

# THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Timeframe:	Minimum of 5 hours
Learning outcome:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explain the research process.</li></ul>
Recommended reading:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sample research report provided in <b>Appendix 3</b>.</li></ul>
Section overview:	<p>The purpose of this section is to orientate you to (1) the research process and (2) the research report required for this module. This section considers the 'big picture' – broadly what you need to know and be able to do.</p> <p>The sections that follow will provide you with more in-depth knowledge about business research and will equip you with the research skills necessary to carry out research and complete your research report.</p>

## Defining Business Research

Business managers are responsible for making coherent, effective, efficient, economical and transparent decisions. Whilst a learned and intuitive understanding of business management and its environment based on existing business knowledge and experience is often used, business research provides more rigorous (scientific) information in support of decision-making. Consider the following definitions:



**Research** is a "systematic process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information – data – in order to increase our understanding of a phenomenon about which we are interested or concerned."

(Leedy and Ormrod, 2013:2)

**Business research** is the "systematic and objective process of gathering, recording, and analysing data to aid in making business decisions."

(Zikmund in Bajpai, 2011)

Key words emerge from these definitions:

- Systematic process (inferring a set of steps)
- Objective process (inferring that the researcher must not be biased or prejudiced)
- Based on a phenomenon (problem or question)
- The process includes:
  - Gathering data
  - Recording data
  - Analysing and interpreting data
- The research process facilitates more rigorous decision-making



Business research is aimed at decreasing the risk of making poorly informed decisions.

Leedy and Ormrod (2013:2-6) emphasise that research has distinct characteristics. Research:

1. Originates with a **problem** (or question) within a **specific area of interest** (topic)
2. May be divided into more manageable **sub problems** (or questions) in order to address the overarching problem (or question)
3. May suggest tentative solutions to the problem in the form of a **hypothesis** (this hypothesis directs the researcher to appropriate data, e.g. employees in training programme A will be more effective in their workplace than employees in training programme B)
4. Requires a clear articulation of the **research objective** (clear statement that identifies what the research process seeks to achieve)
5. Rests on certain **critical assumptions** (factors that are out of the researcher's control, e.g. if the researcher is conducting a survey in which sensitive data is a requirement, he/she needs to assume that participants in the study will answer truthfully; the researcher will, however, explain how he/she has attempted to overcome this, e.g. anonymity and confidentiality preserved and that any participants who withdrew from the study did not experience any ramifications).
6. Requires the **collection and interpretation of data** in an attempt to resolve the problem that initiated the research



Research is not merely gathering information and transferring this from one location (i.e. the Internet) to another (i.e. a report).

(Leedy and Ormrod, 2013:1-2)

The need to make informed decisions motivates an organisation to undertake research. Examples of research titles are given below. In each case, the title suggests the problem areas.



- Motor vehicle brand strategies using social media
- Attrition rates among educators in private schools in Gauteng
- Working mothers and flexible work schedules in the banking sector
- The South African wine market: a marketing segmentation study

In the private sector, research takes place across all industries, and it occurs across all functions, e.g. financial management, human resource management, marketing management, etc. It also extends to community problems where organisations continue to search for innovative ways of improving consumer well being (social and environmental responsibility).

## The Research Process

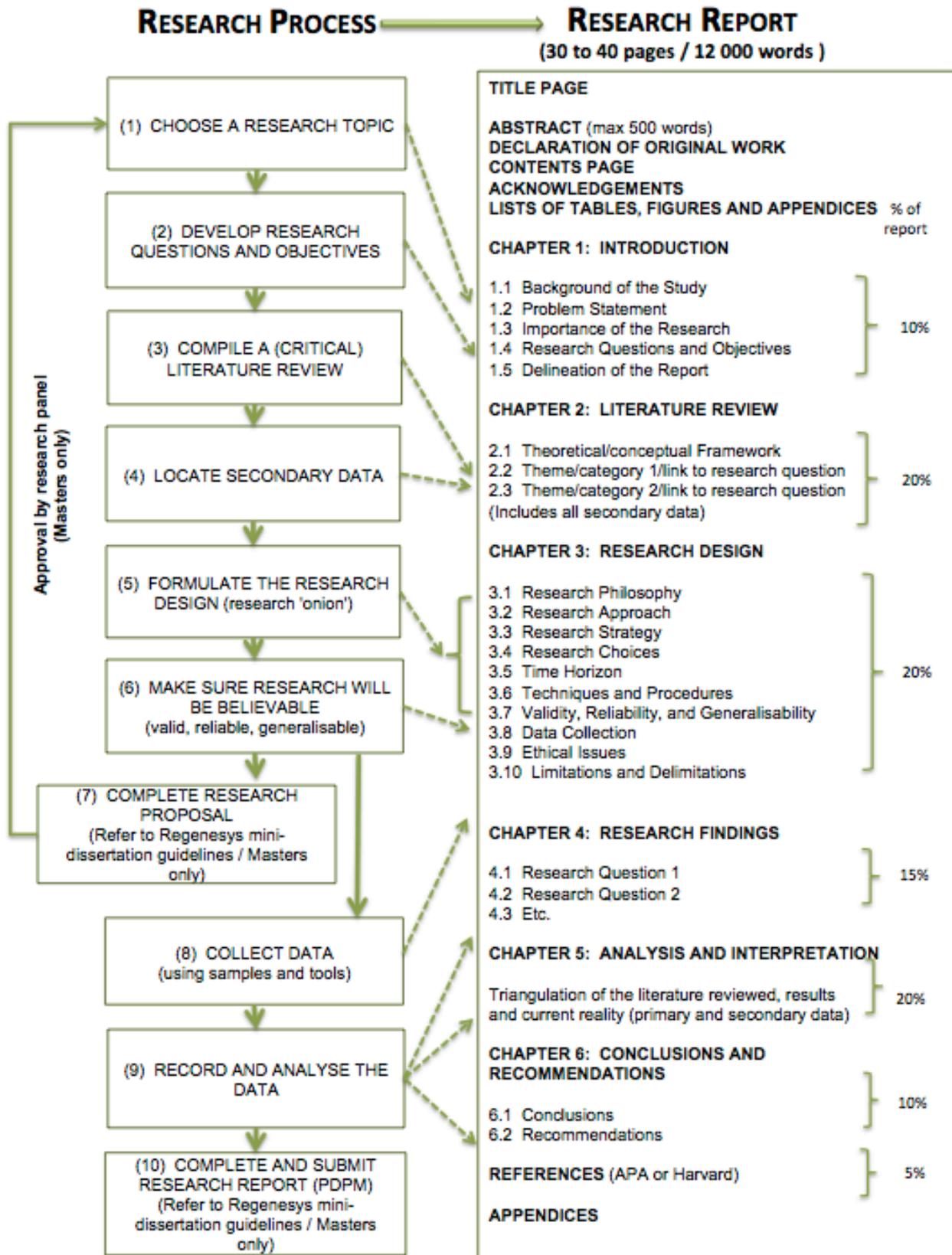
For the purposes of this module we will follow the business research process shown in **Figure 1**, with the exception of step 7 (the research proposal), which is a requirement for Regenesys' Master in Business Administration degree only. The research process provided is aligned to a 'Research Report', which is a requirement for this module.

The 10-step research process is covered in the following sections of this study guide:

1. Choose a research topic – **Section 8.2**
2. Develop research questions and objectives – **Section 8.3**
3. Compile a (critical) literature review – **Section 8.4**
4. Locate secondary data – **Section 8.4**
5. Formulate the research design (using the 'research onion') – **Section 8.5**
6. Make sure research will be believable (valid, reliable and generalisable) – **Section 8.5**
7. Complete research proposal (not a requirement for Postgraduate Diploma in Public Management)
8. Collect data – **Section 8.6**
9. Record and analyse the data – **Section 8.7**
10. Complete and submit a Research Report – **Section 8.8**

A 'Research Report' follows the structured research process, however, the output is considerably less than the mini-dissertation required for the Masters' degree (e.g. 30 to 40 pages versus 80 to 120 pages respectively), none-the-less research principles still apply.

**FIGURE 1: RESEARCH PROCESS AND THE RESEARCH REPORT**



(Adapted from Saunders and Lewis, 2012; Regenesys, 2013)

Terms will be explained under each section in this Study Guide. However, before moving onto the next section, it is useful to consider the following important terms (many of which appear in **Figure 1**).

**TABLE 1: RESEARCH TERMS USED IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS DIAGRAM**

Term	Explanation
<b>Research topic (or problem area)</b>	The focus of the research – the problem area is the axis around which the entire research process revolves. Refer to <b>Section 8.2</b>
<b>Research question</b>	This may be one overall question or a number of key questions that the research process will address. These questions precede the research objectives. Refer to <b>Section 8.2</b> .
<b>Hypothesis</b>	A testable proposition stating that there is a significant difference or relationship between two or more variables. Again, this is a precursor to the research objectives. Refer to <b>Section 8.2</b>
<b>Variable</b>	An individual element or attribute upon which data is to be collected, e.g. when a research problem involves a possible cause-and-effect relationship the researcher will be looking at the extent to which one variable (the hypothesised cause) influences another variable (the hypothesised effect). We refer to variables throughout this Study Guide.
<b>Research objectives</b>	Clear, specific statements that identify what the research process seeks to achieve as a result of doing the research. Refer to <b>Section 8.2</b>
<b>(Critical) Literature Review</b>	A detailed overview of the significant literature available about the chosen topic providing discussion and critical evaluation. It reflects clear argument to contextualise and justify the research. Refer to <b>Section 8.4</b> .
<b>Data</b>	Facts, opinions, and statistics that have been collected and recorded for analysis. We refer to data throughout this Study Guide.
<b>Secondary data</b>	Data used for a research project that were originally collected for some other purpose (e.g. census data). Refer to <b>Section 8.4</b> .
<b>Primary data</b>	Data collected specifically for the research project being undertaken. We consider this in detail in <b>Sections 8.5 and 8.6</b> .
<b>'Research onion' (metaphor for research design)</b>	The route map to chart the researcher's way through choosing an appropriate research design. The outer layers of the onion contain thinking about research philosophies and approaches. The central layers reflect the need to consider research strategies and choices, while at the centre of the 'onion' data collection and analysis are the central concern. We consider this in detail in <b>Section 8.5</b> .
<b>Validity</b>	The extent to which (1) the data collection method or methods accurately measure what they were intended to measure and (2) the research findings are really about what they profess to be about. Refer to <b>Section 8.5</b> .
<b>Reliability</b>	The extent to which the data collection methods and analysis procedures will produce consistent (repeatable) findings. Refer to <b>Section 8.5</b> .
<b>Generalisability</b>	The extent to which the results of the research can be applied more generally (more widely) than the study itself (may only be relevant to the specific context of the study). Refer to <b>Section 8.5</b> .

(Saunders and Lewis, 2012; Leedy and Ormrod, 2013)



## Task Questions

Whilst you may not have an in-depth understanding of the research process yet, the following task is aimed at orientating you to research structure, in particular the research process and the research report provided in **Figure 1**.

Refer to the sample research report provided in **Appendix 3** and then, as a class, answer the questions that follow. Do not be concerned about the detail – we will cover this in the remainder of the Study Guide – focus on the significant elements.

1. What is the research topic?
2. Identify the background to the research and the research problem?
3. Does the research present a research question (questions) or a hypothesis (hypotheses)?
4. Why is this research important?
5. Identify the literature review and identify the framework for this research. Discuss the possible usefulness of a framework in research.
6. Locate the section that explains the research design. Discuss why you think a clearly articulated research design is fundamental to research.
7. Identify examples of data.
8. Brainstorm what it means to "analyse" data.
9. Compare this research report to the research process outlined in **Figure 1**. Make sure you can match the key elements in the research process to this research report.
10. What have you learned about research structure?

## When is Business Research Justified?

Whilst there is a need to make well-informed decisions, not every decision requires business research. Zikmund, Babin, Carr, and Griffin (2012) provide four criteria that assist in determining the need for research:

1. **Time constraints** (the urgency of the situation may prevent research);
2. **The availability of data** (the data may already exist or it may not be practically possible to collect the data, e.g. too costly);
3. **The nature of the decision to be made** (a routine decision that will not incur a substantial investment may not warrant research; the more strategic or risky the decision the more likely research is required); and
4. **The value of the research information in relation to costs** (the return must be worth the investment).