

Part-III: Information Analysis and Presentation: The Art of Academic Writing

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Planning the Research Strategy/Research Methodology: After selection of the topic for a project, the next step is to carry out the research which requires 'research planning' or technically, adopting the methodologies of research. As discussed in the precious issue, for the first topic, the researcher can search the databases with requisite pre-selected Key Words (Names of specific diseases and additionally, the key words like Public Health, Epidemiology etc.) using limits like India and the time period.

For the second topic, the research can log in to the websites of the respective institutes and can see the lists of publications which are often available. Alternatively, s/he can also go through the profiles of scientists/ researchers in respective disciplines/ departments and can get their publication lists. Additionally, the researcher can devise survey questionnaire according to the purpose of the study. As I have mentioned at the very beginning of this topic, this is an extremely important exercise. Each study is unique in nature and questionnaires should be devised accordingly. While constructing a questionnaire, the researcher must keep in mind what information s/he wants to collect for the study? A questionnaire which is not 'tailor-made' for a particular study often results poor response rates. Never-the-less, it is a common practice among peer groups that if a particular responder express reluctance in attending a questionnaire, most of the others follow suit! It is a general practice that the questionnaire should be compact, specific/focused, neat and trim. There should not be any repetition and it should never reflect unwanted inquisitiveness. It should be kept in mind that the purpose of the researcher is to get the relevant materials only and it should never reflect any intension to intrude into the privacy of the person; otherwise, the entire purpose of the project may go astray! Issues like date of birth, residential address; personal contacts etc. should either be omitted or restricted to the 'least minimum'. The issues like age etc. can also be estimated through alternative ways like years of service. For qualifications, it is always better to check with their individual profiles which are often available; otherwise, alternative ways like providing sets of degrees to tick the applicable items or to strike off those not applicable. There are several alternative ways to dig out peripheral information using phrases like '*Please name Three Journals of your choice in your field of activities*'. This apparently benign question can speak volumes to conceptualize the focus of research in most cases. If the questionnaire is devised properly & purposively for a particular study, the desired information can be extracted quite comfortably which will give rise to the relevant data. This is why questionnaires are devised specifically for a particular study. Since each study is different, the questionnaires too, should be different for each of them. A generalized questionnaire copy pasted from some others certainly saves time & effort of the researcher but at the same time they seem to compromise with the originality of the study and most importantly deprive the researcher to have a better idea of the project which, in turn affect the project to a great extent.

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