How to identify a researchable topic?

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Research

• *Defining research* – *search for knowledge*

• *Innovative and new*

• *Defining and redefining problems, formulating and testing hypothesis, suggesting solutions and approaches*
Defining Research

- Research is an art of investigation of new and innovative aspects of any branch of knowledge.
- It comprises of defining and redefining problems, formulating hypothesis, suggest solutions or solution approaches, collecting and analyzing data, deriving, experimenting, and eventually validating the hypothesis or deducing new conclusions.
- Research is also defined as search for knowledge through objective and systematic method of finding solution to a problem or developing foundational theories.
Dimensions of undertaking research

- Intellectual/contribution to knowledge
- Research philosophy & methods
- Functional: meeting degree requirements
- Career/professional
- Personal
Researcher characteristics

• Ability to work conceptually, critically, coherently and creatively
• Understanding of the chain of reasoning
• Ability to formulate evidence-based arguments and conclusions
• Ability to source, review and integrate academic literature
Identifying a research topic/question

- Typically starts as a broad, general idea in a field
- Field/broader thematic area as the whole cake
- Topic – small slice of the cake

![Diagram showing the relationship between research topic and boundaries of research]
How to choose a topic?

• Focus on an area of research of real interest and which you are knowledgeable about:
  • What interests you?
  • What is the current state of research and discussion in this field/area?
  • How would undertaking this research contribute to knowledge in the field?
  • What is the significance of the topic?
  • Is it practical and doable/achievable/feasible/realistic?

• Aims: general
• Objectives: specific goals/targets
Why the importance of a literature review?

• To identify research topics/ problems (establishes the credibility of the writer and the research topic)
• Essential part of research processes (including proposal writing)
  • Evaluation of the literature guides the formulation of research questions
• May form a research project in itself (desk-top studies)
# Using a KUM chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K (Known)</th>
<th>U (Unknown)</th>
<th>M (Me)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K column: what is known about the topic (examples of research, how were they framed, etc.)</td>
<td>U column: what is unknown about the topic (unanswered questions, gaps, contradictions, etc.)</td>
<td>M column: ME – what do you want to learn from your research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A good topic...

• Defines the aims of the research/ investigation
• Sets boundaries and parameters for the research/ delimits the research
• Provides direction
• Is clear and concise (every word makes a difference)
• Is jargon-free and conceptually straight-forward
From a topic to a title

• A title should be focused, using as few words as possible that accurately describes the topic

• Avoid the use of words such as “An examination of…”, “A study of …”, “An investigation of …”, “An analysis of…”, “Observations on …”, etc.

• Title should not be description but indicate a more critical and analytical stance (especially for a PhD)

• A problem/ issue that needs RESEARCH to be undertaken should clearly emerge

• NOTE: The title is important since keywords are often generated from the title
Points to note

• Use proper terms and concepts
• If the study is of a particular species, name it properly and scientifically in the title
• If a case study is used, specify location
EXERCISE 1: INFORMATION PYRAMID

Topic

Main concepts/detailed ideas

Main themes/issues

Foundation concepts
FIGURE 3.1 CONCEPT MAP OF POTENTIAL RESEARCH TOPICS

EXERCISE 2: MIND MAPS

• Useful way of mapping out what you are thinking (connections)
• Unpacking concepts and relationships
• Brainstorming
• Cluster the facts and ideas together under common themes
TOPIC: Environmental factors contributing to conflicts between ethnic groups in South Africa: A case study of the South Durban Basin
Domain and Variables

• Links to the 5Ws and H:


• Domain:
  • Units to be studied (people, policies, strategies, species, etc.)
  • Number of units (all, some, one)
  • Area (South Africa, Durban, South Durban Basin, etc.)
  • Time (last 10 years, post-apartheid, etc.)

• Variables:
  • The features of the domain to be studied
Questions