



Starting Research for your Dissertation: video tutorial

<http://www.screencast.com/t/ULSvuvBN>

Transcript

Introduction: Welcome to this tutorial on Starting Your Research for your Dissertation from the University of Reading Study Advice team. The tutorial is designed for you to go through at your own pace and you can pause it at any time.

Slide 1: Starting a research project is exciting but can be overwhelming as there are so many possible routes you could go down – it just tends to make your head spin.

Slide 2: But there are just 3 main questions you need to ask to make getting started manageable:

- First, what do you know already about your research question or topic?
- Then, what do you need to find out about your question or topic?
- And finally where can you find this out?

Slide 3: Brainstorm or note down what you know already about your topic – this may be from previous assignments you’ve done or lectures that you’ve had, it may be from hunches or assumptions you have about the topic that you want to test out with further reading, or it might be from your wider knowledge or interest in the area, from news stories, or topical issues that you’ve seen. Write what you know down on paper as it helps to have it recorded, and you will probably see that you know more than you think, even though you are just starting out.

Slide 4: Once you’ve mapped out what you know, you can start to identify the gaps in your knowledge and what you need to find out in order to fill these gaps. A good strategy is to write down what you need to find out in the form of questions, so for example instead of saying I need to find out more about monkey social status and bananas, phrasing it as a question, so: ‘What does previous research say about how the social status of monkeys affects their ability to get bananas within their group?’ immediately forces you to be more specific and to start defining exactly what you want to investigate. If you prefer focusing on a single detailed aspect of a topic, start with one article and use

bibliographies to build up. If you prefer to see an overview first, start with a general text like an encyclopaedia entry first and then narrow down your focus.

Slide 5: Now you have listed what you need to research, ask yourself where you might find this information out. There are many sources available here at Reading, but as a dissertation involves exploring a topic more deeply, it is likely you will need to go beyond the University library – possibly to other libraries, archives, or private collections. A good place to start is to use Summon to find the journal articles and book chapters that we have available here at Reading. But don't just stop there – it is also important to use the databases for your subject to find a broader range of sources. You may be able to get hold of sources outside Reading through interlibrary loan or by visiting another library – your liaison librarian can help advise you on this. Getting access to sources may take some time, some travelling, or permissions, so when you're planning your dissertation, think ahead to allow enough time for this. Also time can fly when you're in the exciting stage of scoping and exploring your topic, so it's a good idea to set a deadline for moving on from the initial research stage to starting to do more planning and writing – you can always come back to researching to fill any gaps later. For more on planning your dissertation see our tutorial on 'Managing Time for your Dissertation' in this series.

Slide 6: One final tip is keep track of your sources from the very beginning. You don't want to be in that situation of having the perfect quotation but no idea where it came from, forcing you to do a u-turn and not be able to use it. Always keep good references and records from the start and you will have a good map of your dissertation journey – showing what you found out and where you found this out.