

All beginnings are difficult, but each beginning is filled with a magic....: From topic to research question

Metaphor: Picture of a block of granite before the sculpture takes shape. From raw material to a work of art....



How can I get going in a concrete way?

Important steps

In the previous sections we have seen which possible starting points there are for an ARP and which can give direction. These general hints and examples illustrate the core of the first phase, finding a research theme or the ideal of a possible research question. **Documenting** such a process is always useful, i.e. noting all sorts of thoughts, observations and ideas about your theme and your research question thus supporting reflection. In order to do this we have assembled a range of processes and sources of inspiration, e.g. the research diary (see overview of instruments).

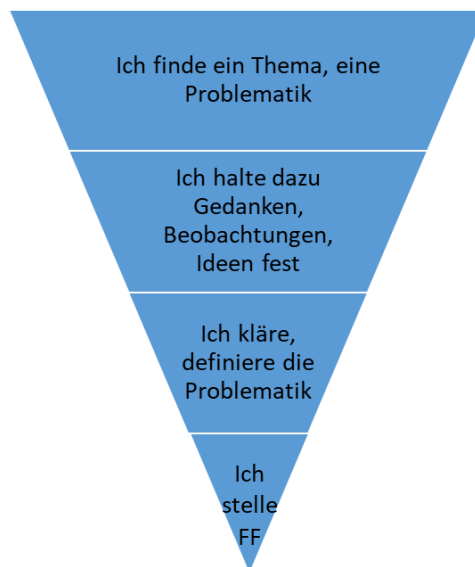


Fig 1: From the topic to the research question (adapted from:
<https://www.mahara.at/artefact/file/download.php?file=593547&view=80446>)

In the second phase it is a question of **narrowing down the question** and **defining**.

Let's start with an example. You have seen that your students approach reading tasks with a low level of motivation and self-confidence. They stumble over unknown words and complain that they are understanding very little. As the teacher you would like to understand the reasons for this better and to make changes. Such questions arise:

- What are the reasons for this pattern of student behaviour?
- Does the *problem* concern all learners?
- Are learners facing problems with all texts?
- How do effective learners approach the reading tasks?
- What was my approach up to now?
- Which other methods are available?
- What might be the view of colleagues, instructors, the literature.... about the situation?
- ...

We have put together a set of tools for this stage as well.

The aim of the process is a gradual pinning down of the **research question**, which may serve as a guideline for the whole ARP. In our example, this might be:

- Which challenges do students face when solving a reading task?
- Which reading strategies do the learners know and employ?
- Which forms of work (individual reading, questions in plenary, co-operative reading, reading circles etc.) support reading comprehension?
- Does production-orientated reading support the understanding of a text?
- ...

The process as described above and, especially Phases 2 & 3 are not necessarily linear. Asking questions even if they are still imprecise and broad is supportive to fining the research area.

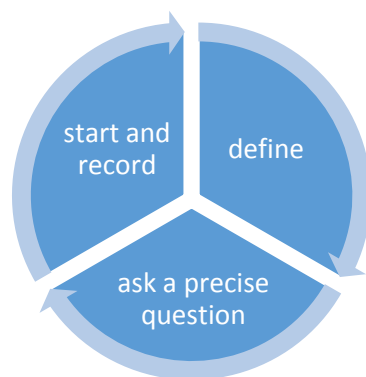


Fig. 2: Developing a research question

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