Some thoughts and ideas on ‘Doing research’

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Several key points are important at the outset:

• There is a lot of information available – you can’t read it all, so be selective. Look for good review papers, articles and book chapters to help guide you through the literature. Read around the topic to help develop your interest, your focus, and your research question(s).

There is a resource of papers, articles and book chapters on the UKECONET WEBSITE – www.ukeconet.org. We don’t expect that you will read them all! This isn’t the intention. Browse the information and select papers or articles of particular interest to read. Others may well be useful in assignments and research etc. throughout the course. Above all, get a feel for how to write and interrogate ideas and information to produce a coherent report.

• Try to get a feel for the research and academic interests of our group here in the Department of the Natural & Built Environment. This will be of considerable help during your time with us. You can begin to identify members of the various academic teams who may be able to help and support your learning and research, and also those who might supervise your dissertation. Find out what people are interested in and have written about!

• When you read a paper, think about the style and the approach to presentation. This will help in your own assignments etc.

• Many of the papers also give further useful references that you may also wish to chase up via the Library / Adsetts Centre.

• Think about approaches to research and evaluation, as well as presentation and packaging.

• Keep an open mind in your research and reading and seek to balance the various informed views of the ‘experts’. (Bearing that an expert can be defined as follows: ‘X’ is an unknown quantity and a ‘spurt’ is a drip under pressure [X-spurt]!!!).

• Note carefully our comments and guidance on referencing and on acknowledging information sources, plus on the problems of plagiarism.

• Lastly for now, acquire and read at least one good book on research and learning methods, and approaches to academic writing.

It is also recommended to read around the subject and to at least dip into some of the classic environmental, conservation, countryside recreation and countryside access texts. You can learn a lot from a well-written book, article, or paper even if written years ago. (For the environmental courses a recent example, to dip into might be ‘Last chance to see’ by Douglas Adams and Mark Carwardine, published by Pan in 1990; for more access and countryside subjects, look at Countryside Recreation by Sue Glyptis, or the various books by Marion Shoard. Ask the academic staff for their recommendations.)
Ask members of our academic teams in your field of interest for other ideas and suggestions.

**Some thoughts on the research process!**

Beware of ‘opinions’ rather than ‘facts’ and ‘argument’ on the interpretation of facts, and note the dangers of plagiarism from other people.

‘To lift from one book is plagiarism, to lift from three is pure research – but to make up your mind on all of them is positive purgatory.’

*Adapted from Anon. in: Alfred J. Pugsley (1939) Dewponds in Fable and Fact. Country Life*

**Giving weight to opinions:**


In science, particularly, it is a basic tenet that a mere assertion carries no weight, means nothing beyond the expression of an opinion by the writer. If I write that ‘cats eat mice’ as a bald statement, no scientist can give the statement any value beyond noting that ‘Rotherham makes the unsupported assertion that cats eat mice’. If it is an original observation, I must say where, and under what circumstances, I observed cats eating mice, so that my evidence can be given proper perspective by anyone making a general survey of the diet of cats, or the predators of mice. If my assertion is second-hand, I must give my source, so that the reading scientist can check back to find the circumstances and the evidence of the person who did make the observation.

If, for some reason, I become interested in the phenomenon of cats eating mice, and make some observations that I intend to publish as a contribution to science, it is my duty to make a survey of what other people have written about cats eating mice, so that my observations can be compared with those of my predecessors. If many people have written about this subject, then I don’t need to cite every author, but the few key writers, who will in their turn, have given references to, and summaries of, the work that went before. This is the basic approach on which rests the cumulative nature of the factual raw material of science and scientific research. Learning how to track down the literature, how to use the indexing systems and networks is a key part of education.

Evaluation of the information gathered (primary and secondary), and the interrogative process to come to your own conclusions/opinions is the final step. It is only at this final stage that your ‘view’ or ‘opinion’ has any real worth, beyond it being a statement of one person’s feelings on a topic. The value placed on your opinion or conclusions by others will be set by the evidence you present and by the quality of your academic argument that bring you to this point.

Good Luck!
To succeed

To do well in this Course, and to gain maximum benefit, we expect you to do a substantial amount of background reading. You should be aware that whilst some of the sources are in the Main Library (Adsetts), others are not. Most of these are in the Resources Room Level 4 Norfolk Building. You are expected to access these and to use them!!!

There are also very useful environmental and countryside / tourism, leisure / geography / landscape libraries with the City Council and ‘the other’ University!

Environmentalists - You should also read *The Journal of Practical Ecology and Conservation*, and the various volumes of the journal: *Landscape Archaeology and Ecology*; for environmental ‘issues’ read *ECOS*; and for conservation / ecology read *British wildlife*. [You can subscribe to or purchase these various volumes at a substantial discount. Please ask]. Other journal extracts are in the file boxes in the Resources Room. There are also copies of essential reading from the Agencies such as *Land Management* (formerly *ENACT*) from English Nature / Natural England.

More environmental information is also down-loadable from our web sites at [www.ukeconet.org](http://www.ukeconet.org)

We also run both professional training seminars and major national and regional conferences. Most of these have a huge discount to our own students. These are a good way to network and to meet potential employers etc!!

Ask for details.

If you want a list of suggested key background reading then just ask.............