**RESEARCH ESSAYS**

**Research, Think, Write**

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| **AIMS:**   * Indicate to students what to do with research proposal feedback. * Indicate to students that their first research proposal is not the end of the thinking, planning and researching process. * Provide tips on organising research. * Provide tips on how to reference authors appropriately. |

# SECTION ONE: Outline [less than 5 minutes]

Outline the format of the lecture:

1. How to respond to research proposal feedback.
2. How to continue the process and thinking about and planning research.
3. Continuing the process of researching and beginning to write.

# SECTION TWO: Research Proposal Feedback [5 – 10 minutes]

The point of this section is to emphasise the importance of looking over research proposal feedback thoroughly. Another important part of the process to highlight is ongoing discussion with tutors. This is important both in regards to sorting out unacceptable research questions, and developing accepted research questions. Emphasise that *all* students will need to adapt either their research question or the direction of their research (of course to different degrees) from that presented in their research proposal.

* It is worthwhile to indicate to students that the person who provided their essay feedback is the same person who will mark their essay. Thus it is a good idea to go and see the tutor personally and make sure the feedback has been understood well, and get some tips (you might want to refer back to Lecture Four, “Acting on Feedback” and return to some of the ideas laid out there around the importance of paying close attention to tutor comments and feedback). Tutors tend to like seeing student interest in their essay, and back and forth brainstorming for essays tends to result in good essays. **Engaging with their tutor** (beyond the proposal comments) will have tangible benefits – it will aid students in developing and improving their research plan.
* When marking research proposals tutors usually leave hints. Tell students they should look for these hints.
* Give students a clear indication of what they must do if their **research question** was **rejected**. This usually involves doing a rewrite of some sort. Whatever the case may be, it is very important that students with rejected questions know what to do next. For this course, it is essential that students who had their research questions rejected must re-write their proposals and resubmit to their tutors (give the deadline for this). For those who have been given the feedback that significant revisions are required, it is highly recommended that they re-write and resubmit their proposal. Even after resubmission, further discussion with their tutor may be required (perhaps return to the idea of the research proposal as part of the process of thinking about research, as laid out in Lecture Six, “Writing a Research Proposal”).
* Include a discussion of common problems students faced, often the **topic being too broad**. Provide some tips on different ways they can narrow their research. Once again note that if a student is stuck, they should speak to their tutor for advice on narrowing their topic. You should use an example that illustrates a general topic and then a narrower version within that topic. The example used in the slideshow [slide 5] uses the broad topic of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the South African TRC. A narrower topic would look at only the truth hearings (and thus ignore statement collection; reparations) and assess how successful they were at revealing gaps in South African history during the apartheid period (and thus ignore links between truth and reconciliation or healing).

# SECTION THREE: Thinking, Planning and Researching [10 – 20 minutes]

The point here is for students to recognize how the research proposal has helped them in the process of thinking, planning and conducting research.

Give students a checklist of things they should have at least started while doing their research proposal. All these aspects form part of the ongoing process of planning the research paper:

* They should have a **preliminary research question**.
* They may or may not have a **preliminary thesis statement**. Here remind students that both the research question and thesis statement should not be set in stone. It is an ongoing process of research and thinking. If they find new research indicates their question or thesis statement is defunct then it is better to draft a new research question or thesis statement, than force out a bad question, or bad thesis statement.
* They should have done some **preliminary reading**: they should be becoming familiar with the common themes and debates within the literature; they will have some assessment on whether the conflict/case has been thoroughly researched or if there are potential or significant gaps; they should be starting to think about which areas of the literature they are going to focus on (of course informed by and adapted according to their research question).
* They should have a **preliminary methodology**. Indicate to students that they should be thinking about what methodology would best serve the purposes of their essay. They should look for a methodology that is most appropriate to answer their research question.
* They should have a **preliminary table of contents**. This also means that they should have an essay structure in mind.
* For all of this, they will need (at least to some extent) a **case study**. They should be thinking about how this case study fits in to the wider literature on the topic. They should also ideally be sure that the case study (and the research question that flows from it) is interesting to them. They will need to put in significant time and energy in researching and writing on this case, so it is certainly preferable that the case engages them so as they are sustained through the process.

**Reminders about introductions:**

Remind students that their introduction for the research essay may differ somewhat from introductions that they have written for shorter assignments. Since the research essay is a longer item, it may require a longer introduction than usual. The introduction can include:

* Some background information [this should be brief – since there likely will be a separate section that provides the descriptive information needed].
* An overview of the paper.
* Clear thesis statement and line of argumentation.
* Definitions of key concepts and terms.
* Methodology.
* [Limitations.]

Advise the students not to spend ages trying to perfect their introduction before writing out the rest of their paper. It is likely that they will need to revise their introduction significantly once they have finished off their paper.

# SECTION FOUR: Thinking, Writing and Research [15 minutes]

Tutors should feel free to share any tips they have about how they go about planning the structure of their own essays, and how they organise their research. Obviously this is a rather subjective issue, so it is mostly important to reiterate how important the process is, and provide basic ways to plan and organise research, that students can pick up and implement easily.

* Make it clear that students need to **organise their research**, and there are two levels to this:
  + On a **practical** **level**, well organized research makes the writing process easier since you’ll know where you found what. E.g. which author has which arguments, and which factual details? [See Slide 15].
  + More importantly, organizing research means that students know where their **argument(s)** stands in regards to different authors, and where each piece of literature stands in regards to other authors. This point can’t be emphasised enough, and this is a good time to also emphasise that students should have their own argument (thesis statement), and use other authors to promote their argument, as opposed to regurgitating other author’s arguments in a directionless manner (perhaps refer back to Lecture Two, “Building an Argument” to illustrate this point further).
    - Students should aim to have researched thoroughly, and organized this research before they begin writing. Running through this process thoroughly will reduce the amount of revisions that need to be made during the writing process.
* Thinking about **sources** in terms of their origin is also important. From this, the student needs to think about how their views and arguments relate to the authors, i.e. they need to be active in their reading rather than passively taking in ideas.
* Students are often concerned with the question: **how much research is enough research?** If time allows, perhaps have a discussion around this. Answers might include: you know you’ve done enough research when you keep reading the same thing, or you’ve done enough research when you can answer your research question, or that you’ve done enough reading when you can identify all the major themes and debates within the literature. [See slide 15]. Try to emphasise that strategic and directed reading which enable students to ‘label’ or organise debates is more important than lots of reading; it will enable students to have a coherent overview of the literature. [See slide 16 for sets of questions students should be asking themselves in relation to the literature].
* Provide or do an illustration for the students. Mind maps are a good idea, and examples of easy ways to organize research, like: Author – Thesis Statement, Concepts and Definitions, Stance in the Literature. [See examples on slides 18-21]. Mind maps/diagrams can also help students think about the approach they are going to take, e.g. if a causal question, are they going to concentrate on one variable as explanatory or on multiple variables?
* The direction and nature research and writing will also depend on the type of question you are asking [see slide 22].
* Provide practical advice on how to use different texts in an essay. **Paraphrasing** is the essence of any essay, so try to illustrate this to the students. Quotes should rather be reserved for a situation where it is near impossible for the student to rephrase without losing the meaning and potency of the statement. If the student finds the constant need to use quotes, then there is a strong chance the student does not actually understand the author.
  + Illustrate that good paraphrasing not only indicates to the marker that a student fully understands the literature, but also allows a student to summarise author arguments and concepts, which gives them more space to outline their own arguments. A discussion could be had on when to quote, and when to paraphrase.
  + Refer them to the adapted writing guide included in the Merits of Methodology lecture folder.
* Provide tips on how to draw up **essay plans**; once again mind maps seem to be popular. Illustrate to students that the point of an essay plan is for them to outline their line of reasoning, e.g. how the essay will flow logically from introduction to conclusion. A plan should also help them figure out where different authors apply to their argument [see 24].

# CONCLUSION

Thinking about your research is very important. A well thought-out essay will:

1. Have a pertinent research question.
2. Have a narrow enough scope.
3. Be logically structured, planned and organised.
4. Be immersed in the literature but still maintain its own argument.
5. Have an appropriate methodology to answer its research question.
6. Have a clear thesis statement that (i) relates to the question and (ii) is constantly referred back to.

To achieve this, it is essential that students take research as a continual process. As such, their research essay should be an extension and development from their proposal.

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