

Dr. Evans' Research Tips

From McNair Scholars Program "Research Methods" Course

www.ProfessorEvans.com

1. Do an extensive literature review on your topic. A lit review is *not* a cursory event; it will allow you to convincingly situate your research in the range of views already presented on the subject in question. You are to be in dialogue with other scholars on your topic.

2. Write from your sources. Build your essay, thesis, or dissertation step-by-step, at every stage from the sources. Do not write your paper then try to find sources to plug in or justify your position.

3. Understand that research is original discovery of a question and answer. Research is not simply moving information from one place or form to another or summarizing others' views. What do YOU bring to the table that is new, unique, and original in this discussion?

4. Clarify the scope of your research topic and stay with it. You can spin out of control if you do not stay with your topic. Research can only be about 1 of 4 things (conveniently called nouns): person, place, thing, or idea. Decide what your topic of interest is, and demarcate your area of study around that topic. Though you may find many sources that address areas outside of your scope, *note that the data are outside of your scope* and move on to data that relates to your initial question. Too often, writers pose a question that they do not answer because they do not define a scope and find resources that deal with the topic in the area of interest. Be sure to say WHY you are defining your scope a certain way.

5. Know what type of research you are doing (you may engage in mixed approaches, but be clear on what those are):

1. Action
2. Case study
3. Content analysis
4. Correlational
5. Developmental
6. Ethnography
7. Experimental
8. Ex post facto
9. Grounded theory
10. Historical
11. Observation
12. Phenomenological
13. Quasi-experimental
14. Survey research

6. Justify your methodology. Your data determine your methodology. Decide what your primary focus will be, then engage in qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodology FOR A REASON.

7. Invest in a research guide. I use *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (Paul Leedy & Jeanne Ormrod, 2005) because it outlines the types, methodologies, methods, potential difficulties, standard definitions, and solutions to research in multiple disciplines.

Richard Marius' A Short Guide to Writing about History
BUY THIS GUIDE--IT IS ESSENTIAL (This outline doesn't give you the details...)

1. The historical essay has an argument
2. The good historical essay has a sharply focused and limited topic
3. Good papers in history come from primary sources
4. Write your history paper in the same spirit you would tell a good story
5. Get to the point quickly
6. Write a good title for your paper
7. Build your essay step by step on evidence
8. Document your sources
9. Historical essays are written dispassionately
10. A historical essay should include original thoughts of the author; it should not be a rehash of thoughts of others
11. Always consider your audience
12. An honest essay takes contrary evidence into account
13. Essays uses standard English and observe the common conventions of writing
14. Let your first and last paragraph mirror each other

Central Questions to Form about History Research:

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

Why?

How?

Modes of History writing

1. **Description** (sensory experience)
2. **Narration** (story telling)
3. **Exposition** (explanation of cause and effect or meaning)
4. **Argument** (persuasion)