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A Coursebook in Academic Research and Thesis Writing

学术研究 with 论文写作教程 (英文版)

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A Coursebook in Academic Research and Thesis Writing

学术研究 与 论文 写作 教程
(英文版)

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内容简介

本书按照学术研究的过程和论文写作的结构展开，可以使读者跟随各章节内容，学习如何进行论文选题、设计研究问题、选择研究方法，如何写致谢、摘要，到最后逐步完成整体学术论文的写作过程。本书内容结合了国际通行的学术写作规范和中国学生毕业论文写作的主要问题，不仅为即将或正在撰写学位论文的学生提供借鉴和参考，也为学生使用英语进行学术研究与写作，在国际期刊上用英语发表论文、参加国际学术会议打下基础。本书注重科学性、实用性、知识性和综合性相结合，是一本具有较强实用性的学术研究与论文写作参考书。

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Introduction

What is research? In Webster dictionary (Brown, 2020) it is defined as “the studious inquiry or examination especially investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws”. In a broad sense, doing research is not a rare case in our lives. We sometimes try to solve a very practical problem by taking the research approach. For example, if you are faced with decorating your new house for the first time, you have to collect information about the issue, do some detailed investigation about maybe a very small gadget’s installation and design your own style based on plentiful information you collected from different sources. When the project is done, you may reflect on the procedure about where something could be bettered or draw the conclusion about the gains and losses in finishing the project.

What is academic research? When the research is done in academia, it is not designed to benefit a specific person or organization but designed to be from a voice of authority and can change how people view whatever is being researched. Academic research follows the scientific method as a way to ensure that objectivity is kept at all times. Academic research is a systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information (data) scholarly to better understand a phenomenon about which we are interested in or concerned with. It is a lengthy process, focused, specific, intensive, accumulative, and educational, and is not mere information gathering, transportation of facts from one location to another, and rummaging for information.

What is academic writing? Once the research has been finalized and the conclusion found, the researcher writes up the findings as an academic paper. If the paper could be published, it will have a reputation for bringing valuable, valid information to the public. Academic research and writing are the catalysts to change in many ways. Once a discovery is made in a field, it often leads to more inquiries and deeper exploration into the subject. It can become like a domino effect for new, increased knowledge.

What is thesis writing? Thesis writing is a must task you can’t escape if you want to get a degree in college education. Usually, the word “thesis” is relevant when applying for

a bachelor's or master's degree, while “dissertation” is associated with a doctorate. Thesis writing can be challenging for most postgraduate students. It is a far bigger project than most students will ever have undertaken. It may be the longest piece of continuous writing they have ever done. But one of the many rewards for students is to receive positive examiners' reports.

A Coursebook in Academic Research and Thesis Writing is specially designed for postgraduate students. The students are assumed to improve their research competence and acquire requisite skills in paper and thesis writing. It aims to help students understand the basic concepts, process and principles of academic research, and acquire the ability to write academically by applying proper and scientific research methods with academic norms and format.

This textbook aims to foster students' academic competence by introducing the principal elements of a thesis in the following eight chapters.

Chapter 1 explains the process of doing research and writing a research paper from the initial rudiments of research paper writing. These explanations of fundamental knowledge make the book accessible and appealing to postgraduates.

Chapter 2 reviews the initial stages of writing a research paper, including selecting and narrowing down the topic, developing research questions, and designing the titles.

Chapter 3 discusses the way of writing a thesis introduction, which is the beginning part of a thesis.

Chapter 4 offers instructions for writing a literature review. Writing a literature review is often regarded as a difficult task to do and is a part that Chinese students easily do have more problems in writing a thesis.

Chapter 5 provides tips for writing a solid methodology. It is important to write clearly what research methods you used to do your research, and how you applied them. It allows the readers to evaluate the reliability and validity of the result.

Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 elaborates two most commonly used research methods in humanity and social science study, a case study, and a survey study.

Chapter 8 presents the basic principles of attributing ideas and quotations to their sources. Because most plagiarism results from the careless application of the rules for documentation, this chapter explains in detail the methods of citation and referencing. Besides, this chapter offers instructions for writing abstracts, acknowledgments, and conclusions.

Rudiments of Research Paper Writing

In this chapter you will get to know:

- What is research?
- What is good research?
- What is a thesis?
- What are attributes of a successful thesis?

1.1 What Is Research?

Before we start to learn how to write a thesis, we must know what research is, because thesis writing is based on the research you've done.

Someone says that research is easy! Look at the word “research”. It consists of “re” and “search”. So does it mean Re (repeat) + search? Sure, it doesn't mean we search for the information again. We often conduct research both in academic learning and in our daily lives. And you may have done this many times in course projects. What is sure of is that:

- Research is not mere information-gathering.
- Research is not mere fact discovery or fact transcription.
- Research is not merely rummaging for information.
- Research is not a catchword used to get attention.
- ✓ **Research is the creation of new knowledge.**
- ✓ **Research is asking important questions and creating new information.**

Doing research may be difficult for some of you. Some of you may be ill-prepared, like not having undergone a creative thinking course or not having read widely enough. Others may have the wrong perceptions about research, have difficulty finding and formulating a research question, or do not know how to use the web/library for research.

To define research academically:

answer to the problem itself. This enables us to conduct more in-depth research later on.

Descriptive: Descriptive research expands knowledge of a research problem or phenomenon by describing it according to its characteristics and population. Descriptive research focuses on the “how” and “what”, but not on the “why”.

Explanatory: Explanatory research, also referred to as casual research, is conducted to determine how variables interact, i.e. to identify cause-and-effect relationships. Explanatory research deals with the “why” of research questions and is therefore often based on experiments.

1.3 What Is Good Research?

A good research involves systematic planning and setting time-based, realistic objectives. It entails feasible research methods based upon a research methodology that best suits the nature of your research question. It is built upon sufficient relevant data and is reproducible and replicable. It is based on a suitable rationale and can suggest directions for future research.

Qualities of Good Research^①

Good research is anchored on a sound research question.

A sound research question is one of the most important characteristics of good research. In 2010, Farrugia et al. proposed that developing a research question is the most important step in doing a research project.

A good research question details exactly what a researcher wants to learn and defines a study’s scope. By formulating a good research question, researchers can ensure that they stay on track during the course of their study. In most cases, the research question influences the rest of the steps a researcher takes during his or her study as well.

However, the formulation of a research question is often easier said than done. As such, numerous frameworks — like the FINER and PICO criteria — have been invented to help researchers formulate sound research questions.

For instance, Cummings et al. (2013) suggest using FINER criteria to create or evaluate a research question. According to this set of criteria, a good research question is:

^① The part of qualities of good research is edited from the online source Bouchrika (2014) (<https://research.com/research/top-10-qualities-of-good-academic-research>)

- F — feasible
- I — interesting
- N — novel
- E — ethical
- R — relevant

Choosing a good question is usually the first and the most important factor in our research. Asking questions may not be that difficult, but to ask good ones is not easy at all.

A good research question should be **significant original, and answerable**. Doing research is like taking a long journey. Asking an ill-formulated question is the same as traveling in the wrong direction and can result only in the wasted time and effort.

Some may wonder: How can I choose a good research question? Where do ideas come from? Ideas will not come into your mind automatically. In most cases, they come from a deep understanding of a subject, and the possession of broad knowledge.

Good research follows a systematic, appropriate research methodology.

The overall quality and success of a research study are largely determined by the research methodology it uses (Thattamparambil, 2020). Choosing an appropriate research methodology helps ensure that researchers can collect relevant data and use the right data analysis methods.

Research methodology refers to the systematic procedures or techniques a researcher uses to ensure that his study achieves valid, reliable results (Jansen & Warren, 2021). Research methodologies are often classified into qualitative research, quantitative research, and mixed-methods research.

- **Qualitative research methodology** involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data, such as language to interpret subjects' beliefs, experiences, and behaviors (Pathak et al., 2013). Qualitative research techniques include interviews, focus groups, and case studies.
- **Quantitative research methodologies** involve the collection and analysis of numerical data to discover patterns, test relationships, and make predictions (Bhandari, 2021a). In doing quantitative research, surveys, experiments, and systematic observation can be used to collect accurate data.
- **Mixed-methods research methodologies** combine quantitative and qualitative methods. According to Wisdom and Cresswell (2013), combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies “permits a more complete and synergistic utilization of data than do separate quantitative and qualitative data collection and

analysis.”

Researchers must consider a variety of factors in choosing the best methodology for their study. In most cases, research questions and objectives play a significant role in defining the most appropriate research methodology to use.

Good research acknowledges previous research on the topic.

While good research leads to the discovery of new knowledge, it also means studying previous research on the topic. By studying scholarly articles and other works related to your subject of interest, you get an idea of what has already been studied and how your study fits into existing research.

Exploring previous research can also ensure that you’re not duplicating existing work. Related literature can also shed light on potential obstacles and issues researchers may encounter during their studies.

Given the importance of studying research related to one’s topic, most academic research projects (like theses or dissertations) feature a literature review. A literature review describes and objectively evaluates scholarly articles, books, and other sources relevant to a particular field of study, helping readers gain a full understanding of the topic at hand (Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, n.d.).

Good research uses relevant, empirical data and proper data analysis methods.

One of the most important qualities of a good research study is that it deals with empirical data. Empirical data is data that has been collected by researchers themselves through observation, experience, or experimentation (Bradford, 2017). This is crucial in doing good research because empirical data is considered objective, unbiased evidence.

Good research doesn’t stop with the collection of empirical data, the data collected must be analyzed properly as well. The type of data collected largely determines the right data analysis method to use.

Quantitative data, for instance, is usually analyzed through descriptive statistics or inferential statistics (Humans of Data, 2018). These statistics can help researchers find figures to summarize variables, find patterns, and make predictions. On the other hand, the analysis of qualitative data involves identifying and interpreting patterns and themes in textual data. Common analysis methods for qualitative data include content analysis, narrative analysis, and thematic analysis (Warren, 2021).

Using these analysis methods, you can interpret quantitative or qualitative data to answer your research question.

Good research is representative and generalizable.

Criteria of good research include being representative. In research, representativeness refers to a sample's ability to represent a larger group. This means the characteristics of the subjects (people) being studied closely match those of the study's target population (Austin Research, 2014).

In most cases, representativeness can be achieved through population sampling (Economic Research and Social Council, n.d.). By using proper methods to create a representative sample, researchers can ensure that their findings can be generalized to the larger population represented.

Good research is guided by logic.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of research is that the entire process is guided by logic. Using logic, for instance, can help researchers determine what kind of data they need for answering their research question. Being guided by logic throughout the research process also helps researchers spot fallacies and inconsistencies in their claims and findings.

The logical processes of induction and deduction can also prove to be valuable in the research process. Golesh et al. (2019) proposed that logic aids researchers by helping them arrive at valid conclusions. According to the study, inductive reasoning can be used to discover patterns and construct generalizations and theories. Meanwhile, deductive reasoning can help researchers collect empirical data to confirm or refute theories or hypotheses.

Aside from these applications of logic, logical reasoning can also make more research more meaningful, especially if the research is to be used in the context of decision-making (Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, n.d.).

Good research has external validity.

Good research has external validity if its results or findings can be applied to the real world (Glen, 2019). If your research findings can be generalized to other situations or applied to a broader context, your study has high external validity.

There are two types of external validity for researchers to consider: population validity and ecological validity (Bhandari, 2021b). Research with findings that can be generalized from the sample to the larger population has a high population validity. Meanwhile, you can achieve ecological validity if you can apply your study's findings to real-world situations and settings.

Since generalizable knowledge is almost always the aim of scientific research, external validity is an important component of good research as well.

Good research is replicable, reproducible, and transparent.

Replicability, reproducibility, and transparency are some of the most important

characteristics of research. The replicability of a research study is important because this allows other researchers to test the study's findings. Replicability can also improve the trustworthiness of a research's findings among readers (Understanding Health Research, 2020).

Good research is also reproducible. Though replicability and reproducibility are often used interchangeably, research is reproducible if researchers achieve consistent results using the same data and analysis methods (Miceli, 2019). The reproducibility and replicability of a research study and its findings can confirm the study's overall validity and credibility.

For research to be replicable or reproducible, it must also be transparent or available to other researchers. Research must be written or presented in such a way that it provides comprehensive details on how data was collected and analyzed and how conclusions were reached (Baskin, 2020). This is why most scholarly articles provide clear descriptions of their corresponding research process.

Good research acknowledges its limitations and provides suggestions for future research.

In addition to information on data collection and analysis methods, good research also opens doors for future research on the topic. For instance, researchers can provide details on unexpected study findings or suggest techniques for exploring unaddressed aspects of your research problem or research question (Business Research Methodology, n.d.).

In many cases, these suggestions for future research stem from the research's limitations. Researchers must acknowledge their study's limitations and potential flaws and present these along with the study's findings and conclusion. Ross and Zaidi (2019) further explain that a meaningful presentation of a research study's limitations includes implications of these limitations and potential alternative approaches.

Good research is ethical.

Understandably, good research is carried out according to research ethics. Research ethics provide standards of conduct for scientific researchers. These standards help protect the rights and dignity of research participants while ensuring that researchers practice values, such as honesty, objectivity, integrity, and accountability in their work (Resnik, 2020).

Resnik also emphasizes the importance of learning how to interpret and apply various ethical standards in research, especially since existing ethical codes won't cover every situation.

Some of the most common violations of research ethics include:

- **Falsification** — This involves the manipulation or omission of data or findings.

- **Fabrication** — This involves making up data or results and presenting these as accurate.
- **Plagiarism** — This refers to the use of another person’s work without giving due credit.

1.4 Research Process

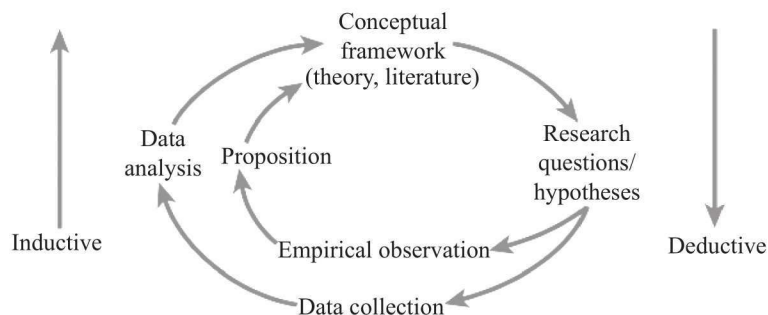


Figure 2 Research wheel (Gupta, 2021)

Research Wheel

In this section, we will discuss the research process. Rudestam and Newton proposed a Research wheel (Figure 2) in 2007 to describe the stages of the research process. The bottom-up process shown in the figure is called the inductive approach, which begins with a set of empirical observations or data, seeking patterns in those observations, and then theorizing about those patterns. The top-down process, or the deductive approach, starts with a theory or literature, developing hypotheses from that theory, and then collecting and analyzing data to test those hypotheses.

Deductive Reasoning

Deductive reasoning is a logical approach where you start from general ideas or theories to specific conclusions, and it is often called top-down reasoning.

In deductive reasoning, you will often make an argument for a certain idea. You make an inference, or come to a conclusion by applying different premises. A premise is a generally accepted idea, fact, or rule, and it’s a statement that lays the groundwork for a theory or general idea. Conclusions are statements supported by premises. For example, in the table 1 a conclusion is usually drawn based on two premises. This format is called “premise-premise-