Tips for Managing AI Interactions in Qualitative Research

A practical guide for thoughtful, reflexive engagement with AI tools in qualitative research

Many researchers are experimenting with AI tools—but navigating their use while maintaining methodological integrity can be challenging. This guide supports qualitative researchers in working with AI in ways that are purposeful, transparent, and aligned with their epistemological commitments.

It includes:
Structured strategies for prompting and process design

- Recommendations for maintaining context across AI interactions
- An AI interaction log and prompt builder
- Ethical guidance for integrating AI reflexively
- Practical ways to apply this guide in teaching, supervision, and individual research practice

This is not a guide to the tools themselves, but a roadmap to help you make informed, reflexive decisions about how you use them in research.

Structuring AI Inputs for Clarity and Depth
AI is sensitive to how requests are framed. Broad or vague prompts often produce superficial responses. These strategies support clarity, purpose, and interpretive integrity.

- Be specific about your task and analytic focus
  e.g. Instead of "Summarise this interview," try:
  "Identify how this participant describes their experience of institutional change."
- Break long texts into smaller segments – Avoids truncation and encourages careful reflection on meaning
- Provide contextual framing
  e.g. "This interview explores remote teaching. Identify themes related to belonging."
- Choose tools based on their strengths – e.g., Claude (context retention), GPT-4 (flow and structure), Gemini (interpretive range)

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2. Managing Context and Continuity Across Sessions
AI systems have memory and token limits. Over time, they may forget key details or shift direction. Preserve rigour by maintaining control of the flow.

- Recap earlier findings before prompting further
- Start fresh, when necessary, with a short summary
- Use a parallel research log to document decisions and outputs

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3. Using AI to Support Your Analysis Without Replacing Interpretation

AI can help you notice patterns or surface familiar language—but it cannot interpret meaning, navigate nuance, or engage reflexively. That work belongs to you.

- Use AI to support early exploration—such as clustering similar ideas or generating tentative summaries
- Treat AI as a conversational partner or sounding board: let it prompt further questions, not provide answers
- Approach any outputs as provisional, and reflect on potential biases, what may be absent, oversimplified, or assumed
- Always keep your theoretical lens and analytic goals central

4. Ethical and Reflexive Use of AI

AI tools are not neutral. Their use in research requires active reflection on responsibility, transparency, and potential distortion.

- Seek ethics approval for AI use in your research. If unsure, contact your ethics committee for guidance.
- Disclose AI involvement in methods sections or acknowledgements
- Avoid uploading identifiable data to AI
- Stay alert to simplification, bias, or misrepresentation of participant voice
- Reflect on where your interpretive stance and the AI's output diverge

5. Prompt Builder

Use this page to craft purposeful, transparent prompts.

Reflection Question	Your Notes
What is the research task?	
What context does the AI need?	
What kind of output do I expect?	
What assumptions does this task involve?	
How will I evaluate and reflect on the output?	

6. AI Interaction Log Template

Track your decisions and maintain a transparent process.

- Date – When the interaction with the AI tool took place
- Prompt – The exact input or question you gave to the AI
- AI Tool – The name of the tool used (e.g., GPT-4, Claude, Gemini)
- Summary of Output – A brief overview of what the AI generated
- Researcher Notes – Reflections, concerns, or interpretive insights
- Included in Write-Up? – Indicate whether this output was used in your research documentation or reporting

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7. Using This Guide in Practice

This resource can support a range of research and teaching contexts:

- Use as a desk reference when working with AI tools
- Print for supervision, ethics review, or teaching sessions
- Pair with reflective journalling, analytic memos, or coding frameworks
- Share with colleagues and research teams to support consistent practice

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8. Final Reflection

AI tools can streamline aspects of the research process—but only when used with care, clarity, and critical attention. As qualitative researchers, our role is not simply to use technology, but to shape how it's used, and to ensure our methods continue to centre reflexivity, ethics, and meaning making.

Looking for More Support?

Explore training options at **clairemoran.com/training** or get in touch to discuss tailored sessions: **claire@clairemoran.com**. I'd be delighted to hear from you!