

Managing your Research Teacher Guide

Understanding Data

These guidelines provide suggested exercises to do in class with postgraduate students who are in the process or about to undertake the Managing your Research online training course from the Institute of Historical Research (SAS), University of Hull, the Humanities Research Institute (University of Sheffield), and funded by the AHRC.



This Guide suggests a series of exercises that you may wish to do in class alongside the online resource.

Learning outcomes:

- You will have a clearer understanding of the importance of data management within history research
- You will have acquired an understanding of the process of a history research lifecycle
- You will have acquired an understanding of the process of a data management lifecycle in a history research setting
- You will have developed a lifecycle model of your own history research that can be developed and maintained throughout the work
- You will have developed your own History Data Management Plan that can help to inform your research throughout its lifecycle
- You will have a better idea of what types of files you will need to manage during your research and how to structure these files within a folder system.
- You will have considered the advantages and disadvantages of different storage methods

Introducing the Topic

Initially, the training is about gaining an insight into what “data management” is about, and how it affects historians.

The importance and benefits of data management to the historian can be obscured by past learned behaviours. By exploring actual research processes, and, wherever possible, incorporating students' own research topics and data, an understanding of the added value can be developed.

The primary focus in this course is on learning about how to develop a lifecycle model on an individual basis for each student. This lifecycle model applies directly to their own work and provides a basis for creating their own History Data Management Plan.

The learning process will be "hands on". Students will gain insights into both their personal data management requirements, and their overall research processes.

Exercise 1: class discussion

Data Management is a recognised and relevant process for research development. Ask the class to explain why data management is important for historians.

Exercise 2: group work

Using a copy of the Data Management Plan from the online course ask students to consider the questions in each section for the following example research projects. What issues arise?

Example 1 – a piece of research based around a substantial text that has been published in the past

Example 2 – a piece of research based around a variety of unpublished texts such as correspondences, personal diaries, notes

Example 3 – Quantitative data derived from a variety or set of records. This might derive from official records, archaeological reports, architectural data

Example 4 – a project focused on evidence derived from images such as paintings, drawings, maps

Example 5 – a project based upon audio or video recordings. This might be professional or amateur films (television, movies) or interview recordings conducted with witnesses to an event or time

Structuring your Research

What kind of data will you be gathering, creating, and using over the course of your research? This question is one of the first things a postgraduate student will need to consider.

There are many starting points to research but in all cases the student will need to consider what it is they plan to do and what 'data' they plan to use, create, or gather.

As part of this process they will need to consider the following issues and come up with a strategy to manage them.

1. How long will the research take?
2. What do you expect to research?
3. What is the end goal? (PhD thesis; monograph; article; digital project?)
4. If the research is funded is there any specific rules you must follow?
5. Are there any requirements from your institution?
6. Are there any budgetary restrictions?

These questions could form the basis for class/group discussion. It is worth spending a bit of time asking the question: what is PhD research and what is its end goal? Although generally the Thesis is the end goal of most doctoral research in the humanities, it is useful to suggest or discuss other methods of dissemination. What about a blog or website? A digital edition of a text? A display or public engagement activity? There are many possibilities.

The following exercise helps students to put down their thoughts in writing and to begin this discussion. It can be printed as a hand-out for use in a classroom setting.

Exercise 3: Group work

Consider your own research project. In the first box below write down all the types of files that you will be creating (i.e. journal articles; photographs; text documents; databases; scanned primary sources, web resources).

Second, re-order these files into top level folders. Some are suggested for you but you may wish to change these and add more (space is available to do this).

Administration Secondary sources Primary sources Drafts Research Documents

Next you need to consider what formats these files will come in. Will you be largely dealing with pdf's and text documents or photographs, videos, and statistical files (i.e. databases or spreadsheets)?

Add to the list above the file formats you believe each file group will contain. In groups discuss how you plan to manage the research process. Consider the following:

- How will you gather the files
- How will you structure them and ensure that accessing the files is manageable?
- How will you deal with version-control (i.e. how will you ensure that you keep old versions of files and make clear which file is your current version).