

CHOOSING A RESEARCH QUESTION

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What is it you are interested in

- If you are thinking about a PhD or a grant, you must be interested in research or wanting to train to be a researcher.
- Why? There are much easier ways to make a living...
- Why live on short term contracts?
- You must want it.
- So what are you interested in?
- Some people have a clear idea already.

But...

- Some don't.
- Some are passionate about an area.
- But that doesn't necessarily mean there is 'room' for a grant or PhD.
- There must be a gap, a niche.
- What difference will this make?
- The So What question.
- Doesn't have to be 'everything...'
- But needs to be something. Funding is tight.

So, what?

- First stage of PhD is often refining and identifying that gap, through a (systematic) literature review.
- PhD ideas often change, a bit, or a lot! And that is fine, its part of your training.
- With a grant you may want a small pilot grant first to work up the research question.
- Rarely do people get big £ grants for large projects without any pilot work
- Grant bodies want the latest cutting edge research
- But at no risk to it not happening!

Who do I work with?

- Think carefully, you will be working with these people for years
- Possibly every day
- Another presentation...

There are courses on ‘Writing a research proposal’

- PhD first year module (usually)
- Read some successful grants
- Read some more successful ones
- Focus on the grant bodies you want the support from
- Talk to them! Well in advance. They are very helpful
- Are they really interested in your idea? Have they funded similar things?
- Talk to people who have won lots of grants, its very hard
- We all had to learn the hard way, avoid some pain

Be practical

- If it's a PhD – be pragmatic, to answer your question...
- You need passion
- You need a gap/angle
- You need data
- You need skills
- You need money
- You need supervisors who also have a passion/skills/time
- Interview them. Work up the question with them!

Summary

- For a PhD – talk to people, talk to potential supervisors, often scholarships are available with a question already.
- Set off optimistically, but questions may change – that is research, sometimes it doesn't work!
- For a grant – you usually won't get the first one, it will take 2-3 goes.
- Make your question appropriate for the funder, once you have the money you can work specifically on things.
- Catch funders attention, its very competitive, get me interested!
- **Interesting/Different/Practical/Difference!**