

WHO AM I, AND WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH RESEARCH?

A critical self-reflection guide for students

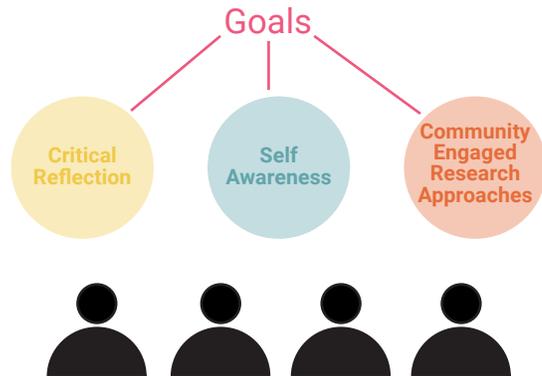
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Developed through collaborative efforts from
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Office of Community Engagement Ambassadors

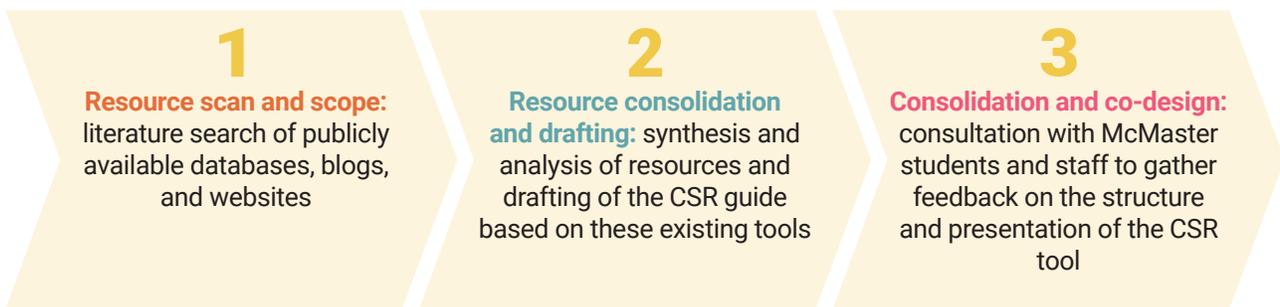
OVERVIEW & DEVELOPMENT

Reflection has been acknowledged as an important part of the research process, and there are many existing resources available to students to help facilitate reflection in their research. However, there is an opportunity to consolidate these existing resources to create a cohesive, transdisciplinary critical self-reflection (CSR) tool for students.

The goal of this guide is to foster critical reflection, self-awareness, and community engaged research approaches among students. The guide works to support students in understanding who they are and how this will impact the communities they are partnering with in their research.



This guide has been collaboratively developed through a **three phase** process:



So what does this guide include?

1 An outline of key concepts, **community engaged research (CER)** and **critical self-reflection (CSR)**



2 A structured **CSR TOOL** for students to engage with at different points in the research process

KEY CONCEPTS

COMMUNITY ENGAGED RESEARCH (CER)

What is community engaged research?

- Community engaged research (CER) puts community partnerships at the forefront of the research with the aim to recognize community-specific ways of knowing (1,2).
- CER is based on equitable participation, community relevance, and action and change, and fosters collaboration, co-learning, and community control in research (2,3).

What does CER look like at McMaster?

- The McMaster Office of Community Engagement (OCE) supports research partnerships between the university and community. The OCE does this by helping students, staff, and faculty learn about and embed the principles of community engagement in CER initiatives, and by helping community members access appropriate support within the institution.

- The OCE is also home to a co-curricular CER program, the McMaster Research Shop, which facilitates research project partnerships between community organizations and teams of student volunteers.
- The office provides a diversity of practical resources to support community engagement initiatives, such as this guide.

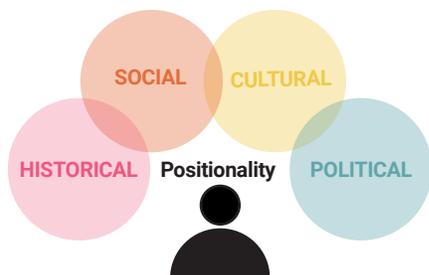
What does CER have to do with critical self-reflection?

- Critical self-reflection is a primary aspect of CER.
- Researchers are successful when they hold the skills to navigate partnerships with an awareness of who they are and how their own values inform the research.
- Exploring your own lens and values can be done through transparent communication with community partners, and critical self-reflection.

CRITICAL SELF REFLECTION (CSR)

What is critical self-reflection?

- CSR is a process that can help foster awareness of positionality, or who you are, in research.
- Positionality is the social, cultural, political, and historical context that shapes identities and power dynamics between people (4–6). For example, positionality is made up of intersecting aspects of our social identities such as class, gender, age, race, citizenship, ability, etc., creating a lens of understanding and experiencing the world (5,6).



- CSR is a practice of critically examining the assumptions, values, and beliefs we hold as individuals in society (6–10).
- By identifying our assumptions, values, and beliefs through a process such as CSR, learning can become more relevant and engagement with community more meaningful and ethical (9,10).

What resources exist for CSR?

- There are a number of resources about critical reflection in qualitative research and experiential and service learning (7–18).
- Many of these resources identify the importance of reflection on an experience or an event (ex., asking, What? So, what? Now what?) (14,19,20), while some highlight the importance of reflection on the self and individual positionality in relation to an experience, research project, or event (6,7,12,15,16,21–23).

What is the opportunity for this CSR tool?

Although there are a number of CSR resources available to researchers, there is limited connection across existing information. This CSR tool consolidates existing prompt questions, resources, and activities on CSR, to create an accessible tool for students.

Resources
Prompt Questions
Activities



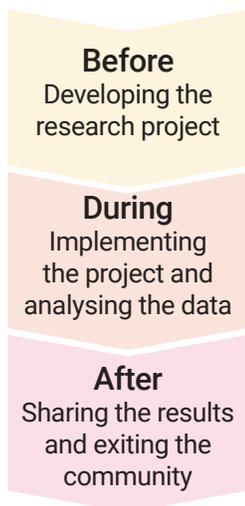
WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THIS CSR TOOL

At its core, CSR involves asking and reflecting on critical questions. This tool aims to support students across disciplines engaged in CER initiatives by providing them with a practical CSR process for before, during, and after the research project.

How to use the CSR tool?

How you choose to explore and use this tool is up to you, and your research team, but, the tool invites reflection at different stages of the research process, offering key themes, prompt questions, and activities and resources to engage with. Implementing the tool could involve reflecting on the questions and recording them in an ongoing 'research journal' at each stage of the process, and/or hosting a one hour voluntary meeting with the research team/community at each stage of the process to check in, complete one or two of the included activities, record your thoughts on some of the prompt questions, and discuss the process. In general, the resources/activities included at each stage of the process could be used as inspiration for how to use this tool.

Stages of the research process



Aspects of the tool

KEY THEMES

Overarching themes at each stage of the research, that provide a set of concepts to root reflections in

PROMPT QUESTIONS

Questions developed through consolidation of existing knowledge, that provide an overarching guide for reflection

ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

Key resources, examples, and activities that provide potential avenues of thinking through the prompt questions

* Click on bullet points to be connected to links

BEFORE

KEY THEMES

Positionality Assumptions Knowledge Hopes

PROMPT QUESTIONS

- Who am I and what is my position in this project? Who is the community?
- How am I feeling about this work?
- What does this topic bring up for me?
- Why am I interested in this topic?
- What am I comfortable/uncomfortable with in this project?
- What are my values, beliefs, and biases in this project?
- What strengths do I bring?
- What assumptions am I making about the topic/community knowledge and skills/myself/my knowledge?
- How have my assumptions and knowledge informed the research?
- What am I hoping to get out of this project?

ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

1 NARRATIVE JOURNALING

- Collaborative Engagement from within the Academy: A Self-Reflexive Narrative (Lake, 2018)
- Positionality practices and dimensions of impact on equity research (Secules et al., 2021)
- Facilitating critical self-exploration by global health students (Ventres, 2019)

2 DISCUSSION/WORKSHOPPING WITH THE RESEARCH TEAM AND COMMUNITY

- Power Structure Assessment Framework (ICRC, 2021)
- Empowering meaningful community engagement and involvement in global health research - critical reflections and guiding questions (Nelson, 2021)

3 SOCIAL IDENTITY MAPPING

- Social Identity Map: A Reflexivity Tool for Practicing Explicit Positionality in Critical Qualitative Research (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019)
- What is positionality? (Pollock, 2021)

4 DEVELOP YOUR ETHNOGRAPHIC TOOLKIT

- Create a T-table to consider the invisible and visible tools of your positionality (Reyes, 2020)

5 REVIEW PUBLISHED COMMUNITY RESEARCH GUIDES

- Principles for Conducting Research in the Jane Finch Community
- A Guide to Inclusive and Meaningful Research with Hamilton Newcomers
- Community Resource Handbook: A Guide to Community-Engaged Research
- Research 101: A Manifesto for Ethical Research in the Downtown Eastside

DURING

KEY THEMES

Challenges Power dynamics Humility

PROMPT QUESTIONS

- What is going well right now? What is frustrating?
- What is my relationship to the community like? Are there power dynamics between myself and the community? How are they showing up?
- How am I fostering humility in this project?
- How am I valuing different experiences and knowledge of myself and others involved?
- What have I learned about research so far?
- How am I integrating critical self-reflection into the research process (e.g., in coding/analysis)?

ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

1 REFLECTIVE, CONTINUOUS DATA COLLECTION AND JOURNALING

- Memo-writing: narrative reflection and brief notes to record why decisions are made (Birks et al., 2008)
- Learning journal (Cheng et al., 2015, pp. 4)
- Narrative journaling about challenges and successes based on prompts (Hampton, n.d.)
- Explore 'reflexivity in practice' (Liwanag & Rhule, 2021)

2 REVIEW TIPS FOR STRONGER LISTENING SKILLS

- How qualitative researchers can build stronger listening skills

3 ACCOUNT FOR POSITIONALITY

- Accounting for positionality in coding (Reyes, 2021)
- Reflexivity in quantitative research (Pfurtscheller et al., 2022)

AFTER

KEY THEMES

Sharing results Exiting community Connection

PROMPT QUESTIONS

- How am I thinking about my positionality after the research is completed?
- How did what I achieved in this project align or misalign with what I hoped to achieve?
- In what ways were community benefits prioritized (or not) in this project? Was this what I expected?
- What was my experience engaging in on-going reflection regarding my identity, biases, and assumptions?
- How am I sharing the results of the research? How is the community involved in this aspect of the project?
- How will I continue to engage with community or not?

ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

1 NARRATIVE JOURNALING

- 'Reflexivity in practice' (Liwanag & Rhule, 2021)
- Consider Stages 3 and 4 of the Community Engaged Learning Reflection Framework

2 DEBRIEF AND FOLLOW UP WITH THE COMMUNITY AND RESEARCH TEAM

- Explore how to communicate your research findings (Karim et al., 2021, pp. 12)

3 CONSOLIDATE YOUR LEARNING

- Build a student portfolio (e.g., written consolidation of reflections, audio/video reflection, art piece etc.) based on the reflection prompt questions in this CSR tool and offered by Cheng et al. 2015 (pp. 6)

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