Roadmap for a thesis

in Social Sciences and Humanities

visit https://seinecle.github.io/methodology for additional resources

Research topic

1

Identify a topic to investigate

It must relate to the subject matter of your degree. You must be genuinely curious about it as it will be your focus for the next months!

Conduct a literature review to explore and understand this topic better, and to highlight its relevance.

The literature review should also show that there remains important, unaddressed aspects of the topic that are worth investigating.

Your research question is precisely one of these unanswered facets of the topic!

Research question

2

Highlight which aspect of the subject remains insufficiently understood

This is your research question!
*A research question should address a **gap** in the literature (no study has elucidated it yet), and should be interesting (why is the question worth asking?)*

- I will measure a relation between variables
- I will measure a variable
- I will compare groups
- I will test a hypothesis

I will make sense of a phenomenon

3

Choose between two broad types of research questions

either you can test a hypothesis, or measure a phenomenon or measure relations between variables,

or you can explore, explain and interpret a phenomenon

(doing both is sometimes called "mixed methods" and given the time constraints of a thesis it is advised to rather choose just one)

set your starting point: point to a "model"

4

Optional but desirable: describe the current "state of the art" with a model

A model is a synthesis of the key concepts and relations within a research topic. It can be very famous and well-defined ("Porter's value chain" in management, or the "small world problem" in sociology).

It can also be quite elusive (no clear author or consensual description), in which case you might have to describe and define a model yourself.

A model described in the visual form, using a diagram with boxes and arrows, can make it clearer to you and your readers.

Research methodology

5

Choose a research methodology

As you can see from the colors, your decision at step 3 has a big influence on which methodology can fit your research question.

Make sure that you are at ease with the research methodology you will use: either you are already familiar with it, or you are able and willing to invest efforts in learning at least the basic principles of it.

"content analysis" is circled in red as it is a very popular methodology in the social sciences and in the humanities, which can be learned and implemented in the time span of a thesis.

Hypothesis testing

Test whether or not the mean of a population is equal to some value.

Test whether or not the means of two populations are equal.
Compare an observed proportion to a theoretical one.

Regression

Linear regression

Multiple regression

+ other methods! (discuss with your tutor)

Content analysis

Text mining

Network analysis

Ethnography

Videography

Interactive data visualization (dashboards)

+ other methods! (discuss with your tutor)

Research question X methodology

6

State how your research question will be addressed by your methodology

Typically: list the hypotheses you will test and **why** do you expect to verify them. Or list the variables and the relations that you will test or measure, and **why** do you expect these relations to be meaningful.

Typically: what do you anticipate your exploration will uncover, and how do you think the methodology will **specifically** help in these efforts.

In the case of a content analysis, at this step you would explain why you choose to collect interviews rather than news articles or else, and you would state the concepts and categories that you will use to analyze your content.

Data collection

7

Collect your data

*Collecting data is **not just** downloading a file, recording an interview or querying a database.*

***You must take extra care** for the quality of the data, which depends on the type of data you collect. Make sure you document all the steps you take.*

*Then, **you must make sure** it is properly stored (are you complying with regulations on privacy? and more) and cleaned (did you remove faulty values if any, did you add metadata, etc.)*

surveys

socio-economic statistics and records

laboratory experiments

social media data

data from information systems

crowd sourced tasks

interviews

field work

news articles, any corpus

Data analysis

8

Analyze your data

This step is highly dependent on the methodology you have chosen. Please refer to the fact sheets for each methodology for guides and resources: https://seinecle.github.io/methodology/

Deriving results

9

Stating a result and its significance

*What is a "result" is once again dependent on the methodology you have chosen. It can be "**this hypothesis is accepted**", or "**we find an effect of this variable on this one**", or "**we find 5 key topics in this collection of documents, which are …**"*

***Common to all methodologies is the way these results should be framed**. In all cases, you should explain and trace back to some of the steps described above:*

*- **step 6**: why is this result contributing to answering your research question?*
*- **step 4** (optional but so useful!): why is this result confirming, extending or modifying the model of the state of the art?*
*- **step 2**: if this research question is better understood thanks to your results, how is the research topic better understood now?*

Limits, extensions and conclusion

10

Acknowledging limits, pointing to possible extensions and concluding

This last part offers a last moment for reflection:

*- what were the limits of you work? Typically, limits derive from the methodology that was used (if you **explored**, you didn't **test** and vice and versa). Limits also stem from the scope of your study, and the resources at your disposal: what were interesting aspects of the research topic that you were unable to investigate, due to limited time and resources?*

- what are new perspectives traced by your work? Answering a question usually opens new ones! These can also be your concluding words.