



LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY

Doing Your Dissertation

**Study Resources and
Advice to Help You
Succeed**

Student Services

Disability Advice, Support Worker Service

CONTENTS

1. PLAGIARISM AND HOW TO AVOID IT
2. DISSERTATION ELEMENTS, STAGES, DESIGN
3. TOPICS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, PROPOSALS
4. LITERATURE REVIEW
5. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS / INTERVIEWING
6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Note: The main focus of this study resource is on *qualitative social science research projects*. Check your dissertation module handbook carefully to make sure you understand what kind of research you are required to undertake for your project.

How to use this resource:



Read the advice and the E-book extracts.



Find and use the E-books mentioned.



Do the tasks in the red boxes.

1. PLAGIARISM AND HOW TO AVOID IT

- This section signposts you to LIBRARY CATALOGUE resources that explain what plagiarism is and how to avoid it in your dissertation.

Kirton (2011, p.221) describes plagiarism as idea “theft”, even if it is done accidentally.



Mark

Brilliant dissertation [electronic resource] : what you need to know and how to do it
Kirton, Bill.
2011
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/deep/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9780273743781>

No Cover Available

Plagiarism is stealing

If you take someone else's ideas and pretend they belong to you, that's theft, plain and simple. The problem is that over recent years technological advances such as digital scanners, photocopiers and file-sharing have all made it much easier to cut, copy and paste things. You may even do so without knowing you're doing it. So it really is in your interests to get to know exactly when and how you need to acknowledge intellectual property. Apart from anything else, wouldn't you rather develop your own ideas than steal other people's? Isn't that why you're at university?

if you take someone else's ideas and pretend they belong to you, that's theft

If you have used work of any sort by other people then to avoid plagiarism, “acknowledging the source” is essential (Kirton, 2011, p.222).

Plagiarism – using the work of someone else as if it were your own without acknowledging the source. (Note. 'Work' here includes ideas, writing and inventions – not just words.)

You need to protect yourself against accidental plagiarism. When you find relevant and useful information in books, journal articles, videos, etc, it is important to make notes as you go along. If you want to quote directly from the publication, include the page numbers that the quotes are taken from. Recording these details as you go along will save you a lot of time because it means you won't have to chase up your sources later. There is also another vitally important reason. It is to avoid *plagiarism*, as Birley and Morland (1998, p.83) explain:



Mark  **A practical guide to academic research [electronic resource]**
Birley, Graham.
Moreland, Neil.
1998
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds-beck/detail.action?docID=1688999>

TIP

When typing up quotes, make sure that you provide the full bibliographic reference in your notes for use when using the quote and providing the reference. This should *always* include the page numbers.

Page numbering also makes sure that you are not guilty (knowingly or unknowingly) of plagiarism. Plagiarism is the process of passing someone else's work off as your own. In most situations where plagiarism occurs and is found out there are severe penalties. Where your research is part of a course or programme of study it is not uncommon to find plagiarism losing credits, and perhaps even leading to your being required to leave the course or programme. In our opinion nothing is worth that.

It is important to remember that ignorance or a poor understanding of plagiarism will not be accepted as an excuse. For example, if a student accidentally uses an idea or a direct quotation from a publication without acknowledging the source, it is still regarded as plagiarism even if it was done unintentionally. It is much better for you to be safe than sorry, particularly as plagiarism can be detected by **Turnitin** software. White and Rayner (2014, pp.159-160) explain the risks and how to avoid them:



Mark  **Dissertation skills for business and management students [electronic resource] *Second edition.***
White, Brian, author.
Rayner, Stephen,
2014
View this electronic resource: <http://login.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781473708136>

Always use your own words and never be tempted to copy out other people's writing. This is plagiarism. Plagiarism can be defined as **taking and using someone else's writing, ideas or thoughts and passing them off as your own**. When writing a dissertation you may come up against a difficult concept which you need to include, and at first glance it may seem a lot easier to copy out someone else's writing, or summarize, i.e. paraphrase their writing...**if this is discovered when your dissertation is marked, the chances are you will fail your dissertation**. Plagiarism and paraphrase are regarded as serious offences. **Most universities now use an analytic software programme, such as Turnitin to screen all submitted work to identify plagiarism and will come down heavily on the guilty student**. If you have some doubt about this aspect of academic writing at any point check it out with your supervisor. More generally, **always ensure you acknowledge the source of ideas you pick up and use, whether in the development of your argument or discussion, or with direct use of citation**. You should realize, nonetheless, that **it is expected that you use people's ideas and quotations, provided that you acknowledge and/or cite them in your writing**. Academic writing always contains references to other published works. It gives your work credibility, as it shows you are aware of the current literature in your field of study. Published work can also be used as evidence to support your line of argument. There are different conventions and ways of citing other people's writing.

Bottomley and Cartney (2018, p.61) list the key reasons why you should reference. Although they are referring to Social Work, these reasons also apply to any subject area.



Mark

Academic writing and referencing for your social work degree [electronic resource]
Bottomley, Jane (Senior language tutor), author.
Cartney, Pat,
2018
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?>



Accurate referencing of academic work is essential for the following reasons.

- It is a form of academic 'courtesy', both to the writer (by acknowledging their work) and to the reader (by helping them to find the source easily).
- It indicates that you have consulted authorities and checked your facts, allowing the reader to have confidence in what you write.
- It signals that you have contextualised your ideas in a wider framework, linking your work to work done previously by other scholars.
- It shows the reader that you have used the literature to build your own ideas.
- It signals that your ideas are founded upon scholarship, and thus have credibility.

- It signals you, as a writer, are situated within the social work knowledge community.
- It shows that you are not pretending to be the source of information or ideas found in sources, i.e. that you are not attempting to plagiarise.

In summary, you are expected to both use and refer to the work and ideas of others. Showing knowledge and understanding of the literature is a key part of your dissertation and of your academic writing generally. However, you must always acknowledge the sources that you have used. Doing this properly, using the **Harvard system**, will improve the quality of your work and raise your coursework grades.

Task

For information on the **Harvard** referencing system, look at '**Quote, Unquote**'. This comprehensive guide tells you how to reference a variety of different formats and media. The guide is available online from the library in two versions: Quote, Unquote Online and a downloadable Quote, Unquote PDF:

https://libguides.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/subject_support/harvard_referencing/quote_unquote_online

Go to the **Skills & Subject Support** library web page:

https://libguides.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/subject_support

Under the **Skills** section, click on **Referencing & Plagiarism**. Use the resources there to find out more.

For more detailed information on plagiarism and how to avoid it in your dissertation, use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find and read more from the E-books mentioned above.

2. ELEMENTS, STAGES, DESIGN

- This section introduces you to library resources that will help you learn how to plan and conduct a dissertation successfully.
- Read the information below and do the tasks. Use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find and read more from the E-books mentioned.
- Then use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find other resources relating to your own particular research interests and subject area.

When designing a research project, Robson and McCartan (2016, p.28) list “various things which should be thought about and kept in mind”. These are shown in the box below, and include the *purpose* of the research, the *conceptual framework*, the *research questions*, the *methods* and the *sampling procedures*.

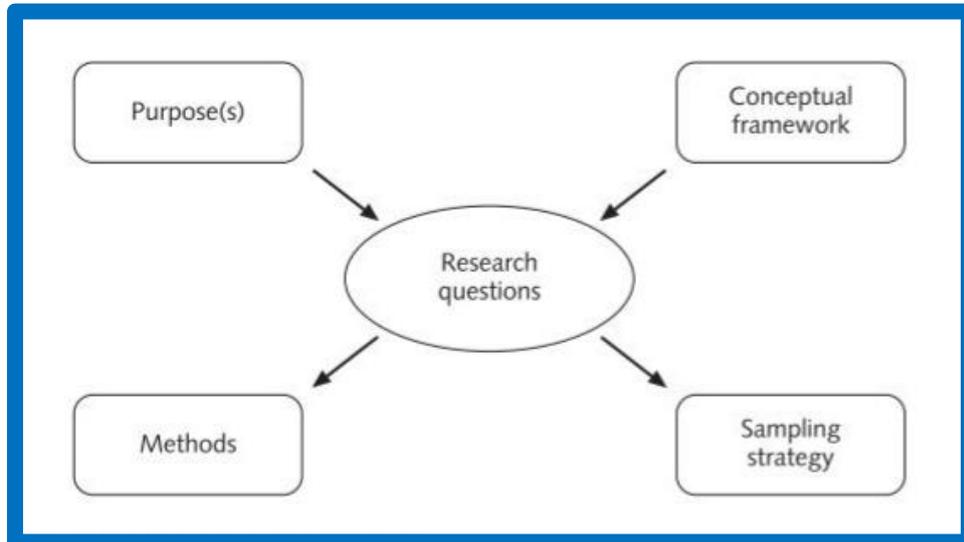


<input type="checkbox"/> Mark	Real world research [electronic resource] : a resource for users of social research methods in applied settings <i>Fourth edition</i>.
No Cover Available	Robson, Colin, author. McCartan, Kieran, 1980- 2016 View this electronic resource: https://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?

- *Purpose(s)*. What is this study trying to achieve? Why is it being done? Are you seeking to describe something, or to explain or understand something? Are you trying to assess the effectiveness of something? Is it in response to some problem or issue for which solutions are sought? Is it hoped to change something as a result of the study?
- *Conceptual framework*. Your theory about what is going on, of what is happening and why. What are the various aspects or features involved, and how might they be related to each other?
- *Research questions*. To what questions is the research geared to providing answers? What do you need to know to achieve the purpose(s) of the study? What is it feasible to ask given the time and resources that you have available?
- *Methods*. What specific techniques (e.g. semi-structured interviews, participant observation) will you use to collect data? How will the data be analysed? How do you show that the data are trustworthy?
- *Sampling procedures*. Who will you seek data from? Where and when? How do you balance the need to be selective with that of collecting the data required?

Your dissertation should include all the elements listed in the box above. If someone asks you, then you should be able to explain clearly the purpose of your research, your theory and research questions, your methods for data collection and analysis, and so on. The

important “things” listed above appear again in the diagram below (Robson and McCartan 2016, p.72). Look carefully at the arrow heads and the direction of the lines in the diagram. These suggest how the different elements in the framework, “need to be interrelated and kept in balance” (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p.73).



So, the *purpose* of your research should influence the development of your *research questions*, which in turn should influence the *methods* you use. In other words, the methods you choose should be appropriate to answer your research questions, which in turn should reflect the purpose of your study in the first place.

Task: Think about your dissertation ideas in relation to the important “things” described by Robson and McCartan (2016). Which of these elements need more attention from you? Use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find the Robson and McCartan E-book, and read more about how to develop the elements of the framework for your dissertation.

Your dissertation may be the biggest research project you have undertaken so far. There is a lot to consider. Planning the stages in detail is vitally important to ensure good outcomes. Carey (2013, p.20) describes eight key stages in a dissertation project. Carey emphasises that in qualitative research the stages “typically overlap and are also likely to alter throughout a project”. Likewise, “depending upon the topic there can also be differences in the amounts of time and effort that go into each stage” (ibid., p.21).



Mark



The social work dissertation [electronic resource] : using small-scale qualitative methodology *Second edition.*
Carey, Malcolm, author.
2013
[url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9780335247608&uid=^u](http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9780335247608&uid=^u)

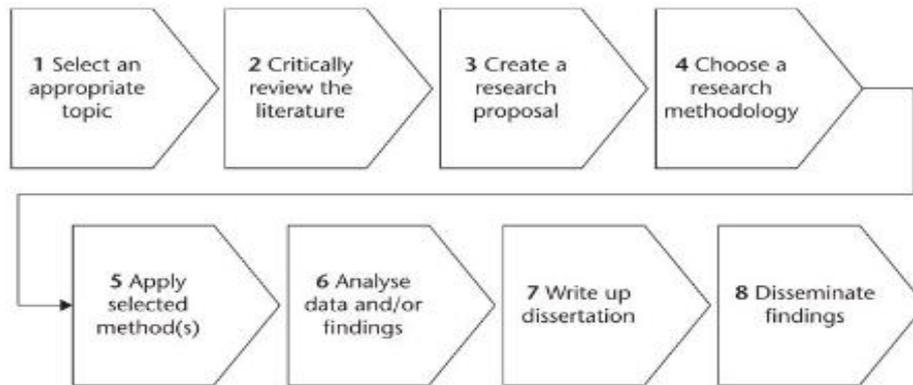


Figure 2.1 The stages of a dissertation.

Using the above eight-stage framework, Carey (2013, p.36) then provides the following outline example of a social work dissertation and the outcomes from each stage.

36 THE SOCIAL WORK DISSERTATION

Table 2.2 The stages of a social work dissertation involving empirical research

Stage	Outcome
1 Topic/research question	How do care managers working with people with a disability believe that their assessment skills could be improved?
2 Proposal	Aims and objectives included a plan to interview care managers at practice placement setting regarding their attitudes to and experiences of the assessment process. Plan also to use interpretive theory to build and develop theory around care managers' responses.
3 Literature review	Academic journal papers (for example, <i>British Journal of Social Work</i> , <i>Critical Social Policy</i> , <i>Disability and Society</i> , etc.); textbooks (for example, covering community care policy, social work and disability, social policy, etc.); magazines (for example, <i>Community Care</i>), etc.
4 Methodology	Interpretive theory.
5 Methods	In-depth semi-structured interviews with six care managers specializing in the needs of adults with a physical disability.
6 Analyse data and findings	Looked for key themes amidst transcripts and notes taken during interviews. Compared any findings with previous empirical research. All but one care manager argued that bureaucracy, performance targets and limited time available to spend with service users and carers influenced their assessment work.
7 Write up	Chapter 1: Introduction; Chapter 2: Literature review; Chapter 3: Methodology; Chapter 4: Findings; Chapter 5: Analysis and discussion; Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusions.
8 Dissemination	Professional and non-professional social work practice.

Task: Think back to the Robson and McCartan (2016, p.28) book that we looked at earlier; in relation to the social work dissertation shown above, are the important “things” clear? Does the outline include the *purpose* of the research, the *conceptual framework*, the *research questions*, the *methods* and the *sampling procedures*? Use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find the E-book by Carey (2013) and read more about what is involved in the different stages of a dissertation.

Doing a dissertation requires careful planning of every stage. This planning will make your task easier, so think of it as a good investment of your time. If you know what you are doing and what is required for each step, then you will do better and hopefully feel less stressed. Swetnam (2004, p.17) provides this diagram of a “task plan” for writing a dissertation.

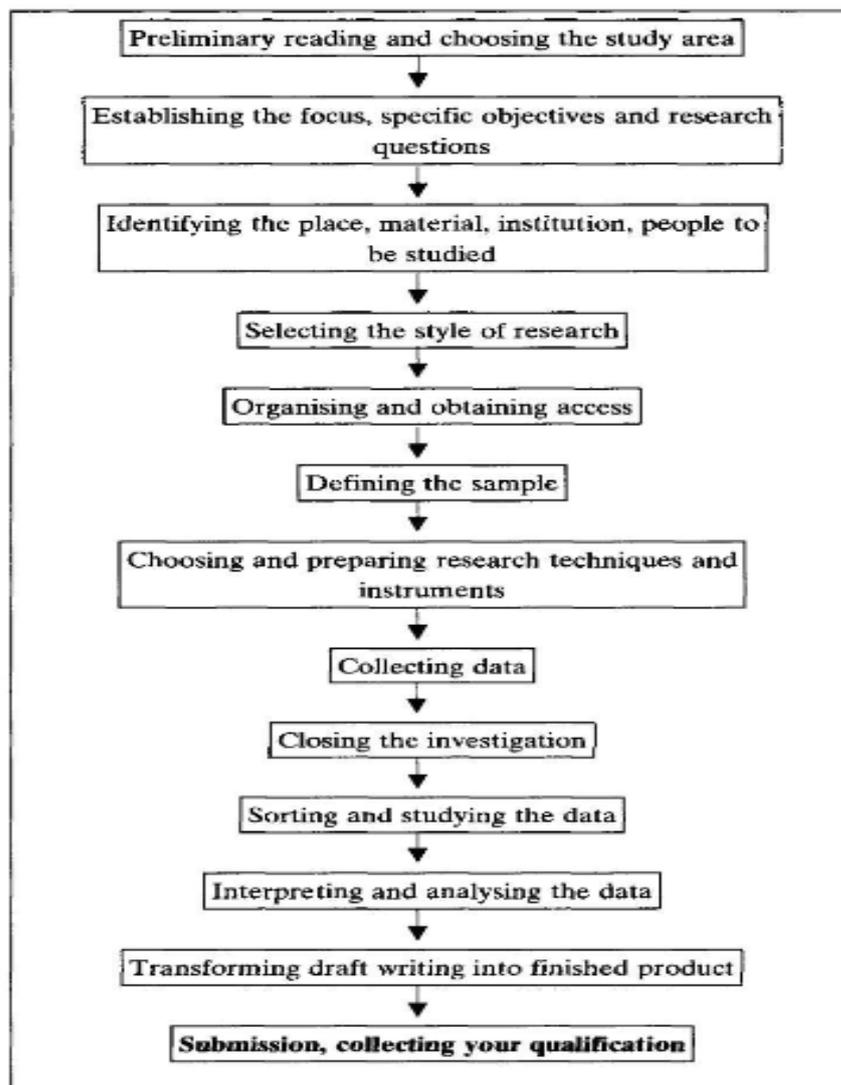


Fig. 1. A typical task plan.



Swetnam's (2004) book is aimed at UK postgraduate students, but much of the advice given is also relevant to undergraduates. For example, where are you now with regard to the different steps in Swetnam's dissertation task plan? Have you done preliminary reading to help you identify an appropriate topic for investigation? Have you looked at the information sheet in this series on "Dissertation Topics, Research Questions and Proposals"?

Task: Look at the frameworks suggested by the different authors mentioned above (Carey, 2013; Robson and McCartan, 2016; Swetnam, 2004). Use their framework elements and stages as headings for your own dissertation planning. Start populating the different sections with draft ideas for your research design. Build in a time frame with realistic target dates for starting and completing each stage. Find and read other library E-books to find out more about planning the different stages involved.

When writing up the different sections of your dissertation, make sure you explain what resources you used and what advice you took from different authors, e.g. about deciding your choice of topic, your conceptual framework, the research questions, how you conducted your literature review, why you chose the methods you did, your data analysis, etc. This will show the person marking your dissertation that you used good quality literature on research methods to inform your research design.

There are many general books in the library to help you write dissertations. For example, Kirton (2011), below, is generic and quite reader friendly. The contents include deciding a topic, setting a research question and clear objectives, the stages to follow, how to undertake a literature review, data analysis and writing up, and ethical issues.



Some of the library resources are more specific – for example relating specifically to the social sciences:



Mark  **Doing your undergraduate social science dissertation [electronic resource]**
Smith, Karen, PhD.
Todd, Malcolm J.
2009
View this electronic resource: <http://login.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9780203881262>

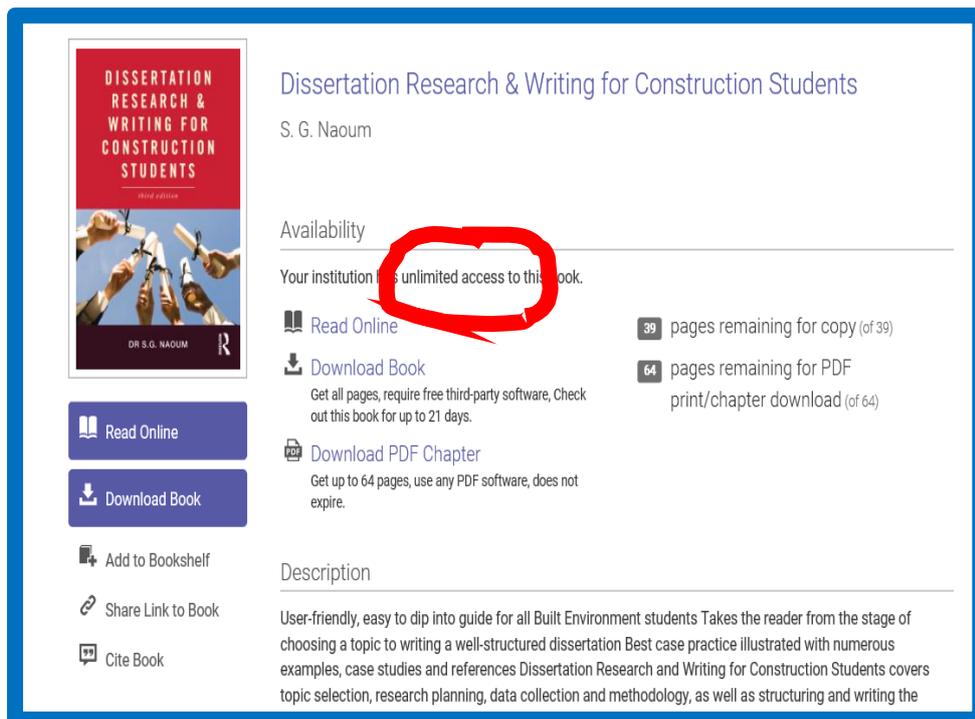


Mark  **Doing your social science dissertation [electronic resource]**
Burnett, Judith.
2009
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781446202432>

Other books focus on particular subject areas. Many are available as E-books, so you can read them online or download sections anywhere you have an internet connection.



Mark  **Dissertation research & writing for construction students [electronic resource] 3rd ed.**
Naoum, S. G. (Shamil G.)
2013
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds-beck/detail.action?docID=1074955>



Dissertation Research & Writing for Construction Students
S. G. Naoum

Availability

Your institution has unlimited access to this book.

Read Online 39 pages remaining for copy (of 39)

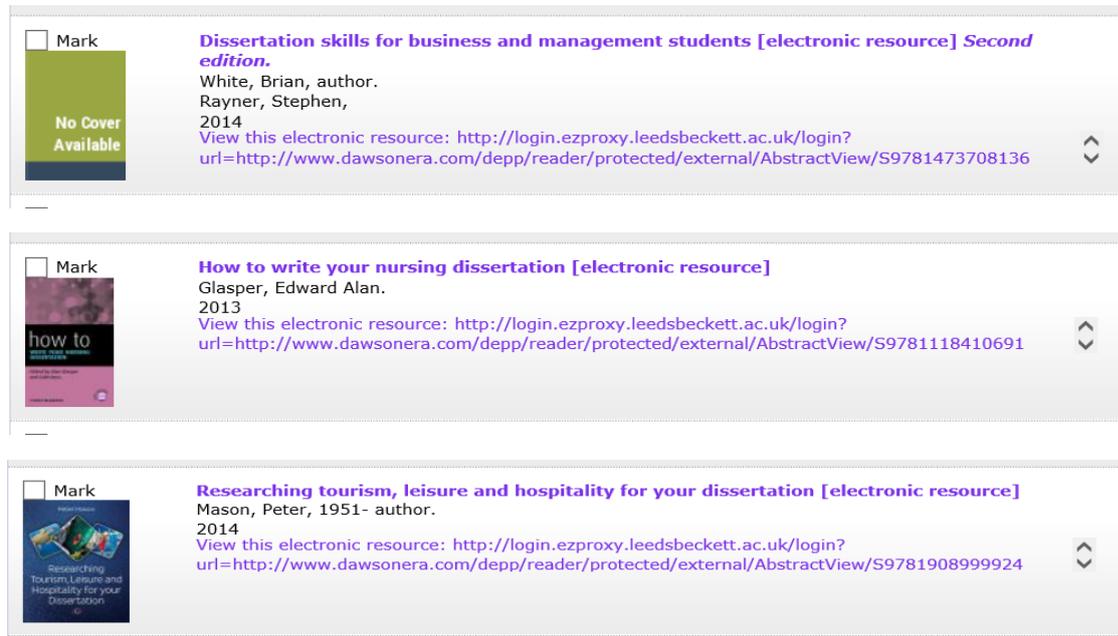
Download Book Get all pages, require free third-party software, Check out this book for up to 21 days. 64 pages remaining for PDF print/chapter download (of 64)

Download PDF Chapter Get up to 64 pages, use any PDF software, does not expire.

Description

User-friendly, easy to dip into guide for all Built Environment students Takes the reader from the stage of choosing a topic to writing a well-structured dissertation Best case practice illustrated with numerous examples, case studies and references Dissertation Research and Writing for Construction Students covers topic selection, research planning, data collection and methodology, as well as structuring and writing the

Some books may be useful to you even if you are not studying the particular subject that they focus on. For example, the book by Carey (2013) that we looked at earlier was written for students of Social Work, but the topics covered are also relevant to other subject areas. Here are a few more subject specific resources you can find in the library:



The image shows three library catalog entries for electronic resources. Each entry includes a 'Mark' checkbox, a book cover image, the title, author, year, and a link to view the resource. The first entry is for 'Dissertation skills for business and management students [electronic resource] Second edition' by White, Brian, and Rayner, Stephen, published in 2014. The second entry is for 'How to write your nursing dissertation [electronic resource]' by Glasper, Edward Alan, published in 2013. The third entry is for 'Researching tourism, leisure and hospitality for your dissertation [electronic resource]' by Mason, Peter, 1951-, published in 2014.

Mark **Dissertation skills for business and management students [electronic resource] *Second edition.***
White, Brian, author.
Rayner, Stephen,
2014
View this electronic resource: <http://login.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781473708136>

Mark **How to write your nursing dissertation [electronic resource]**
Glasper, Edward Alan.
2013
View this electronic resource: <http://login.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781118410691>

Mark **Researching tourism, leisure and hospitality for your dissertation [electronic resource]**
Mason, Peter, 1951- author.
2014
View this electronic resource: <http://login.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781908999924>

What subject are you studying? What topic are you researching? Which resources will be most useful to you in your dissertation? Try dipping into a range of resources to get the information you need. Finding a resource that speaks to you, in a style you like, will make your dissertation planning that much easier. Read around to find what you need

Task: Go to the LIBRARY CATALOGUE webpage and put in search terms such as “dissertation” and “research methods” and use search terms that describe your research topic ideas. Look at the search results. Click on the E-books to see what the contents are like. Find the resources most relevant to you, your subject area and your research interests. Use the resources you find to develop your research design and quote them in your dissertation write-up to show that you have used them. Always collect quotes and page numbers as you go along and record the bibliographic details; then you can cite and reference the sources easily without having to go back to look for them later (which can be very time consuming).

- Go to the **Skills & Subject Support** library web page:
https://libguides.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/subject_support
- Under the **Skills** section, click on **Dissertations & Literature Reviews**. Use the links to the resources there (videos, etc) to find out more.

3. TOPICS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, PROPOSALS

- This section introduces you to library resources that will help you understand how to choose a topic, design research questions and develop a proposal for your dissertation.
- Read the information below and do the tasks. Use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find and read more from the E-books mentioned. Look for other E-books relating to your own particular research interests.

A dissertation is an independent learning project. It is different from most of the other work you will have done at university. You decide the topic and you work on your dissertation individually, with some support from a supervisor. You have to plan and carry out the research over a significant period of time. In their book about social science dissertations, Smith, Todd and Waldman (2009, p.2) describe the responsibility this involves.

The longer word count of the dissertation requires you to sustain your analysis and interpretation over a greater range of material and almost inevitably involves you in more careful and subtle argument. The preparation and writing of the dissertation makes you take responsibility, with the support of a tutor, for your own learning. You have to manage your independent study, your time and present the results of research clearly and methodically.

As one student articulated (Todd *et al.* 2004: 339–340):

In other courses it's set out what they want you to find out. This is about your individual thought and direction – you can go off in your chosen direction, branch out and make different things relate to each other. There's more freedom involved.



<input type="checkbox"/> Mark	Doing your undergraduate social science dissertation [electronic resource] Smith, Karen, PhD. Todd, Malcolm J. 2009 View this electronic resource: http://login.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/deep/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9780203881262	^ v
-------------------------------	---	--------

Deciding on a topic is the first step in your dissertation journey. Inspiration for a topic choice can come from a number of places. Neuman (2014, p.173) describes different possible

sources including personal experience, the media, gaps in our knowledge, problem-solving, job opportunities, personal values, and daily life:

1. *Personal experience.* You can choose a topic based on something that happens to you or those you know. For example, while you work a summer job at a factory, the local union calls a strike. You do not have strong feelings either way, but you are forced to choose sides. You notice that tensions rise. Both management and labor become hostile toward each other. This experience suggests unions or organized labor as a topic.
2. *Curiosity based on something in the media.* Sometimes you read a newspaper or magazine article or see a television program that leaves you with questions. What you read raises questions or suggests replicating what others' research found. For example, you read a *Newsweek* article on people who are homeless, but you do not really know much about who they are, why they are homeless, whether this has always been a problem, and so forth. This suggests homeless people as a topic.
3. *The state of knowledge in a field.* Basic research is driven by new research findings and theories that push at the frontiers of knowledge. As theoretical explanations are elaborated and expanded, certain issues or questions need to be answered for the field to move forward. As such issues are identified and studied, knowledge advances. For example, you read about attitudes toward capital punishment and realize that most research points to an underlying belief in the innate wickedness of criminals among capital punishment supporters. You notice that no one has yet examined whether people who belong to certain religious groups that teach such a belief in wickedness support capital punishment, nor has anyone mapped the geographic location of these religious groups. Your knowledge of the field suggests a topic for a research project: beliefs about capital punishment and religion in different regions.
4. *Solving a problem.* Applied research topics often begin with a problem that needs a solution. For example, as part of your job as a dorm counselor, you want to help college freshmen establish friendships with each other. Your problem suggests friendship formation among new college students as a topic.
5. *Social premiums.* This is a term suggested by Singleton and colleagues (1988:68). It means that some topics are "hot" or offer an opportunity. For example, you read that a lot of money is available to conduct research on nursing homes, but few people are interested in doing so. Your need of a job suggests nursing homes as a topic.
6. *Personal values.* Some people are highly committed to a set of religious, political, or social values. For example, you are strongly committed to racial equality and become morally outraged whenever you hear about racial discrimination. Your strong personal belief suggests racial discrimination as a topic.
7. *Everyday life.* Potential topics can be found throughout everyday life in old sayings, novels, songs, statistics, and what others say (especially those who disagree with you). For example, you hear that the home court advantage is very important in basketball. This statement suggests home court advantage as a topic for research.



Mark

No Cover Available

Social research methods [electronic resource] : qualitative and quantitative approaches
Seventh edition.
Neuman, William Lawrence, 1950- author.
2014
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781292033617>

When choosing a topic, Neuman (2014, p.172) recommends that you pick something that interests you. You might have only a vague idea at first, but this will become clearer as you explore the options. Kawamura (2020) emphasises the importance of planning all aspects of your research project. You need to be absolutely clear about your topic and your research questions before you begin collecting any data. Kawamura's (2020, p.34) advice is aimed at fashion students but is equally important for students in other subject areas:

Research process

A researcher cannot suddenly jump into the data-collection process. There is a planning stage; the whole process of research needs to be considered and reconsidered before you begin your research and organize and structure your study (Marshall and Rossman 2015; Neuman 2019).

Selecting a topic

The very first step of research is a topic selection. You know you want to research and write about fashion/dress, but that is an extremely broad topic. Your research focus needs to be more specific than simply "fashion/dress." You know that you want to research something related to or relevant to fashion, but what about fashion? Fashion/dress can be analyzed from numerous perspectives, and you should know exactly what area of fashion you want to study and what exactly you are trying to investigate in your research.

Furthermore, you must be able to clearly state the topic you are interested in and raise the problem you want to investigate. Many students flounder in



Mark



Doing research in fashion and dress [electronic resource] : an introduction to qualitative methods *Second edition.*
Kawamura, Yuniya, author.
2020
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds-beck/detail.action?docID=5940271>

When choosing a topic, it also helps to think about yourself as the person who will be doing the research. Robson and McCartan (2016, p.49) talk about the importance of the researcher starting from where they are. They cite Kirby and McKenna (1989, p.46), who consider what the researcher as a person brings to their research:

As Kirby and McKenna (1989) put it:

Remember that who you are has a central place in the research process because you bring your own thoughts, aspirations and feelings, and your own ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, family background, schooling, etc. to your research (p. 46).



Mark



Real world research [electronic resource] : a resource for users of social research methods in applied settings *Fourth edition.*
Robson, Colin, author.
McCartan, Kieran, 1980-
2016
View this electronic resource: <https://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?>

The significance of the researcher as a person is also discussed by Neuman (2014, pp.20-21) who explains how the researcher's personal beliefs and social self can play an important role in the topic selection process. In a similar way, Kawamura (2020, p.37) recommends recognising and making connections between your own "individual, private experience and the wider society".

Task: Think about what you as a person can bring to your research. Think about your personal experiences and your values. Take a look at the Neuman E-book and the real life examples provided there of how a researcher's social self can influence their research design. One example is "Gang Leader for a Day" (Neuman 2014, p.20).

Whatever topic you choose, you will need to start reading around it, to understand it better and to decide on which aspect you want to focus. Kawamura (2020, p.36) describes this process and how it can lead to the development of a dissertation research question.

You begin with an idea for a research study. You know you want to study something about fashion/dress or something in relation to that. You begin reading the related and relevant literature on the topic/idea. During this process, you should begin to formulate a research question or a hypothesis. It is acceptable if your research question changes during the research process when your methodological tools are qualitative. This is one of the major differences between quantitative and qualitative methods.

Formulating a research question can really sharpen the focus of your whole dissertation. It can make life easier for you in many ways. In a book chapter on Research Questions and Research Design, Gleeson (in Hartas, 2010, p.143) lists the following advantages:

Box 5.1 Why formulate research questions?

- Set the scope and parameters of your study.
- Offer a framework for the literature review.
- Guide epistemological questions about the nature of knowledge.
- Assist in the construction of a research design.
- Guide decisions about research methods.
- Structure the analysis of data and the writing up.



Mark



Educational research and inquiry [electronic resource] : qualitative and quantitative approaches
Hartas, Dimitra, 1966-
2010
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?>

Neuman (2014, p.174) suggests techniques for narrowing your topic into a research question. These include examining the literature, talking over ideas with others, applying the topic to a specific context, and defining the aim or desired outcome of the study. Whatever process you use, the research questions you develop should be of good quality and carefully thought out. Robson and McCartan (2016, p.62) recommend these criteria:

Characteristics of good research questions

Good research questions:

- are clear and unambiguous;
- show the purpose(s) of your project (to explore, describe, explain, and/or empower);
- are answerable – and point to the type of data needed to provide answers;
- are not trivial; and
- form a coherent interconnected set (they are not an apparently random collection).



Mark



Real world research [electronic resource] : a resource for users of social research methods in applied settings *Fourth edition.*
Robson, Colin, author.
McCartan, Kieran, 1980-
2016
View this electronic resource: <https://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?>

Importantly, your research questions will also help you to make decisions about your research methods. Robson and McCartan (2016, p.47) recommend that the approach or methodology you choose should be driven by your research question as, “different types of research question...call for different methodologies”. You will need to think in detail about your research approach and the most appropriate techniques to use. Mason (2014, p.73) emphasises that, “what is very important is that you select your approach carefully and are able to give the rationale for your choice”. Using justifiable research methods will improve the design, process and final quality of your dissertation.

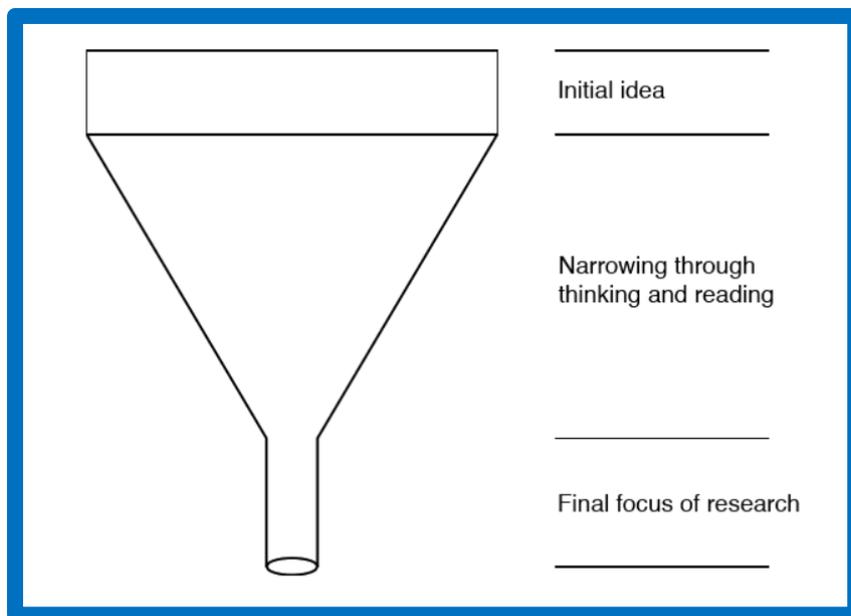


Mark



Researching tourism, leisure and hospitality for your dissertation [electronic resource]
Mason, Peter, 1951- author.
2014
View this electronic resource: <http://login.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781908999924>

Eventually you should move from selecting a topic and developing a research question (or questions) to the writing of your dissertation proposal. This narrowing process is depicted in the following diagram by Naoum (2013, p.11).



Mark

Dissertation research & writing for construction students [electronic resource] 3rd ed.
Naoum, S. G. (Shamil G.)
2013
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds-beck/detail.action?docID=1074955>

Naoum (2013, p.11) provides this outline structure for a dissertation proposal.

The dissertation proposal

After you decide on a topic for research, your dissertation proposal should contain the following:

- 1 Working title
- 2 Purpose (rationale for the study)
- 3 Research goals
 - Aim
 - Objectives
 - Key questions
 - Hypothesis (if applicable)
- 4 Initial literature review
- 5 Outline methodology
- 6 Proposed contents
- 7 Initial references
- 8 Work plan

Below is an example of a very short dissertation proposal provided by Swetnam (2004, p.20). It is a proposal for a research study to investigate possible discrimination at a community leisure centre.



<input type="checkbox"/> Mark Derek Swetnam	Writing your dissertation [electronic resource] : how to plan, prepare and present successful work 3rd ed. [revised]. Swetnam, Derek. 2004 View this electronic resource: http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/deep/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781848031265
--	---

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Draft title

An evaluation of community facilities at Hightown Leisure Centre: their use, management and development.

Aim of the research

Following recent criticisms from organisations and the public that the use of the new leisure centre is restricted to certain groups, the study aims to investigate the present use of the centre and to determine whether some people are disadvantaged by the facilities currently offered.

The study will concentrate particularly on the use made of the centre by mothers of small children, ethnic minority groups and the elderly over a six-month period. The hypothesis is that greater community use would result if more attention was paid to the needs of these groups. It is intended that the research will result in practical management recommendations.

Questions to be addressed include:

1. Are there perceived and real inadequacies in provision?
2. Do they disadvantage certain social groups?
3. Does this have an undesirable effect on community relations?
4. How may provision be made more equitable?

Style and techniques

The work will be a case study generalisable to other similar centres. Use will also be made of survey and documentary analysis. Instruments for data collection will principally be interview and questionnaire to obtain descriptive statistics.

Theoretical base and initial reading

Reference will be made to management theory, management of change and multicultural education.

Field (1991) *Post 16, community education and racial equality. Multicultural Teaching*

Symonds and Kelly eds (1998) *The Social Construction of Community Care*

Haworth (1997) *Work, Leisure and Well-being*

How would you rate the quality of the above proposal to investigate possible discrimination at a community leisure centre? How good are the different elements? Burnett (2009, p.80) provides the following checklist for evaluating dissertation proposals.

- A clearly defined research question
- A persuasive argument that the research is important and worthwhile
- The researcher has identified their philosophical stance, possibly standpoint and style of research, for example positivist, feminist etc.
- The researcher can link their proposed project to a wider field of study and show how their work adds to it
- The researcher has designed a methodological approach which is viable, reliable and valid
- The researcher gives reasons for their choice of specific methods, discussing strengths and limitations of the approach
- How the research plan is to be executed has been well worked out: the nuts and bolts of doing the research, including a project plan, has been provided
- There should be some consideration given to whether or not ethical issues arise, and how they will be addressed
- There is a strong bibliography containing:
 - Recent research reports including journal publications
 - Works by the leading researchers in the field
 - References to the methods literature and debates
 - Works relating to ethics

Figure 5.1 What Makes a Good Research Proposal?



Mark

[Doing your social science dissertation \[electronic resource\]](#)

Burnett, Judith.
2009

View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?>

[url=http://www.dawsonera.com/deep/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781446202432](http://www.dawsonera.com/deep/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781446202432)



Task: Use Burnett's checklist above to evaluate the dissertation proposal on investigating discrimination at the leisure centre. Go through each of Burnett's bullet points, one by one, and decide how well the proposal meets these quality criteria.

Find the other E-books mentioned in this information sheet and use them to advance your dissertation planning. Do a search to find other dissertation E-books relating to your particular subject area and research interests.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

- This section signposts you to library resources that will help you understand what a literature review is, why it is needed, and how to conduct one yourself.
- Read the information below and do the tasks. Use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find and read more from the E-books mentioned.
- Then use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find other resources relating to your own particular research interests and subject area.

The literature review is an essential part of your dissertation. Doing it properly will have a big influence on the quality of your whole research project. Kawamura (2020, p.36) explains why the literature review “cannot be avoided”; her advice is aimed at fashion students but is equally relevant for students in other subject areas:



Mark

 **Doing research in fashion and dress [electronic resource] : an introduction to qualitative methods *Second edition.***
Kawamura, Yuniya, author.
2020
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds-beck/detail.action?docID=5940271>

The literature review

Once you know your research topic, questions, or hypothesis, the next step is the literature review. This step is required for any scholarly research paper and cannot be avoided. There are two purposes to the literature review (Hempel 2019):

- (1) You do not want to needlessly duplicate another researcher's ideas or research, although sometimes researchers conduct the same or similar studies to check the reliability of results. A thorough literature review helps you learn from previous research, give recognition where credit is due, become more knowledgeable about the problem or the question you are studying and thus avoid unnecessary duplication of effort.
- (2) You refer to other studies and research so that you know what has been done in the field, what other research questions were raised and answered. It shows to the readers that you have done your homework before embarking on your own study. It is considered preliminary research. It is not sufficient to simply focus on your own research. Your own research should not even begin without the literature review. It is important to understand that every researcher is making a contribution to the research community or the community of fashion/dress studies.

Carey (2013, pp.83-84) distinguishes between an *initial* review and a longer *ongoing* review, emphasising the importance of critically analysing the findings of your literature review. The initial literature review should also help you to decide on a methodology for your research project. Seeing what methods others have used will give you ideas for your own approach.



Mark



The social work dissertation [electronic resource] : using small-scale qualitative methodology *Second edition*.
Carey, Malcolm, author.
2013
url=<http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9780335247608&uid=^u>

The literature review

Holloway (1997: 99) summarizes a literature review when she declares: 'Researchers trawl the relevant and related literature, summarise the main ideas from these studies as well as some of the problems and contradictions found, and show how they relate to the proposed project.' Just as significant are attempts to *critically engage with* and *analyse* any findings. As Walliman (2006: 182) underlines:

Doing a literature review means not only tracking down all the relevant information, but also taking a critical position on the ideas contained therein . . . providing a description is not enough; your task is to give your own personal and professional appraisal of the content and quality of the text in question.

84 THE SOCIAL WORK DISSERTATION

This process is especially significant in qualitative research; perhaps even more so within an applied discipline such as social work in which ethics and values play such a central role.

There are many reasons for undertaking a literature review, which include:

- it helps to stimulate ideas;
- it illustrates what other researchers have done in your area;
- it broadens perspectives and places work into context;
- it supports and expands upon personal experience;
- it helps to fulfil the expectations of a supervisor;
- it offers familiarity with different research methodologies and methods used by other researchers;
- it improves research skills and knowledge;
- it improves reading;
- it may improve writing style by offering examples of how to construct and present arguments or a theory;
- it helps to better understand a discipline and subject area.

(Adapted from Blaxter *et al.*, 2006: 93)

Typically, a literature review for qualitative research will develop in two stages. This includes a relatively brief *initial* review, followed by a longer *ongoing* review. The former begins prior to, or soon after, a research question has been formulated, and includes a search for a handful of key related publications that will help develop a proposal. This initial stage will also help to narrow any focus so as to construct a methodology and possibly begin to plan

Whatever the topic and research question(s) you have chosen, your dissertation should be worth doing. Your literature review should persuade your reader, and of course you, that this is the case. Brinkmann (2013, p.88) explains how the reader uses a literature review to judge the worthiness of the research project itself. In your case, it is your tutor who will read, examine and mark your dissertation. The literature review is therefore a key element in determining the quality of the dissertation and the ultimate grade they will give you.



<input type="checkbox"/> Mark	Qualitative interviewing Brinkmann, Svend. 2013 View this electronic resource: http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199861392.001.0001
No Cover Available	

The literature review should give the reader a clear idea of why the research was worth doing in light of what has already been done in the field. So, in order to be able to assess the worthiness of the research project, (and to be able to decide whether to spend time reading the rest of the text), the reader should be informed about research that has already been done on the theme of interest.

The literature that you review may include different or conflicting findings, theories, and arguments. Controversies and limitations should be recognised by you and discussed, not ignored. Robson and McCartan (2016, p.52) explain how it is important to look for areas of contrast between different publications, to try to understand why these differences exist, and to explain your critical thinking on the issues to your reader.



<input type="checkbox"/> Mark	Real world research [electronic resource] : a resource for users of social research methods in applied settings Fourth edition. Robson, Colin, author. McCartan, Kieran, 1980- 2016 View this electronic resource: https://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?
No Cover Available	

Purposes of the literature review

Puts together the literature on a topic of interest and:

1. Exposes main gaps in knowledge and identifies principal areas of dispute and uncertainty.
2. Helps identify general patterns to findings from multiple examples of research in the same area.
3. Juxtaposes studies with apparently conflicting findings to help explore explanations for discrepancies.
4. Helps define your terminology or identify variations in definitions used by researchers or practitioners.
5. Helps to identify appropriate research methodologies and instruments (e.g. interview schedules, validated tests and scales).

Clearly, an important purpose of your literature review is to place your research in the context of previous research, making connections between your study and what has gone before. Neuman (2014, p.126) explains how doing this will make you more knowledgeable about the field, help you with your own research design, and make your dissertation more credible to your reader / examiner.



<input type="checkbox"/> Mark	Social research methods [electronic resource] : qualitative and quantitative approaches <i>Seventh edition.</i> Neuman, William Lawrence, 1950- author. 2014 View this electronic resource: http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/59781292033617
No Cover Available	

1. *To demonstrate a familiarity with a body of knowledge and establish credibility.* A review tells a reader that the researcher knows the research in an area and knows the major issues. A good review increases a reader's confidence in the researcher's professional competence, ability, and background.
2. *To show the path of prior research and how a current project is linked to it.* A review outlines the direction of research on a question and shows the development of knowledge. A good review places a research project in a context and demonstrates its relevance by making connections to a body of knowledge.
3. *To integrate and summarize what is known in an area.* A review pulls together and synthesizes different results. A good review points out areas in which prior studies agree, disagree, and major questions remain. It collects what is known up to a point in time and indicates the direction for future research.
4. *To learn from others and stimulate new ideas.* A review tells what others have found so that a researcher can benefit from the efforts of others. A good review identifies blind alleys and suggests hypotheses for replication. It divulges procedures, techniques, and research designs worth copying so that a researcher can better focus hypotheses and gain new insights.

Task: Think about your literature review in relation to the comments made by the authors above. Which aspects of your literature review may need more attention from you? Have you identified any areas of controversy or disagreement between authors? Have you considered the methods used in the literature in relation to choosing your own research methods? Use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find the E-books mentioned above, and read more about how to develop your literature review.

A literature review is usually written in the style of an essay and should include a significant element of analysis, critical discussion and synthesis. This is different from an annotated bibliography, which instead deals with a list of individual publications and comments on them one by one. Oliver (2012, p.9) contrasts the two forms.



When a series of literature is presented, along with a brief commentary summarizing the content of the research or article, then this is much closer to what is usually termed an annotated bibliography. This can be very useful to read, particularly if you need to survey a field very rapidly. It can provide you with a quick picture of the scope of a research topic, and what some of the main researchers and writers have said. However, it is typically a much more limited piece of work, without the depth of analysis and discussion which is associated with a literature review.

Although as we have said, a literature review does need a structure, and a number of different sub-headings and sections, it is essentially written in an essay style of writing. This is sometimes known as a discursive style. In other words, it is a style of writing which includes a number of different features including summarizing, description, analysis, discussion, evaluation, reflection and comparison. In order to achieve this style, a literature review cannot be brief, which explains why it is often the longest chapter in a student dissertation.

Although it is similar to an essay, it is important to remember that your literature review is not like a freestanding essay. As Oliver (2012, p.94) points out, "it is very important that a literature review has a coherent structure which links with the other elements of the dissertation." In other words, your reader should be able to see clearly how your literature review relates to your research aims and objectives, to your research questions, to your methodology and to your findings and discussion sections (Oliver 2012, p.134):

Connecting the literature review with other parts of the dissertation

Sometimes students think of the literature review as a little bit of a formality – something which is a requirement, and therefore they carry it out, but would rather prefer to get on with presenting and analyzing their research data!

However, the literature review is at the heart of a dissertation, and care should be taken to make sure it interconnects with all the other sections of the dissertation. The basic reason for this is that the literature review provides the basis for the current research. It establishes the nature of the ground on which the current dissertation is built – rather like the foundations of a building. The new research should sit firmly on the foundations of the literature review, with the result that the reader of the dissertation will be able to understand the continuity in the creation of knowledge and ideas.

The *literature review* section of your dissertation is obviously the main place where you review the literature relating to your research question. But you will also need to review some literature for your *methodology* section, where you draw on published studies to explain and justify your approach and the methods you have chosen. Later in your *findings* and *discussion* sections, you will again need to compare your research project findings with the findings of the studies you looked at in your main literature review. Birley and Morland (1998, p.83) give advice on this:



Mark
ACADEMIC RESEARCH
A practical guide to academic research [electronic resource]
Birley, Graham.
Moreland, Neil.
1998
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds-beck/detail.action?docID=1688999>

Typically there are three places in a research project where some review of relevant literature is required. These are when a researcher is:

1. considering what has already been researched and written about the topic(s) or research question(s)
2. seeking to explain and justify their research philosophy, methodologies, specific techniques and analytical approaches as well as deal with issues of reliability and validity
3. drawing out and stating the conclusions of their research. It is here that a comparison or reflective commentary on the relevant literature reviewed is commonly required and undertaken.

When you begin searching for relevant literature, you need to do this in a logical, systematic way. You need to have a clear idea of what you are looking for and how to look. A clear search strategy will save you time and effort and deliver good results. Oliver (2012, p.41) recommends drawing up a list of key words related to your topic and research questions:

Determine the key words in the subject area

The identification of the key words of a research study is the first essential step in identifying the relevant literature. Unless this is done in a careful, logical way, you will probably fail to identify some of the key areas of literature. To take a hypothetical example, we might consider a research dissertation entitled 'Social interaction in the multicultural classroom'. This research project could have the following possible aims:

- To analyze the role of religion in the multicultural classroom.
- To explore the significance of mother-tongue communication in multicultural education.
- To examine the factors which affect the integration of children in a multicultural environment.

From the title and aims, we can fairly easily identify some key terms. These might be:

- Interaction
- Multicultural classroom
- Religion
- Mother-tongue
- Communication
- Multicultural education
- Integration
- Multicultural environment

A clear search strategy will help you. Brainstorming and concept mapping can help you develop one. Using anti-social behaviour as an example research topic, Smith and Todd (2009, p.37) give an example of the process of moving from brainstorming to concept mapping. The resulting concept map is shown in the figure below, with the concepts shown in bold type. A concept map like this can then be used as a tool to focus your search.



Mark

Doing your undergraduate social science dissertation [electronic resource]
 Smith, Karen (Education consultant)
 Todd, Malcolm J.
 2009
 View this electronic resource: <https://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?>

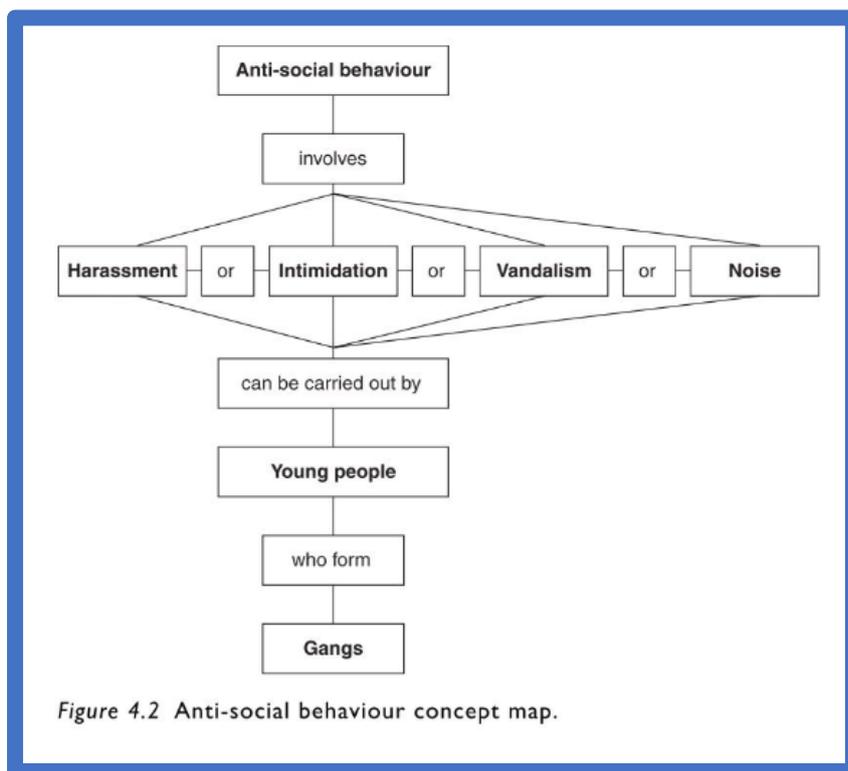


Figure 4.2 Anti-social behaviour concept map.

Smith and Todd (2009, p.38) recommend using a thesaurus or encyclopaedia to come up with synonyms (other words similar in meaning) for each of your main concepts. This will make your search more powerful and help you to avoid missing any important publications relevant to your topic. They explain how all these components can then be used in combination as “search statements” using the Boolean operators AND, NOT and OR; “as soon as you realize their power, you will be using them all the time” (2009, p.38).

Task: Go to the LIBRARY CATALOGUE and find the E-book by Smith and Todd (2009). Read their examples and try brainstorming and concept mapping to develop your own search strategy. Read their tips on how to use Boolean operators. Try using them yourself, incorporating the main concepts and synonyms for your research topic.

When you find relevant and useful sources (books, journal articles, etc), it is important to make notes of what you are reading as you go along. You should put notes into a Word document including, for example, the aims of the research study you have read, the methods they used and the findings. You might also want to quote directly from the publication, including the number of the pages which the quotes are taken from. Doing this as you go along will save you a lot of time because it means you won't have to chase up the information later. But there is also another vitally important reason, which is to avoid *plagiarism*. Birley and Morland (1998, p.83) explain:

TIP

When typing up quotes, make sure that you provide the full bibliographic reference in your notes for use when using the quote and providing the reference. This should *always* include the page numbers.

Page numbering also makes sure that you are not guilty (knowingly or unknowingly) of plagiarism. Plagiarism is the process of passing someone else's work off as your own. In most situations where plagiarism occurs and is found out there are severe penalties. Where your research is part of a course or programme of study it is not uncommon to find plagiarism losing credits, and perhaps even leading to your being required to leave the course or programme. In our opinion nothing is worth that.

It is also important that you don't use literature just for 'padding', to increase the word count to get your review over and done with. This will lower the quality of the review and your whole research project. Birley and Morland (1998, p.96) emphasise that the literature you choose to review must be relevant to the focus of your own research project:

The literature review should not include literature for its own sake.

TIP

When the literature survey has been written check the following.

- Has the emphasis been on the most important and relevant authors and works?
- Are the sources up to date?
- Is the survey critical of authors and their work where appropriate?
- Does the literature review focus on the research concerns and questions (and not deviate)?
- Does it read well?

If at all possible, ask some other people to read the literature review, for in writing authors can often get too close to their work and miss items or connections.

A literature review normally uses what are known as ‘secondary’ sources of information. Carey (2013, p44) describes these as “where primary data has been processed or analysed, typically by other researchers”. In the box below, Carey (2013, p.90) gives examples of primary and secondary sources. Journal articles are often a major component of a literature review as they tend to be more reliable. This is because they go through a ‘peer review’ process where the quality is checked by academics in the field before they are accepted for publication. Carey (2013, p.91) suggests that “for an initial literature review and proposal you should be able to rely upon a handful of journal articles, key textbooks and chapters in books that *closely relate* to your topic”.

Table 5.1 Primary and secondary sources of information

Primary	Secondary
Observation	Journal articles
Experience	Chapters in books
Relevant people	Monographs
Statistical data	Textbooks
Historical records and texts	Government publications
Organization records	Popular media
Personal documents (letters, diaries, reports, etc.)	Research reports
Film/video	Previous dissertations
Original works of literature and art	Specialist magazine articles
	Internet articles
	Databases (for example, the Census or <i>Social Trends</i>)

However, your literature review is not simply about referring to and quoting from the primary and secondary sources that you have read. It must include your own thinking and your critique of what you have read. It needs to be organised in a way that reflects the focus of your dissertation proposal and the focus of your research questions. Kornuta and Germaine (2019, p.35) give the following advice.



Mark

Halyna M. Kornuta

A Concise Guide to Writing a Thesis or Dissertation: Educational Research and Beyond

Electronic book text

A concise guide to writing a thesis or dissertation [electronic resource] : educational research and beyond *Second edition*.

Kornuta, Halyna M. (Halyna Maria), author.
 Germaine, Ron W. (Ronald Wesley),
 2019

View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?>

It is pertinent to mention what a Literature Review is not. It is not primarily a collection of quotations from other writers. While reporting about the findings and perspectives of others is an important part of the Literature Review, it must be done in a way in which your own flow of thought and organization is evident. Paraphrasing ideas, and comparing and contrasting perspectives expressed by different writers are important considerations in constructing the Literature Review. Avoid plagiarism by giving credit when paraphrasing or quoting someone else's ideas or words.

The structure of your literature review should reflect your research aims and the research questions that you develop for your research proposal. The headings and sub-headings should relate clearly to the aspects of the topic which form the focus of your research. Put simply, Oliver (2012, p.9) suggests:

- There should be a clear structure.
- There should be an explanation for that structure.
- The literature should be presented in a planned order, for which there is a clear rationale.

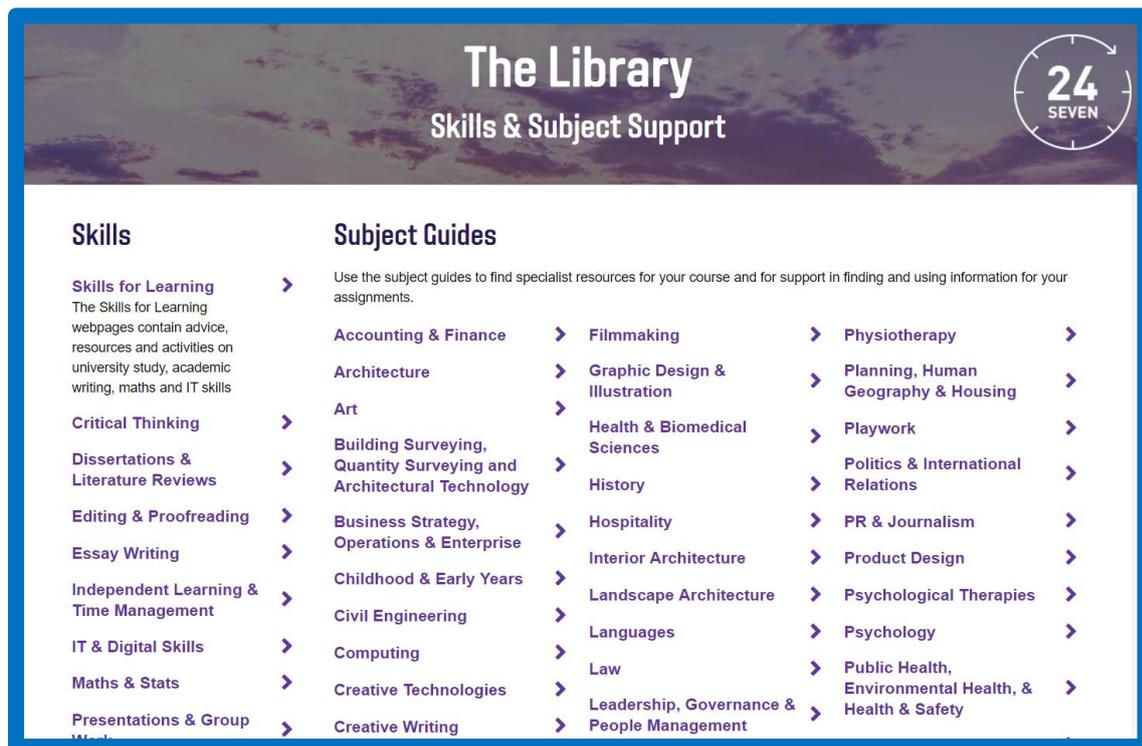
Task:

Think about your literature review in relation to the information provided above and the various comments made by the book authors. Which areas of your own literature review do you need to work on and improve?

Use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find the E-books mentioned above and read more about how to develop different aspects of your literature review.

You can quote from the books mentioned above (and any others you find) to explain to your reader how you approached your literature review. Demonstrating a clear and methodical approach, supported by the literature on how to actually do a literature review, will improve the quality of your dissertation and this will be reflected in the grade you are awarded.

This section has introduced you to some of the key aspects of conducting a literature review. You will need to learn more if you want to plan and carry out a successful research project for your dissertation. You can find more information and resources to help you on **The Library** web pages. A good place to look is on the **Skills & Subject Support** page. In the subject guides section you can find useful information provided by the Academic Librarians:



The Library
Skills & Subject Support

24 SEVEN

Skills

- Skills for Learning > The Skills for Learning webpages contain advice, resources and activities on university study, academic writing, maths and IT skills
- Critical Thinking >
- Dissertations & Literature Reviews >
- Editing & Proofreading >
- Essay Writing >
- Independent Learning & Time Management >
- IT & Digital Skills >
- Maths & Stats >
- Presentations & Group Work >

Subject Guides

Use the subject guides to find specialist resources for your course and for support in finding and using information for your assignments.

- Accounting & Finance >
- Architecture >
- Art >
- Building Surveying, Quantity Surveying and Architectural Technology >
- Business Strategy, Operations & Enterprise >
- Childhood & Early Years >
- Civil Engineering >
- Computing >
- Creative Technologies >
- Creative Writing >
- Filmmaking >
- Graphic Design & Illustration >
- Health & Biomedical Sciences >
- History >
- Hospitality >
- Interior Architecture >
- Landscape Architecture >
- Languages >
- Law >
- Leadership, Governance & People Management >
- Physiotherapy >
- Planning, Human Geography & Housing >
- Playwork >
- Politics & International Relations >
- PR & Journalism >
- Product Design >
- Psychological Therapies >
- Psychology >
- Public Health, Environmental Health, & Health & Safety >

Task:

- Go to the **Skills & Subject Support** web page:
https://libguides.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/subject_support
- Under the **Skills** section, click on **Dissertations & Literature Reviews**. Use the resources there (videos etc) to find out more.
- Under the **Subject Guides** section, click on your subject area and then look for information on **Research Skills**.

5a. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

- This section signposts you to library resources that will help you to understand research methodologies and methods - what they are, why they are needed, and how to use them in your research design.
- Read the information provided below and do the tasks. Use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find and read more from the E-books mentioned.
- Then use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find other resources relating to your own particular research interests and subject area.

To begin with, here are some philosophical questions for you relating to research:

What is the nature of reality? What is the nature of knowledge?

How can we find truth? What methods should we use?

As a researcher, your answers to these questions are significant because, as Neuman (2014, p.93) points out, all research rests on assumptions about reality and knowledge. We use the terms *ontology* and *epistemology* to refer to the nature of reality and of knowledge.



<input type="checkbox"/> Mark	Social research methods [electronic resource] : qualitative and quantitative approaches Seventh edition.
	Neuman, William Lawrence, 1950- author. 2014 View this electronic resource: http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781292033617

Ontology: An area of philosophy that deals with the nature of being, or what exists; the area of philosophy that asks what really is and what the fundamental categories of reality are.

(Neuman 2014, p.94)

Epistemology: An area of philosophy concerned with the creation of knowledge; focuses on how we know what we know or what are the most valid ways to reach truth.

(Neuman 2014, p.95)

For your research project, you will be investigating a topic that is real and one which you want to know more about, in order to produce knowledge on the topic. You will need to describe its nature, and decide what methods are best to investigate it. For example, you may want to conduct research on some aspect of racism in a particular context. This would require a consideration of definitions and theories, such as Critical Race Theory, relating to

the nature of racism. In what ways does racism exist and in what ways can it be known? These are questions of ontology and epistemology; you don't have to use these actual terms in your dissertation, but if you do use them it will show your examiner that you are aware of them and that you know how to use them in an academic research context. Reading about and understanding what is meant by *ontology* and *epistemology* will also help you to choose a philosophical approach and appropriate methods to use in your research project, whatever your topic may be.

Your methodology (i.e. your approach) is defined by White and Rayner (2014, p.30) as "the research rationale and conceptual framework for your research design", while your research methods are "the range of techniques, tools and / or procedures that are used to generate and collect data". Therefore the methodology section of your dissertation should "focus upon the logic behind using these methods in the context of your research"; the explanation of your methodology "is widely regarded by examiners as a strong indicator of the scholarly value and quality" of your dissertation (ibid., p.30).



Mark

No Cover Available

Dissertation skills for business and management students [electronic resource] Second edition.
White, Brian, author.
Rayner, Stephen,
2014
View this electronic resource: <http://login.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781473708136>

To develop as a researcher, White and Rayner (2014, p.31) recommend that you "explore the meaning and implications of three key philosophical terms for your research":

- **Ontology.** This is concerned with the nature of existence. It is bound up with a particular belief in what exists, or theory about the nature of being, or the kinds of things that have existence. The implications for research are bound up with decisions about the place or relevance of ideas associated with validity, reliability, subjectivity, objectivity and truth.
- **Epistemology.** This is the study of knowledge and justified belief. It serves as the basis for knowledge, and types of evidence, information and the way we interpret and construct our findings for a piece of research. Ideas about methodology and method are, for example, shaped by epistemic principles adopted by the researcher. Similarly, epistemic issues arise when working on the creation and different forms of dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry.
- **Axiology.** This is the study of value, or goodness, in its widest sense. It plays a constant part in decisions and conduct in research design. A simple example of this role is in the adoption of ethical principles. It also reflects much more wide-ranging issues to do with the on-going relationships between the researcher, research participants, and the research itself.

How we see the world, how we feel about seeking truth and our methods of producing knowledge are all important aspects of our research. For example, Letherby (2003, pp.19-20) writes that “feminist epistemology means feminist ways of knowing.” In the chapter extract below, she talks about the status of knowledge claims, and how power and privilege can influence the way in which issues in the social world are defined.



Mark
 **Feminist research in theory and practice [electronic resource]**
Letherby, Gayle.
2003
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?>

Different epistemologies have characterized different historical times and places. Examples of different epistemological approaches include Greek rationalism, seventeenth and eighteenth-century empiricisms, eighteenth-century Enlightenment and twentieth-century postmodernism (see McCarl Nielsen 1990 for a further discussion). Stanley and Wise (1993: 188) suggest that:

An ‘epistemology’ is a framework or theory for specifying the constitution and generation of knowledge about the social world; that is, it concerns how to understand the nature of ‘reality’. A given epistemological framework specifies not only what ‘knowledge’ is and how to recognize it, but who are the ‘knowers’ and by what means someone becomes one, and also the means by which competing knowledge-claims are adjudicated and some rejected in favour of another/others.

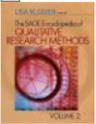
It follows therefore that feminist epistemology means feminist ways of knowing and in Chapter 2 I consider this further. Here I am concerned with the status and privilege accorded to different knowledge claims. Many feminist writers have argued that knowledge, reason and science have been ‘manmade’. The general idea here is that western societies have been dominated by patriarchy and men have used their positions of power to define issues, structure language and develop theory. Thus, men have been able to promote their own interests and, as a result, all the dominant forms of discourse in western culture – art, media, literature, science, social science and so on – exhibit predominantly male characteristics. This general argument is a central claim of feminist theory but within this it is possible to distinguish a number of different and incompatible positions.

When it comes to deciding which methodology and methods to use, power and privilege can be important considerations. For example, a researcher may decide to involve their participants as co-researchers. This method, known as *participatory research*, is sometimes used in feminist studies, and other areas where the participants are acknowledged as experts, rather than seeing the researcher as “the authority figure” (Given, 2008, p.599). A

participatory approach shares the power between the researcher and the participants; the latter are not 'subjects' of an investigation but co-researchers. An example is provided below by Given (2008, p.600), which describes a research project conducted by a student in the USA for her dissertation.



Mark



The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods [electronic resource]
Given, Lisa M.
2008
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/Leeds-beck/detail.action?docID=1995285>

Black Southern Women: Their Lived Realities

In the author's dissertation work, tentatively titled *Black Southern Women: Their Lived Realities*, the participants were invited to share the stories and experiences of their lives growing up and raising families in the rural South. As a former member of the community, the author collaborated with approximately 10 participants, allowing them to be equally invested and equally involved in the process of collecting, writing, interpreting, and editing the stories they wrote. Their involvement began during the early stages of recommending other participants and retelling stories in individual and group settings to ensure adequate information was available. As co-investigators their stories were instrumental in establishing and representing a corporate set of themes and experiences. The author shared her experiences with the participants, and together, they were able to compare and contrast their ideas about the topics of research. Though the co-researchers in this project were not involved in the writing stages, they did have the opportunity to respond to the stories the author wrote, offering their unique perspectives and feedback as participants in the research and characters in the stories. The resulting research project is a collaboration between the researcher and the researched, including participants as co-researchers.

The title of the dissertation above refers to the experiences of the participants as "their lived realities". This choice of words, and particularly the use of 'realities' (plural) rather than 'reality' (singular), is significant as it suggests that the author has a particular stance or philosophical position on researching the social world. The idea of there being not one but multiple alternative realities is discussed by Denscombe (2017, p.140) who contrasts *positivistic* approaches with *phenomenological* approaches.



Mark



EBOOK: The Good Research Guide: For Small-Scale Social Research Projects [electronic resource] 6th edition.
Denscombe, Martyn, author.
2017
View this electronic resource: <https://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?>

Multiple realities

When the social world is seen as 'socially constructed' it opens up the possibility that different groups of people might 'see things differently'. There is the prospect of alternative realities – realities that vary from situation to situation, culture to culture. In this respect phenomenology stands in stark contrast to positivistic approaches to social research that are premised on the assumption of *one* reality. Whereas positivistic approaches look for explanations that fit one universal reality, phenomenological approaches tend to live with, even celebrate, the possibility of *multiple realities*. Reflecting the fact that the world as experienced by living humans is something that is created through the way they interpret and give meaning to their experiences, phenomenology rejects the notion that there is one universal reality and accepts, instead, that things can be seen in different ways by different people at different times in different circumstances, and that each alternative version needs to be recognized as being valid in its own right.

As they themselves are social beings, individuals conducting social research may have views on reality that influence their research decisions at many levels. Neuman (2014, p.95) writes about this, describing two contrasting approaches: *realists* believe that “there is an empirical world ‘out there’ that exists apart from our inner thoughts and perceptions of it”; *nominalists*, however, believe that “interpretations and subjective views greatly influence all observations” that we make. As a researcher, it is important to acknowledge that your personal views may influence your research. If you are not aware of this, then the approach you adopt and the methods you choose may be unconsciously influenced by your beliefs and your research findings may be unwittingly influenced or biased by your views.

The world of published research is itself influenced by different philosophical movements, and the strength of these may increase or decrease at certain time periods as other influences take effect. When you read a publication, it is possible that it is coming from a particular philosophical position in terms of how the author sees the world. For example, Robson and McCartan (2016, p.17) discuss the rise of Modernism with its belief in “rationality, and progress through science”, and how its “claims to truth” became challenged by Postmodernism.



<input type="checkbox"/> Mark	Real world research [electronic resource] : a resource for users of social research methods in applied settings <i>Fourth edition</i>.
No Cover Available	Robson, Colin, author. McCartan, Kieran, 1980- 2016 View this electronic resource: https://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?

Postmodernism and extreme relativist approaches

The movement known as *postmodernism* has influenced thought about social research (Alvesson, 2002; Sim, 2011) as well as permeating the arts, literature and architecture. Although by no means a unified approach, several ideas figure prominently. Essentially, whatever *modernism* advocated is opposed by postmodernists. Modernism was linked to developments in Europe leading to the scientific revolution of the sixteenth century and later centuries, and the so-called 'Enlightenment' fully flowering in the eighteenth century. It sought to provide freedom from the irrationality, ignorance and superstition of the middle ages. Modernism's central belief was in rationality, and in progress through science. Postmodernism challenges the idea of progress through reason. Modernism seeks general truths. Postmodernism says there is no basis for such claims to truth. 'Objective criteria that are presented as a basis for distinguishing truth from falsity are seen to be nothing more than forms of persuasion that are designed to show that what is claimed is true' (Blaikie, 2007, p. 50). Critics of postmodernism are scathing. For example:

The philosophical postmodernists, a rebel crew milling beneath the black flag of anarchy, challenge the very foundations of science and traditional philosophy. Reality, they propose, is a state constructed by the mind, not perceived by it. In the most extravagant version of this constructivism, there is no 'real' reality, no objective truths external to mental activity, only prevailing visions disseminated by ruling social groups (Wilson, 1999, p. 44).

As in many movements in social science, there are varying postmodernist positions, discussed by Maxwell and Mittapalli (2010, p. 151). They cite Ezzy (2002, pp. 15–18) who argues that, while some postmodernists deny that reality exists, others simply want to emphasize the complexity of our process of understanding it. While such moderate postmodernists would reject the idea of universal truth, they are likely to accept 'the possibility of specific, local, personal, and community forms of truth' (Kvale, 1995, p. 21).

Within social science there are influential relativistic approaches as well as postmodernism.

Task:

Go to the LIBRARY CATALOGUE, find the E-book by Neuman (2014, p.94) and read more about realist and nominalist positions. Think about where you stand in relation to these perspectives. How aware are you of your own views on reality and how they might influence your research?

How complex or straightforward is reality? How many realities are there? Have a look at the E-books by Denscombe (2017) and Robson and McCartan (2016) and consider your philosophical position on this issue. What are the implications for your research?

Find the E-book by Given (2008, pp.599-600) and read more about the benefits and the challenges of involving your participants as co-researchers. Is *participatory research* a possibility for your research project? Which method(s) do you think would be most appropriate for your research topic and questions, taking into account your position with regard to ontology, epistemology and axiology?

Your methodology and methods are very important elements of the research process. Kawamura (2020, p.34) suggests that “a researcher cannot suddenly jump into the data-collection process. There is a planning stage; the whole process of research needs to be considered and reconsidered before you begin your research”.



Mark

Doing research in fashion and dress [electronic resource] : an introduction to qualitative methods Second edition.
 Kawamura, Yuniya, author.
 2020
 View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?uri=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds-beck/detail.action?docID=5940271>

Research design is described by White and Rayner (2014, p.29) as “the blueprint or detailed outline for the whole of your research and dissertation. It relies on careful planning”. There is a lot to think about in research design. Taking a ‘big picture’ perspective can help you with the overall process. In the diagram below, White and Rayner (2014, p.29) summarise the various features of research design that you need to consider.

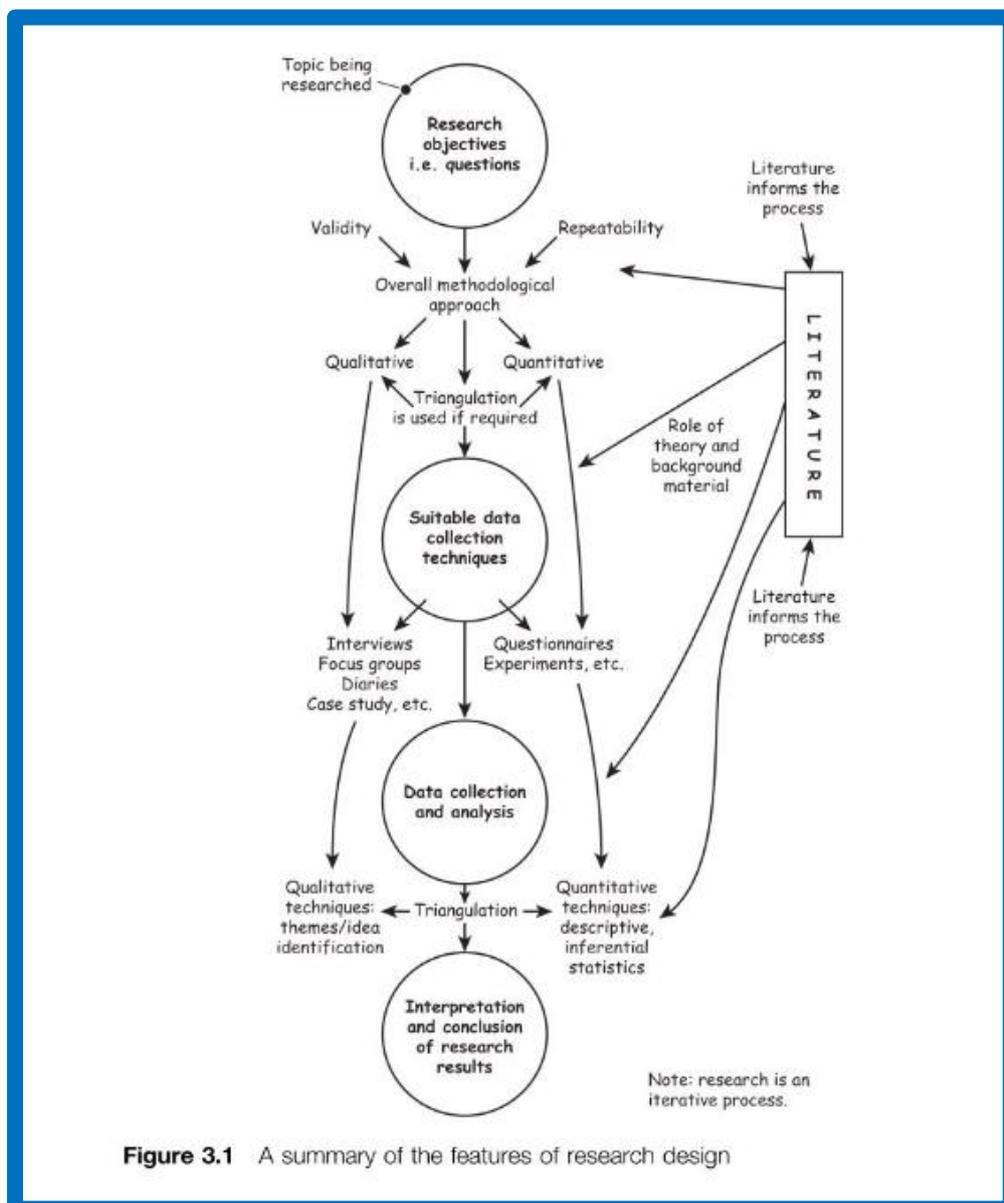


Figure 3.1 A summary of the features of research design

As you can see in the diagram above, 'validity' and 'repeatability' are two important features to consider in your overall methodological approach. Repeatability is also referred to as 'reliability'. Payne and Payne (2004, p.196) explain the meaning of reliability and validity in terms of "the credibility of research".



Mark

Key concepts in social research [electronic resource]

Payne, Geoff.
Payne, Judy.
2004

View this electronic resource: <http://login.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.dawsonera.com/download/protected/external/AbstractView/50781848600631>

There are two main questions about credibility of research. The first addresses whether we would get similar results if the study were repeated. The second question is more challenging: even if the same results were obtained, would they be *right*, i.e. have we actually measured what we needed to look at, in a way that accurately captures its characteristics? The first question is about *reliability*, the second about *validity* (dealt with in a closely linked section, **Validity**). The two are often confused (for people who like mnemonics, RELiability is about REpeatability)...Reliability is about being confident that the way data were gathered could be *repeated without the methods themselves producing different results*.

Whatever the methodology and methods you choose, you will need to consider the validity and the reliability of your research as they relate to the credibility of your research findings. However, the terms validity and reliability can have somewhat different meanings in different research contexts and for different researchers, depending on the type of research you are undertaking. Sometimes researchers can have very different views about what is valid, about the importance of reliability, and about what is the most appropriate method to use in a particular research context. When deciding which approach to use, Robson and McCartan (2016, p.47) take the view that "the research question is the key. Different types of research question...call for different methodologies". They suggest the following "simple rules of thumb" when deciding on which research methods to use (2016, p.242).

- To find out what people do in public, use *direct observation*.
- To find out what they do in private, use *interviews* or *questionnaires*.
- To find out what they think, feel and/or believe, use *interviews*, *questionnaires* or *attitude scales*.
- To determine their abilities, or measure their intelligence or personality, use *standardized tests*.

Going back to the diagram on the features of research design, White and Rayner (2014, p.29) give two options for an overall methodological approach – **quantitative** or **qualitative**. Summarising the features of the two approaches, Robson and McCartan (2016, p.19) describe how “to a considerable extent they present mirror images of each other: numerical vs. non-numerical; decontextualized vs. context important; *objectivity* vs. subjectivity, etc. What is put forward as a positive feature for one side of the divide would represent a criticism from the other”. There has been much debate about the nature and relative dis/advantages of the two approaches. In the box below, Robson and McCartan (2016, p.18) explain the two traditions of quantitative and qualitative social research; they describe “warring tribes” of researchers with very different ideas about how to understand “people and their problems”. The highlighting has been added here to the original text:

The two traditions: quantitative and qualitative social research

For many years there was a basic choice to be made when carrying out a piece of social research. The two alternatives were known as **quantitative** and **qualitative** social research. **The quantitative route tried to follow essentially the same research path as researchers in the so-called ‘natural’ sciences such as physics, chemistry and biology.** **Advocates of qualitative approaches considered that, because the focus of social research is on human beings in social situations, you need a very different approach to the research task.** Human consciousness and language, the interactions between people in social situations, the fact that both researcher and researched are human – and a host of other aspects – all were considered to require, and make possible, a radically different approach to research. Their criticisms of quantitative approaches as a basis for social research were influential, but many social researchers either chose to ignore these criticisms or attempted to come to terms with them rather than abandon quantitative research.

Warring tribes of quantitative and qualitative social researchers fought a good fight. **The quantitative camp claimed that their scientific approach was the only way to conduct serious research and cast doubts on the value of qualitative research.** **Qualitative advocates countered that the dead hand of numbers and statistics was no way to understand anything worthwhile about people and their problems.** Thankfully the new millennium appears to have brought a détente, though sniping across the trenches continues (Holosko, 2012 and Shaw, 2012 provide an example of a reasonably civilized interchange). There are still zealots proclaiming their version of the true faith, but several commentators (e.g. Bryman, 2006b; Walsh, 2012) now see this as a worn-out debate. This is in part because many researchers appear content to continue with their own prescriptions following well-worn paths, letting others follow their own, different, paths. This situation has been described as the ‘two solitudes’ (Stoppard, 2002). There remain problems, particularly when a researcher wishes to use qualitative methods in a field where quantitative methods are the norm (e.g. Yang, 2013). Encouragingly, however, there is a growing recognition of the value of combining elements of both quantitative and qualitative research styles...

The features typically associated with *quantitative social research* are summarised below by Robson and McCartan (2016, p.19). Again, the highlighting is not in the original text; it has been added here to bring out some of the key aspects.

Quantitative social research: typical features

- **Measurement and quantification** (i.e. turning the information or data obtained into numbers) is central. Accuracy and precision of measurement is sought.
- A focus on **behaviour** (i.e. on what people do or say).
- The **scientific** approach is adhered to, with the same general principles as natural science.
- A **deductive logic** is adopted where pre-existing theoretical ideas or concepts are tested.
- **Design of the research is pre-specified** in detail at an early stage of the research process.
- **Reliability** (consistency over time and with different observers) and **validity** (showing they measure what is intended) of measurements is **important**.
- Detailed specification of procedures is provided so that **replication of the study is possible** (i.e. it can be repeated so that the findings can be checked).
- **Statistical analysis** of the data is expected.
- **Generalization** of the findings is sought (usually in the form of statistical generalizability which requires the sample of participants studied to be representative of some wider population).
- **Objectivity** is sought and **distance maintained between the researcher and participants**.
- **Standardization** is sought in the interests of control and accuracy. This often involves decontextualization (i.e. stripping the situation researched from its context, or ignoring the possible effects of the context). Some artificiality may be needed to achieve the desired standardization.
- A neutral, **value-free** position is sought.

Task: In their E-book, Robson and McCartan (2016, pp.21-22) describe the philosophical belief system underlying the quantitative approach as being “closely linked to *positivism*”, which was itself for a long time “the standard philosophical view of natural science”. Look at their E-book and read their short summary of positivistic science, how it came under attack, and how an alternative approach called *post-positivism* emerged. To what extent do you dis/agree with *post-positivistic* ideas about the nature of reality and how to find truth?

In contrast with quantitative social research, Robson and McCartan (2016, p.20) list the following features typically associated with *qualitative social research*.

Qualitative social research: typical features

- Accounts and findings are presented verbally or in other non-numerical form. There is little or no use of numerical data or statistical analysis.
- An inductive logic is used starting with data collection from which theoretical ideas and concepts emerge.
- A focus on meanings.
- Contexts are seen as important. There is a need to understand phenomena in their setting.
- Situations are described from the perspective of those involved.
- The design of the research emerges as the research is carried out and is flexible throughout the whole process.
- The existence and importance of the values of researchers and others involved is accepted.
- Objectivity is not valued. It is seen as distancing the researcher from participants.
- Openness and receptivity of the researcher is valued.
- The generalizability of findings is not a major concern
- It takes place in natural settings. Artificial laboratory settings are rarely used.
- Both the personal commitment and reflexivity (self-awareness) of the researcher are valued.
- It is usually small scale in terms of numbers of persons or situations researched.
- The social world is viewed as a creation of the people involved.

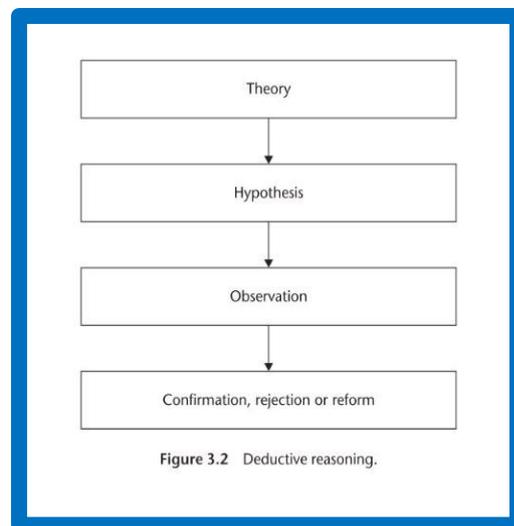
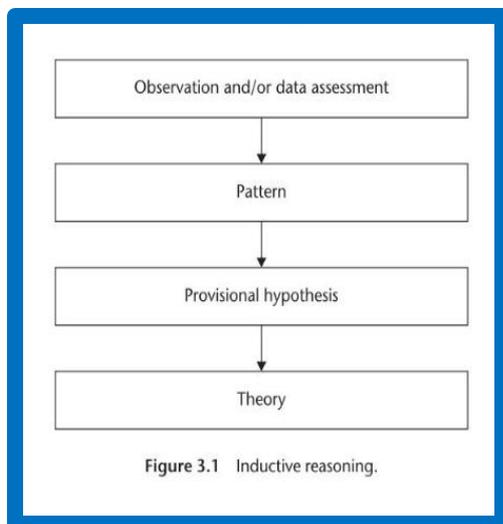
Critical reasoning is an important part of your dissertation research process. In the two boxes above, Robson and McCartan (2016) mention the use of **theory** and different kinds of **logic** in social research. They mention that **inductive reasoning** is commonly associated with qualitative research, while **deductive reasoning** is associated with quantitative research. Carey (2013, pp.51-52) explains these two different approaches or types of reasoning (inductive and deductive). Inductive reasoning sets out to discover theories. Carey (2013, p.50) describes a theory as “a set of statements or proposals that helps us explain and understand what it is we have discovered”. Inductive reasoning is very common in

qualitative research. It involves moving from analysis of your data and your findings to a hypothesis and a theory that may explain what you have found. The process of inductive reasoning is depicted by Carey (2013, p.51) in Figure 3.1 below. While inductive reasoning involves theory construction, in contrast, deductive reasoning involves starting out with a theory and testing it. The deductive reasoning process is depicted in Figure 3.2 below. However, as explained by Carey (2013, pp.51-52), these two forms of reasoning can also be combined in a process known as ‘retroduction’, where ideas and evidence interact with each other.



Mark

The social work dissertation [electronic resource] : using small-scale qualitative methodology *Second edition*.
 Carey, Malcolm, author.
 2013
[url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9780335247608&uid=^u](http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9780335247608&uid=^u)



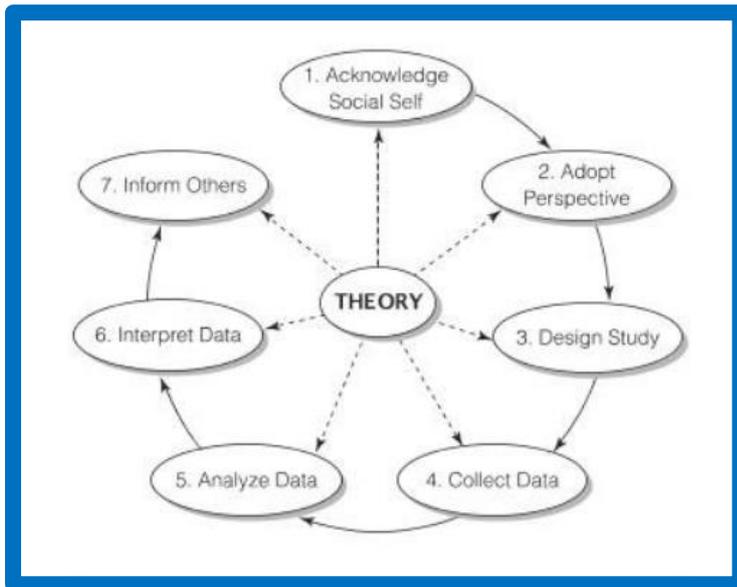
Similar to Carey’s (2013) explanation, Neuman (2014, pp.69-70) talks about the “direction of theorizing”. Firstly, a **deductive** approach involves starting with abstract or theoretical thinking and moving to concrete situations and evidence to evaluate the theory. In contrast, an **inductive** approach begins by “observing the empirical world”, reflecting on what is happening and moving toward a theoretical understanding of what has been observed. Again, like Carey (2013), Neuman (2014) also explains how it is possible to use both of these approaches in a research study.



Mark

Social research methods [electronic resource] : qualitative and quantitative approaches *Seventh edition*.
 Neuman, William Lawrence, 1950- author.
 2014
[View this electronic resource: http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781292033617](http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781292033617)

Of course, the use of theory is not limited to any one particular stage of the research process. It can and should be considered in relation to all stages of your research project. As a researcher, you can use theory to describe how you see the world, how you feel about seeking truth and your methods of producing knowledge. These issues relate to questions of ontology, epistemology and axiology, which were considered at the beginning of this information sheet. Neuman (2014, p.21) provides the following diagram that suggests how **theory** can be incorporated into every step in the **qualitative research process**.



Hammersley (2013, p.15) also contrasts quantitative and qualitative research approaches and mentions flexible design, verbal analysis and “the essential role of subjectivity” as key elements within qualitative research.



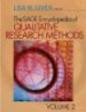
	<p>What is qualitative research? [electronic resource] Hammersley, Martyn. 2013 View this electronic resource: https://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds-beck/detail.action?docID=6159759</p>
---	--

In light of this contrast with quantitative social science, we can define ‘qualitative research’ along the following lines: ***a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of analysis .***

In the box above, Hammersley (2013, p.15) mentions the importance of your research design being driven by **data**. But what are data? In the SAGE Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods (Given, 2008) data are referred to as “a collection of information” (p.185); **quantitative** research collects “data that are in numerical form” while **qualitative** data is a collection of information that is not numerical in form; these can be verbal or non-verbal (p.186):



Mark

The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods [electronic resource]
Given, Lisa M.
2008
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/Leeds-beck/detail.action?docID=1995285>

Data are verbal if the majority of what is being analyzed is words. Verbal data sources include items such as personal diaries, letters, media reports, surveys/ interviews, and fieldnotes. Within the group of interviews the data can come from in-depth/unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews, structured interviews, questionnaires containing substantial open-ended comments, focus groups, and so on.

Nonverbal data sources include items such as student concept maps, kinship diagrams, pictures, video, film, art, and print advertisements. Each type of data and how it was collected has different strengths and weaknesses in relation to the research questions and analysis techniques. For example, nonparticipant observations from video collected through surveillance cameras potentially allow the researcher to collect data without influence in the field, but there are issues with the ethics of these observations.

Task:

What type of research method(s) would be most appropriate to help you meet your study aims and objectives, and to help you answer your research questions?

What kind of theory might you bring into your research design? What sort of reasoning could you use?

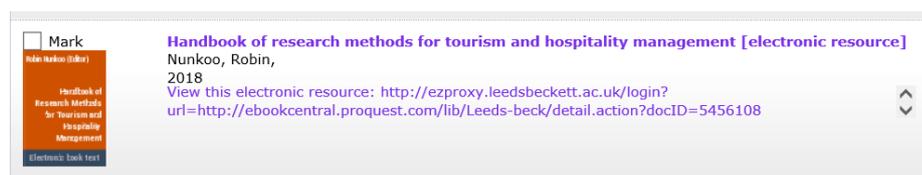
What kind of data would be most appropriate for your research project?

Go to the LIBRARY CATALOGUE and find the E-books mentioned above. Read more about the methodological choices available to you. Also find information about the possible theories that you could use in relation to your subject area, your research topic and your research questions.

Another important research term that you need to consider is **sampling**. For example, you may decide to recruit some participants for your research project and interview them to get their views on a particular topic or controversial issue. You will need to think about where these participants are going to come from. How exactly are you going to select your participants and how many will you need? Carey (2013, p.46) gives this explanation of sampling in a social work research context; it is also relevant to other subject areas:

A **sample** is a small group of research participants or subset drawn from a wider **population** and from which a degree of generalization can be made. Sampling is the process by which a sample is gathered. The population is represented by the total number of people who are members of your area of research interest (e.g. female carers, newly qualified male social workers working within mental health care). A distinction is also drawn between **probability samples** and **non-probability samples**. Probability samples allow each member an equal chance of being selected by the researcher, and they therefore enjoy a high degree of representativeness and remain the most common samples used in quantitative research. Qualitative researchers, however, rely more upon non-probability samples in which each member of a population does not have an equal chance of selection. This sampling approach is unlikely to be representative and allow generalization yet it has the advantage of providing a rich source of data for analysis.

The above concepts are also explained by Teeroovengadum and Nunkoo (in Nunkoo, 2018, p.478). Again, although their book is about research on tourism and hospitality management, the points the authors make are also relevant to other subject areas.



The probability sampling approach, which is mostly associated with quantitative research, focuses on the randomness and the objectivity of the sample selection process. The findings drawn from a sample that has been selected using a probability sampling method can be generalised to the study population with a determined degree of accuracy and confidence level. On the other hand, the non-probability sampling approach is usually associated with qualitative research, where the main objective is usually to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, rather than making generalisations.

The sampling approach that you choose will depend on many factors, including your particular research aims and objectives, your underlying philosophical approach, the time available to you, other resources you have at your disposal, and the research questions that you hope your research will answer.

If you decide to use a *non-probability sample*, Davies & Hughes (2014, p.152) explain different ways of approaching this; for example, they describe **convenience sampling** where participants are selected in terms of their “ease of availability”.



Mark

 **Doing a successful research project [electronic resource] : using qualitative or quantitative methods *Second edition*.**
Davies, Martin, 1936- author.
Hughes, Nathan, 1978-
2014
View this electronic resource: <http://login.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/deep/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781137306500>

Convenience sampling

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method where research participants are selected on the basis of ease of availability. Participants will be those who are readily accessible to the researcher and easy to recruit or convince to take part. This might mean friends, family or colleagues, or people within a local area. While the method has practical strengths, this means that the researcher cannot make scientific generalizations from the sample to the population, as the sample is not representative.

Another approach to consider is **purposive** sampling. The same authors (*ibid.*, p.157) explain how this refers to selecting “typical” individuals who you think will be representative of the population you want to research.

Purposive sampling

A purposive sample is based on the selection of individuals who are believed to be ‘typical’ or strongly representative of a population or phenomenon. In this approach, there is no attempt to be statistically representative of the population.

There are different approaches to purposive sampling. Robson and McCartan (2016, p.281) describe one particular type known as “snowball sampling”.



<input type="checkbox"/> Mark	Real world research [electronic resource] : a resource for users of social research methods in applied settings <i>Fourth edition</i>.
No Cover Available	Robson, Colin, author. McCartan, Kieran, 1980- 2016 View this electronic resource: https://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?

Snowball sampling

Here the researcher identifies one or more individuals from the population of interest. After they have been interviewed, they are used as informants to identify other members of the population, who are themselves used as informants, and so on. This is a useful approach when there is difficulty in identifying members of the population, e.g. when this is a clandestine group. It can be seen as a particular type of purposive sample. As well as its value in identifying a sample it has also been used to shed light on social and other networks (Browne, 2005; Farquharson, 2005). However, Waters (2014) suggests, with an example, that it can be prone to failure in obtaining a sample, and that caution should be used in considering its adoption.

An example of a snowball sampling design in tourism and hospitality research is provided by Teeroovengadum and Nunkoo (in Nunkoo, 2018, p.483). They describe a research study which investigated people’s experiences of food tourism. The summary provided in the box below describes how the authors went about recruiting appropriate participants.

BOX 39.5 SNOWBALL SAMPLING

Our study is based on interviews with 16 tourists who had a deep interest in food and who had traveled for food experiences. A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit food tourists, a suitable method to find and approach tourists having the relevant experience for our study (Ziakas and Boukas 2013). We started with the one participant who helped in identifying other food tourists such as Jesper, Sara, Fiona, Kim, and Johanna. Anna, our first interview participant, is a passionate home cook who also works as a freelance journalist. She was considered an ideal participant because she knew about a number of food tourists in the region by having read about them in the local newspaper, which has a weekly food section. The other participants were identified by the first author when taking part in food-related academic conferences or through the help of other participants.

Source: Goolaup (2018, p.222).

In the food tourism study described above, 16 participants were recruited and interviewed to collect the study data. The summary provided above does not give details of what type of interviewing method was used. It may have been a *semi-structured* format, which is a very popular type of interview as described below by Elliot (2016).



Mark
Oxford
A dictionary of social research methods [electronic resource]
Elliot, Mark (Mark James),
2016
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191816826.001.0001/acref->

semi-structured interview

A method of research used in the social sciences, within the qualitative approaches. It is the most commonly used type of interview, and, as opposed to a structured interview, it is more open, allowing new ideas to be raised during the interview by the interviewee. It usually involves the use of an interview schedule which includes the broad topics to be covered and some indicative questions for each topic. During the interviewing process there is flexibility, and opportunities to adapt questions, change order, or ask extra unplanned questions to explore and clarify the interviewee's responses.

For your research project you will need to make a decision about your *sample size*. This refers to the number of participants that you aim to recruit. For example, in the food tourism study mentioned above, the researchers recruited 16 participants to interview. Teeroovengadum and Nunkoo (in Nunkoo, 2018, p.486) give the following advice:

Sample Size Determination in Qualitative Research

In qualitative research, the size of the sample is not guided by statistical considerations. Instead, researchers often use the data saturation point as a guideline. Data saturation refers to the point where new data no longer provide additional information. Some specific recommendations of sample size in qualitative research have been made using experience gained from past studies. For grounded theory research, a sample size of 30–50 participants is recommended by Morse (1994); while Cresswell opines that a sample of 20–30 is sufficient. For phenomenology research, Cresswell (1998) proposes 5–25 participants; and in line with this, Morse (1994) suggests a sample size of at least six. Saunders and Townsend (2016) reviewed a sample of past studies in organisation and workplace research employing qualitative methodologies. They found the norm to be from 15 to 60 participants. Their review study also revealed that many studies failed to adequately report their sample size and/or to provide adequate justifications for the size of their sample.

For a university student doing their first major independent research project, **qualitative data analysis** may be something completely new, strange, and challenging. However, as Given (2008, p.186) explains, there are “common features” that you should be aware of which will help you to find your way through the process:

Regardless of the perspective or paradigm one uses, the analysis of qualitative data involves a number of common features. These include simultaneous data collection and analysis, the practice of writing memos during and after data collection, the use of some sort of coding, the use of writing as a tool for analysis, and the development of concepts and connection of one’s analysis to the literature in one’s field.

For example, when analysing interview data, researchers may use an approach called *thematic analysis*. This is a way of processing and reducing your data so that you can identify or interpret themes. The extract below from Given (2008, p.867) suggests how thematic analysis can be used in “the search for patterns of experience within a qualitative data set”. Your data set may be a collection of interviews. In which case, you could use thematic analysis to search for patterns and interpret themes in the data that will help you to answer your research questions.

Thematic analysis is a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set. Thematic analysis is primarily a descriptive strategy that facilitates the search for patterns of experience within a qualitative data set; the product of a thematic analysis is a description of those patterns and the overarching design that unites them. Thematic coding is the strategy by which data are segmented and categorized for thematic analysis...In thematic coding, the analyst frequently begins with a list of themes known (or at least anticipated) to be found in the data. When data for thematic analysis are collected through semi-structured interviews, some themes will be anticipated in the data set because those concepts were explicitly included in data collection. Codes may also come from a beginning conceptual model, the review of the literature, or professional experience...coding categories serve as a receptacle for promising ideas. Promising ideas become coding categories through a rigorous process of analytic induction that includes both within and across-case comparisons...Coding facilitates the development of themes, and the development of themes facilitates coding. In coding, portions of data are separated from their original context and labeled in some way so that all data bearing the same label can be retrieved and inspected together.

This information sheet has introduced you to just some of the many aspects of research methodology and methods. You will need to learn more about them if you want to plan and carry out a successful research project for your dissertation. You can find more information and resources to help you on **The Library** web pages. A good place to look is on the **Skills & Subject Support** page. In the subject guides section you can find useful information provided by the Academic Librarians:

The Library
Skills & Subject Support

Skills

- Skills for Learning
The Skills for Learning webpages contain advice, resources and activities on university study, academic writing, maths and IT skills
- Critical Thinking
- Dissertations & Literature Reviews
- Editing & Proofreading
- Essay Writing
- Independent Learning & Time Management
- IT & Digital Skills
- Maths & Stats
- Presentations & Group Work

Subject Guides

Use the subject guides to find specialist resources for your course and for support in finding and using information for your assignments.

Accounting & Finance	Filmaking	Physiotherapy
Architecture	Graphic Design & Illustration	Planning, Human Geography & Housing
Art	Health & Biomedical Sciences	Playwork
Building Surveying, Quantity Surveying and Architectural Technology	History	Politics & International Relations
Business Strategy, Operations & Enterprise	Hospitality	PR & Journalism
Childhood & Early Years	Interior Architecture	Product Design
Civil Engineering	Landscape Architecture	Psychological Therapies
Computing	Languages	Psychology
Creative Technologies	Law	Public Health, Environmental Health, & Health & Safety
Creative Writing	Leadership, Governance & People Management	

Task:

- Go to the **Skills & Subject Support** web page:
https://libguides.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/subject_support
- Under the **Skills** section, click on **Dissertations & Literature Reviews**. Use the resources there (videos etc) to find out more.
- Under the **Subject Guides** section, click on your subject area and then look for information on **Research Skills**.
- For more information on interviewing, see section 5b below.

5b. INTERVIEWING

- This section introduces you to library resources that will help you learn how to plan and conduct interviews successfully.
- Read the information below and do the tasks. Use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find and read more from the E-books mentioned.
- Then use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find other resources relating to your own particular research topic and subject area.

In this book on qualitative interviewing, Brinkmann (2013, p.21) describes “producing knowledge” as being the central goal of qualitative interviews. Brinkmann also mentions the value of “a reflexive account” of the interview, including a reflection on issues relating to “power and control”:



(1) *Purpose*: Unlike everyday conversations with friends or family members, qualitative interviews are not conducted for their own sake; they are not a goal in themselves, but are staged and conducted in order to serve the researcher’s goal of producing knowledge (and there may be other, ulterior goals like obtaining a degree, furthering one’s career, or positioning oneself in the field, etc.). All sorts of motives may play a role in the staging of interviews, and good interview reports often contain a reflexive account and discussion of both individual and social aspects of such motives (does it matter, for example, if the interviewer is a woman, perhaps identifying as a feminist, interviewing other women?). Clearly, the fact that interviews are conversations conducted for a purpose, which sets the agenda, raises a number of issues having to do with power and control that are important to reflect upon for epistemic reasons as well as for ethical ones (Brinkmann, 2007b).

Task: Think about your research topic and your interview plans. What kind of knowledge production are you interested in? What is it that you want to know, exactly? Are there any ethical or other issues relating to power and control that you need to consider? Is it possible that any power issues might influence the knowledge production process in your research project? Look at Brinkmann's (2013) E-book to find out more about how this might happen.

The semi-structured interview is a popular research method. Elliot (2016) explains how it typically involves an open and flexible approach where the interviewer follows a prepared schedule that covers the various aspects of the topic.



Mark
Oxford
A dictionary of social research methods [electronic resource]
Elliot, Mark (Mark James),
2016
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191816826.001.0001/acref->

semi-structured interview

A method of research used in the social sciences, within the qualitative approaches. It is the most commonly used type of interview, and, as opposed to a structured interview, it is more open, allowing new ideas to be raised during the interview by the interviewee. It usually involves the use of an interview schedule which includes the broad topics to be covered and some indicative questions for each topic. During the interviewing process there is flexibility, and opportunities to adapt questions, change order, or ask extra unplanned questions to explore and clarify the interviewee's responses.

It is essential to develop your interview questions carefully. Gillham (2000, p.21) warns that if you simply “knock out” your questions then the interview that you conduct may be “disastrous” because the data will be poor and perhaps even “impossible to analyse”.



Mark
The research interview [electronic resource]
Gillham, Bill .
2000
View this electronic resource: <http://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781441160232>

The *emergent* character of ‘interview’ questions cannot be emphasized too strongly. The way to construct a disastrous interview or questionnaire is just to sit down and knock out a set of questions off the top of your head. As anyone with experience in higher education will testify, this is all too often how it is done by students at many levels. The resulting data are not only poor but often virtually impossible to analyse.

If you don't plan your interview questions carefully, then the data you get from the interview will be of poor quality. Planning good interviews can be a slow and difficult process. However, the data you get from a good interview will help you to answer your research questions. It is a good idea to think of the interview planning process as an investment that will more than pay back the effort you put in. This will be reflected in the overall quality of the dissertation and the grade you are awarded by your tutor.

Task: Think about your interview questions. Do you need to give more attention to their design and development? Look at Gillham's (2000) E-book and find out how to develop good quality questions for your interviews.

It will help your planning and preparation if you think about the interview in stages. Robson and McCartan (2016, p.290) suggest a sequence of five different sections:



<input type="checkbox"/> Mark	Real world research [electronic resource] : a resource for users of social research methods in applied settings <i>Fourth edition.</i>
No Cover Available	Robson, Colin, author. McCartan, Kieran, 1980-2016 View this electronic resource: https://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?

The sequence of questions

A commonly used sequence is as follows:

1. *Introduction.* Interviewer introduces herself, explains purpose of the interview, assures of confidentiality, asks permission to tape and/or make notes.
2. *'Warm-up'.* Easy, non-threatening questions at the beginning to settle down both of you.
3. *Main body of interview.* Covering the main purpose of the interview in what the interviewer considers to be a logical progression. In semi-structured interviewing, this order can be varied, capitalizing on the responses made (ensure 'missed' topics are returned to unless this seems inappropriate or unnecessary. Any 'risky' questions should be relatively late in the sequence so that, if the interviewee refuses to continue, less information is lost.
4. *'Cool-off'.* Usually a few straightforward questions at the end to defuse any tension that might have built up.
5. *Closure.* Thank you and goodbye. The 'hand on the door' phenomenon, sometimes found at the end of counselling sessions, is also common in interviewing. Interviewees may, when the recorder is switched off or the notebook put away, come out with a lot of interesting material. There are various possible ways of dealing with this (switch on again, reopen the notebook, forget about it) but in any case you should be consistent, *and* note how you dealt with it.

There are many things that can go wrong in an interview. You need to be prepared so that everything goes as well as possible. Carey (2013, pp.131-132) describes some of the “key skills” that you will need as a researcher if your interview process is to go successfully.



Mark

 **The social work dissertation [electronic resource] : using small-scale qualitative methodology *Second edition.***
Carey, Malcolm, author.
2013
url=<http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9780335247608&uid=^u>

Core interview skills: approach and rapport

At first glance, any interview process may appear to be relatively straightforward. However, interviewing participants is often much more complex and potentially hazardous, especially if prior planning and careful consideration are not undertaken. Denscombe (2007: 124–8) has provided a useful overview of some of the key skills to apply during any qualitative research interview process. They include a need for the following factors.

132 THE SOCIAL WORK DISSERTATION

Be attentive throughout

Listen carefully to what is being said and try to minimize potential distractions (such as noise levels, possible interruptions, etc.). Try to also remain in the background and be careful about when to ask questions, and avoid unnecessary ‘chatter’ outside of any formal interview questions.

Remain sensitive to the feelings of the informant

You may not necessarily agree with the viewpoints being expressed but it is distracting if you emphasize any disapproval, such as with explicit gestures or noises. Try to manage and restrain your body language and not interrupt when a speaker is making a point.

Tolerate silences

Bear in mind that silences do not always mean that an interview has stalled but may instead allow the participant time to contemplate a question or possible response. Try not to be too eager to break silences – potentially this could disturb or even sabotage a good rapport!

Be adept at using prompts

Although silences can be productive, sometimes prompts are necessary to move an interview along. Use your instinct and discretion. Also subtle tactics such as repeating a question or offering some examples from your own interpretation of an answer may help, especially if a participant’s answer is unclear or if a response is unsatisfactory.

Use probes if appropriate

Again, if an answer is unclear or too brief, then the use of a subtle probe may

When you plan your interviews, be sure to describe how you did this in the Methodology section of your dissertation and refer to the sources you used. For example, you can use and refer to the E-books mentioned in this information sheet. This will show the person marking your dissertation that you used good quality research methods literature to develop your questions for the interviews and to sharpen your interviewing technique.

Taking part in an interview can be hard work, both for you and for your interviewee. You should do everything you can to make it go well, and to wind it down successfully at the end. Wengraf (2001, p.205) gives some advice on how to do this, and how to keep in contact with your interviewee afterwards if necessary.



Mark

Qualitative research interviewing [electronic resource] : biographic narrative and semi-structured methods

Wengraf, Tom.
2001

View this electronic resource: <https://ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?>

A small image of the book cover for 'Qualitative Research Interviewing' by Tom Wengraf, showing a green and black design.

ENDING THE FORMAL INTERVIEW WELL: THE LAST FIVE MINUTES AND THE REMINDER OF 'POST-INTERVIEW' ARRANGEMENTS

The interview can be a tiring experience for both parties. You need to ensure that the interview 'ends well'. You should always invite the informant to say anything else that he or she thinks might be relevant to the topic or the interview process that has not yet been mentioned: if you give enough time to this, you may find a whole new area of information emerging quite at the end.

You should always confirm that you can be contacted afterwards as per your 'contact sheet' and just confirm that the informant might be asked if they would consider giving a short (phone or face-to-face) follow-up interview in case material comes up in the transcript which isn't quite clear. Invite the informant to send you any written comments or make contact by phone if they think later of any points they would like to make.

Make sure that the informant is aware of your appreciation of the time and energy they have already committed to your research by agreeing to and undertaking the interview.

Task:

Think about the questions you want to ask your interviewees. Which ones are relatively easy, or relatively risky? Have you prepared any cool-down questions to help manage any possible tension in your interview? Look at the Robson and McCartan (2016) E-book to find out more about how to manage the stages of your interview and how to keep on good terms with your interviewee.

Have you got any tactics planned for how to "remain in the background" and get the most out of your interviewee? How will you use silence effectively? Look at Carey's (2013) E-book to find out more about how to plan and conduct your interviews successfully. Have you planned the closing stage of your interview? What options do you want to keep open after the interview? Look at Wengraf's (2001) E-book to find out more about how to manage this stage successfully.

You can see that Carey (2013, pp.131) cites a useful book by Denscombe (2007). Find the details of this book yourself in the Bibliography section of Carey's book and look up the latest edition of Denscombe using the university's LIBRARY CATALOGUE. See what advice Denscombe gives on interviewing and on other aspects of research.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

- This section signposts you to library resources that will help you to present and discuss your research findings.
- Read the information below and do the tasks. Use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find and read more from the E-books mentioned.
- Then use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to find other resources relating to your own particular research interests and subject area.

The findings section of your dissertation is where you present to your reader your analysis of your data. Some dissertations combine the presentation of the findings with the discussion of the findings. For example, Burnett (2009, p.205) suggests grouping 'data / findings / discussion' in the same chapter and points to some of the challenges involved.



<input type="checkbox"/> Mark	Doing your social science dissertation [electronic resource]
	Burnett, Judith. 2009 url= https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9781446202432&uid=^u

This chapter often causes some of the greatest problems, due to the exciting but daunting issue of being faced with a desk or PC full of data. Work through your data systematically, and **be both reasoned and creative with the categories of meanings that you produce in the results...You need to bring forward issues arising from the methodology, for example, your place in the research process and how this might have shaped interaction or the interpretations which you make...**

However, some people prefer using two different dissertation chapters, one for presenting their findings and a separate chapter for their discussion of those findings. You might want to talk to your supervisor about these options before making a decision on which format you should choose. Whichever format you decide on, you need to be very clear about the difference between what exactly is meant by 'findings' and what is meant by 'discussion'. Smith, Todd and Waldman (2009, p.135) explain the difference between the two as follows:



Mark



Doing your undergraduate social science dissertation [electronic resource]
Smith, Karen (Education consultant)
Todd, Malcolm J.
2009
[url=https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9780203881262&uid=^u](https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9780203881262&uid=^u)

Many students confuse findings with discussion, and it is important to keep them separate, at least in your mind. In the findings section, you are presenting what you have found in your research and what you interpret those findings to mean. The discussion section is where you link your data analysis back to literature you introduced in your literature review. Some dissertation guidance will put the two together in one chapter, others will ask for separate chapters. Check what is required at your university.

Whichever format you choose, one chapter or two, the presentation of your findings is very important. You need to present clearly the outcome of your data analysis and explain to your reader what you have discovered. You will need to make decisions about what exactly are your key findings and how much detail to provide. You will need to be selective and think carefully about keeping to an appropriate word limit for this section. Carey (2013, p.198) gives the following advice:



Mark



The social work dissertation [electronic resource] : using small-scale qualitative methodology *Second edition.*
Carey, Malcolm, author.
2013
[uri=http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9780335247608&uid=^u](http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9780335247608&uid=^u)

It is important to be detailed but succinct and also selective about what it is that will be admitted and omitted **in the findings chapter. Only material that connects directly with either the research aims or objectives should be included.** Some findings can be condensed or discussed less explicitly to make more space for supplementary findings if they have a function regarding the overall study. Despite these intentions, you will still need to **be careful not to cram too much information into this chapter** as an avalanche of findings may confuse or even confound the reader. Try to decide what takes priority and always think carefully about what will be included and how this links to your principal research ambitions.

The findings that result from your data analysis should be presented clearly, in a way that your reader will see as credible and trustworthy. Smith, Todd and Waldman (2009, p.135) emphasise the importance of using logic and evidence to support your argument:

In your findings section, it is important that you **present your results in a logical and convincing manner**. If your results are presented in a confusing way, the reader will not follow your argument and may not trust your conclusions. ...When it comes to qualitative data, there are no fixed rules about the best way to present qualitative data...you need to **choose extracts from your data that evidence the arguments you are making in your data analysis**. These can be, for example, quotes from your interviews or focus groups or notes or photographs from your observations. **Quotes and other raw data will bring your analysis to life and will make your findings more credible**...you should clearly label your data extracts. For interview data, you may choose to give your interviewees pseudonyms (made-up names) or you might decide to number the interviews. You should set your quotes apart from the rest of the text by indenting them.

You must be careful that you do not stray into discussion when you are presenting the results of your data analysis. For example, in Hartas (2010), Pritchard warns against considering the implications of your findings at this stage or bringing in research done by others; using relevant subheadings is recommended to maintain focus (pp.614-615):



Mark **Educational research and inquiry [electronic resource] : qualitative and quantitative approaches**
Hartas, Dimitra, 1966-
2010
url=<http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckt&isbn=9781474243827&uid=^u>

Results

It is important that in this section you **do nothing more than present your results**. It is not the place for any consideration of the implications of your work or for consideration of the work of others. **The results section is not the place for comment or discussion** either...What you present must be clear and unambiguous and this will not be possible unless you clearly describe and explain the presentation of your results...When setting out your results section **the use of subheadings which relate to specific research objectives or to specific items from the methods section may well be useful**. This technique for breaking up text with useful and meaningful subheadings is a good way of allowing easy access to your work for the reader and you should consider its use throughout.

The warning provided above by Pritchard (2010) is similar to that given by White and Rayner (2014, pp.163-164). They also stress the importance of explaining to your reader how you interpreted the data to arrive at your results. This process needs to be explained in a way that is transparent and credible, so that your findings are as trustworthy as possible:



Mark

No Cover Available

Dissertation skills for business and management students [electronic resource] *Second edition.*
White, Brian, author.
Rayner, Stephen,
2014
View this electronic resource: <http://login.ezproxy.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781473708136>

Results

Results can range from transcriptions of interviews to tables of raw data. **This section only describes the results obtained. Refrain from explaining what they mean.** This comes in the next section. It is very easy to comment on the results when describing them, but this can be confusing for the reader. In this section you would **include a full analysis of how you interpreted the data and give details of any calculations.** If you have collected data in a number of different ways, keep each one separate. In this section you can include tables and figures to summarize your quantitative results, and describe the trends and concepts identified from qualitative analysis. With certain quantitative investigations you may have collected vast amounts of data. In these situations summarize the data with the use of tables and only include the summaries in the main dissertation. **The original data can either be included in an appendix or can be submitted as a separate file.** It might be a good idea to discuss this with your dissertation supervisor.

Your decisions about how exactly to display the results of your data analysis will depend a lot on the nature of the data itself. In the excerpt below, Mason (2014, pp.208-209) outlines some of the issues to consider and the challenges that may be involved:



Mark

Researching tourism, leisure and hospitality for your dissertation [electronic resource]
Mason, Peter, 1951- author.
2014
[url=https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckett&isbn=978190899924&uid=^u](https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=LeedsBeckett&isbn=978190899924&uid=^u)

If you have used a qualitative approach, the way in which you display your results will depend very much on the data you have collected. Display of data may require little more than a summary of the key points made by respondents and the use of some 'verbatim' to illustrate this. However, some results in qualitative research, such as demographic data, can be displayed in tables, charts or graphs. Depending on the nature of your qualitative research, even more so than in the case of quantitative research, it may not be that easy to separate the results from the discussion of the results. This will be particularly the case if you used, for example, emergent research (see Cresswell, 2009). This form of qualitative research is where you modify your techniques and/or questions on the basis of results and findings from an earlier stage of research. If this is the case then it is very likely that you will need to discuss why you made the changes – this will inevitably involve discussion, and not just presentation of the results from the earlier stage. However, as with the statement above concerning quantitative research, if you do combine the results with discussion of results in one chapter, you should explain carefully why you are doing this.

Once you have finished presenting your data analysis and results, Pritchard (in Hartas, 2010) explains how **moving from your findings to your discussion section** will involve engaging critically with those findings (p.615). There is much to consider and include in this process:

The discussion section of a dissertation is the crucially important step that must be taken from the presentation of results to a critical engagement with them. There has been a good deal written about all aspects of the process of research, but as far as the final written product is concerned, more has been written about the discussion of results than about any other part of the process. The discussion section can be one of the most difficult to write. It involves more than reporting; it involves a high level of critical thinking, and this needs to be translated into text in a way that meets the requirements of the project as a whole. The research question must be to the fore, and all of the results reported earlier must be considered. Probably the most important pitfall to avoid in a discussion section is simply restating the results. Discussion implies a good deal more than any sort of restating what has gone before. The results should be referred to, but it is your job to add a good deal more to them in terms of analysis and development of ideas and argument. Boote and Beile (2005) tell us that we have to synthesize results in a way that permits a new perspective to be developed and this requires us to be involved in making links, comparisons and contrasts, and to juxtapose the results with the findings of others. Hart (1999) encourages us to provide a new perspective of the situation under investigation by considering the results in the context of the literature, by referring back to both the literature review and the detailed results. It is also possible that you may need to consider methodological matters as well, and discuss the suitability of what you have done in relation to what you have discovered.

As explained by White and Rayner (2014, p.164), your discussion section involves an interpretation of your results in relation to the aims and objectives of your research. This must include consideration of the literature previously reviewed, the theory you have used, your methodology and data collection techniques.

Discussion (interpretation of the results)

In this section you answer a number of questions. You **interpret what your research findings mean and whether they agree with the aims and objectives** set out in your proposal. You **relate your work back to the literature review** and see how it fits in with all the published work. **How does it compare with established theories and ideas?** Are there similarities and differences and why? If you have taken a grounded theory approach, how has the theory developed? Are there any generalizations you can make? You also need to **include in the discussion an account of the appropriateness of your methodology and data collection techniques**, and whether in hindsight they were the most suitable. The discussion is a very important section of the dissertation, and should **also demonstrate how your research relates to the wider context of the subject**...It is very easy when writing the discussion to include general points that, although important, do not arise from your work. **You must base your writing in this section on the work you have done.**

In their advice above, White and Rayner (2014) warn against your discussion including points that do not strictly relate to the research that you have done. This is important to remember. You need to check your writing to make sure that you are not drifting into speculation that does not relate to your research findings. It can be easy to drift in this way and it is a common feature of student dissertations. Such drifting will lower the quality of your discussion, as described by Pritchard (in Hartas, 2010, pp.615-616):

One further possible pitfall is including speculation, which goes beyond the evidence which arises from the research undertaken. **The discussion must be based fully on the results, their significance and their relationship to previous work.** A survey reported by Onwuegbuzie and Daniel (2005) on the most commonly criticized aspects of discussion in research writing submitted for publication found that:

- the discussion was too brief
- there was repetition of material from the results section
- there were too many cases of over-generalization (going beyond the data)

With these three points in mind and with a focus on a thorough critical treatment of the results, the likelihood is that you will write a good discussion section.

Look at published research articles to get ideas about how to write-up your own discussion section, as recommended by Smith, Todd and Waldman (2009, pp.136-137):

Traditionally, the discussion links findings to the literature presented in the literature review. The discussion section is the place where you show the significance of your findings and highlight what has been achieved when compared to the original aims. There are arguments for extending the coverage of literature in this section but only in exceptional circumstances, such as when you have obtained completely different results to what you expected. The discussion should be an opportunity to raise the different voices of interest in the research question and to explore the findings in the light of the literature and different perspectives within it.

In a piece of small-scale research, Swales and Feak (2004: 270–272) identified the following different ways to open the discussion section:

- citing the main results;
- discussing the literature;
- offering general conclusions;
- reminding the reader about the original purpose;
- highlighting the special importance of the research site;
- focusing on the methodology;
- discussing the limitations of the research.

Look at some discussion section openings in articles that relate to your topic area. Doing this will give you a sense of what happens in your field. When you write your own discussion section, you can use the same opening strategy.

Task: Go to the LIBRARY CATALOGUE, find some of the E-books mentioned above and read more about how to plan your Findings and Discussion sections. You can also cite these E-books in your dissertation write-up, to show that you have used the literature on 'doing research' to inform the design and reporting of your own research project.

There are many other useful E-books that will help you with your dissertation. Use the LIBRARY CATALOGUE to search for E-books that relate to your subject area and to your specific research topic.

Look at previous student dissertations to see how they have presented their findings and structured their discussion. Ask your supervisor for advice.



LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY

Contact Details

Supportworkerservice@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

Disabilityadvice@leedsbeckett.ac.uk