

How to select a Research Topic

Learning outcomes

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- Generate ideas that will help in the choice of a suitable research topic;
- Identify the attributes of a good research topic;
- Turn research ideas into a research project that has clear research question (s) and objectives;
- Draft a research proposal

Disclaimer

- Not a session on Research
Methodology

Formulating and clarifying your research topic

The important steps

- Identifying the attributes of a good research topic
- Generating ideas that help you select a suitable topic
- Turning ideas into clear research questions and objectives
- Writing your research proposal

Attributes of a good research topic

Is it Feasible

- Are you interested by the topic?
- Do you have the necessary research skills?
- Can you complete the project in the time available?
- Will the research still be current when you finish?
- Do you have sufficient financial and other resources?
- Will you be able to gain access to data?

Attributes of a good research topic (2)

Appropriateness: is it worthwhile?

- Does it meet the examining/Publisher 's standards be met?
- Does the the topic contain issues with clear links to theory?
- Are the research questions and objectives clearly stated?
- Will the proposed research provide fresh insights into the topic?
- Are the findings likely to be symmetrical?

Generating research ideas

Useful Techniques

Rational thinking

Creative thinking

Searching the literature

Scanning the media

Brainstorming

Relevance Trees

Exploring past projects

Discussion

Keeping an ideas notebook

Rational thinking

- Examining your own strengths?weakness and interests
- Looking at past project titles (Good Projects)
- Discussion: Colleagues,peers tutors and professional groups
- Searching the literature (e.g)
- Scanning the media (e,g)

Creative thinking

- Keeping a notebook of ideas
- Exploring personal preferences using past projects
- Relevance trees
- Brainstorming

Keeping a notebook of ideas

- One of the more creative techniques that we all use is to keep a notebook of ideas.
 - noting down your ideas
- then pursue the idea using more rational thinking technique later.

Exploring personal preferences using past project

1. Select six projects that you like
2. For each of these six projects, note down your first thoughts in response to three questions (if responses for different projects are the same this does not matter);

What appeals to you about the project?

What is good about the project?

Why is the project good?

Exploring personal preferences using past project

3. Select three projects you do not like.
4. For each of these three projects that you do not like.

What do you dislike about the project?

What is bad about the project?

Why is the project bad?

Relevance tree/Hourglass Method

- You start with a broad concept
- which you generate further (usually more specific) topics.
- Each of these topics forms a separate branch from which you can generate further, more detailed sub branches.
- the sub branches more ideas are generated and recorded.
- Further examined and selected

Brainstorming

- Define your problem – that is, the sorts of ideas you are interested in – as precisely as possible.
- Ask for suggestions, relating to the problem

- Record all suggestions, observing the following rules:

No suggestion should be criticized or evaluated in any way before all ideas have been considered;

All suggestions, however wild, should be recorded and considered

As many suggestions as possible should be recorded.

- Review all the suggestions and explore what is meant by each.
- *Analyze the list of suggestions and decide which appeal to you most as research ideas why.*

Refining research ideas

- Using the Delphi Technique
- Conducting a preliminary study
- Continually testing out your ideas
- Integrating ideas
- Refining topics given to you by your organisation

Criteria for a good research question 1.JPG

Criteria for good research question 2.JPG

Criteria for a good research question.JPG

Writing research questions

Write research questions that are

- Consistent with expected standards
- Able to produce clear conclusions
- At the right level (not too difficult)
- Not too descriptive
- Use the 'Goldilocks Test'

Clough and Nutbrown (2002)

Goldilocks test

- Clough and Nutbrown use what they call the Goldilocks test

Is the Research question ?

- Too big need significant funding
- Too small are likely to be insufficient substance
- **Too hot** maybe so because sensitivities that may be aroused as a result of doing the research .
- **Just right** are those just right for investigation at this time by this research in this setting

Turning ideas into research projects

Examples of research ideas and their derived focus questions

Research idea	General focus research questions
Advertising and share prices	How does the running of a TV advertising campaign designed to boost the image of a company affect its share price?
Job recruitment via the Internet	How effective is recruiting for new staff via the Internet in comparison with traditional methods?

Table 2.2 Examples of research ideas and their derived focus research questions

Examples of Research ideas and their questions

- Research idea

Light and Mental Health

Question

What effect does (day)light have on Mental Health and well being in KSA?

Drug prescription rate and Mental Health

What are the most common mental Health ? problems in KSA?

Breast Cancer and Mammography in KSA

What are the causes of poor uptake rates

Turning ideas into research projects

Writing clear research objectives

- Check your examining body's preferences for stated objectives
- Use a general focus question to achieve precise objectives
- Example ?

Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Turning ideas into research projects

Include SMART Personal objectives

Specific: What precisely do you hope to achieve from undertaking the research?

Measurable: What measures will you use to determine whether you have achieved your objectives?(Secured a career-level first job in software design)

Achievable: Are the targets you have set for yourself achievable given all the possible constraints?

Realistic: Given all other demands upon your time, will you have the time and energy to complete the research on time?

Timely: Will you have time to accomplish all your objectives?

Writing your research proposal

Concept Paper /research proposal

- To organise your ideas
 - Concept paper
 - Concept diagram
- To convince your intended or target audience
- To meet ethical requirements

Content of your research proposal

- Title - likely to change during the process
- Background - context within the literature
- Research questions and objectives - what you seek to achieve

Content of your research proposal

- **Method** - can be in two parts: research design and data collection
- **Timescale and Resources** - (finance, data access, equipment)
- **References** - include some key literature sources

Summary

The best research topics

- Formulate and clarify the topic
- Meet the requirements of the examining body
- Use a variety of techniques when generating research ideas
- Are focused on clear questions based on relevant literature

Summary: Chapter 2

The best research topics

- Are theory dependent
- Have a proposal containing organised ideas

Tell the reader:

- What will be done and why
- How it will be achieved

References

- Saunders ,Lewis and Thornhill ,Research Methods for Buisness Students .Mark Saunders Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill 2009
- Janie Irwin Penn state University and Kathy Yelick UC Berkeley .