Wake Forest University
School of Medicine

Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Comprehensive Cancer Center
Qualitative and Patient Reported Outcomes (Q-PRO) Shared Resource

Member Checking

What is member checking?

Member checking is a technique to enhance the credibility of qualitative research by presenting either raw data or synthesized research findings to participants for comment.[1,2] Participants may confirm the accuracy of findings, expand on findings, or challenge them. Member checking is used to validate the trustworthiness of qualitative research and reduces the possibility of mis-interpretation and mis-representation of participants.[3]

Member checking can be done during data collection (e.g. sharing transcripts), during analysis (e.g. sharing preliminary findings) or after data analysis (e.g. sharing final findings or research products). Member checking is most frequently done with the original research participants, but can also be done with other people from the same member or stakeholder group.

Multiple techniques have been documented for presenting data back to participants, including sending interview or focus group transcripts to participants to review for accuracy; conducting follow up interviews or focus groups with participants to validate findings[3]; presenting findings at community meetings or participatory workshops[4,5]; and preparing and distributing study briefs to participants and asking for written feedback.[3]

What are the limitations of member checking?

It can be difficult and time-consuming to re-engage participants after data collection, and research teams have documented low response rates to member checking attempts.[4] Even when they do re-engage, participants may be reluctant to provide feedback or challenge the findings, depending on the power dynamics between the research team and the participants.[6]

Member also checking invites the possibility of privileging one individual's account of the data over the researchers' analysis of the entire dataset, and researchers may feel pressure to change findings based on participant feedback.[6]

When should I conduct member checking?

As with any rigor-enhancing technique, you should consider both the value and practicality for your research project. It is not necessary to use member checking in every context, but if may be beneficial if you are doing community-engaged, participatory, and/or action research.[6] You should complete member checking as soon after data collection as possible, both to provide timely feedback to participants and to minimize issues with participant perspectives on the research project changing over time.

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[1] Lincoln YS & Guba EG. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
[2] Doyle S. Member checking with older women: A framework for negotiating meaning. *Healthcare for Women International*. 2007: 8, 888-908. doi:10.1080/07399330701615325

[3] Birt L, Scott S, Cavers D, Campbell C, Walter F. Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? Qualitative Health Research. 2016; 12(13): 1802-1811. doi:10.1177/1049732316654870

[4] de Loyola González-Salgado I, Rivera-Navarro J, Gutiérrez-Sastre M, Conde P, Franco M. Conducting member checking within a qualitative case study on health-related behaviours in a large European city: Appraising interpretations and co-constructing findings [published online ahead of print, 2022 Jul 13]. *Health (London)*. 2022;13634593221109682. doi:10.1177/13634593221109682

[5] López-Zerón, G., Bilbao-Nieva, M. I., & Clements, K. A. V. (2021). Conducting Member Checks With Multilingual Research Participants From Diverse Backgrounds. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods*, *2*(2). doi:10.35844/001c.24412

[6] Caretta MA & Perez MA. When participants do not agree: member checking and challenges to epistemic authority in participatory research. *Field Methods*. 2019; 31(4), 359-374. doi:10.1177/1525822X19866578