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| This course focuses on writing an academic research report and giving an oral presentation on your research topic. The best way to learn these skills is by actually conducting a small-scale research project, writing up the results, and then presenting your research in an oral presentation. Before we learn about the necessary writing and presentation skills, we need to consider the nature of doing research. |

**Reflection: What is research?**

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| "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."  Isaac Newton, 1676 |

**Task 1: Discussion**

During this course, you will conduct a small-scale research project. Before you begin your project, think about your previous experience and/or knowledge about research. Discuss the following questions in pairs or in a group.

1. What is research? (Can you summarize your ideas in a one-sentence definition?)
2. Why is research important?
3. Do you think university students should conduct their own research, or just be able to understand the research of others? Why?
4. Why is it important to share research findings with others? How is this sharing usually done?

**Task 2: The Research Process**

With your group or partner, brainstorm the stages that are necessary for conducting research. What does a researcher need to do to begin a research project? What other stages are necessary? What are the final stages of the research process?

Create a flowchart to illustrate the research process in the box below.

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| Flowchart of the research process |

When you are finished, share your flowchart with other groups, and compare your flowchart to the one on the following page.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Flowchart of the Research Process** | | | | |  |  |
|  | A  Define the research problem |  | **B**  Review previous studies related to the topic |  | **C**  Formulate research questions and/or hypotheses |  | **D**  Design the research |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **G**  Interpret and report |  | **F**  Analyze the data |  | **E**  Collect data |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Choosing a Research Topic**

The theme of your research project should be “***the life of university students in Hong Kong***.” You will work in a group of three (or possibly in a pair) and collect data from other students through **both** questionnaires **and** interviews. Within this theme, you have the freedom and flexibility to choose your own topic. However, your topic should also meet the following criteria:

1. **Meaningful**. You should choose a topic that is important **to you**. Do not choose a topic just because you think it will be easy, or because you think your teacher will like it. Choose a topic that you find interesting and you generally want to learn more about.
2. **Do-able**. Remember that you will collect questionnaire and interview data from other students, and thus, you should choose a topic on which these students (your subjects) are able to provide you with the relevant information. (**NOTE:** **Your topic should be one which can be discussed in depth through interviews, not one which simply leads to short, factual answers.**)

**Task 3: Possible Topics**

Listed below are four examples of possible topics for your research project. Work in a group or with a partner to brainstorm additional possible topics. You do not need to decide on your topic yet, but be ready to share your possible topics with the rest of the class (and listen to the other groups so you can get additional ideas for your topic).

* university students’ attitudes towards premarital sex
* adjustment problems encountered by first year university students
* university students’ Internet usage
* university students’ uses and abuses of credit cards

**Narrowing your Focus**



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| A good research topic addresses a **specific question or problem**. |

It is very typical for students to set off on a research topic, only to discover that the topic they have chosen is too broad. If you are lucky, you will find out before you conduct too much research, because otherwise much of the research you carry out in the beginning will be useless once you finally do narrow your topic.

A good research project must be narrowed down in order to be meaningful and manageable. If your topic can be summed up in one, two or three words, like *smoking*, *school cheating*, *exercise*, *democracy in Hong Kong*, or *Korean pop culture*, then it is probably **too broad**. One way to narrow down your topic is to apply a few of the old familiar question words, like *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, *how*, *how much*, *how often*. Let’s choose the broad topic of *reading habits* as an example. This is too broad to count as a topic yet, so you need to consider what exactly you want to find out about reading habits:

**Broad topic: *Reading Habits***

* Who
  + Who reads the most? (1st year students? Final year students? Local? Exchange? Males? Females?)
  + Who reads the least?
* What
  + What kinds of texts are students required to read?
  + What kinds of texts do students find most/least enjoyable to read?
  + What difficulties do students face when reading English texts?
  + What strategies do students use when reading in English?
* Where
  + Where do students prefer to read? (Library? At home?)
* When
  + When do students prefer to read?
* Why
  + Why do students read English texts?
* How
  + How much time do students spend reading Chinese texts?
  + How can students be encouraged to read more?

By considering these wh- questions, a student might come up with a more specific topic, expressed in the following research questions:

1. How much time do Hong Kong students spend reading academic and non-academic texts in Chinese and in English?
2. What difficulties do HK students face when reading English texts?
3. What strategies do HK students use to overcome these difficulties?

These specific questions meet the two criteria mentioned above. The project is now ***meaningful*** because the results might be useful to other students trying to improve their reading skills and relevant to English teachers who are concerned about students’ reading skills. It is also ***do-able*** in the context of the project for this course, because the best way to find out these answers is by using questionnaires and interviews to ask students about their reading habits.

**Task 4: Zooming In**

Work in a group or with a partner and choose two or three of the broad topics that you brainstormed in Task 3. Then, narrow the focus of each of these topics so that it is both manageable and do-able. Write down your suggested topics in terms of specific research questions in the box below. Be ready to share your ideas with the rest of the class.

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| Broad Topic #1 : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Specific research questions:  Broad Topic #2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Specific research questions:  Broad Topic #3: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Specific research questions: |

After you have identified a suitable, and narrow, reach topic, what would be the next stage in the research process? Why is this next stage necessary?

**Academic Research Reports**

An academic research report is a paper written by an investigator to describe a research study. Such a report often has a standard format for structuring the information (although, of course, there may also be differences among reports). There are basically four parts to an academic research report as shown below:

|  |
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| **Introduction** |
| **Methods** |
| **Results** |
| **Discussion** |

Each of these major sections of a report can also have sub-sections. For example, the *Methods* section will often contain the sub-sections of *Participants*, *Materials*, *Procedures*, and *Data Analysis*.

**Task 5: Identifying Parts of a Research Report**

Your teacher will give you the first draft of a research report on the reading habits of university students. However, the draft is cut up. Work with a group or partner to put all the pieces in the correct order.

When you are finished, check your answers with the complete draft of the report in EAP2 - Unit 01 – Appendix – Student Reading Habits.

**Task 6: Extending your Learning Independently**

Find an academic research report related to your major or related to a course you are taking this semester. What differences and similarities do you notice between the report you found and the report on reading habits?

Your teacher may ask you to share what you discovered in the next lesson.

**Independent Learning**

There is no fixed number of hours that you are required to complete for your independent leaning this semester.

However, you will need to work independently to learn and practice a variety of skills and to acquire a range of knowledge. The skills and information you acquire will help you successfully complete your research project (and also help you with other university courses and your career upon graduating). **At a minimum**, you will need to do the following independently:

* Read widely about your chosen topic and summarize/paraphrase the information you find
* Learn basic and advanced features of MSWord (including, but not limited to: setting page margins, line spacing, paragraph spacing, fonts, hanging indents, page numbers; using headers and footers; using tables; using spell-check and grammar-check)
* Learn to use RefWorks (or similar software) to manage and generate your reference list.
* Learn to use Google Docs to create and administer your questionnaire
* Learn PowerPoint to create your presentation slides
* Learn Excel (or similar spreadsheet program) to analyze your data using simple statistics
* Learn basic research methodology for conducting quantitative and qualitative research (especially questionnaire design and interviewing procedures)
* Practice presentation skills (including pronunciation, use of visuals, delivery skills)
* Learn and practice any grammar, language patterns, and vocabulary that you need for writing your research report

You are also encouraged to make use of the **Writing Studio** to obtain feedback on your written drafts, and the **Speaking Studio** to obtain feedback on your practice presentations. You will also find useful activities on the **ELSS website** to help you in planning and delivering your oral presentation, as well as activities on vocabulary, grammar and academic style.

**Ground Rules for your Research Project**

You will work in groups of three (or possibly pairs) to conduct an original, small-scale research project, write up the results as an academic research report, and give a presentation on your findings.

**General theme of the project**: *The life of university students in Hong Kong*. Within this theme, you will have the freedom and flexibility to choose your own topic and narrow the focus so that it is manageable and do-able.

**Requirements**:

* You will need to search, locate, and read articles relevant to your topic and incorporate the information from these sources into your report.
* You will need to design a short questionnaire and use Google docs to administer the questionnaire and manage the responses.
* The questionnaire should be piloted on at least four people (these people do not count as your participants).
* Each person in your group or pair will be responsible for collecting questionnaire data from 15 participants (minimum), a total of 45 participants for your project (30 participants for a pair).
* You will need to design a set of open-ended interview questions (an interview guide).
* Each person in your group or pair should pilot the interview with at least one person (this person does not count as a participant).
* Each person in your group or pair will be responsible for conducting (at least) three face-to-face interviews (in English).
* Interviews should be audio-recorded and submitted to your teacher.
* Your report should be written in an academic style, with citations in APA format, and with a reference list.
* Each person is responsible for writing **all** sections of the report and for **all parts** of the oral presentation.

**Format of your report:**

* Double-spaced
* 1-inch margins
* 12-point font
* Cover page which includes: title; names and student ID of each writer; section number; teacher’s name; date
* Header which includes: title and names of each writer
* Page numbers in a footer
* Reference list
* Your questionnaire and interview guide should be included as appendices
* You should proofread your report so that it is error-free.

**Tentative Dates (your teacher might change these dates):**

Week 2: Submit your initial **research topic** and research questions

Week 4: Submit a draft of your **Introduction**

Week 6: Submit a draft of your **Methods** section

Week 8: Submit a draft of your **Results** section

Week 10: Submit a draft of your **Discussion** section

Weeks 11 – 12: **Oral Presentations**; Submit the **final draft** of your report