

Choosing your topic and developing the proposal

1. Introduction to the Dissertation
2. Choosing a subject area and topic
3. Aim and Objectives
4. Relationship with Methodology

What is Research?

- **Research** is a systematic enquiry which is reported in a form accessible to others.
- **Research** is concerned with seeking solutions to problems or answers to questions.

What is Research?

- Research challenges ideologies and beliefs.
- Generates new concepts and broadens our perspective and perception.
- Conclusions lead to new theories and beliefs.

When can we do Research?

- We do research whenever we gather information to answer a question that solves a problem.
 - Helps to understand things better
 - Writing a formal report
 - Writing is thinking

How to conduct Research?

- Observations made by researchers should be systematic arguable and challengeable.
- Explain how information was collected argue for the results obtained and explain limitations.
- Anyone conducting the research in the same way should arrive at the same conclusions.

Why do we do research?

- Essential in making everyday decisions
- To learn to work systematically and to learn to critically analyse issues before believing in them.
- Purpose is to describe, explain, understand, criticise, analyse existing knowledge and phenomenon.

Induction vs Deduction

- Induction: observing facts to generate theory
 - observations - findings - theory
- Deduction: gathering of facts to confirm or disprove hypothesized relationships
 - build hypothesis from existing knowledge - test or scrutinise - accept or reject

Subject Areas

- A subject area consists of a broad range of **possible issues**;
- It defines the **boundaries** within which you will find your actual topic;
- A subject area is usually much **too large** to be taken as a topic in itself.

Research Topic

- The research topic is a specific subject within the general subject area:
 - A question to be answered,
 - A problem to be solved, or
 - A hypothesis to be tested
- Usually the title of research directly announces its topic, but not always.

Research Topic

- Answer a question to solve a problem that you can convince readers to care about.
- Research topic is an interest stated specifically enough for you to imagine becoming an expert on it.

Finding a Topic

- Start by listing relevant topics that interest you:
 - From modules
 - From your work place
- Start reading:
 - Find out what is available and what has been done
 - See how others have narrowed it down
 - Understand what specific issues others have found.
 - Helps to inform you about how much data the library holds on your topic.

Finding a Topic

- Topic should not be broad
- It is too broad if you can state it in 4 or 5 words:
 - Contractors' cashflow in infrastructure projects
- Use active verbs to put more focus:
 - Describe, contribute, develop
- Investigate the reasons for negative cashflow in railway infrastructure projects.

Finding a Topic

- Topic should not be too narrow otherwise you will not find data on it:
 - *Remember an MSc dissertation is a three month full time job: how much can you finish in this time with the resources that you have.*

Too narrow a topic?

- Should not be too narrow and you should be able to set it in the context of a wider subject area:
- E.g. “Impact of Risk on the viability of PPP for JNNURM scheme in India”.
- Might fall in the subject area of “Risk in PPP projects”
- One of Several Appropriate Topics in this Subject Area:
- “Assessing the viability of PPP in Water supply infrastructure: A Case Study of JNNURM Scheme in India ”

From focused topic to research question

- Need to identify the data that are needed to answer your question
 - Who, what, when and where
- Focus on how and why: more critical thinking
- Real Estate Market Dubai
 - What is the history of the Dubai REM?
 - How did it develop
 - What were the drivers? What were the barriers?
 - How did it boom?
 - Why did it bust?

From focused topic to research question

- Structure and composition: how does it fit with a larger system?
 - What is the government policy?
 - Who are the key players? How do they relate to each other? What is the role of foreigners vs locals?
- How is the topic categorized? How does it compare with others? Can it be grouped?
 - Compare with a more developed REM – UK?
 - What is the market composed of: commercial, vs industrial or residential – what are the characteristics of each sector and how does it influence the rest of the market?
- What ifs:
 - what if the policy did not change to allow foreign ownership? What if there were no private developers?

From focused topic to research question

- Follow the questioning of your sources:
Extend the question (time and place)
- Support claims with new evidence: “xx used government reports would documents reveal the same results?”
- Look into similar topics: “ZZ discussed supply chain management in manufacturing: can we extend his thinking to construction?”
- Look at further research in articles....

Types of Research Problems

- Practical problem
- Conceptual research problem
- Applied vs Pure research

So what?

- You now have a topic and a question that interest you.
- So what question forces you to think about what others think of your topic..
- How will not answering the question keep us from understanding something else better than we do?

Working towards answering your question

- 3 steps: Topic/Question/Significance
- Step 1: name your topic
 - I am studying/working on
- Step 2: add an indirect question
 - Because I want to find out why/how/whether
- Step 3: answer So What?
 - In order to help understand...

Choosing and Refining Your Topic

- Have you expressed your question clearly and concisely?
- Is the question sufficiently challenging?
- Is answering the question within your reach given limitations of time, resources and access to information?
 - begin to think of the link between the Research Question and your methodology.

Rationale / Introduction

- Contextualising background
- Common ground:
 - one sunny morning Little Red Riding Hood was skipping through the forest on her way to her grandmother's house...'
 - Stable statement of what we already know..
- Statement of the problem
 - Disrupt the context: condition of incomplete knowledge or consequences of that knowledge
- Response to the problem:
 - the aim of this dissertation is to ..

Research Question, Aim and Objectives

- Answering your research question is also referred to as meeting your overall **Aim**
- This is a broad overarching question and you will also wish to answer smaller, subsidiary questions which are related to the main aim.
- These are sometimes referred to as your **Objectives**

Principal and Sub- Questions

- A good principal question or problem should be easily divided into several more practicable sub-questions or problems.

Subsidiary Questions or Objectives

- These describe a set of smaller questions to be tackled.
- They should address the main research question and will be within the general aim of the research.
- They *may* indicate the work or activities necessary to approach the overall aim.
- They should be set out in a logical order, e.g. from general to specific, from description to analysis, from analysis to conclusions/ recommendations.

Useful verbs in objectives

First Objective	Main Objectives	Final Objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review• Describe• Identify• Establish• Outline• Highlight• Reveal• Discuss	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reveal• Discuss• Explore• Consider• Examine• Investigate• Compare• Analyse• Evaluate• Assess	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop• Recommend• Outline• Make

Methodology

- The methodology is a description and explanation of the tasks which are necessary to answer your research question/achieve your research aim.

Comments on Methodology

- It is always necessary to set your topic in a wider context of knowledge and theory in the subject area, so it will always be necessary to carry out a literature review.
- The literature review will also help you to refine the questions you need to ask.
- The techniques used e.g. interviews, analysis of secondary data, surveys, analysis of documents, case studies etc. **must** be directed towards answering your research question and must be feasible given your resources.
- Use your stated methodology as a guide to what you will do and when – don't write it after the event to summarise or justify what you've done.

Some Common Mistakes

- Research to fill in gaps in your own knowledge;
- Identified a problem to which the answer can be only yes or no;
- Identified a problem which is not true or does not exist.

How to prepare a research
proposal?

Good research proposal

- Should have these sections:
 - A research title
 - Background discussion of the research topic
 - Question or Aim
 - Subsidiary questions or objectives
 - Methodology
 - Anticipated findings
 - Time scale and working programme
 - Planned structure of the report/dissertation
 - Reference list

Background of research

- Good background of research comes from a thorough literature review
 1. Subject area
 2. Historical changes
 3. Major current issues
 4. Main outstanding problem

Methodology

- **Description of the theoretical or conceptual framework to be used**
- **Description of specific data collection methods and research design**
- **Description of analytical techniques**

Good research proposal should demonstrate:

- The research is worth doing
- The study is carefully planned and can be executed successfully
- The researcher is competent to conduct the study

Overall Research Process

- Identify a broad area of study
- Narrow it down to a research topic
- Decide the approach
- Formulate the plan
- Collect data or information
- Analyse and interpret data
- Present the findings

Hypothesis

- **Some research begin not with a question, but with a hypothesis**
 - An hypothesis is a specific statement of prediction. It describes in concrete terms what you expect will happen in your study.
 - By research, you can accept or reject the hypothesis.
 - A single study may have one or many hypotheses.

Hypothesis

- Hypothesis (as Research Title):
‘The requirement for affordable housing in new residential developments will constrict the supply of land and increase land values.’

MSc Dissertations - Expectations

1. Well conceptualised – very clear aim and objectives.
2. A questioning perspective – free thinking, critical mind, challenging common beliefs.
3. Be ready to defend your work actively.
4. Convincing rationale.
5. Analytical not narrative dissertation.

MSc Dissertations - Expectations

- Logical coherent flow.
- Informed by theory.
- Contribution to knowledge?
- Looking at practice from a wider more analytical perspective.
- Development of the student towards a critical and reflexive intellectual stance.