

Empirical Research Skills



Opening round:



Today...

- Research **documentation**
- Research **process**
- **Developing** a research question
- **Types** of research questions
- Research **proposal**
- **Research informed** practice
- **Finding** research material



Documentation you need in place before you start your research:

- A covering letter
- An Information Sheet
- A focus group schedule [containing your main overarching question, and your 3-4 questions for your focus group]
- A consent form
- A debrief form

Task 1: RESEARCH DOCUMENTATION



Developing a Research Question

- Important element of research – **drives** whole process
- If research question **muddled** – study will be muddled
- Needs to be **precise** and **specific**
- **Informs** what **methods** will be used – methods that will answer your research question
- You will be expected to **answer** the **research question**!



Is the Research Question Exploratory (open) or Confirmatory (closed)?

Exploratory

- Requires elaborate / descriptive (usually verbal) answer (more than one word or phrase)
- Example: What is the experience of wearing a nicotine patch? (including emotions, cognitions, perceptions)?

Confirmatory

- Narrow range of answers (yes, no, maybe, choice)
- Example: Does wearing a nicotine patch reduce craving when a smoker is exposed to a smoking cue (e.g., seeing someone else light up a cigarette)?

Types of Research Questions

Questions

- What / when / where / who / NOT Is...do... ?
- RQ: What processes do GP surgeries have in place to avoid long waiting times?

Task 2: Developing **your** research question



- What is your proposed research question?
- Is it clear, muddled, or ambiguous (does it have more than one meaning)?
- Is it answerable / manageable (in the time you have)?
- Is it 'exploratory' or 'confirmatory'?
- Is it appropriate / ethical for this setting?
- Has the topic been researched previously / what relevant literature have you identified?

GROUP WORK ON FOCUS GROUP PROCESSES



Task 3: Developing A Focus Group Schedule

Keeping your research question in mind...

- Design a 3-4 Interview Schedule (semi-structured to be used with a focus group)
- Consider what you need to know in order to answer your research question
- Points to keep in mind: question order – natural progression / appropriateness / ethical sensitivity / clarity of language / open or closed / rationale for each question (why am I asking this?)

Research Process

- Research question / what do I want to know?
- How might I discover answer / what method?
- Collect data
- Analyse / explore data
- Interpret / make sense of data
- Disseminate / share findings



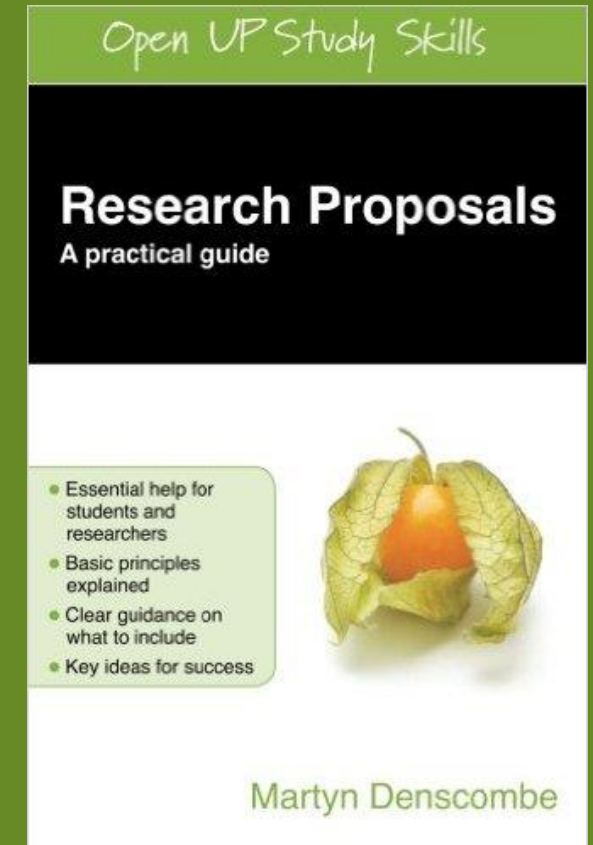
Data (plural) / **datum** (singular) =

Facts / information / statistics / test results / quantities / details / etc

Gathered together for reference or analysis

Research Proposals

- Brief document (relatively)
- Outline plan for a research project
- Produced at beginning of research process
- Prior to data collection
- Outlines **what, how, and why?**
- Helps plan and organise research project



Seven Basic Questions

- What is it [the study] all about?
- What do we already know about the subject?
- What does the research need to find out?
- How will we get the necessary information?
- What will it cost and how long will it take?
- Is the research socially acceptable?
- What are the benefits?



STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Typical Headings / Sections	Basic Questions
Title Keywords Aims Background	What is it all about?
Literature Review	What do we already know?
Research Questions	What do we need to find out?
Methods	How will we get the necessary information
Planning and Resources	How long will it take and what will it cost?
Ethics	Is the research socially acceptable?
Outcomes	What will be the benefits?

Successful Research Proposals



Worthwhile

- Positive / clear purpose / benefits
- Need for the research
- Benefits – knowledge contribution / informs good practice / findings have impact
- Suitable methods used

Feasible

- Scope and scale
- Access to data
- Resources available
- Ethics

- Approval required **before** commence research
- Purpose - evaluate quality / worthwhile / deliverable
- Evaluated by – supervisors / tutors / research committees / ethics committees

Distinctive Proposals

- Originality
- Timeliness
- Special interest ('pushes the right buttons')
- Wider application
- Precision



Reasons for Rejection: Weaknesses...



- **Research problems** –
Vague / unfocused / unimportant / unlikely to yield new information / ill-defined / more complex than realise / very narrow interest
- **Research design and methodology** –
Vague / unfocused / data difficult to access or inappropriate for research problem / proposed methods or instrument inappropriate
- **Investigation** –
Insufficient training or experience / unfamiliar with literature / insufficient time
- **Resources** –
Unfavourable institutional setting / limited or unrealistic equipment, or other resources

Research Informed Practice

What, why,
how?



Research Informed Practice

(Adapted from McLeod, Elliott & Wheeler, 2010)



- Two aspects...

Using others' research to inform your practice

Doing research on your own practice in order to improve it
(e.g., clinical audit)

A. Research Informed Practice: Sources of Information

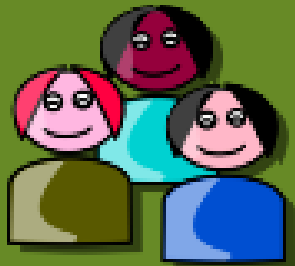
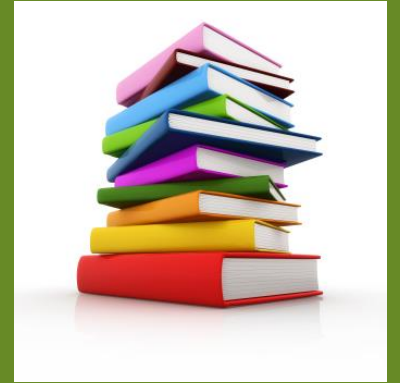
- 1. Read journals on a regular basis:

Review journals

Research summaries (evidence-based mental health; review books)

Journals (*Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*)

Journals in your area (subject / theoretical orientation)



- 2. Ask supervisors / others for reading ideas

- 3. Online resources:

Databases (PsycInfo, SSCI, Index Medicus)

Empirically supported treatments / evidence-based practice sites

www.apa.org/divisions/div12/rev-est/index.shtml

Speciality sites (PTSD, Focusing Institute)

Network for Research on Experiential Psychotherapies

www.experientialresearchers.org

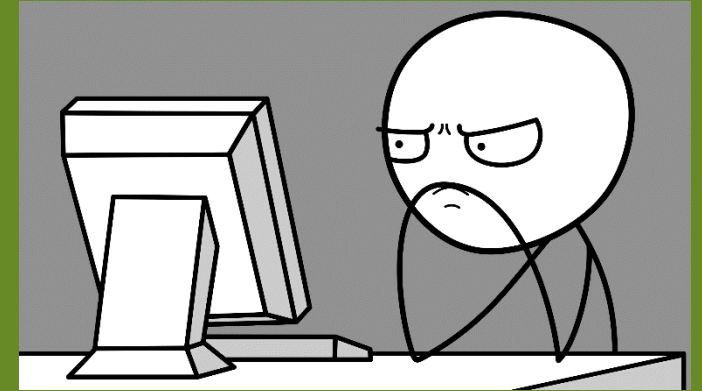
Amazon.com

Organisational websites (APA.org, BACP.co.uk)

List servers and online newsletters

e-journals

Information on relevant journals www.psycline.org/journals/psycline.html



Why is your research necessary?

Problems with available research (limitations)

- ☐ Lack of generalisability; oversimplification; boring / irrelevant details; lack of specific information
- ☐ Identify the gap in knowledge your research is going to aim to fulfil

Task 4: This week....

- Identify **two** pieces of **research** relevant to **your research question**
- Read through these and note their relevance to your research question
- What type of research question have they used?
- Outline the process they have followed to answer their question
- Comment on the overall clarity / quality of these pieces of research

Closing round:



References

- Denscombe, M. 2012. *Research Proposals: A Practical Guide*. UK: Open University Press
- McLeod, J., Elliott, R., and Wheeler, S. 2010. *Training counsellors and psychotherapists in research skills: a manual of resources*. UK: BACP.
- Perren, S. 2010. *R9 Information Sheet: How to write a research proposal*. UK: BACP