

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design



Research Design

- How to write a **good / successful** research proposal
- “one of the most difficult and demanding tasks confronting any research student”
- A rite of passage...
- “...a Darwinian learning-by-doing ordeal for which there is presumed to be no body of preparatory knowledge that can be passed on in advance; those that succeed return, and those that don't are never seen again...”



Framing your Research Design

- The basis of any good research topic is **a sound, well thought out research question**, which aims to test current models or theories using new data
- Research design: a coherent framework within which the researcher aims to provide conclusive answers to their research question(s)
- You need to have very clear objectives

Framing your Research Design

- The form of the research design depends upon the nature of the proposed research:
 - **EXPLORATORY:** aiming to learn more about a particular theme/area & to provide the research community with a more comprehensive data set
 - **DESCRIPTIVE:** describing (or defining) a set of variables & their relationships
 - **EXPLANATORY:** testing an existing model or theory with new data

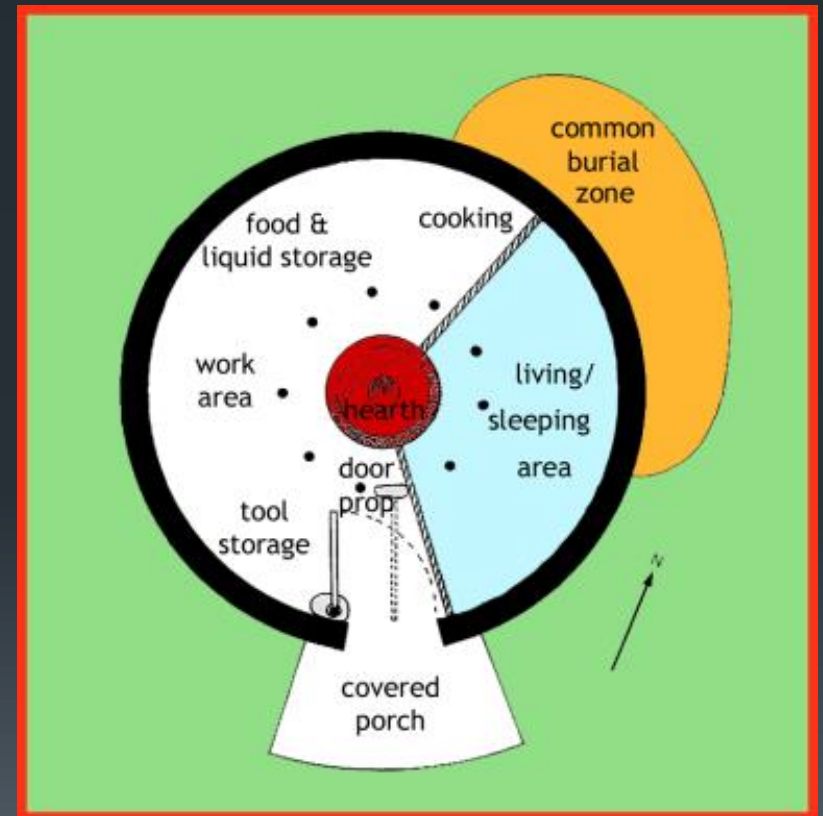
Exploratory Research

- Aims to uncover initial information, to set the parameters of a potential research question
- Is it important to test a particular model or theory?
- Have you got sufficient information to conduct this research & write a clear & coherent research question?
 - Collecting valuable information for designing larger scale research



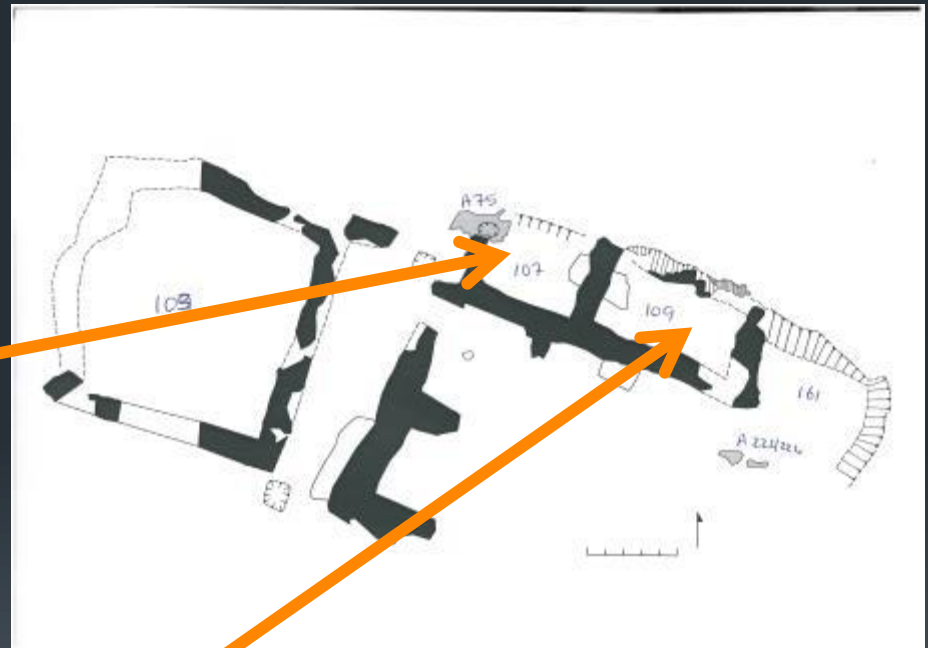
Descriptive Research

- The objective is to define an area of material
- Tends to be more specific & focused:
 - A well defined problem or research question
- Clearly defined methodology for collecting & analysing data



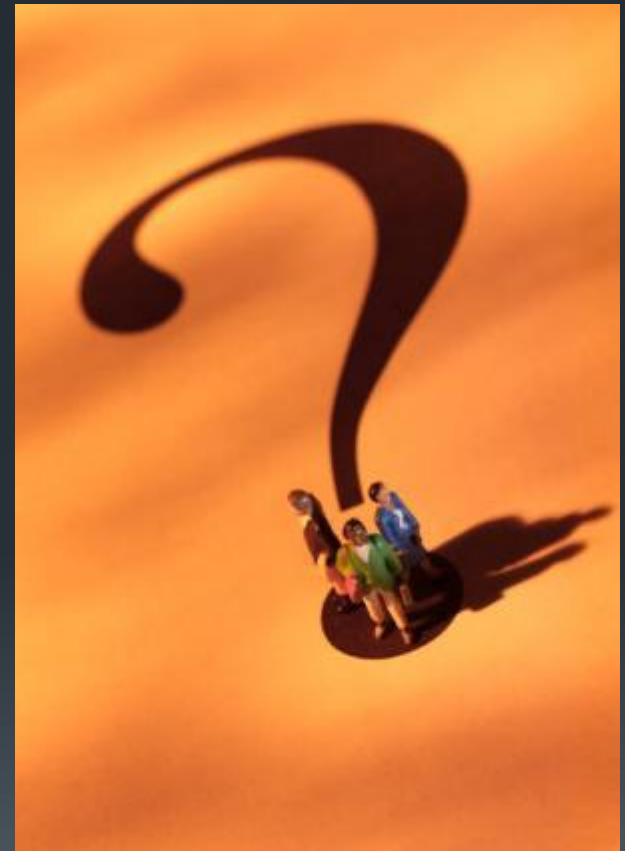
Explanatory Research

- Aims to **examine** & **explain** relationships & the observations made in descriptive research
- Should be **theoretically informed**



Research Question

- The most critical part of your research proposal
- You must excite the interest of your reviewers: **catch the eye & be memorable**
- Defines the proposal
- Guides your arguments & enquiry
- How do you choose your topic?
 - What are you interested in?
 - Why?



Research Question

- Extensively research your topic to define:
 - Previous research
 - Gaps: need for research
 - Contradictions
- A strong research question should be clear, relevant, evocative & researchable



Practicalities of Research

- Is your result question practical?
- Do you have the necessary background to complete research?
- Is the time-frame realistic?
- Consider possible limitations
 - Any ethical restraints?
 - Any problems with access to the material?
 - Cooperation from local community?



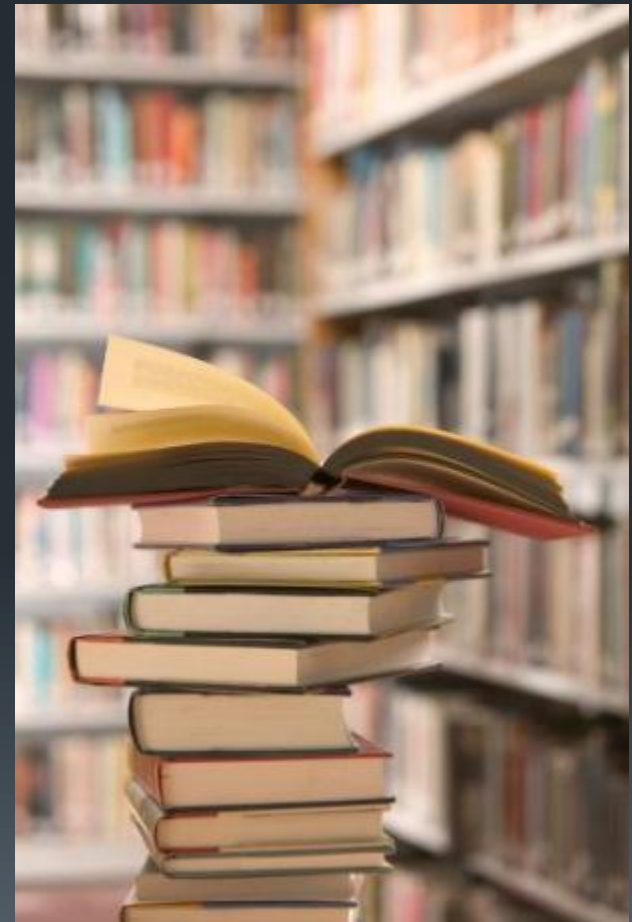
A good research question is...

- **Relevant:** to a wide community of researchers (& local communities)
 - Fills a gap in knowledge
 - Ties in with broader theories, themes, contexts
- **Distinctive** in approach & stands out from the crowd
- Clear, concise, & jargon-free
- **Achievable**



Background to Research

- Situate your research in its broader intellectual/ disciplinary context
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the relevant literature & issues
- Make explicit links between:
 - Background
 - Your research question
 - Your theoretical/ methodological approach



Be Interesting

- **Grab** & keep the attention of your reviewer
- **Engage** your reviewer with the broad themes & issues
 - This should be concise, easy to read, jargon-free & **focused**
 - It should display relevance & a fresh approach
 - It should demonstrate the depth of your own knowledge & your understanding of the literature
- **Be engaged**: implicitly reveal what has drawn you to the topic in the first place
- Demonstrate that your interest in the topic is justified & will be sustained over the time required to complete the project

Theory & Methodology

- You need to be explicit & to justify your approach
- Situate your work within the wider theoretical context
- Justify the **need** for & **interest** in your proposed research
- How are you going to complete this research?
- Is your methodology/ theory appropriate?



Framing the Question

- Develop a preliminary research question, topic, & approach
- Identify relevant theoretical & empirical sources
- Work on a preliminary bibliography
- **Advice!!!:** present short version to your advisor/a colleague
- Use feedback to identify areas that need further background research & development
- Research the context, history, background to your topic... refine your question/approach
- Are there any **ethical issues** you need to consider?

Identify Funding Sources

- Be aware of possible funding bodies & what they fund
- Browse the web
- Keep an eye on noticeboards



Successful Funding

- Reviewers read a proposal with three questions in mind:
- What are we going to learn as a result of the proposed project that we do not know now?
 - Your goals, aims, & outcomes
- Why is it worth knowing?
 - Significance
- How will we know that the conclusions are valid?
 - Criteria for success

Developing a Research Proposal

- Begin by developing a **generic research proposal** & budget (your “white paper”) for the project you would like to get funded, if applying to different bodies for this project
 - You will need to adapt & tailor this to guidelines of different funding bodies:
 - Highlight key words, phrases, research agendas & couch your proposal in these terms
- If applying to a specific grant, tailor your proposal to that from the start

Abstract / Summary

- Important: this is the **first impression** of your proposed research
- Reviewers may refer back to this when making their final recommendations
 - Also their **final impression** of your project
- Word count? stick to it...
- **Succinct & interesting** summary of your proposed research

Abstract / Summary

- This should highlight the key elements of your research:
 - The general purpose
 - Your specific goals
 - Your research design & methods
 - The wider significance (contribution & rationale)
- “The proposed research aims to...”

Ethics

- Clearly identify any ethical issues
- How do you intend to resolve these?
 - Have you discussed possible ramifications with your supervisor?
- Do you know where to find the University's [ethics policy](#)?
- You will need to complete this & submit it to the ethics committee



Costings

- Budget carefully but **realistically**
- Think about **all** areas of expenditure
- Does the funding body cover these areas of expense?
 - Can you get this covered elsewhere?
- Consider including a budget narrative (or budget justification) explaining the various expenses



Costings

- How to organise your budget clearly:
- Set out a spread sheet/table
- Separate out different areas that need funding:
 - Travel expenses
 - Accommodation & subsistence
 - Any overheads?
 - Translator costs
 - Consumables
- Indicate **subtotals** & **totals** clearly
- **Check your numbers!**
- **Check if these costings are eligible to be put against the grant**

Costings

- Do you have to pay university overheads?
- Research Development Office: what are the standard (required) rates for overheads?
- Can you gain exemption? (does the funding body itself cover overheads?)
- Draft budget: get this checked by the university officer in charge of grant administration

Timeframe for Research

- Provide a detailed timetable
 - Breakdown research into key stages
 - When will you begin & complete each step?
- Provide a table summarizing the timeline for the project
- Some funding bodies ask for Gantt-charts



Handy Hints

- Begin early
- Be aware of **deadlines** & give yourself plenty of time
- Apply early & often
 - If you don't apply you won't get any money!
- **Don't panic!**



Handy Hints

- Include a covering letter
- Answer all questions & follow the guidelines to the letter
- Keep a checklist of all elements needed:
 - Separate CV, costings, reference letters, etc.



Rejection

- If rejected...?
- **DON'T GIVE UP**
 - Between 50-95% percent of submitted proposals are rejected or not funded
- Ask for help & advice
- Revise your proposal
 - & apply again



Successful Funding

- Be prepared & methodical
- Know what your funding body is looking for
- Be prepared to adapt your research project accordingly
- Get advice: research proposal & budget
- Keep to word limits



Successful Funding

- There are two keys to successful grant proposal writing
 - Know what you want to do
 - Know your funder: what do they want you to do?
- In addition to luck!



Successful Funding

- And finally..
- **Give yourself plenty of time!**

