🧠 Module 1: What is Research and What Makes a Good Research Question

🎓 Overview

- Presented by **Dr. Simon Rofe** and various academics.
- Focuses on defining **what research is**, **what it means to be a researcher**, and **how to create a good research question**.
- Emphasizes the importance of **systematic inquiry**, **original contribution**, and **relevance**.

1️⃣ Understanding Research

✳️ General Meaning

- **Research** is not just about reading or collecting existing information.
- It is about **making an original contribution**, even if small, to existing knowledge.
- It involves **asking a meaningful question** and finding an answer through **systematic and organized investigation**.

🧩 Key Characteristics

Aspect	Explanation
Purpose	To add new insight or understanding, not just summarize what is known.
Systematic Inquiry	Research must follow clear, structured methods to ensure reliability.
Balance	Good research balances what's **achievable** with what's **meaningful**.
Finite Process	Research projects must have an **end point** where conclusions are drawn.

2️⃣ Perspectives from Academics

👩‍🏫 Dr. Sandra Halperin (Author of *Political Research Methods and Practical Skills*)

Definition:

> "Research is systematic inquiry that helps to make sense of the world and the debates of contemporary significance."

Key Points:

1. **Systematic Inquiry** – not just reading or collecting facts; research organizes knowledge meaningfully.
2. **Research Question** – central to all research because it:
    - Guides what to include or exclude.
    - Helps manage time, scope, and focus.

3️⃣ What Makes a Good Research Question?

🔍 Three Main Attributes (Sandra Halperin)

Attribute	Description
1. Significance	The question must address an important issue or puzzle that matters to a broad community or real-world problem.
2. Researchable	It must be answerable through systematic methods (not too broad or metaphysical).
3. Not Definitively Answered	Should explore areas where knowledge is incomplete, uncertain, or can be re-examined in light of new trends.

Additional Notes:

- Avoid "reinventing the wheel."

- Good research builds on prior knowledge but adds something **new or applied** to a **different context**.
- Research should be **cumulative**, helping knowledge grow over time.

4️⃣ Other Expert Views

👨‍🏫 Rob Denny (Lecturer in Research Methods)

Definition:

> "Research is the process of collecting information about the world and using it to answer questions."

Main Ideas:

- **Systematic Process:** Data should be collected and analyzed methodically.
- **Goes Beyond Data:** Researchers interpret, explain, or describe findings, not just report them.
- **Communication:** Findings must be shared — e.g., through books, articles, or other media.

Simplified Definition (as he told his daughter):

> "Finding out stuff and telling people about it."

Personal Insight:

- Started with a narrow, society-specific focus (Nepal) but moved toward **universal themes** that are **relevant globally**.

5️⃣ Example: Linking Research to Real-World Problems

👩‍🎓 Ethnographic Research Example

- A teacher studied **immigrant youth** who struggled in school despite motivation.
- Conducted **3 years of ethnographic research** — observing, interviewing, understanding from students' perspectives.
- Result: Research helped develop **practical tools for teachers** to support similar students.

📘 Module 2: What Is a Literature Review and Why You Need to Make One

🎯 Overview

- Presented by **Yenn** and **Dr. Simon Rofe** with contributions from several academics.
- Focuses on understanding **why literature reviews matter**, **how they connect to research questions**, and **how to approach them effectively**.
- Central metaphor: **joining a conversation or roundtable** of scholars to contribute your own ideas.

1️⃣ What Is a Literature Review?

✳️ Definition

A **literature review** is a *systematic examination and discussion* of existing research relevant to your topic or research question.
It involves **analyzing**, **summarizing**, and **critiquing** previous work to show:

- What is already known
- What debates exist
- What *gaps* remain to be explored

> "A literature review is not just about reading mountains of books — it's about being part of a broader dialogue."

2️⃣ The Purpose and Value of a Literature Review

Purpose	Explanation

1. Join the Academic Conversation	Imagine pulling up a chair to a roundtable of scholars. You “listen” (read) their ideas and then “speak” (write) your response.
2. Situate Your Work	Helps you identify where your research fits in existing knowledge.
3. Identify Gaps	Reveals what hasn’t been fully explored — this is where your research can contribute something new.
4. Avoid Duplication	Prevents repeating what has already been done.
5. Guide Your Research Design	Influences your research question, data collection, and analysis.
6. Demonstrate Expertise	Shows that you know the key authors, theories, and debates in your area.

3️⃣ Relationship Between Literature Review and Research Question

- The **literature review and research question are closely connected.**
- Your **question leads you** into the conversation, but your **reading helps refine the question**.
- As you engage with other scholars’ views, you **reformulate or sharpen** your question to ensure it remains relevant and original.

> “Your research question is a gateway into the conversation, but it must be re-articulated as you read and learn more.”

4️⃣ Key Metaphors Explained

Metaphor	Meaning
Roundtable Conversation	The literature review is like joining a table of scholars — understanding their perspectives and adding your own.
Fancy Dinner Party	You listen respectfully, respond intelligently, and add value to the discussion without dominating it.
Movie Backstory	The literature review provides background and setting — showing why your "story" (research) matters and what gap it fills.

5️⃣ Insights from Different Academics

👩‍🏫 Dr. Simon Rofe

- Literature reviews are **not about quantity of reading** but about **engagement** and **understanding dialogue** in the field.
- Emphasizes **awareness of different perspectives** and positioning your own within that space.

👩‍🏫 Dr. Sandra Halperin

> "The term 'literature review' sounds dull, but it's actually one of the most creative and satisfying parts of research."

Her Key Points:

1. It's where you engage directly with other experts.

2. You highlight both **strengths and weaknesses** in their work.
3. You identify **what still needs to be done** — what questions remain open.
4. You demonstrate **why your work matters** and **how it adds value**.
5. The literature review shows your research question is **not definitively answered** yet.

👨‍🏫 Reza (Contributor)

Main Ideas:

- Academic research is an **ongoing global conversation** among scholars.
- A **good literature review** ensures you understand others' work deeply enough to engage critically and meaningfully.
- It helps determine if your project is **worth pursuing** and guides the direction of your **data collection and analysis**.
- The literature review should be **driven by your research question**, not just by what literature exists.

👩‍🎓 Other Contributors

Key Observations:

- A literature review shows that the researcher:
    - Understands **key debates, authors, and ideas**.
    - Can **compare and contrast** different approaches.
    - Can identify **regional or temporal differences** (e.g., how European, American, or Korean scholars view the same topic differently).
- It helps trace **the evolution of ideas** — how questions, methods, and terminology have changed over time.

6️⃣ Common Misunderstandings Clarified

Misunderstanding	Reality
“It’s just a summary of books and articles.”	❌ It’s actually **critical engagement** — comparing, evaluating, and identifying what’s missing.
“It’s separate from my research question.”	❌ It’s **deeply connected** — your review shapes and refines your question.
“It’s done once at the start.”	❌ It’s **ongoing** — as you read more, you adapt your question and arguments.

🧠 Module 3: Why Are Planning and Management Important in Research?

🎯 Overview

- Led by **Dr. Simon Rofe** and other academics.
- Focuses on the **importance of planning, time management, and organizational skills** in conducting successful research.
- Emphasizes that **research is not a neat, 9-to-5 process** — it requires flexibility, foresight, and structured thinking.

1️⃣ The Core Idea: Why Planning Matters

Key Point	Explanation
Research is unpredictable	You may face unexpected delays, changing directions, or new findings that alter your plan.
Good planning reduces stress	A structured plan helps accommodate changes without panic or disorganization.
Time management is crucial	Research almost always takes longer than expected — account for revisions, setbacks, and reflection time.
Critical thinking requires space	You need time to *think*, not just to *write* — planning allows for that intellectual space.

Quote:

> "Research is not a nine-to-five exercise; it's full of uncertainties. Good planning allows you to stay critical and flexible."

2️⃣ Simon Rofe & Yenn's Introduction

- Emphasize that **time management** and **planning** are *among the most important elements* of good research.
- Researchers must **set aside sufficient time** to:
    - Accommodate changes.
    - Reflect critically on the project.
    - Maintain organized progress.
- Reminder: *Research always takes longer than you expect.*

Practical Tip:

> Build extra time into your schedule for unexpected issues or revisions.

3️⃣ Advice from Researchers and Academics

👩‍🎓 General Research Advice

1. **Set specific milestones** (e.g., finish readings by a certain date, begin writing on another).
2. **Stay flexible** — revisit your plan and adjust it as your research evolves.
3. **Avoid last-minute rush** by leaving *contingency time* for things that don't go as planned.
4. **Record citations immediately** — even for sources you disagree with; they might become useful later.

Quote:

> "A research project rises or falls with how well you've thought through your time."

🗂️ Writing and Documentation Tips

- Write **footnotes and references as you go** — don't delay them until the end.
- Practice **daily writing**, even if brief — it strengthens your ideas gradually.
- The best writers maintain consistent, structured writing routines.

Quote:

> "If you haven't had time to write sufficient drafts, it will never be a good piece of writing, no matter how good the idea."

4️⃣ Dr. Sandra Halperin – Structural Planning and Integration

🔍 Her Approach to Planning

Sandra explains that **research planning** means developing all the **key elements of research simultaneously**, adjusting them as you go.

Element	Description
Research Question	Must be clear, justified, and relevant.
Rationale / Importance	Why the question matters; its link to contemporary debates.
Literature Review	Tests if your question adds something new or addresses a gap.
Theoretical Framework	Defines assumptions and key concepts; should align with your question.

Methodology	Ensures your question is demonstrable and researchable.

Key Strategy:

> Keep all these elements "in the air" — develop them **in tandem**, revisiting and refining each as the others evolve.

Outcome:

- Prevents wasted time or mismatched sections.
- Ensures coherence across the entire research process.
- Maintains a **systematic logic of inquiry**.

5️⃣ Dr. Reza's Perspective – Management & Communication

💡 Key Insights

- Research is **multidimensional** — involves participants, funders, stakeholders, and ethical considerations.
- Without **planning and management**, projects can quickly fall apart.
- **Communication skills** are part of good management — keeping all collaborators informed and aligned.

Advice for Early Researchers:

- Don't assume you naturally have management or communication skills.
- Attend **workshops or classes** to build these skills deliberately.
- Research management is not "soft" — it's *essential*.

Quote:

> “Unless you could deliver a workshop on management skills, don’t assume you already have them.”

6️⃣ Perspective on Efficient Time Use

🕑 Efficiency Through Prioritization

- The most successful researchers are often those with **busy lives** — they learn to:
    - Set clear **priorities**.
    - Work **efficiently** in limited time.
    - Recognize when something **isn’t worth pursuing** (e.g., a dead-end archive).

Practical Lesson:

> Learn to see when a research path isn’t feasible within your timeframe — it’s better to redirect than to waste time.

Quote:

> “It’s not something you do between nine and five. Research becomes part of your personality and instinct.”

🧩 Module 4: How Do You Know You Have Been a Good Researcher at the End of Your Project?

🎯 Overview

- Presented by **Dr. Yenn** and **Dr. Simon Rofe**, with contributions from several researchers.
- Focuses on **evaluating your own performance** as a researcher when a project concludes.
- Encourages **self-reflection**, **ethical accountability**, and **confidence in your process and impact**.

1️⃣ Simon and Yenn's Introduction — Reflecting on the End of a Research Project

🧠 Key Aspects to Reflect On:

1. **Personal Satisfaction**
    - Reflect on your **own sense of achievement** and growth.
    - Consider how your skills and understanding evolved:
        - Did you develop a stronger research question?
        - Did you engage meaningfully with the literature?
        - Did you improve your time management and planning?
2. **Convincing an Audience**
    - Can you **clearly communicate and justify your research** to others — classmates, colleagues, or family?
    - Can you explain *why* your research question matters and *how* your findings contribute?

3. **Social Impact**
    - Even beginner researchers can make **meaningful change** — however small.
    - Reflect on how your work **adds value to society, community, or academic debate**.

Quote:

> "All of us have the capacity to make meaningful change in the world around us."

2️⃣ Rob's Perspective — Systematic and Meaningful Research

📚 Criteria for Good Research

Criterion	Description
Systematic Approach	Followed a structured, logical, and organized process throughout.
Clear Rationale	Clearly justified *why* you chose your approach and *how* it addresses your question.
Confidence and Pride	Feel proud of your work and able to *stand by your conclusions*.
Interest and Engagement	A good project should be *interesting* — both to the researcher and to readers.

Quote:

> "A good piece of research is one you are confident about — systematic, clear in its rationale, and something you're proud of."

3️⃣ Reza's Perspective — Ethical and Methodological Integrity

✅ Three Indicators of a Good Researcher

1. **Ethical Soundness**
    - You maintained **integrity** and avoided unethical practices.
    - At the end, you can look back and say:

      "My ethical credentials are intact."

2. **Validity and Reliability**
    - Your **research design was sound** — appropriate for your aims.
    - You collected data properly and **triangulated** where necessary (i.e., cross-checked using multiple sources).
3. **Strong Data Support**
    - Your **findings and conclusions are supported by evidence**.
    - Claims align with the data — whether theoretical, policy-based, or applied.

Quote:

> "You know you've been a good researcher when your data strongly supports your arguments and your ethical standards remain intact."

4️⃣ Sandra's Perspective — Self-Reflection and Enduring Value

💡 Personal Measure of Success

- A unique test: reread your work after some time —
  if it **still interests or inspires you**, that's a good sign.

- If you can **reread your own paper and feel proud**, rather than embarrassed, that shows quality.

Formal Measures (External Recognition):

- Cited or referenced by others.

- Positively received by academic or professional audiences.

Personal Measure (Internal Satisfaction):

- You still find it meaningful, engaging, and well-written.

Quote:

> "When I reread my work and still want to read it to the end — that's when I know it's good."

5️⃣ Broader Reflections — Success Beyond Results

Aspect	Description
Success is not about having all the answers	Sometimes you *can't* find every answer — that's the nature of research.
Openness and Honesty	Good researchers are transparent about limitations and unexpected results.
Impact on Others	Even if one person learns from your work, it's meaningful success.

Learning Journey	Growth in skills, discipline, and understanding matters as much as the final outcome.

Quote:

> “If one person reads my research and takes something from it, that is success in itself.”

6️⃣ Key Takeaways — Hallmarks of a Good Researcher

Quality	Description
Ethical Integrity	Acted responsibly, with honesty and respect for participants and data.
Systematic Process	Followed a clear and well-justified methodology.
Validity & Reliability	Research design produced trustworthy and defensible results.
Reflective Thinking	Engaged critically with your own learning and performance.
Communication Skill	Explained your findings clearly to different audiences.
Meaningful Contribution	Created work that adds value, however small, to society or knowledge.
Personal Pride	Feel satisfied, confident, and proud of your work when you look back on it.