



A GUIDE  
FOR STUDENTS  
IN EDUCATION  
& APPLIED  
SOCIAL SCIENCES

How to do Your  
**Research  
Project**

**Gary Thomas**



# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xiv</i>
<b>1 Your introduction: starting points</b>	<b>1</b>
Question: Where do I begin? Answer: Begin at the beginning, with an introduction	2
Thinking of a research idea	3
Purposes of research	3
Kinds of question	5
Kinds of question – and some nutshell-sized studies and their implications	7
Coming up with a question	12
Can I have more than one question?	13
Is it feasible? Problems with research questions	13
Prima facie questions	14
Kinds of evidence and kinds of answer	16
A title	20
What research is – and what it isn't	21
Overview	21
Further reading	22
<b>2 Project management</b>	<b>23</b>
Drawing a timeline	25
Just look at those fingernails! Time management	26
Overview	29
Further reading	29
<b>3 The literature review</b>	<b>30</b>
Primary and secondary sources	31
Quality of sources	35
Your literature review should tell a story – it should not be a list	36
Thinking around your question: drawing a storyboard	37
Critical awareness: be your own Jeremy Paxman	41
Click 'Search': finding information	44
Hints on searching – separating the wheat from the chaff	52
Understanding how sources are cited: the Harvard referencing system	54

Taking notes and quotes	56
Overview	59
Further reading	59
<b>4 Decide on your question – again</b>	<b>60</b>
Seeing the wood for the trees	60
From storyboard to storyline	61
Theory	65
Overview	68
<b>5 Deciding on an approach: methodology and research design</b>	<b>69</b>
Research design	70
Research approach	71
Frameworks for thinking about the social world – paradigms	72
Paradigms and research approach	77
Thinking critically – how the ‘ologies’ help	83
From purposes to questions to approaches to data gathering	90
Overview	95
Further reading	97
<b>6 The design frame</b>	<b>99</b>
Some general issues in design	101
Sampling	102
Variables	105
Reliability	105
Validity	106
Generalisation and generalisability	108
Positionality	109
Triangulation	111
The design frames	112
Action research	112
Case study	115
Ethnography	118
Evaluation	122
Experiment	124
Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies – and surveys	129
Comparative study	136
Can I mix design frames and methods?	140
Postmodernism	141
Overview	143
Further reading	144

<b>7 Practical matters</b>	<b>146</b>
Ethics	146
Access	154
Overview	154
Further reading	156
<b>8 The right tools for the job: data gathering</b>	<b>157</b>
Tools and methods	157
Be creative	159
Data-gathering tools – mainly for use with words	160
Interviews	160
Accounts	166
Diaries	166
Group interviews and focus groups	169
Document interrogation	170
Data-gathering tools – for use with words and/or numbers	173
Questionnaires	173
Observation	183
Data-gathering tools – mainly for use with numbers	189
Measurements and tests	190
Official statistics	191
Overview	195
Further reading	195
<b>9 How to analyse the information you gather</b>	<b>197</b>
Analysing words	197
Constant comparative method	198
Network analysis	198
Construct mapping and Theme mapping	200
Grounded theory	202
Thick description	202
Discourse and content analysis	205
Computers and verbal data analysis	207
Sociograms	208
Analysing numbers	210
Eyeballing	212
Using Excel to do your data analysis	212
Statistics that describe	213
Statistics that help you understand a relationship between two variables	218
Statistics that help you to deduce (or infer)	220
Discussing your analysis	225

Drawing out 'theory'	228
Overview	233
Further reading	233
<b>10 Concluding</b>	<b>235</b>
Writing a conclusion	236
Writing an abstract	237
General points about writing and presentation	238
Coda	242
Further reading	242
Appendix	244
References	245
Index	249