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## Process Analysis Task 2: Identifying a research topic and refining this into a feasible research question.



This is a vital part of the research process – it is really about identifying something specific that you are wanting to find out and being clear why this is actually worth exploring. It is important to note that identifying such a question depends on knowing to some extent, but not at world-expert level, what is already known about the field from which a topic is drawn, and what is not known. This you can find out from relevant books, published research and possibly from non text sources within the area that you are investigating.

In order to make your task easier you will limit your search for a research question to those sources that are available to you on this module. Notice that, until you have a question, your reading in the literature will be a kind of overview, which will focus on possible areas of interest or enquiry, and on mastering general concepts. Once you have a question, you will return to the literature, of course, with specific learning needs in mind, which will focus and direct your reading in depth, as required by the question.

You should distinguish carefully between a **research field or area** (as Bryman calls it), and a **research topic or question**. A research question is specific; for example “What effect does caffeine have on students’ ability to remember a word list?” That is a specific question. It could be located in a research field titled “The impact of stimulants on human performance.” Research fields can contain hundreds of valid questions, many of which may yet have to be articulated.

Before starting this task you should consult the following the following text(s):

Bryman, A. 2001 *Social Research Methods*. Oxford, OUP. Read Chapter 25 and Chapter 2.

You may also find it helpful to refer to Robson, C. 1993 *Real world research*. Oxford, Blackwell. The summary box on p 27 and what follows provides you with an useful overview.

In addition you may wish to consult one of the general research methods texts in the library – some of these are listed in Resources section of the learning environment - see [research methods texts](#). Remember that at level 3 you are expected to demonstrate independence in your study and to explore sources beyond the listed core texts.

When you have familiarised yourself with the issues of refining a topic and expressing it in the form of a question, select one of the research papers that you have read which you feel may have some useful ideas for a research topic for your group – a question for which you might be able to obtain a sound answer. You should guide your search by the following considerations:

- Is it **feasible** for us? For example in respect of:
  - Time available for the study
  - Equipment required
  - The number of people who would need to participate
  - The expertise that we have available
- Is it **worthwhile**? Would others be interested in the answer, and perhaps find it useful?
- Will there be any problems in relation to ethical issues?

As you do this, record, briefly again on a split page, how you tackled this task against the following headings:

- Possible research topic
- Possible research question based on this topic
- Initial analysis of feasibility of question

Identify one or two possible research questions, summarise briefly why you feel these might be useful questions and post these on the group Discussion board so that these can be used in the group discussion in the next meeting.

*Note that minutes of meeting are to be posted on group Discussion board – this should include a combined list of possible research questions – on which the tutor will comment as relevant*

Following the meeting review the research questions proposed by the group and retained as possible questions. Choose one of these to explore further.

## Process Analysis

While you are engaged in this task, write and send to your commenter a 300 - 400 word account in which you think through the answers to one or more of these questions, whose answers are likely to be of immediate use to you:

- How am I tackling identifying a research topic and refining this into a research question?
- What is working well in this process for me, and why?
- What is problematic for me, and why? How might I overcome that problem?

- What am I learning from this that I can use next time I have to identify a research topic and refine it into a research question (such as next semester in the project)?
- Are there any weaknesses emerging from this review which should receive attention from us, here and now, in respect of our tentatively chosen question?

Submit this process analysis to your commenter by the date set out in Course Calendar