Research and Reading

VALUE MaP

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Aims of this workshop

- Define and describe the nature of research
- Outline effective target-specific research techniques
- Outline ways of coping with the reading load
- Outline ways of selecting reading material
  - efficiently
  - reliably
- Outline the process of reading
- Explore the concept of reading for different purposes
- Look at ways of reading more efficiently
Discussion

- Scenario –
- You have a 2k essay to be completed in 5 weeks time
- You are now starting a period of research:
- *What are some of the problems you might face?*
- *How can they be overcome?*
What is research?

Research simply means:
- Investigating a given topic *thoroughly*
  - Accurately connecting your research to a specific research question
  - Finding out the key literature on the topic (literature review)
- Identifying key themes/ideas/theories for more detailed investigation/evaluation/testing
What is research?

- Identifying **boundaries**: what to study/use immediately, what to omit
- Extending **learning** – being able to **use** research material
- Identifying possible areas for **further (later) study**
Defining the research issues

- Research is always hard to manage if the research topic is too broad or too vague
- Always set out to investigate a **specific** issue
- You may find clarifying this as a hypothesis (theory-to-prove) clarifies your aims
- It is important that you think hard about your supporting research topics as well
  - The sub-topics that clarify the main topic
Defining the research issues

- **Example:**
- **Investigate the impact of streaming in secondary education on students’ confidence and abilities**
- **Hypothesis/argument:** *Streaming reduces/enhances classroom performance*
Defining the research issues

- **Supporting research topics**
- Specific subject(s)
- Control group – classes/schools/samples
- Evidence:
  - A. Internal assessments/tests – data/figures
  - B. External examinations – data/figures
- **Focus group/questionnaires**
  - Students
  - Staff
Establishing the purpose

- As well as defining your research topic(s), it’s important that you think why you are researching.
- What is your primary purpose?
- E.g. short 2K coursework essay; 4K essay; dissertation; business report; oral presentation.
- Note that the different purposes create different demands in terms of audience and length/amount of research.
Establishing the purpose

- **Examples:**
- **2K coursework essay:**
  - 5-12 (?) core texts, drawing heavily from pre-identified reading, plus a limited amount of your own research
  - Aims to demonstrate you have a core understanding of a module
  - Extensive original research is inappropriate here
Establishing the purpose

- **12K Dissertation, for Masters or 3rd Year UG**
- 50 – 150 sources
- Wide range; many journal articles
- Starts with core pre-identified sources; goes on to include a wide range of sources found by original research
- Aims to explore a topic widely; to give an opportunity for your own original evaluations; to demonstrate your skills in the research process as well as expressing an opinion
- Extensive research is entirely appropriate here!
Establishing the purpose

• **Warning**: it is very easy to over-research short coursework essays!
• Sometimes too much is read/researched...and then not used!
• Research can become an excuse – that feels legitimate! – for delaying writing...
• Beware the procrastination trap!
• Think in advance about
  - The amount of research needed
  - The range/no. of sources
Starting with a general source

- It is a good idea to start research with something very general
- This gives a ‘sketch map’ of the research territory
- It starts your research ‘thinking’; it should not be reflected in your academic writing!
- Should you use Wikipedia?
  - Yes: why not?
- *But you should never cite it!!*
Starting with a general source

- Other generic sources:
- The general/core/introductory textbook
  - e.g. CB343 Hamilton and Webster (2009)
- The pre-University text
  - e.g. Haralambos and Holborn (2013)
- Remember, these are starting points!
Working with internet resources

- In a Web2, digital age this is inevitable
- [And highly desirable!]
- But is important that these are ‘proper’ academic sources
- Note the concept of peer reviewed sources
- Don’t just rely on Google/ Google Scholar
- Use the internet resources identified by the module/programme, and by the Subject Guides
Working with a range of sources

- As noted above, the Internet is a hugely powerful source for academic research
  - Many academic journals are available in hard copy, and as a www source
  - Some journals are www only
- However, it is crucial that you use a range of resources
- Books + journals + www sources + whatever else is appropriate to the subject/topic
- Don’t get stuck in an ‘Internet only’ approach
- Relate your Internet use to your discipline/subject
  - e.g. Psychology, Law, History etc.
Working with your reading lists

- Use your reading lists!
- The module/programme related reading lists should be your **first** starting point after the general reading
- Look at themes/issues/topics
- Place reading list sources into 3 categories
  - Core
  - Important
  - Specialised but relevant
- Don’t forget your **subject guides**
- [http://www.kent.ac.uk/library/subjects/index.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/library/subjects/index.html)
Establishing a time-line

- It is very easy to spend too much time researching
  - Note comments above on procrastination
- Try and establish a clear time-line for research
- Move on at (self)agreed times
- Set clear and realistic targets
- These targets must be sensibly related to the purpose of your research
  - With shorter essays, try and define and schedule a specific no. of sources
- Use a weekly planner/schedule
Once you have identified some sources, it is important to allow time to process these sources!
- Allow time for reading!
- Research is not just about finding sources (research in itself), but about using these sources effectively!

Questions:
- Do you identify all sources, then read?
- Do you research a theme/topic, read + research a second theme, read etc.?

This would depend on purpose, as noted above
- Masters Dissertation
- UG coursework essay
Establishing reading priorities

- Once you have done some general reading, you have to start somewhere!
- Again, reading lists can be very helpful here
  - Use the generic 3 part categorisation
  - Core + important + specialised but relevant
  - Start with core reading
- Map out an order of reading that matches your research needs
  - e.g. Significant issue/theories first, then case studies/investigations
Establishing reading priorities

- Don’t just ‘hop about’ from task to task
- Work systematically through a sequence of (self)agreed tasks
- To ‘get you going’ [i.e. day 1 of the research trail?] just plunge in anywhere!
- After this, adopt a systematic order for research
Taking a literature review approach

- A formal literature review is a systematic survey of a field of research
- It will take a chronological, thematic and conceptual approach to a topic
- It will present a complete ‘overview’ of the research in this field
- Unless you are a PhD, MPhil student, this is not really appropriate!
Taking a literature review approach

- However, you can adopt an *informal* literature review approach
- Survey a range of sources once you have identified them
  - Where are the similarities/dissimilarities?
  - How do they relate to one another?
- Group them together, then read more carefully
Finding further sources

- Although you will be mapping your research against...
  - (Self)agreed time-lines
  - (Self) agreed targets
- Inevitably, your research will generate further research
- With many topics, you could research continuously!
- In your time-lines, allow for the discovery of new material!
  - Note the power of serendipity!
  - Suggestions from staff, suggestions from (trusted) peers
- Good research combines the previously identified with the newly discovered
The ultimate aim of research is to embed your investigation into an academic document, or a formal presentation. These must be plagiarism-proof, and observe the conventions of formal referencing. All your ‘evidence’ must be properly identifiable!

- In-text citations; footnotes; reference list; bibliography
Keeping records

- Unless you record your sources meticulously you will either-
  - Fail to produce a piece of plagiarism-proof academic work
  - Waste time going back over research material/sources to retrieve bibliographical information
- In particular, do make a note of when you accessed Internet resources: record the day(s) of access
  - e.g. “Accessed 10/10/2016” etc.
As noted above, you will want to convert your research into in-text citations, footnotes, a reference list or a bibliography.

It is easy to use your sources properly if you use the same format in your record keeping as you will in the final document or presentation.

Embedding research into assignments

- Beware of accidentally merging unattributed ‘snippets’ of original sources with your own writing!
  - Mosaic plagiarism
- Make sure you scrupulously separate anything taken directly from source material from your own words and summaries
  - Notes from reading template?
Discussion

What kind of difficulties do you experience with academic reading?
Managing the reading load

- Read efficiently: SMART targets!
  - specific
  - manageable
  - accurate
  - realistic
  - time-defined
- Plan your reading
- Divide your reading into manageable sections
- Read effectively...
Strategies for approaching reading

- Use the 2 Point Strategy:
  - 1. **Why** am I reading this?
  - 2. **What** do I want to get from it?

- Think about purpose and context
- Take a structured and sequential approach to reading...
Strategies for approaching reading

- Raise questions in advance
  - What do you want to know?
  - What does the reading list suggest you will find out?
  - Identify specific terms/words you are looking for
- Note these questions before reading
- Index card? Post-it?
- Make a note of new specialised/technical terms
- Learn some of these in advance if necessary
Strategies for approaching reading

- **Survey your text - Books**
  - Title + series?
  - Year + revision/edition
  - Text on front/back cover
  - Foreword/Introduction
  - Contents
  - Index
  - Chapter headings
    - Skim *early* sections of chapters?
Survey your text- **Web-sites**

Site map

Source/ sponsoring organisation

- Single ‘author’? Academic institution? Peer-reviewed?

Date/ relevance of information

Visual material
Strategies for approaching reading

- **Survey your text- Journals**
  - Editorial/editorial comment
  - Titles of other papers
  - Abstract(s)
  - Visual materials
  - Charts/tables/summaries
  - References
Reading for different purposes

- **Skim**
- **Read for general impression**
  - Don’t stop!
  - Light pencil annotations
    - a. Passages you don’t understand
    - b. Specific topics/questions
      (Check preliminary questions)
  - Read as quickly as you can
Reading for different purposes

- **Scan**
- **Read for specific questions**
  - Re-visit places where you have annotated a & b
  - Now read carefully
  - Try and keep to about 10-20% of the whole text
Reading for different purposes

- **Read for detail**
- **Read to remember + use ideas**
  - Structured approach (see below, Slide 17)
  - Individual paragraphs/sections
  - Accompany with notes
  - *Active* reading
Active reading involves:
- Reading the first and last sentence of each paragraph
- Second-guessing
- Summaries
- Noting questions as you read
- Tracking the main ideas...
- And anything that gets you actively engaged with the text!
Active reading

- The structural approach-
- Working with academic paragraph-structure
  - Topic sentence
  - Explanation/analysis
  - Evidence
  - Transitional statements
- Main ideas = topic sentences
- Use this structure to break down information within the paragraph
Maintaining concentration whilst reading

- Read actively
- Use BBR
  - Block
  - Break
  - Review
- E.g. 30 mins concentrated reading; 5 minutes break; 3 minutes recall from memory + 2 minutes check; move on> 45 minutes etc.
The reading notebook

- Get into the habit of keeping a reading ‘notebook’
- Note down
  - full bibliographical details
  - all significant reading you have done
  - all ideas for future reading
- Keep it up to date
- Keep it accurate
- Use it to prepare for references and bibliographies
GOOD LUCK...

- For all your research and reading

- [www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/learning](http://www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/learning)