- **The do's of research question generation**
  - **Read**
    - Questions rarely emerge from our thoughts fully formed. Through reading, we refine what we want to know, or what is yet to be known about a topic.
  - **Think in terms of concepts, not just topics**
    - A topic may be very broad, but exploring it through the lens of a particular concept can help focus on what it is we want to ask
  - **Identify puzzles**
    - Through the literature review (discussed in more detail, below), we can often identify contradictions for the existing research. These contradictions may inform our own research question
  - **Identify existing gaps and limitations**
    - There may be particular groups that have not been studied in relation to our topic, either because their conceptual significance was not recognised or because previous samples did not include them.
  - **Acknowledge feedback loops**
    - While we always aim for a tight focus, we do not want a question that is so unfocused that it leads us chasing down every potential issue at the expense of following through analysis and conclusions
  - **Write a question**
    - Rather than making a statement, actually shape your focus into a question form, something that ends with a question mark
- **The don'ts' of research question generation**
  - Avoid rushing to your research question
  - Avoid problems of misinterpretation, by conceptualising all of the core concepts
  - Avoid posing long and complicated research questions
  - Avoid basing or tying your research question to a particular method
  - Avoid asking questions that have already been answered
- **Research aims**
  - **Aims**
    - What we want to achieve by our research: for example, an understanding of how year 8 students use mobile phones
  - **Theory**
    - A record of previous thinking about the important processes that shape social patterns
- **Literature review**
  - **Reviewing the literature**
    - Some people may begin a literature review with a clearly defined research question, but as a literature review will stimulate new ideas, your question needs to be flexible enough to change as you read
  - **Evaluating sources**
    - **Peer reviewed articles in scholarly journals**
      - These are research articles that have been read and commented on by other academics – they have been 'quality controlled'. They provide full details of the research, including the method and research questions as well as findings and conclusions.
    - **Conference proceedings**
      - These are a bit like edited books, created from papers presented at gatherings of academics. Many conference proceedings are peer reviewed, and published in conjunction with, or soon after, the conference. They can include new research, but may not be easily accessible.
    - **Monographs and edited books**
      - Monographs are scholarly books on a particular issue; edited books consist of chapters by a number of different authors. They are sometimes, but not always, peer reviewed. Again, they can be a useful source of information and analysis, but are not always completely up to date
    - **Textbooks**

        - These are written with the aim of making information accessible to people who are learning about a subject. Writers develop summarised and simplified accounts of research, which may be incomplete or lack the nuance of the original report
    - **Research reports**
        - Not all research is conducted by academics in universities, and not all research is reported in books and articles. Other institutions also conduct and report on research. Some have strong links in academic and subject reports to peer review. Research reports are also produced by government departments, and are subject to internal review process.
    - **Media pieces**
        - This includes a broad array of materials, including articles, opinion pieces and editorials, interviews and radio and television reports
    - **Internet sites**
        - This information is accessible, and often reports on very recent issues. Some sites are simply electronic versions of social scientific research, but others, for e.g. interest groups, blogs, discussions forums or online journalism, are not subject to peer review, and the information they provide should be treated with caution.
- **Managing your review**
    - Ideally you should keep the following types of information:
        - The key search term you've used, so that you don't repeat them
        - The full bibliographic details of each work you read
        - The details of each work, including key words, abstract, research questions, problems and aims, methods, key findings, arguments, conclusions
        - A list of works that look relevant, and that you plan to track down
- **Writing the literature review**
    - Literature review
        - A critical analysis of the existing research literature, theoretical and empirical, related to our research topic. It informs us of what is known and not known about our topic.

- **Methods**
    - **Selecting a research method**
        - Understand a wide range of social research methods
        - Acknowledge that all research methods have strengths and weaknesses
        - Select the research method to suit the research project
    - **Moving from your research question to the research method**
        - **Practicability considerations**
            - Which research methods are feasible for this particular research question and also for ourselves as the researcher
        - **Social science considerations**
            - Which methods will provide the most rigorous and valid way of answering this research question from a social science perspective?
        - **Resource considerations**
            - Which research methods are the most cost-effective in terms of time, for both the researcher and respondents and also in term of finances, to answer this research question
- **Definition and measurement decisions**
    - **Conceptualisation**
        - The process of developing concepts that focus on the research question
    - **Nominal definition**
        - A definition of exactly what we mean by the particular concepts we are using
    - **Operationalisation**
        - Operationalisation is about deciding how we will measure or identify our concept, and the means we will use to determine its presence or its absence
- **The theoretical direction: deductive or inductive**
    - **Deductive theory**
        - Deductive theory is a way of developing theory that begins with the idea and proceeds to collect data to test the validity of the theory
    - **Inductive theory**