

How to do Research : A Practical Guide to Designing and Managing Research Projects, 3rd Revised Edition

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Another academic year, another research primer. Given that we are presented with a third edition, *How to do Research* clearly appears to be a popular and a well-sought-after monograph, presumably providing something that others do not. Presumptions should always be avoided, however. And the potential danger is that *How to do Research* has become such a staple of university reading lists that it is analogous with an old pair of slippers; so familiar and so comfortable that any shortcomings that may have arisen over time are simply tolerated for fear of change. Reviewing this text afresh is therefore order of the day.

The aim of *How to do research* is to provide an “accessible” guide to the research process for the novice researcher. The book is divided into two sections (Research Process and Methods) and then subdivided into various useful categories. The Research Process explores the development of research objectives, study design and planning, drawing conclusions, report writing and dissemination. Often missed in the subtitle, the book encompasses guidance on the management of research projects generally, such as project planning, monitoring progress, liaising with advisory committees, the writing of funding proposals and so forth, all of which are covered in this first section also.

Since Moore has presided over numerous research projects, he is able to pepper each subsection with valuable hints and talks frankly about the common pitfalls of project management. As can be expected, the Methods section introduces various research methods and explores the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Both sections are supplemented by a useful appendix providing a copy of a successful grant proposal (submitted by the Policy Studies Institute, of which Moore was Principal Fellow). It is also worth mentioning that, although this book is published by Facet (publishing wing of the UK Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals) and contains a variety of LIS examples (including the aforementioned appendix), it is very much a general guide to social research and could feasibly be used in a variety of disciplines.

The most advantageous aspect of *How to do Research* – and the most immediately noticeable - is the language and the book structure. Moore assumes a fatherly attitude throughout; his language is straight talking, devoid of jargon and often humorous. The sections are well organised, making the book extremely accessible and conducive to quick consultation. Of course, the act of reading any primer is the act of accepting that one needs help in the task one is attempting to accomplish. This requires the author to assume nothing about the reader and - as is always customary in books of this type - some advice is simply commonsense. But Moore should not be criticised as many readers will undoubtedly lack it; the reader has, after all, decided to engage in the act of 'reading a primer'. It may appear blunt at first, but it is entirely consistent with the fatherly approach adopted by Moore and it is necessary to ensure no novice strays into a research project nadir. From this perspective, Moore is successful in providing an “accessible guide” and should be commended.

Unfortunately, this success is not reflected in other – perhaps more important - aspects of the book. *How to do Research* is a primer; a text providing the elementary principles of a subject. Yet some elementary principles of research are omitted and the

proceedings perhaps get a little too accessible. For example, the opening section of the book addresses the development of research objectives, yet nothing is mentioned about the development of theories or hypotheses. These are covertly discussed within a subsection encompassing the development of research aims but because they are bundled in with aims and objectives neither concept is articulated properly. Indeed, the term “hypothesis” – a term synonymous with research itself - does not feature in the text or the index (which incidentally includes several page number errors). Despite the author having substantial research credentials, there are moments when this publication barely scratches the surface of what research often entails. Very little detail is provided in any section, forcing the reader to undertake supplementary reading to explore the verities of crucial concepts such as data analysis (which is barely granted more than six pages).

And this is where *How to do Research* fails to measure up to other introductory research books, such as that by Powell and Connaway (2004) (reviewed in *Library Review* 55/6). Such texts should provide information on a need-to-know basis. This can be a delicate balance. Concepts such as data analysis or hypothesis development can be ugly and complex, but they are the sure foundation of research. The raison d'être of any introductory guide is to instil in the novice sufficient understanding of complex phenomena so that they can progress. Regrettably, *How to do Research* sacrifices the exploration of key research concepts in order to keep the book palatable and thus anything remotely complex remains an enigma waiting to be cracked by the novice at a later date.

It is all the more regrettable since Moore's writing style – so beautifully deployed throughout – would have been best used to tackle the ugly and the complex. As it stands, there are many other books which address those areas that *How to do Research* has omitted or skated over. True, they may lack Moore's accessible writing style and project management tips, but they compensate for this by providing well annotated examples of, say, statistical tests and when particular tests should be applied, techniques on how to improve research validity, sound theory development, improved guidance on writing research reports, and so forth. These slippers are far from being consigned to the dustbin, but perhaps it is time to browse the latest styles in one's local department store.

References

Powell, R. R. & Connaway, L. S. (2004), *Basic research methods for librarians – Fourth edition*, Libraries Unlimited, Oxford.

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