Enclosure 6

How to improve your research skills

You've probably had to do a lot of research as part of projects or assignments. Your lecturers give you instructions on how to conduct research. This will help you to pass the assignments and get your grades.

However, research skills is more than just meeting the requirements for a class assignment. It is also a key competency that employers look for in university graduates.

So, how do you develop this competency? And how could collaborative learning help you develop this to a higher level? Here are a five tips to improve your research skills.

1 Develop an enquiring mind

People with an enquiring mind are always on the lookout for new knowledge, interested in new developments, ideas, insights and perspective. An enquiring mind wants to know.

An enquiring mind is a key skill in today's fast changing world. If you have an enquiring mind, you go beyond the subject that you're studying and try to look at the bigger picture. You are interested and curious about things in everyday life and ready to discuss this with others. Here's what you could do to develop an enquiring mind:

- Ask questions and try to recognise issues you'd like to explore;
- Be aware multiple, cross-cultural perspectives for understanding and analysing issues;
- Try to look for solutions to problems or imagine how you could find solutions to problems.

2. Explore and diagnose a problem thoroughly

Imagine you come across a problem or an issue that piques your interest. The first step is to explore and map out the problem. Here are some questions to ask to clarify things:

- What is the problem? Do you have a complete picture? What's missing?
- Whose problem is it? Who is involved?
- Why exactly is it a problem? What's the urgency?
- Where does the problem occur? What are the specific problem areas?
- What's the history of the problem, in other words the back story?

You could start by interviewing anyone who might have a stake in solving the issue. Try to get as many different viewpoints as possible. For instance, you could

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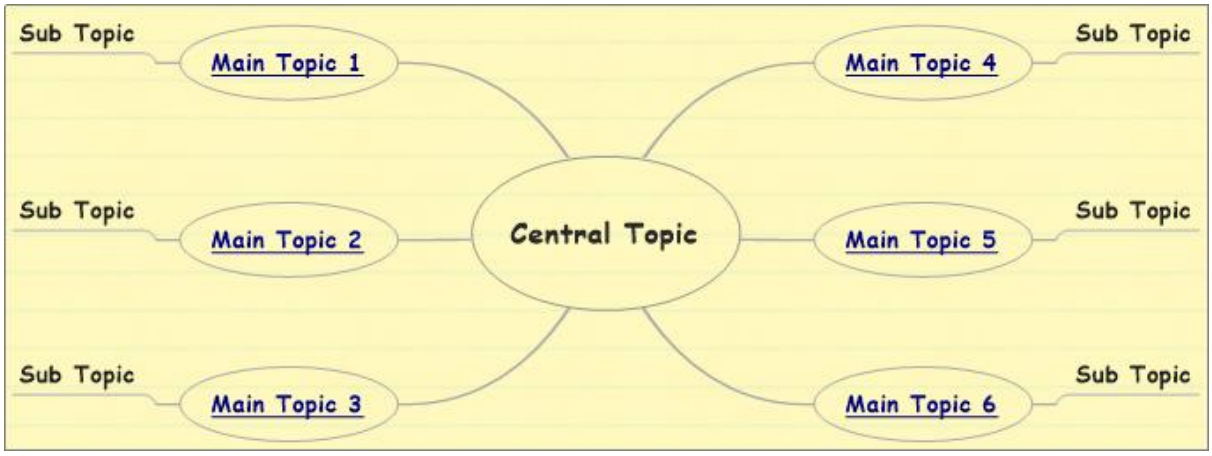
interview international students to give their views from a different cultural mind-set. Do they have the same issues in their country? If so, how do they deal with that?

Map out the problem

Mind mapping might also be a good way of analysing a problem. Mind mapping is an intuitive way of exploring and analysing an issue. It is a great tool to use in the preliminary phase of your research. Use a big blank sheet of paper or you could sophisticated mind mapping software, such as Mindmanager. You'll find great examples of mindmaps on www. Biggerplate.com.



Questions to explore are:

- What would be the key relevant internal and external factors?
- Which relevant data could you gather from available sources? Think of documents, literature, external and internal analyses and first interviews.
- Which issues are most urgent? Which ones are not? And how might these issues be interconnected or connected with your research topic?

3. Spend enough time formulating your Problem Statement

Once you've got a better idea of the issues, you can start formulating your problem statement. This is in important part, so make sure you schedule enough time for this. The clearer and more focussed your problem statement is, the better the quality of research.

A good problem statement is basically a clear and concise description of the problem you're going to address. It should be formulated as an open question.

Complex problem statements consist of a main or central question and sub-questions that address parts of the problem.

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Learn more about formulating problem statements:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_statement

4. Plan your research carefully

Now that you're clear about your problem statement and the scope of your research, it's time to plan your research. Each research project is unique, but you could plan your research with the help of the following questions:

1. ***Why and for whom will you conduct your research?***
   State the reason and relevance and describe the target group.
2. ***What do you want to know?***
   Describe the topic, problem statement, type of research, theories, and operationalization.
3. ***Where will you conduct your research?***
   Define the subject of your research, sources and locations.
4. ***How will you carry out your research and how will you collect data?***
   Describe your research design, methods and techniques.
5. ***How far will you extend your research?***
   Define the scope of your research. In other words, how extensive and how deep will your research be?
6. ***When will you carry out your research?***
   Plan your research: time required for preparation, field research and processing.

5. Keep everyone updated and ask for feedback

The success of your research project also depends on how you interact with your lecturer, client, sponsor or any other stakeholder.

Keep them up to date by submitting regular status reports. Ask for feedback and suggestions about the direction of your research. Your research project will get the best results if you get input from different perspectives.

You should also reserve enough time for reporting and presenting the outcomes of your research. Remember that preparing your final research report and a professional presentation takes a lot of time. Yet, ultimately this will greatly determine the success of your research project.

Learn more

If you want to learn more about developing research skill, the first place to go is your university library. Ask your lecturer for reading tips and suggestions.

On the internet you can also find a lot of great tips and suggestions, for example:

- www.mindtools.com: Problem Solving
- Wiki How: How to do Research

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