Research and Reading
VALUE MaP

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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

*This kind of logical deconstruction creates specific research targets!*
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
• Use a variety of all sources – don’t get stuck in internet only research!
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
Establishing a time-line

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... **BUT**...
- To ‘get you going’ [i.e. day 1 of the reading 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
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 10/10/2018” 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.

Managing the reading load

- Read efficiently: SMART targets!
  - specific
  - manageable
  - accurate
  - realistic
  - time-defined
- Plan your reading
- Divide your reading into manageable sections
  - Chapter of a book; journal article etc.
- 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
“Walk around” your source
No actual reading, but an overall impression
Website: no. of ‘hits’; dates for revision; types of data; visual material...
Book: contents page; index; chapter headings; visual material...
Journal article: abstract; references; visual material...
5 minutes (?): the aim is to gain contextual information that leads you into your reading
Reading for different purposes

- **Skim**
- **Read for general impression**
  - Don’t stop!
  - Light pencil annotations
    - a. Passages you don’t understand – the ‘tricky’ bits!
    - 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
  - Individual paragraphs/sections
  - Accompany with notes
  - *Active* reading
Active reading can involve:

- 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
Look for topic sentences and evidence
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.
GOOD LUCK...

For all your research and reading

www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/learning