - d) *Present study: Weave together first and second thread. Most specific. Eighth pie.*
- 2) **Methods**
 - a) *History / Context of this part of the project*
 - i) *This paper reports on...*
 - b) *Participants*
 - i) *Sampling (Palinkas 2015)*
 - ii) *Recruitment strategy*
 - c) *Data Collection*
 - i) *Data collection format*
 - ii) *Interview guide development*
 - iii) *Data collection numbers*
 - iv) *Describe recording and transcription process*
 - v) *IRB statement*
 - d) *Data Analysis*
 - i) *Inductive and deductive coding (Saldana 2016)*
 - ii) *Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006)*
 - iii) *We identified the following codes...*
 - iv) *Based on these codes, we identified the following themes...*
- 3) **Results**
 - a) *Intro paragraph—summarize results—tell readers what you are going to say—mirror last paragraph of the Introduction (1.d)*
 - b) *Themes paragraphs—say it*
 - c) *Wrap up paragraph—tell the readers what you said— one sentence for each theme, and then the last sentence for the idea presented in Intro paragraph 1.d*
- 4) **Discussion**
 - a) *Bring forward what was written in section 1.d. (eighth pie) Show connection between 1.d and the themes in the Results section*
 - b) *Show how these connections fit with conversations in the current literature—1.c (quarter pie)*
 - c) *Walk it forward, more broadly—maybe reference 1.b (half pie)*
- 5) **Strengths and Limitations**
- 6) **Conclusions**



Van Tiem, Jennifer M. (she/her/hers)
Need-to-address:
What-we-did
Why-we-did-it
What-it-got-us
How-we-analyzed-it

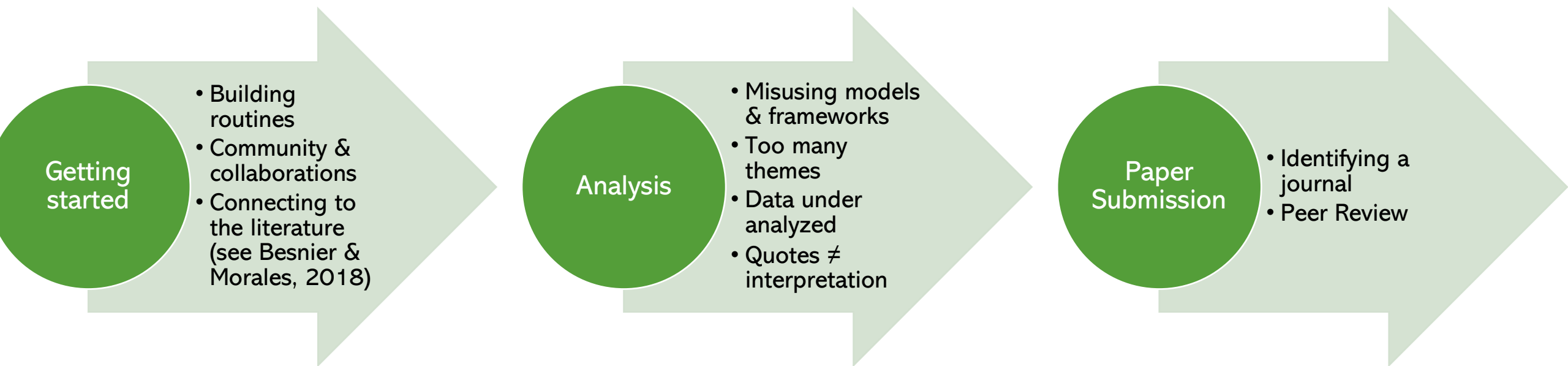


Van Tiem, Jennifer M. (she/her/hers)
Broad-rule-of-thumb-for-whole-paper—each sentence has a job. If you have trouble writing a sentence, start by asking what is the sentence supposed to do?

The background features several abstract geometric shapes. On the left, there is a large green triangle pointing upwards. In the center, a large, light green rounded shape is partially visible. On the right, a thick, circular ring is shown, split into two colors: green on the left and blue on the right. The text is centered within the light green rounded shape.

Addressing Challenges Across the Writing Trajectory

Trajectory of & Impediments to a Qualitative Product



Write Every Day! A Mantra Dismantled

- Examined the premise that daily writing is necessary for success
- Interviews (N=100); Questionnaires (N=1323) of Writers
- Findings
 - ~12% write daily; vast majority do not
 - Timing: breakfast, afternoon, evening, middle of the night...
 - Email on/off; only at work/anywhere but work/only at home; beautiful places/anywhere; small chunks, binge writing...
- There are many ways to be a writer
- Daily writing is not a bad idea
- There is no one-size-fits-all advice

Community & Collaborative Writing

Create a community

- Writing Events, Writing Groups, Writing Buddies, Writing Mentor
- See Fix, Abraham, & Hamilton “How to Start & Run a Writing Community” VA HSR&D Cyberseminar Dec 16, 2019

Collaborative team writing

- Roles & expectations of co-authors & partners
- Authorship (author order; first, second, senior author)
- Optimizing efforts
- Conversations early & often

Strategies to Improve Qualitative Writing

Build infrastructure

- Find/create a writing community
- Find a mentor
- Find exemplars

Build skills

- Participate in peer review
- Lose the guilt; write an SDF
- Learn what works for you

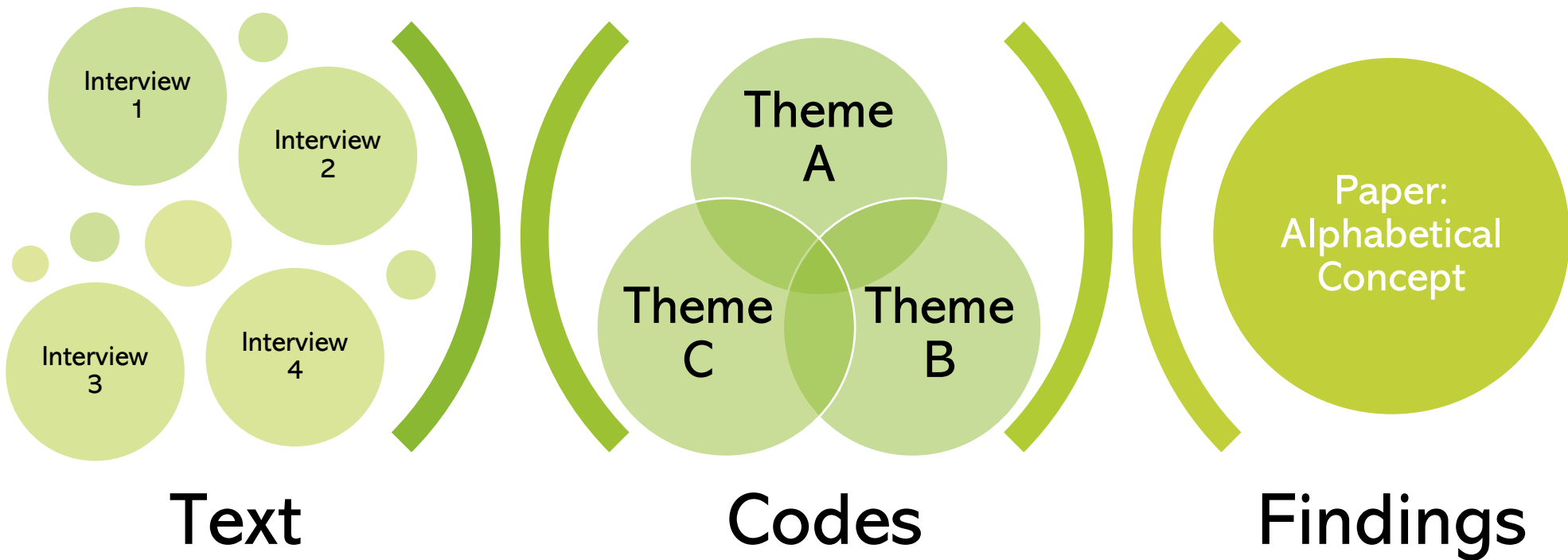
Write

- Start easy
- Edit, edit, edit
- Connecting sections(Background→ Objective→; Methods→ Results

Analytic Impediments to Qualitative Writing

- Misusing models & frameworks
- Too many themes
- Data under analyzed
- Quotes ≠ interpretation

Analysis → Results



Journal Identification



Bibliography



Search for your paper in
PubMed



Ask a colleague



Journal Author Name
Authenticator (JANE)

Qualitative-friendly Journal Ideas*

Health Services Research

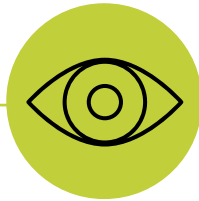
- American Journal of Public Health
- BMC Health Services Research
- Health Expectations
- Health Services Research
- Implementation Science
- Implementation Science Communications
- Journal of General Internal Medicine
- Medical Care
- Patient Education and Counseling
- PEC Innovation
- PLoS One
- *And many other condition-specific journals*

Social Science (Anthropology)

- American Anthropologist
- Anthropology & Medicine
- Human Organization
- Journal of Contemporary Ethnography
- Medical Anthropology
- Medical Anthropology Quarterly
- Practicing Anthropology
- Social Science & Medicine
- Sociology of Health & Illness
- Qualitative Health Research
- Qualitative Research
- *And many other disciplinary specific journals*

**Not comprehensive; based on personal experience*

Post-Paper Submission



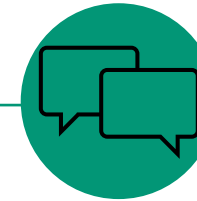
What editors look for

- Fit with Aims/Scope
- Cover letter
- Finding reviewers
- Reviewer recommendation



Peer review

- Editor sends to ~3 content/methods experts
- Can take several months
- Editor reads reviews & makes determination



Responding to reviews

- The reviewer is always right (even when they are not)
- Reflect on their read of the paper & how to revise
- Focus on the specific request
- Respond using a reviewer-friendly format

Areas of On-going Conversation

- Counting
- Describing and justifying sampling strategy
- Quote tables
- Including supplementary materials
 - Interview guide
 - Codebook
- Deidentifying qualitative data and protecting confidentiality
- Including checklists (e.g., COREQ, SRQR)
- Data availability

Qualitative Writing Resources

- Besnier, N. and Morales, P. (2018), Tell the story: How to write for American Ethnologist. *American Ethnologist*, 45: 163-172. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12629>
- Martín, E. (2014). How to write a good article. *Current Sociology*, 62(7), 949–955. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392114556034>
- Pratt, MG. (2009) From the Editors: For the Lack of a Boilerplate: Tips on Writing Up (and Reviewing) Qualitative Research. *AMJ*, 52, 856–862, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.44632557>
- Sword H (2016) “Write every day!': a mantra dismantled.” International Journal for Academic Development. Available here: <https://www.research.ucsb.edu/sites/default/files/RD/docs/Write-every-day-a-mantra-dismantled.pdf>
- HSRD Cyberseminars: <https://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/cyberseminars/catalog-archive.cfm>, use the search term “writing”

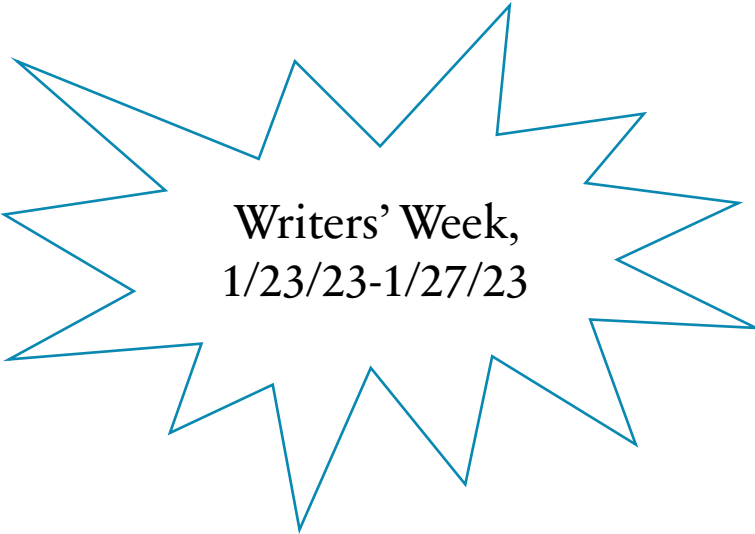
Writing Communities

Writing Community Models

- **Writer's group** (CHOIR & CSHIIP); Monthly meeting, paper presenter, attendees = reviewers; Research area-focused meeting about writing
- **Writer's week/month** (CHOIR; CeMHOR); Held 2x/year, w/a theme (e.g., "Dissemination") w/writing-related activities
- **Roundtable writing review** (CSHIIP) 2 hour, in-person roundtable review of 5 manuscript or manuscript sections; 10 minutes of reading and commenting in silence followed by 5 minutes of sharing with the author out loud
- **Writing buddies** (CeMHOR); Accountability partners, set and log goals

Starting a Writing Group

- **Start Small**
 - Organize a few, low-key events
 - Have 1 simple event/activity & adapt
- **Dedicate (most) time to free writing**
- **Build on existing structures** (research team), activities (center events) & culture
- **Frequency**
- **Timing**, i.e., June (after grants/before Summer vacations) & January (after grants & the holidays)



Writers' Week,
1/23/23-1/27/23

THANK YOU!



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Linda Kawentel



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See CyberSeminar Catalogue for a full list of qualitative research & writing CyberSeminars ([Link](#))

To join QMLC fill out a brief membership intake form using this link:

https://vhaordfedramp.gov1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_etv45XoLuNeNmi
[W](#)

After you fill out the form you will receive emails about upcoming sessions, newsletters, and group discussions.

[QUERI Learning Collaboratives \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/queri/learning-collaboratives/)