



Doing media research



By Allan Rowe

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Introduction

Whatever media course you are doing – an A level, a vocational course, a diploma or an undergraduate course – at some stage you will be asked to find out about something for yourself. This is called 'Research'. Whether you are just looking up something on the Internet, watching or listening to a film or music for the first time, or embarking on a full scale investigation of a topic, your research is for a purpose and therefore needs to be systematic and organised. This does not mean to say that you won't find things out by accident. You may be watching a programme on television, looking at a picture in a magazine, or reading a blog for pleasure and suddenly realise that this is relevant to your research. However, in order for this to happen you need to have a clear idea of what you are looking for and how you intend to use your newfound information.

The purposes of media research

Contextual research

A characteristic of media studies is to delve into the background of a topic. This involves finding out about the circumstances relating to the production, distribution, marketing and consumption of the particular part of the media you are studying.

So, early on in our studies we are interested in questions like:

Who was behind the making of this film?

What prompted the marketing of this magazine?

What kind of people like this sort of music?

Some of this information is factual, but soon the questions may become more abstract and theoretical. Generally we start from questions of what and who, and end up asking the more probing questions of how and why.

Textual research

Source material such as pictures, newspapers, music and DVDs relating to your subject area are the texts from which you glean your information. Unlike merely watching a film for pleasure or listening to some music in the background, your investigation to your source material should have a purpose. Usually this will be to do with identifying aspects of form, style or content that are shared by a number of media sources. It may involve attempting to establish how products change over time. For instance, British films from the 1980s were

generally presented and promoted differently from British films made in the 1990s, even though certain characteristics in both decades were similar. Often this kind of research is done before you work on your own project.

Research for media products

This involves gathering of information, ideas and material for the creation of media products. This is a major part of 'media work' not only for factual programmes and newspapers but also for entertainment forms. It should be a major component of pre-production work for any media production work you do.

Not only are you concerned with authenticity – whether an item of clothing or a figure of speech is right – but also what purpose does it serve; how does it inform the narrative. Even if your research is not contributing to a media product, you will have to present it in some way (a paper, a talk a presentation), so you need to consider whether you have appropriate material in the right form for your audience.

Consider an area of media that might be interesting to research and give examples of:

- Relevant contextual information
- Media texts you could analyse
- Material for a media product (documentary, magazine article) relating to the topic

Choosing your research project

Most research work you do will involve some constraints in terms of subject matter and the form of delivery. However, there will usually be a considerable element of choice in terms of content and often of form. Do look carefully at what the requirements are. These can be found on the awarding bodies website. You will find links to these in the section headed 'General Reading'. In addition, try to look at examples of good work produced by previous students .

You will usually be required to submit your research proposal, to the person who is supervising you, and maybe to an external moderator. This is a really important stage as you will be committing yourself to work, which may take several weeks if not months. Make sure you have thought through and researched the issues below before you commit yourself.

Are you interested in the subject matter?

Students often will start from a media product or a group of products that they like. While this may be a useful starting point it is not enough. You should not assume that just because you like music, for example, that your work will automatically be easier. You will still have to adopt an inquisitive and thorough approach to your subject area.

It usually helps if your experience of the product throws up questions already: Why was it made? What kind of people would like it? Does it mean different things to different people? Often 'difficult' or challenging products lead to the best research.

Alternatively, you can start with a question such as 'how did films get to a stage where they could be shown in people's homes? Or else take on an issue (such as presentation of male and female gender in action movies) and then choose the products that will help you explore the issues.

What questions do I want to ask?

It is not enough with research to simply start with a topic. You need to decide what you are trying to find out. This can be seen as a question or a series of questions or as a 'problematic'. This is a set of problems that you have set yourself. These need to be questions that are not capable of simple or short answers.

Again, it will help if the tasks you set yourself are challenging or difficult. If you think you already know the answer to your questions then there is little point in you embarking on a project. At the same time your research needs to be manageable both in terms of being able to find the relevant information in the time you have available. If in doubt you should ask advice on the suitability of the research project you have chosen.

In setting yourself questions it may be helpful to look at the work of Benjamin Bloom who developed a taxonomy or classification of different questions that we ask. These are in order of complexity

Knowledge:

arrange, define, duplicate, label, list, memorise, name, order, recognize, relate, recall, repeat, reproduce state.

Comprehension:

classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate.

Application:

apply, choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write.

Analysis:

analyse, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test.

Synthesis:

arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up, write.

Evaluation:

appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose compare, defend estimate, judge, predict, rate, core, select, support, value, evaluate

For a fuller explanation of Bloom's taxonomy see

www.first2.org/resources/assessment/Bloom_Taxonomy.htm

Can I get the information that I want?

Before you submit your proposal it is important to do some initial searches to find out how readily available the information that you want is able to find. While you are likely to use a range of formats, your initial source is likely to be the Internet. If you use your keywords (name of your product and concepts you are planning to use) you should be able to get information on the availability of:

Books and DVDs from Amazon www.amazon.co.uk

Printed articles from Google scholar scholar.google.co.uk

Internet material from Google www.google.co.uk

and from Clusty clusty.com

Planning your research project

Having decided on your topic and your problematic, you will need to plan your project. The tightness of your plan will depend at least in part on how you work best. The advantage of a plan is that it provides a framework by which we can chart our progress and allows us to work out what our priorities are likely to be well in advance.

However, during the course of your research you may find that new unexpected elements have come up that have changed the nature of your plan. One of the pleasures of undertaking research is that discoveries are often made by chance - the unexpected film watched late at night on FilmFour, the insightful article found in a listing magazine, or the strange picture found on Google image when you were looking for something else

How much time do you have?

It is always best to start planning from the date when your project is due to be completed. Once you know what your final deadline is you can trace your plan backwards to the date when you intend to start. You can usually find the deadline from the awarding body website. However, usually your research will be marked first by your teacher/supervisor so the date will be earlier than this (and work may not be accepted after the fixed date).

You are often given an earlier date for submitting a 'draft'. It is very unwise to miss this date as it gives you a chance to get detailed feedback and an opportunity to fill in the gaps that are bound to occur the first time you do it.

It is worth working out how much time you can give to the research. You obviously need to consider the time you need to spend on other parts of the subject/unit as well as other subjects you are doing. One way of working this out is to consider how much of the assessment is devoted to this research, how much time you have in class sessions and how much time you will spend outside class.

Example

2nd year A level; Research project 20% of final assessment.

- • Hours in class 150 (30x5)
- • Out of Class time 150 hours Total 300 hours
- • Time for research = $300 \times 20\% = 60$ hours

- •It is likely that less than half of this time will be in class time ; so you will need to use more of your study time on this task , say 45 hours.
- If the plan is to complete this research in half of the year (20 weeks including holidays) -you need to set aside 2-3 hours a week for the research

Setting interim tasks

You need to break your project down into a series of tasks that need to be completed. They will not necessarily be completed in sequence but it is helpful to have target end dates for each of these activities .

Possible breakdown of tasks might be:

- Deciding on topic area
- Defining problematic
- Submitting proposal
- Undertaking general reading
- Listing concepts to be used
- Viewing /listening to /reading primary media material (films/TV programmes/newspapers/magazines/audio tracks etc) that are the subject of your research
- Finding and reading secondary sources (articles/books/documentaries etc) about your topic
- Planning primary research (content analysis/interviews questionnaires etc)
- Undertaking primary research
- Keeping a record of sources you have used
- Writing a bibliography
- Recording your findings
- Evaluating specific material
- Drafting your findings
- Producing a final version in the required format
- Presenting your material in the approved format
- Receiving and responding to feedback
- Producing final version
- Evaluating your research activity

This is a long list and not all of these will necessarily be required for your research. However some of your activities may need to be more detailed.

For example, you may need to visit a specialist library (the BFI

Library (www.bfi.org.uk/nationallibrary/) or exhibition, the newspaper library at Colindale (www.bl.uk/services/reading/newsprepare.html) or the National Media Museum in Bradford. "<http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/>.

You be able to access your local university library by asking for a day pass.

Devising an Action Plan

It is suggested that you draw up an Action Plan covering some of the headings above. This should be a working document, which is amended as you go along. It will also be a useful source when evaluating your research at the end.

In setting target completion dates it is easiest to start from the end and work backwards. So, in the example below you would start by working out the completion date first.

Completion date	16-02-09
Target completion date	09-02-09
Skills required	Writing, textual analysis
Help	Tutor/Supervisor
Resources	BFI National Library for articles and books DVD for watching films
Task	<i>British film in the 1990s</i>

You'll notice that in the example above I have allowed a week before my Target completion date and the Completion date. This gives me a certain degree of flexibility or extra time should I miss my Target completion date deadline.

General reading

There is a strong temptation when you have decided on your topic to rush into the media texts you have decided to use and to find out as much as you can about them. However, like many journeys into the unknown it is helpful to have a map to guide you on your way.

Text books

You may be using a textbook for the course, or your library is likely to have copies of books for the course. If you are not sure of what books to look at, there are recommended reading lists that accompany specifications from awarding bodies

For AQA Media Studies A level

www.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/pdf/AQA-2570-W-SP-10.PDF

For OCR Media studies A level

www.ocr.org.uk/Data/publications/key_documents/AS_ALevel_GCE_Media_Studies_Specification.pdf

For WJEC Media studies A level

www.ocr.org.uk/Data/publications/key_documents/AS_ALevel_GCE_Media_Studies_Specification.pdf

For WJEC Film Studies A level

www.wjec.co.uk/uploads/publications/1598.pdf

For Edexcel National Diploma

www.edexcel.org.uk/VirtualContent/46954/BN011680_NACD_Media_Spec_Iss3.pdf

For OCR National Diploma

www.ocr.org.uk/Data/publications/key_documents/Administrative_Guide_to_OCR_Nationals_20072008_A028.pdf

Having found a suitable textbook use the index to find relevant sections and browse through them. You should not expect to find reference to your specific choice of media product but you should be able to find sections of concepts related to your research such as genre, auteur theory, globalisation, effects on audiences etc.

Alternatively, you could look at books that are designed introduce you to a range of media concepts:

A biographical dictionary of film D Thomson, 1976, New York: Morrow_

The Film Studies Dictionary S Blandford, BK Grant, J Hillier, 2001, Hodder Arnold_

Cinema Studies The Key Concepts, S Hayward, 2000, Routledge

Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies J Watson, A Hill, 2003, Hodder Arnold_
The Media Studies Student's Book G Branston & R Stafford, 2003, Routledge
Narrative and genre: key concepts in media studies N Lacey, 2000, Palgrave MacMillan
Media Institutions and Audiences: Key Concepts in Media Studies, N Lacey, 2002, Palgrave MacMillan

A useful site with an introduction to concepts and ideas relevant to media research is www.ccms-infobase.com

An alternative source for an overview is to use a general encyclopaedia such as *Encyclopaedia Britannica* which you can find in your library. Britannica articles are written by leading specialists in the area of study. This is also available online www.britannica.co.uk, However, this a subscription service which if you are lucky your library may subscribe to.

You may also be familiar with Wikipedia en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Wikipedia is dependent on the contributions of enthusiasts and the quality of its material is less consistent than *Britannica*. However, items are widely read and corrected, and the analysis of the way items have been changed is in itself an interesting piece of research. Generally items that are fan-based or controversial are more problematic A well written contribution will usually give access to further sources either in print or Internet form. One possibility is that on the basis of your research you can add to or amend a Wikipedia entry. For a discussion around the reliability of Wikipedia look at news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4530930.stm

Primary and Secondary research

Often research projects requires you to do both Primary and Secondary research, without necessarily defining the difference between them.

There are two dimensions to this difference. One is concerned with the source of the material – is material collected by the researcher? An example of this might be observing people watching a horror film and discussing it with them afterwards. This is regarded as Primary Research, as it is gathered by the researcher. Set against this is material or data that already exists, such as the film itself or the box office returns for the film. This is referred to as Secondary Research.

The other dimension is the work that is done with the material. Secondary research involves summarising and organising research that has already been done by someone else. This is often referred to as a Literature Review. However, primary research in this sense would involve use of already gathered material but providing your own systematic analysis. To take the example above this could involve a comparison between the box office returns of Japanese horror films and those of the Hollywood re-makes. Similarly, a study could be made of the narrative structure of horror films using existing headings such as hero, victim, monster, action and code. Systematic analysis of media texts is a valid research activity.

Even if you are undertaking some kind of primary research you need to undertake secondary research to find out what the field of study is about, and what has already been done. There are benefits in a small-scale study of finding work that has already been done in a different time and place or with different material and then applying it to your own experience. For instance, you might find research from the 70s that showed presenters on children's television were predominantly male and that woman presenters tended to be subservient to them. You could take this research and compare it with contemporary television where the same gender roles would appear more equal.

In designing your research it is important to remember, that it is better for secondary research to be started (even if not completed) before embarking on your primary research.

Secondary research using the Internet

The Internet is likely to be your major source for facts, opinions and even ideas for your research. The material available to you is immense. Bear in mind though that for most purposes the problem is that there is too much material and you will have to discern what information is the most useful. You may feel that you know how to use the Internet already but it is worth going over some points that will help you get the best out of the Internet for your research purposes.

The first question you need to ask is why the material is there. The Internet is an effective marketing tool, so a good deal of material is there to try to sell products. Sometimes material is there because it is part of the remit of a company, public corporation or government department to keep customers, users or citizens informed on issues that are central to their purposes. For instance, this website is produced by a college lecturer, supported by the British Film Institute which includes in its remit 'to promote education about film, television and the moving image'.

Occasionally material is there to reflect the interests, obsessions or vanity of the contributor. None of this makes the material, in itself, unreliable or biased but it is worth bearing this in mind, when assessing the source.

Material from the Internet is usually free. However, in some instances you are required to register with the site, although not having to pay for it. This gives information about you, which may be useful to the source and if you are not careful to tick the right box your email may be flooded with special offers.

Some sites will give you access to some information but will only offer other information on paying a subscription. An example of this is BARB (Broadcasters Audience Research Board Ltd) www.barb.co.uk/ which gives useful free information of the numbers of people watching or listening to TV channels and radio stations but charges for more detailed information on the characteristics of the viewers and listeners and the specific programmes they use.

Using a search engine

Most of your initial search will involve using a Search Engine, such as Google.

For an account of the most popular search engines see

www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/SearchEngines.html

A search engine will attempt to link you to sites that are related to the words you have used in your query, which will often come into the millions. It then orders them in terms of the popularity and the relevance of the site. This is not a simple process and works electronically, rather than by human intervention. Criteria include the proximity of terms you have cited in the site, and how near they are to the beginning of the text, and the links between each site and other relevant sites. This listing is clearly important and most researchers are unlikely to go beyond the first ten pages of links. For a fuller description of this process look at www.googleguide.com/google_works.html

Some hints about using Google

Don't put in questions or sentences – the search will ignore short words like 'the', 'why', 'and'.

Identify your keywords and link them up in different orders to find appropriate sites

Mix up subject words with function words – such as Interview + Scorsese

Identify phrases you want to find using apostrophes e.g. "National Viewer and Listeners Association"

Limit your searches to UK sites (if that is what you want) rather than searching worldwide.

Use Boolean operators to improve your search AND NOT OR. For an account of this see www.internettutorials.net/boolean.html

A different search engine called Clusty clusty.com works on a different pattern in that it will cluster particular sites together on a generic basis.

For example, if you are looking for material on Stephen Spielberg, you type in Spielberg, and the site will distinguish between Stephen and Robin Spielberg (the singer songwriter). It then gives you options between sites devoted to reviews of films, biographies, celebrity articles and to his response to the Beijing Olympics. Clusty operates as a hierarchy and therefore can save you time exploring sites that are not relevant to your research.

Useful sites

Rather than constantly searching for new sites of the millions available you will want to identify particular sites that are reliable but also give access to a range of material through their own search mechanisms. There will be some element of human selection and possibly editorial control, although not always with links to other sites.

Some sites will be specific to your own research – the official sites for films or the home page of a magazine. Below are some of the sites that students have found useful.

The Internet Movie Data Base www.imdb.com/ This database offers a comprehensive set of data on films that have been released (back to 1895) up to films in production. It includes hard data such as box office returns, news items, reviews and user ratings and comments.

BBC <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

This site has an immense archive of news and comment in print, audio and video, not only on the BBC's own output but on other media and other cultural material. News items tend to be shorter than those from the quality press.

Guardian www.guardian.co.uk/

Considerable archive of news, opinions and background pieces on Media, Film appears under Culture. Search allows for most recent or most relevant (usually more helpful). Also organises items around linked themes e.g. Film censorship. Great wealth of articles, reviews and even stats (overnights) for television and the media. (Need to sign up).

The Times (and Sunday Times) www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/

Search allows for secondary key words – so a search on reality TV allows for a second search on the basis of TV companies

OFCOM www.ofcom.org.uk/

OFCOM is the regulatory body for broadcasting and telecommunications. The site is particularly useful for research findings on aspects of the media industry

Press Complaints Commission www.pcc.org.uk/

This is an industry based self-regulatory body for newspapers and Magazines. Source of information of production codes and of complaints made searchable on basis of subject matter and publications.

Advertising Standards Authority www.asa.org.uk/

This is an industry body with responsibility for setting standards and receive complaints on print and broadcast adverts. Has an archive of complaints but also publishes research on advertising and a site for students

British Board of Film Classification www.bbfc.co.uk/ and www.sbbfc.co.uk/

Has a comprehensive record of classification decisions since the mid 80s. There are a number of case studies on the student bbfc site

Columbia Journalism Review www.cjr.org/resources/

Account of cross media ownership on a multi-national basis, together with articles

Senses of cinema www.sensesofcinema.com/ An on line film journal, with an introductory article on a wide list of film directors from Hollywood and world cinema

Mediaknowall www.mediaknowall.com/

A useful introductory site with introductions to a range of media topics and a further links

UK Film Council www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/

The website of the body which takes a special interest in British cinema – with research papers and a valuable annual statistical review of the British cinema, and details of National Lottery Grant allocation for filmmaking in England.

Find Any Film www.findanyfilm.com/

Supported and funded by the UK Film Council the site that finds information about films currently available in the UK – in any format – to watch, download or rent.

British Film Institute ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/

Extensive website on cinema and television including some archive material from the film magazine *Sight and Sound*. The site includes study guides which are references to books and articles by topics. It also includes www.screenonline.org.uk/ a guide to British film and TV history including both text and clips of programmes.

Audit Bureau of Circulation www.abc.org.uk/

This is an audit of the circulation of newspapers and magazines with links to their websites.

National Readership Survey www.nrs.co.uk/

Information on readership of newspapers and magazines based on surveys of readers

Screen Digest www.screendigest.com/

International news and data on the audio visual industries.

Time Out www.timeout.com/

Mainly London-based listings magazine with an archive of reviews and articles about various media events.

Social Issues Research Centre www.sirc.org/

Research into social and lifestyle issues including the reposting, representation and effects of popular media

Voice of the Shuttle vos.ucsb.edu/

A very comprehensive site from the University of California which covers links to the humanities including a section on Media studies, interpreted widely.

Film Indexes Online film.chadwyck.co.uk/home

Film Indexes Online - is based on data from the BFI and the AFI. They offer journal references for films via title and personality searches.

Film Literature Index webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/fli/index/jsp

Although Film Literature Index only covers indexing from 1976 to 2001, is one of the best Journal Indexes on the web and is free.

Movie Review Query Engine www.mrqe.com

Movie Review Query Engine is one of the better online reviews search engines with links to broadsheets, e-journals and emerging online critical web based sources.

Intute www.intute.ac.uk

Intute aims to guide users to the very best webpages/resources for education and research.

Social Issues Research Centre www.sirc.org

Its useful search engine guides user to free online full-text articles on social and lifestyle issues.

Some hints on using the Internet for research

When you find a site that looks useful skim read it and only save if you find it helpful

If possible highlight and save key parts of text on to your own file

Don't just print out in the hope that it might be useful at some time

Keep a list of domain names of all sites you have found useful

Save the most useful sites in your favourites or bookmarks

Try to establish who is responsible for the content of pages you are using - and check their status

Establish the purpose of the site and/or the organisation which is producing it

Use any comments or 'contact us' or string to open up issues and get further information or the response of other users

Check for other links on the sites you have used

Identify original source for sites and the date (and place) of original publication

Check how recently the site has been updated

User generated content

This covers a broad platform of ways that people share knowledge, experiences and ideas. This can take the form of Blogs, Forums/Chat rooms or Social networks like Facebook, MySpace or You Tube, which you might already contribute to yourself. Information on these sites is not vetted for accuracy, except through comments by other users. However, increasingly they are being vetted by website administrators for offensiveness, copyright infringement and sometimes for relevance to theme of the site. For a fuller account of issues involved see. wikipedia.org/wiki/User-generated_content

Two particular sites Technorati for Blogs technorati.com/ and Omgili for Discussions www.omgili.com/ are useful with search facilities for current topics. Generally UGC is useful as the basis of Primary Research on topical issues but which you have to work on to produce material for your research rather than as a basis for authentic information or informed opinion.

Other sources

Despite the dominance of the Internet as a source of information other sources remain of major importance. In most cases these other published sources have a level of quality control. For instance, books are not only edited, but are submitted to readers before publication. As a consequence, unlike some web sites, there is some control on the accuracy of the information they include.

BFI National Library

The Library has been supporting A Level teachers and students for over 10 years from arranging group visits to supplying photocopied materials through the post. It has many potentially useful sources (over 60,000 books and 6000 magazine titles) with databases and staff expertise to support independent research on a wide range of topics relating to film, television and media studies. Staff at the Library are happy to talk to students about their projects and make recommendations such as key text books like:

Cinema studies: the key concepts. - 3rd ed.

HAYWARD, Susan

Routledge key guides

Abingdon : Routledge, 2006. xv, 586 p.; bibliog. indices.

ISBN 0415367824

The Library also has a mediatheque terminal for onsite moving image research.

www.bfi.org.uk/library email: library@bfi.org.uk

Books

Use the course specifications and references in standard text books as a starting point for finding appropriate books. If you look up the book on the Internet you are usually able to access a table of contents and sometimes sample text, so you can judge whether it is at the level you need. A useful and economical source of information on film is *Pocket Essentials* www.pocketessentials.com/ which offer short introductions to genres and the work of directors. Even if the book you want is not available in your local library, you should be able to access it by inter-library loans. This can take time so it is important to get orders in early in the research timetable.

Magazines and Journals

There are numerous magazines covering aspects of the media. They vary from magazines concerned with celebrity gossip entertainment magazines like *Heat*, industry-based magazines about the marketing of media products like *Campaign* through to academic journals like *Film Quarterly*. More established journals often have a website, with sample material, so you can judge their content and level, This will often include a record of content of previous editions like *Sight and Sound* www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/.

TV and Radio Programmes, DVD Extras, Lectures

While TV and radio programmes, DVD extras and lectures may be perceived as one-offs, and in some cases produced as entertainment, they can be useful sources for research.

The BBC site holds both video and audio recordings and transcripts of interviews about film search.bbc.co.uk/cgi-bin/search/results.pl?go=homepage&scope=all&tab=all&q=film+interviews&Search=Search. The Guardian website carries transcripts of interviews with leading film makers browse.guardian.co.uk/search?site=guardian&search=nft%20interviews

DVD extras are often a useful source, and those for older films often have a reflective rather than a marketing purpose. Occasionally they include a blow-by-blow commentary given by the filmmakers which appears as a voice-over to the whole film such as director Joe Wright, talking us through *Atonement* on the DVD extra.

Another particularly strong example of this are the Sundance Channel's *Anatomy of a Scene* series.

Using sources

Having found a source of information or ideas about your topic you need to decide how you are going to use. It is not enough simply to collect sources and put them into a folder. More often than not you are likely to find too much material, so you will need to be selective in what you use and what you draw from them. There are three criteria you need to apply:

- Relevance
- Authenticity
- Accuracy

Relevance

It is not enough merely to see that certain key words are included in the text. You need to know whether the material is relevant to what you are trying to find out? This means that even before you save the material you will need to skim read to find out its content. Academic pieces will often start with a summary or digest of the argument and serious journalism will usually outline the argument or evidence at the beginning or the end. You need to refer back to the original question or problematic that you set yourself and see whether issues are addressed in the source. If not, but you still find it interesting you may well wish to adapt your original problematic.

Authenticity

You need to trust the source of the material to deliver what you want. The starting point is to discover what you can about the source. This involves finding out what art dealers refer to as the provenance of the material, the source that it originates from. Is it academic, official, reporting, marketing or the expression of opinion or prejudice? All of these sources can be useful to you but you need to know why they have been produced. Exploring where they come from will indicate to you the selectivity, spin or bias that is likely to be attached to them. There will be checks attached to the production of material. Academic work is subject to 'peer review' reading by experts in the field before publication. Official sources are likely to be challenged by opposition parties in a democracy. Journalism is subject to codes of practice and can be subject to complaint and even civil proceedings.

Accuracy

The issues raised under authenticity affects the truth of what is being said. If a finding that you have is key to your research you should try to look for other sources to back it up. This

may be possible by checking the sources quoted in your material. This is why Bibliographies (see below) are so important and why you should aspire to this in your own work.

There is however a problem that when sources quote another source that may in turn be from another source and so on. An expression of opinion and prejudice can then be seen as expression of truth because it has been published. This is a particular problem if you use popular journalism as your major source of information. Occasionally, inaccuracies find themselves recycled as the truth – some sites such as Wikipedia often try to alert researchers to 'grey areas' by including the phrase 'citation needed' next to a statement of fact that does not appear to have been backed up by hard evidence.

On the next page you will find some material you can use to explore issues of relevance, authenticity and accuracy.

Examples

Researching on the issue of EMOs and Suicide came up with the following sources.

Consider each item and its usefulness in research into this area using issues of Relevance, Authenticity and Accuracy

ITEM A

EMO cult warning for parents

By SARAH SANDS_Daily Mail16 August 2006

Parents warned over the new EMO goth danger

There is a also a term which is new to me and amounts to a much more dangerous teenage cult.

The Emos - short for Emotional - regard themselves as a cool, young sub-set of the Goths.

Although the look is similar, the point of distinction, frightening for schools and parents, is a celebration of self harm.

Emos exchange competitive messages on their teenage websites about the scars on their wrists and how best to display them. Girls' secondary schools have for some time been concerned about the increase in self harm.

One governor of a famous boarding school told me that it was as serious a problem as binge drinking, but rarely discussed for fear of encouraging more girls to do it.

Although it is invariably described as a 'secret shame', there is actually a streak of exhibitionism about it.

For full article see www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-400953/EMO-cult-warning-parents.html-

ITEM B

Emo is no suicide cult

Paul Evans

Published in New Statesman 03 June 2008

Angry - but not morose - teenagers gather to mount a singing demonstration at the Daily Mail in Kensington to denounce the kind of stories the right wing paper has run about the 'emo' movement

Public demonstrations aren't a rare occurrence in Kensington. Its numerous embassies often draw crowds who shout slogans at badly behaved governments. Rarely though, are they heard singing chart hits.

Last Saturday, a crowd of around a hundred protestors, almost exclusively in their teens, assembled opposite the offices of Associated Newspapers. Armed with 'Choose Life' flags and banners offering free hugs, they had turned out in response to criticism of their favourite band, My Chemical Romance.

Kate Ashford, an organiser and steward at the event, explained the motivation behind their protest.

"The Daily Mail has written a few articles attacking My Chemical Romance, and calling them an emo suicide cult.

Recently they blamed the band for the suicide of a 13 year-old girl, and that's what sparked us off."

She is adamant that the band "has nothing that promotes suicide or self-harm in its lyrics," and cites precedents such as the media scapegoating of Judas Priest in the early 1990s.

For full article see www.newstatesman.com/music/2008/06/daily-mail-emo-band-suicide

ITEM C

Emo music has been blamed for the suicide by [hanging](#) of Hannah Bond by both the coroner at the inquest into her death and her mother, Heather Bond, after it was claimed that emo music glamorized suicide and her apparent obsession with the emo band, [My Chemical Romance](#) was said to be linked to her suicide. The inquest heard that she was part of an internet "emo" cult ^[27] and her [Bebo](#) page contained an image of an 'emo girl' with bloody

wrists.^[28] It was also revealed that she had discussed "the glamour of hanging" online^[27] and had explained to her parents that her [self harming](#) was an "emo initiation ceremony"^[28]. Heather Bond criticised emo fashion, saying: "There are 'emo' websites that show pink teddies hanging themselves." After the verdict was reported in [NME](#), fans of emo music contacted the magazine to defend against accusations that it promotes self harm and suicide.^[29]

From article on EMO in Wikipedia

For full article see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emo\

ITEM D

Adam and Andrew - Emo Kid

I'm an emo kid, non-conforming as can be_You'd be non-conforming too if you look just like me_I have paint on my nails and makeup on my face_I'm almost emo enough to start shaving my legs_Cause I feel real deep when I'm dressing in drag_I call it freedom of expression, most just call me a fag_'Cause our dudes look like chicks and chicks look like dykes_Cause emo is one step below transvestite__Stop my breathing and slit my throat_I must be emo__When I get depressed I cut my wrist in every direction_Hearing songs about getting dumped gives me an erection_I write in a live journal and wear thick rimmed glasses_I tell my friends I bleed black and cry during classes_I'm just a bad, cheap imitation of goth_You can read me "Catcher in the Rye" and watch me jack off_I wear skin tight clothes while hating my life_If I said that I like girls I'd only be half right_

From lyrics of song by the Californian group Adam and Andrew.

For full lyric see

http://www.lyricsmania.com/lyrics/adam_and_andrew_lyrics_7350/music_pimps_lyrics_24821/emo_kid_lyrics_272410.htm

ITEM E

Was browsing UG and found this. I know it's nothing new as such bt still, I find it quite interesting how they HAVE to blame something!

An inquest in Maidstone has heard that Hannah Bond, a 13 year-old girl from Kent, committed suicide by hanging herself - and emo music has been blamed, reports NME.com. The inquest heard that Bond had discussed with friends the "glamour" of suicide, and was obsessed with American band My Chemical Romance. She had a picture of an emo girl with bloody wrists on her Bebo page. As he gave the verdict of suicide, coroner Sykes said: "The emo overtones concerning death and associating it with glamour I find very disturbing."

Sample responses on thread;

- *Any attack on MCR is welcomed in my opinion. Bloody terrible band*
- *theres a difference between not liking them and advocating their blame for the death of a 13 year old isn't there tho don't you think?*
- *You can't blame a band for her death. Draws comparisons to that crazy teen a year or so back who went on a killing spree after playing a violent video game*
- *don't find someone else let alone MUSIC (no matter what quality of music) for a girls traumatic thoughts and feelings and her tragic end of life. i agree with that _person thinking of killing themselves > therefore more likely listens to emo music,_as the lyrics are quite dark and they seem to relate. if you like emo music you aren't going to automatically kill yourself. they don't kill themselves because they are listening to the band.*

From Foo Fighters Website see <http://bbs.foofighters.com/showthread.php?t=117704>

ITEM F

Moral panics have been described as a condition, episode, person or group of persons which emerge to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests (Cohen, 1972, p.9). They often occur during times when society has been unable to adapt to significant change and when such change leads to a fear of a loss of control within the normal social structure. This was evident during the 1960s when society experienced such modernising trends as the so called 'sexual revolution'. When events, such as those found in the 1960's, occur there is a concern that moral standards are in decline and entire generations can sometimes be accused of undermining society's moral structure.

However, moral panics are not a new phenomenon and the actions of certain segments of society, most notably youths, have often been seen as immoral and threatening to the accepted norms and patterns found within our culture. During the 1950s and 1960's there was widespread concern over the influence of rock 'n' roll music with fears that it led to promiscuity and anti-social behaviour

From Moral Panics by Matthew Woods Aberyswyth University Media and Communications Site

For full article see <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/mtw9403.html>

Some comments

ITEM A

This is from *the Daily Mail*, which has a conservative leaning in its politics and as such stands for the values of what is known as 'Middle England'. As such it tends to be hostile to those who appear to me operating outside the mainstream. The article attempts to explain/warn parents of the EMO phenomena. There is a limited evidence that the reporter has done some research though there does seem to be a tendency to generalise from very limited experience. However, this item might be useful as a starting point to looking at representation of youth cultures in the popular media.

ITEM B

The New Statesman is a weekly journal – broadly 'left of centre' and makes its position fairly clear at the beginning, the headline is not cited as a quote. It seems to be more factual than *the Daily Mail* item and does use direct quotes from its sources rather than reported speech. It is tempting to regard this account as more accurate and less 'biased' and yet you need to consider what it doesn't say.

ITEM C

This is part of a long article in Wikipedia on the EMO phenomenon. Like other Wikipedia sites there is no single author, though there is a record of contributors and alterations. It also has a record of sources (see the numbers in parenthesis) which can be further checked. This particular account appears to be factual and well researched.

ITEM D

This is a lyric from a song by a (non-EMO) Californian group. The intention appears to be comic/satirical and presumably reflects observations made by the artists. It is however, quoted in *the Daily Mail* (ITEM A) in a way that suggests the group is EMO and is encouraging its listeners to act in the way suggested. This is a good example of the virtues of following through a reference.

ITEM E

This is an example of User Generated Content taken on the website of the band the Foo Fighters. While contributors can not be seen as sources of 'authority' they can be seen as expressing popular opinion, although the users of such sites are probably untypical of the general public. As a researcher you can enter on to the site as 'a participant observer'.

ITEM F

While this is not directly related to the EMO phenomenon, this account refers to the history of 'Moral Panics' which is one way of exploring this area. The article is on a university website (although the status of the contributor is not clear from the site). It is probably safe to assume that it has been academically vetted before inclusion

Bibliography

You will need to include a Bibliography with your research. This is a list of resources that you have used in constructing your research report. This should contain any resources you have used; books, articles, videos, DVD extras, the Internet, TV programmes, magazines or newspapers. The Bibliography should appear on a separate page at the end of your research.

Each item you use should be acknowledged in the following manner

- Second name of author,
- First name of author,
- Date of publication,
- Title of book or article,
- Publisher

For web pages the same process is followed. If the author is unknown this should be replaced by the name of source; the publisher is replaced by the URL and date of access. Items are usually grouped by type and then listed alphabetically.

Books

Truffaut, Francois 1978 (updated edition) *Hitchcock*, Paladin

Giles, Jane 1997, *The Crying Game*, BFI Publishing

Articles

Buss, Robin May 2006 *Under the Influence*, interview with Dominik Moll. *Sight and Sound*

DVD

Bouzereau, Laurent (director), 2002 *Guilt Trip – Hitchcock and the Wrong Man*, Warner Brothers

Internet

Mogg, Ken 2008, The MacGuffin Web Page <http://www.labyrinth.net.au/~muffin>

Visited May 2008

You may wish to number items to ease reference in the text of your research.

Sometimes you are asked to write a brief annotation to explain the source. An example might be:

Truffaut, Francois 1978 (updated edition) *Hitchcock* Paladin

This is a record of a lengthy interview between the film director and critic Francois Truffaut and the director Alfred Hitchcock. It covers Hitchcock's work chronologically, film by film up to *Torn Curtain*. It was originally recorded in 1955 but was updated in 1968. The tape recordings are included in some documentaries about specific films.

This layout will normally be sufficient at pre university level. For a fuller account of Harvard referencing see www.lmu.ac.uk/lskills/open/sfl/content/harvard/

Primary research

In deciding what kind of primary research you want to undertake you need to decide whether you are going to engage in quantitative or qualitative research and whether you are examining media texts or the people who produce or consume them.

Quantitative research methods were originally developed in the natural sciences, but have been widely used in the social sciences in censuses and surveys and to some extent in Media and Cultural Studies.

Qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena and in particular the meaning that people attach to them. Such research tends to rely on 'natural' information gathering, through observation and interview.

Textual analysis involves the study of media products, films, TV programmes, magazines, newspapers, adverts, music, web pages etc. In a sense it replicates our normal day-to-day consumption, however it is more structured. We enter into textual analysis with questions or at least specific concepts or ideas we are attempting to identify

Questioning and Observing People. This involves the study of the users and producers of the media, and possibly those who do both (say participants in chat rooms or participants in YouTube). While this often involves face-to-face contact it is sometimes easier to use existing material for instance, looking at discussion chains on the Internet.

This leads to a the following possibilities for research:

Qualitative Text – stylistic analysis of a small number of films from a chosen auteur

Quantative Text – Content analysis of different magazines broken down by per cent of advertisements, pictures, kinds of features

People – in depth interview with the editor of a local newspaper on the basis a number of headings rather than set questions e.g, survey of large number of matched male and female viewers to explore taste in film genres and pleasures attached, using pre-set questions and multiple choice answers

Your own research might involve a number of methods. Large scale quantitative research is expensive and time consuming and therefore difficult to do well. Very little is gained from devising a short questionnaire, with open questions and handing this out to small number of friends.

The following issues need to be considered.

Sample

For any quantitative research it is important to make sure that you have chosen a representative sample. It will help to choose a particular sub group if you want to generalise your findings. This can be on the basis of demographics and/or interests. For instance you could survey 15-20 year old females with an interest in horror films.

See a New York Times article about why this might be a significant sub group

http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/30/fashion/sundaystyles/30horror.html?_r=1&ex=1147060800&en=30046a3615e9bae6&ei=5070&emc=eta1&oref=slogin

Similarly, if you are sampling media products you need to decide in advance of your investigation. You might for instance wish to sample magazines, films or TV programmes on the basis of their popularity (the ten best selling women's magazines) and chose specific editions.

Questions

These are usually divided into Open and Closed questions. The former involves questions that invite an individual to respond maybe with a lengthy response:

What initially attracted you to filmmaking?

I was taking photos and writing short pieces of theatre that we would act out in the street. One day, I wrote a story that couldn't be performed in the street, so I shot it on film. What I discovered was a sense of movement, the ability to develop a story over time, an overall freedom that I didn't have with photography where it all comes down to a precise moment in time. And now I have the irrepresible desire to dig deeper, to go further with what I've learned.

The latter involves limited answers often set out as a multiple choice.

How do you rate this film?

- a) Excellent
- b) Very Good
- c) Good
- d) Average
- e) Poor

Closed questions are easier to turn into quantitative data, but they can oversimplify the response. Open questions rarely work in questionnaires unless you are sampling people who are used to expressing themselves in written prose.

Similar principles can be applied to the 'questions' you ask of texts you are studying. Content analysis, where you fit all the contents of a media product into set categories (e.g. lengths of shots, angles of shots, camera movements) is rather like asking a number of closed questions. However, more impressionistic devices (character identification, narrative shock) are more like asking open questions. It may be worth using a mixture of text and people analysis by asking other people to answer these questions of a text after showing them an extract or a sample page.

Checking first

If your primary research is important to your study and likely to be time consuming, it is well worth your time trying it out on at least one other person before you send it out, to see whether your questions make sense and can deliver what you want.

For an account of issues in primary research

owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/559/01/

For advice on question setting in surveys

gk12.harvard.edu/modules/SurveyQuestionTypes.pdf

For a guide to content analysis

writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/content/

Presenting your research

You will usually be given a framework for presenting your research from the awarding body, though there may be some choice in the way that you do it. Broadly there is a distinction between

- A written report
- and
- A presentation on your research

While the latter is a live form there is usually the requirement for written evidence, if only to standardise the assessment.

Whatever the form it takes the following principles are likely to apply and should be considered when you present your work.

A research project at this level is as much to do with showing that you can undertake research (the process) as it is to do with the findings (the product). It is therefore important that you are able to show your 'workings'.

A narrative

You are expected to tell a story about the way you went about the research. Narratives are not of course the sum of all the things that have gone on but rather a way of organising it a way that make sense to the reader.

Your original action plan will give you an idealised way of sequencing your account

- Deciding on your area
- Engaging on initial reading
- Undertaking secondary research
- Summarising the major findings
- Designing primary research
- Undertaking primary research
- Recording and interpreting findings from primary research
- Drawing conclusion linking secondary and primary research.

If you have a diary of what you did at what stage it will help you writing the narrative.

While your account should make sense, do not be afraid to discuss wrong paths trod and ways that you have changed your route as you have gone along. Most assessments of

research give you credit from learning from experience, and the only way you can be sure that the assessors are aware of this by telling them what you have done.

Presenting findings to an audience

In some instances this will be a requirement for your research, by doing a live presentation. In other instances the audience will be invisible. This presents a problem to anyone who is trying to communicate and it is probably worth while giving yourself an imaginary audience that you are addressing. It is probably best to consider your audience as your peers, who may well be researching their own areas at the same time. By the end of your research you will know more about your topic than they do. You also may well have read material pitched at a higher level than you are operating - undergraduate or even post-graduate material. It is your task to interpret this material for your audience.

Break up the text

We all have difficulty reading long bits of writing or listening to continuous spoken accounts. You should consider breaking up your text with sub-headings which will help the audience understand where you are going.

If possible use other media. You might want to break up a live presentation by using images, diagrams and even a sound track or video. A written account can be supported by graphics, although it is important that these are not just included gratuitously. You are writing about media products so the inclusion of relevant extracts or images should help the understanding of the material and make it more accessible for your audience.

Show your research

You will need to show your research as you go along. You are not writing an essay, but showing how you have found the information that you are using. The account of your research needs to link up with the Bibliography of items either by using footnotes or by reference to item numbers in your text. Where this is a significant part of the process this should be referred to directly ('I found from looking at.....')

Use of appendices

There will be material you have gathered which is not part of your research report. Some of this can be dispensed with, you can leave your assessors to find Internet material if they wish. Some material may help readers to understand what you have done - for instance questionnaires you have used and can be included as an appendix. These should be clearly marked as such. If your paper is a long one, you may wish to include a contents page.

Coming to a conclusion

You should attempt to finish your account by coming to a conclusion summarising the key findings

Evaluation

You will usually be required to evaluate your research. This can be seen as both evaluating the process - i.e.

- how well you have undertaken the research
- the findings and the way you have presented them.

You should go back to your original proposals. Have you done what you intended to do? Sometimes you will have done more, but more often you won't achieve all that you originally aimed to do. You should be honest about this and try to account for this. You should try to show what you have learnt about the research process, and how you would do it differently if you started again. There is little point at this stage making over generalisations of your own failings or indeed blaming others.

It is very hard to evaluate the product unless you have other examples to compare it with. At the end of the process you are likely to have a good sense of how the work might develop if you have more time or resources. If possible you should show or present your work to others and ask them for constructive feedback. Your response to this feedback can be a key part of your evaluation.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism involves other people's work and passing this off as your own. This has been an increasing concern in education over the past few years, with the growth of the Internet and the development of sites devoted to selling you other people's work. At the same time devices for detecting plagiarised work have become more sophisticated and the consequence of submitting plagiarised work are serious.

This is quite a difficult issue when undertaking research. Your secondary research consists of identifying significant work produced by other people and organising it in relation to your problematic.

Where you are using material from other people, you must give them credit and reference the source. This should apply to direct quotes of at least a sentence. If an argument is particularly well made, and you don't want to quote at length the advice would be to make brief notes and with the source closed, re-write it in your own words.