

IPA quality evaluation guide (Smith, 2011)

Acceptable

The paper meets the following four criteria:

- Clearly subscribes to the theoretical principles of IPA: it is phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic.
- Sufficiently transparent so reader can see what was done.
- Coherent, plausible and interesting analysis.
- Sufficient sampling from corpus to show density of evidence for each theme:

N1_3: extracts from every participant for each theme;

N4_8: extracts from at least three participants for each theme; and

N_8: extracts from at least three participants for each **theme_measure** of prevalence of themes, or extracts from half the sample for each theme.

Overall the paper is judged sufficiently trustworthy to accept for publication and include in a systematic review.

Caveats

Compensation

Evidence base and interest factors considered together so that, e.g., a paper with particularly interesting data may gain compensation for a less than ideal evidence base.

Partial acceptability

A paper may be deemed acceptable if it has partial but discrete pockets of acceptable, e.g.,

1. Paper may present four themes, two of which are interesting and well evidenced while two of them are not. In this case, the paper can be considered acceptable as the two good themes make a sufficient contribution in their own right.

2. Paper may have number of themes but evidence each with data from the same single participant. This paper may be considered acceptable if the account of the individual is sufficiently coherent that it can be read as an interesting idiographic case-study.

3. Paper may present data from two participant groups, e.g., males and females and be deemed acceptable for one participant group but not the other.

Safe or borderline?

A paper showing sufficient sampling as described above is deemed safe.

A paper with a sample over eight with extracts from enough participants to illustrate variation but without detail of prevalence or enough evidence of density of themes is deemed borderline.

Unacceptable

The paper fails on one of the four criteria for acceptable. It may be:

- not consistent with theoretical principles of IPA;
- insufficiently transparent for reader to see what was done;
- not of sufficient interest; and
- poorly evidenced.

Predominantly what lets a paper down is the poor evidence base. Typical ways this can occur:

- large number of descriptive/superficial themes from a large number of participants;
- each theme has short summary and one or two extracts without interpretation;
- insufficient extracts from participants to support the themes being illustrated;
- no explanation for how prevalence of the themes was determined; and analysis is crude, lacks nuance.

Overall the paper is not trustworthy and would not be judged acceptable for publication.

Good

Paper must clearly meet all the criteria for acceptable. It then offers these three extra things:

- well focused; offering an in-depth analysis of a specific topic;
- data and interpretation are strong; and
- the reader is engaged and finds it particularly enlightening.

Overall the paper could be recommended to a novice as a good exemplar of IPA.