Research: its building blocks

The Research Process

Regardless of type of research activity, e.g., article, project, thematic report, 'research' is a process. It calls for *thinking* time, i.e., the 'what', the 'why' the 'how'. The thinking then becomes operational by *organising* thoughts and by *writing* them down. This process-oriented approach enables a more satisfying use of research time.

Agenda

Identifying

Planning

Organising

Searching/selecting

Stopping

Identifying (topic)

Take time to know what you want to do in relation to assignment.

Brainstorm possibilities.

Narrow-down topic until it is operational.

Identify key words, concepts, thinkers, events.

Create own hypothesis or research question.

Planning

Take time to develop a guiding plan or strategy.

Identify information type needed to get to where you want to go.

Figure out how much information is actually need.

Identify location where your information can be found.

Calculate time allowance for the research.

Organising

- Take time to find /synthesise / format / write
- Keep a research diary or notebook
    - To respond to what your read, hear, think
    - To help your argumentation; clarify your own position; questions arising
- Store key terms searched for; data sources; list new terms, potential new directions, resources
- Gather <u>all</u> citation information
- Email information to yourself and put it all in 1 folder (bibliography, full articles, abstracts…)
- Consider graphic organisers / **mind maps** (organising information through illustrations)
- If you did not organise while searching – do it before writing!!!!
    - Synthesise = make a whole out of bits + pieces. Gather information from all sources in a way that makes sense *to you*. Skim through notes; stop for new insights/gaps. Re-read hypothesis / research question for changes/ revision.
- Put (loose) ideas down on paper as soon as possible for clarification, for gaps…

Searching/selecting

- Take time to identify type of information needed, locate it, get access to it, e.g., primary and secondary sources

- Develop a search log or data sheet

- Use different sources (books, articles, websites, statistics, policy documents) directly reflecting your research question

- One source leads to another…*and another*

- Make copies of sources so you can write on them: highlight; make notes in the margins

- Get a clear idea of where different authors stand
    - Take time to analyse the argument of your source; note the author's position; main ideas used to support the argument made; note the supporting evidence provided
- Valid and reliable sources (i.e., authority, accuracy, relevance, bias, time of publication)

Stopping

Data collection $\Rightarrow$ read (raw) material $\Rightarrow$ organise it $\Rightarrow$ written it down logically and cohesively.

STOP after considering
- length of your eventual product
- extent to which what is gathered supports the thesis
- clarity of focus
- outstanding questions
- Presentation of different perspectives in sources used
- Would any other addition (a chart, a reference, an image) improve the research <u>significantly</u>?

Resources

http://www.mhs.vic.edu.au/home/library/infoproc/notemk.htm
http://karn.ohiolink.edu/~sg-ysu/work.html
http://graphic.org
http://libweb.sonoma.edu/assistance/research/default.html