

Clip 1: Research questions

So I'm going to consider what the main steps involved in developing research questions are. Now there are a number of ways of generating research topics and developing research questions and they can come from various places. So, for instance, it may be something that's of personal interest to yourself, so something that's puzzled you in your everyday life or something you want to know a bit more of. So, for instance, you may have an interest related to football and gender (who is going to football matches) or indeed it may be another hobby such as skateboarding and issues around skateboarding culture.

So there are many things that may be related to your everyday life that could be relevant to study. Sometimes projects might develop from people's individual experience, so for instance it may be that they've had some employment in a particular area. So it may be that someone had been a social worker or worked with juvenile offenders or indeed worked for an international organisation dealing with sexual exploitation of children for instance and, therefore, go on to do research about it. So it may be those kind of experiences or indeed it may be that someone has been a service user and want to explore those challenges in relation to social sciences.

Alternatively, research might be commissioned. Now this is unlikely in relation to a student project. So for instance at the University of Sheffield, where I work, a number of academics have been commissioned to do work for particular organisations such as the EU or indeed developing social work in different countries and I've been involved in doing research for Axa wealth, Prudential, The Royal Institute for British Architects for instance, all of which has been commissioned.

For students, however, actually searching for literature in relation to modules can be a really useful way of deciding what topic to undertake. It may be that you are doing a particular module and find that there is not very much about it and think that this is a very interesting way of moving forward. So for instances if you are doing a module about aging you may find that there is very little on depression in older people or the role of grandparents in providing care and think 'Ok, that's something I want to look into the literature in a bit more detail and see what's actually out there. Would this make an interesting topic?'

Alternatively it may be that you've come across a study that's already been undertaken and you want to adapt it or develop it; so I've supervised dissertation on things like 'The role of the modern housewife' so developing on someone like [...] work on a housewife.

So there's lots of different ways of generating ideas for research projects. Once you start to have those initial thoughts and ideas, it's then about establishing whether this really is an important topic to look at in depth has it already been covered in lots of detail and also is it something that's currently in the media. That might be another way that generates discussion or ideas for topics. So, you then need to engage with the literature, use your literature research skills developed in order to narrow down and develop specific research questions which then assist you in writing your proposal and moving forward to your dissertation or project.