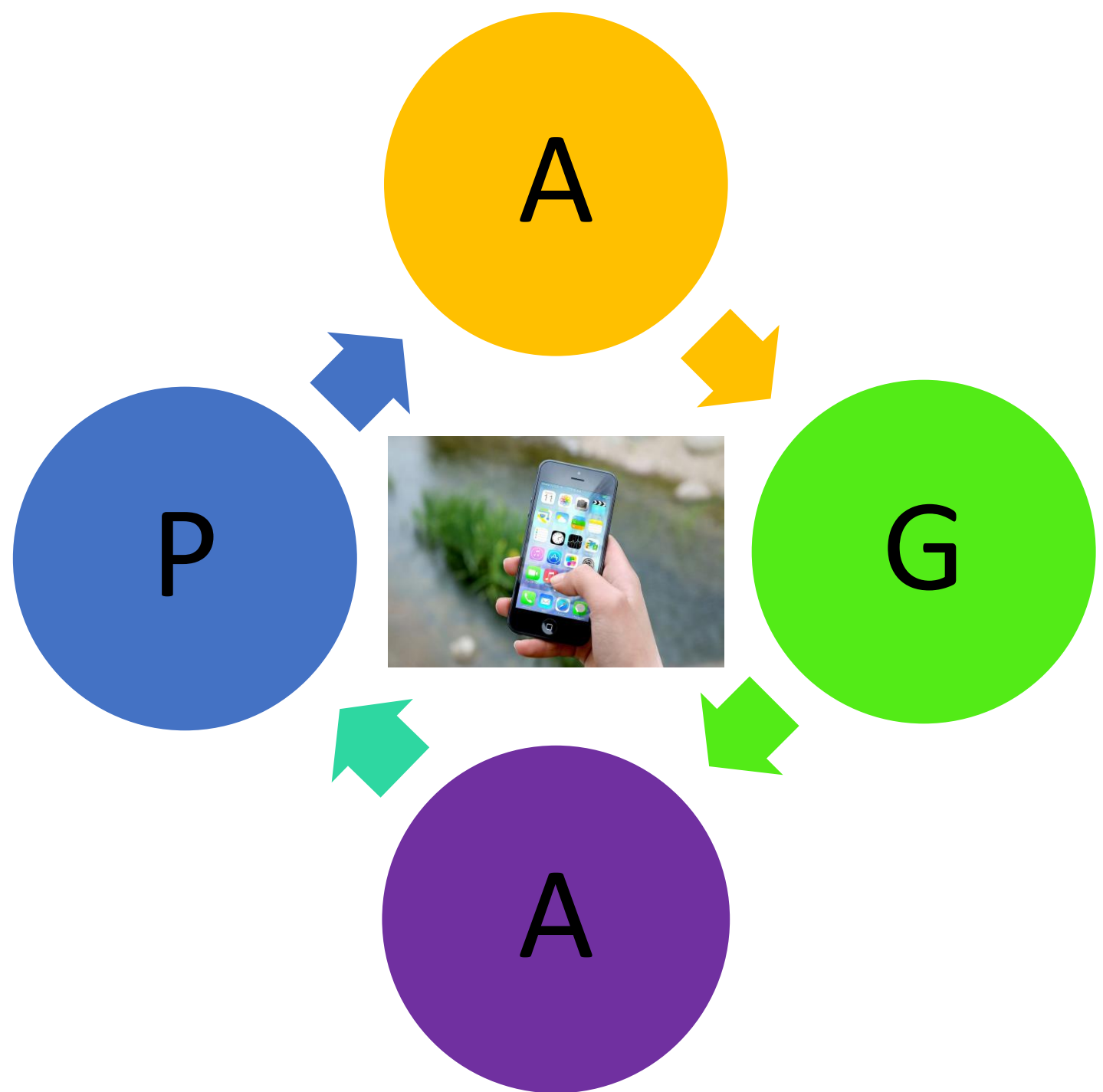


SC101

Researching social life

Course introduction: The
social research tool-box

Dr Katy Wheeler
Department of Sociology



Who am I?

- Katy Wheeler (Katy.wheeler@essex.ac.uk)
- Room 6.352
- Academic support/office hours: Tuesdays, 11.30-1.30
- My research interests include sociology of consumption, ethical consumerism, sustainability, new forms of work
- Teaching Team: Dr Ayse Guveli, Gulcimen Karakeci, Brendan Read, Burak Sonmez
- They will tell you when their office/academic support hours are in your first class with them.



What is this module about?

- How sociologists investigate the social world
- What tools and methods they employ to ensure their research claims are relevant
- How to interpret their quantitative and qualitative data and findings

Key Aims

- To introduce students to the social research tool-box
- To provide students with accessible examples and concepts which will help them to understand how social research projects are planned and carried out
- To teach students the key features of qualitative and quantitative data, including how it is collected, analysed and presented.
- To provide practical hands-on sessions that will help students to develop their research and study skills
- To develop students' communication and critical appraisal skills



Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- formulate a research question
- plan a social science research project
- undertake basic analysis of qualitative and quantitative data
- evaluate the strengths and limitations of different methodological tools for sociological research
- recognise how different types of research data should be presented
- critically assess the connections between theory and research
- engage constructively and reflexively in debate with their peers

Structure of the module

- The module is taught through a combination of lectures, seminars and practicals through both Autumn and Spring terms.
- 50 minute lecture each week in Autumn and Spring terms
- 50 minute class in each week of the Autumn and Spring terms, except for 4 weeks when there is a practical and you will have a 2-hour lab instead of a class.
- The practical in week 10 focuses solely on employability: Helen Standage.
- The other practicals focus on how to use different computer software packages for reference management, quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis.

Lectures, classes and labs

Lectures

- You're mad if you don't attend (You've paid for them!)
- Use them as a 'roadmap', a guide to your own study
- Lecture slides available on Moodle and you can ListenAgain if you want to

Classes and labs

- You MUST make every effort to attend as they rely on group discussion and group work.
 - ***You should stay in the class you have been allocated unless you find that you have a timetable clash. DO NOT SWITCH WITHOUT ASKING Rosa in the Sociology office***

Moodle

- Get to know the [SC101 Moodle page](https://moodle.essex.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1168)
- 10% of your module grade on this course relies on you using this Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)
- There is a general module forum which you can use to ask questions about the course.
- The reading list for the course is accessible via the Moodle Page

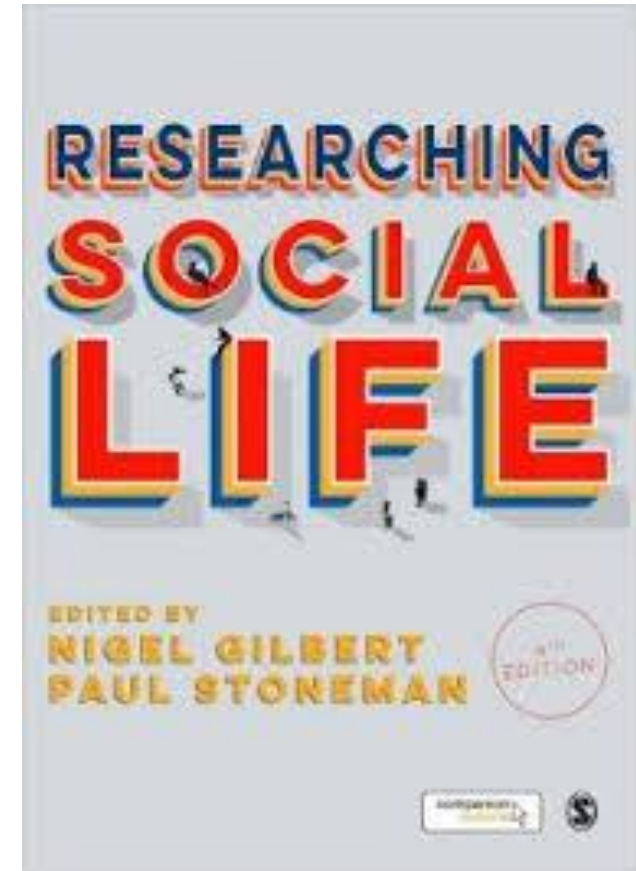
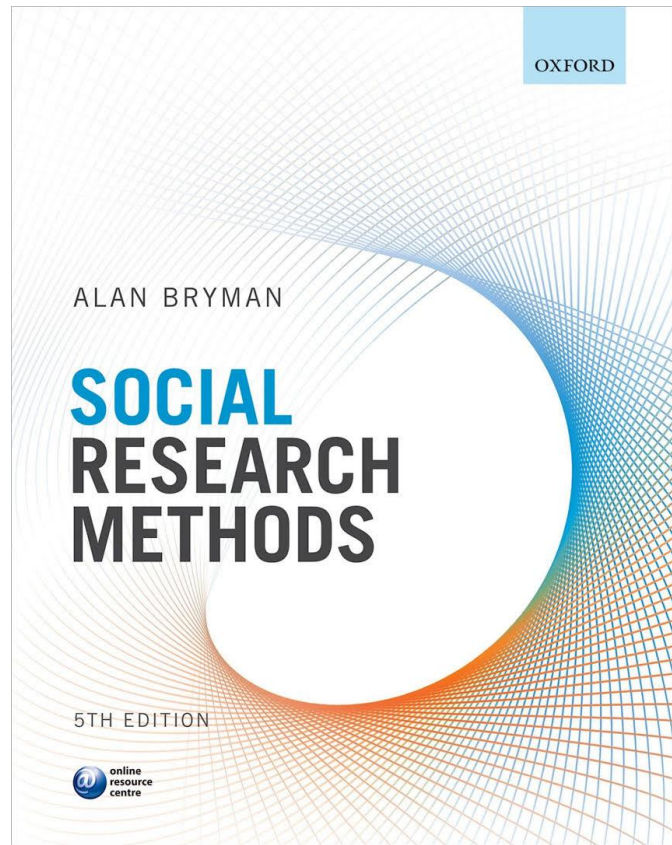
<https://moodle.essex.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1168>

The screenshot shows the Moodle interface for the SC101 course. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'MOODLE', 'My courses', 'Archive', 'FASER', 'Listen Again', and 'Help'. Below this is a search bar and the user's name 'Katy Wheeler student'. The main content area is titled 'Welcome to SC101!' and includes a central diagram with four colored circles (A, P, G, A) connected by arrows. To the left, there's a 'CONTACTS' section for 'SC101 Director' Dr. Katy Wheeler, with her photo and contact details. Below this is a 'CLASS TUTORS' section listing Dr. Ayes Güvelli, Gulcimen Karakocel, Breidan Reed, and Burak Sonmez. Further down is the 'Student Support Services Officer' section for Ms Rowena Mascauly. The right sidebar contains several widgets: 'CALENDAR' for September 2017, 'UPCOMING EVENTS' (none), 'LISTEN AGAIN RECORDINGS' (none), 'NEXT FASER DEADLINES' (none), 'READING LISTS' (SC101 Researching social life 1), 'Employability and Career Centre' with a photo and text, 'SEARCH FORUMS', and 'RECENT ACTIVITY' (Activity since Sunday, 17 September 2017, 3:21). The footer includes the University of Essex logo and 'HELP AND SUPPORT'.

The module reader

- All the readings you need for this course can be found in the course reader, available online:
 - The required readings are available for free download via the library, [here](#)

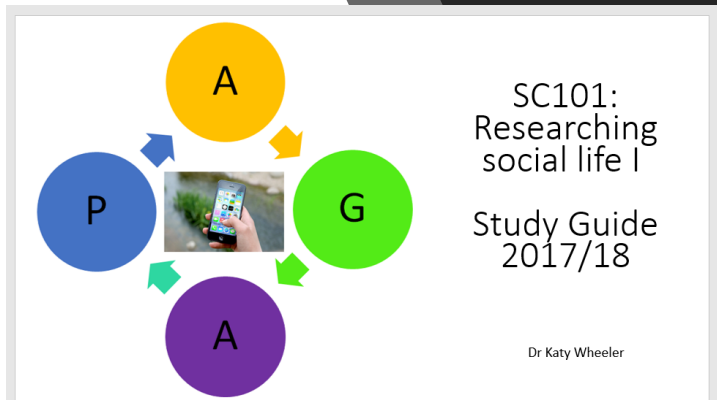
<https://essex.rl.talis.com/lists/9BC750EB-AE17-2BD1-E24A-2A262B12595E.html>



Suggested additional textbook purchase

The Study Guide

- Each week you are asked to complete the required reading within the module reader.
- You will be given a study guide in your first class that includes:
 - keywords (it is highly recommended that you make your own glossary of these keywords)
 - study/reflection questions in relation to the set reading. Use these questions to help guide your reading.
 - The study questions will often be used in your seminars so please bring the study guide to class with you each week.



Assessment

Assessment description	Date due	Weighting
Research question statement (250 words)	Via FASER: Thursday 2 nd Nov, 1pm (Week 5)	5%
First Online quiz (related to employability)	Opens on Moodle Tuesday 5 th Dec and closes 5pm, 8 th Dec (Week 10)	5%
Research proposal (2000 words)	Via FASER: Thursday 14 th Dec, 1pm (Week 11)	25%
Observation write-up (500 words)	Via FASER: Thursday 22 nd Feb, 1pm (Week 21)	10%
Second Online quiz (related to quantitative data analysis)	Opens Tuesday on Moodle 20 th Feb and closes 5pm, 23 rd Feb (Week 21)	5%
In-class presentation	To be arranged with your tutor during your class in Autumn and Spring terms	10%
Critical evaluation exercise (2000 words)	Via FASER: Thursday 26 th April, 1pm (Week 30)	25%
Summer quiz: In-lecture test (multiple choice, based on keywords)	In the lecture slot on 8 th May (Week 32)	15%



**"I TURNED IN MY HOMEWORK TWO DAYS LATE,
BUT NORMALLY IT'S FOUR DAYS LATE,
SO TECHNICALLY IT'S EARLY!"**

Our expectations of you

- Attendance at lectures and classes
- Attention (please only use mobile phones when the learning activities demand this)
- Show respect to fellow learners and teachers
- Preparation for your classes – this means doing your weekly reading
- Participating in group discussions
- Meet coursework deadlines

Your expectations of us

- Engaging lectures and classes that support your learning
- A range of learning resources
- Support – contact your class teacher or personal tutor if you are struggling (email is usually the best way)
- Timely return of marked coursework
- That we'll listen to you and take your feedback on board

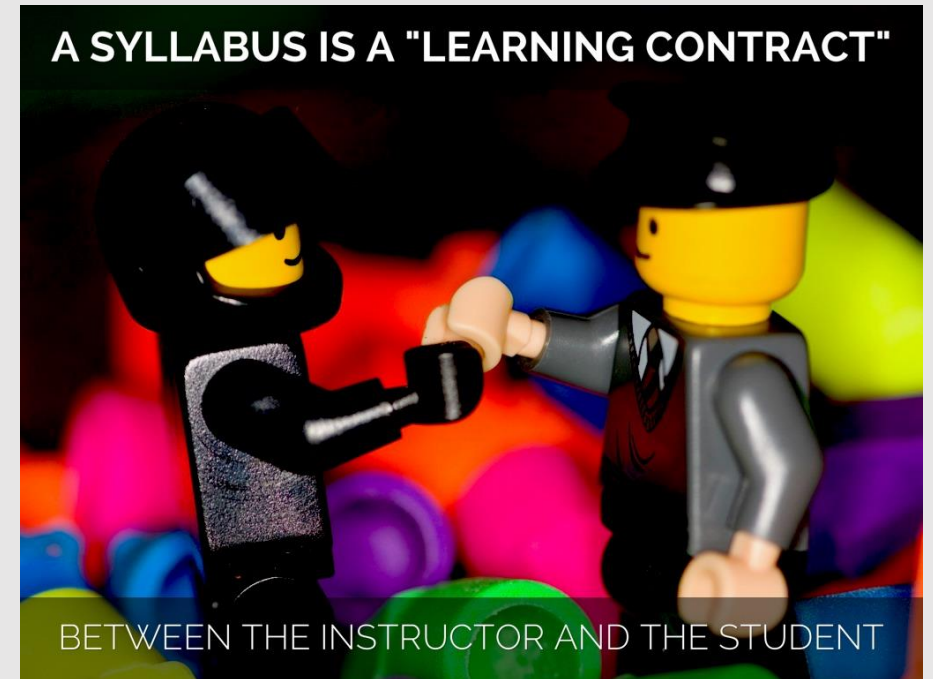


Image credit: [Alise Lamoreaux](#)

Support to individual students outside of classes

- Drop us a line by email: “Dear [insert name]”
- Class tutors and lecturer each have a weekly office/ academic support hour
- Student Resource Centre (Rowena Macauley)
- Make an appointment with me for my office hours on Tuesdays 11.30-1.30pm
- If you are having difficulties PLEASE let us know. We are here to help!

Responding to student feedback

- Research methods is an essential part of your training as a sociologist/ criminologist/ social scientist
- It is one of the key employability skills that you take with you into the workplace when you graduate
- There are particular things that have to be covered
- I have been asked to try to make this course more engaging and relevant to you

The topic for this year is...



Mobile/Smart phones and society

Why choose the Smartphone?

- Most of you will think that you are experts already
- The best sociological research makes the familiar strange
- It provides a shared topic for us to explore together and to learn from one another
- I could have chosen anything...
 - **THE POINT** is that you will be learning a range of transferrable skills that you can use to explore and research the things that you are interested in.

We can ask many sociological questions about mobile/smartphones

- Who has access to these objects?
- Does social class, gender, ethnicity, age shape how smartphones are used?
- What importance do people place on mobile phones and smart technology?
- How is constant connectivity influencing the way people behave in public spaces, learning environments, the workplace, the home?
- How do people in different countries use and interact with mobile technology?
- How is mobile technology/social media used to organise political protests, stay in contact with loved ones, map migrant journeys?



In turn, these questions relate to sociological research processes

Question?	Research process
Who has access to these objects?	Survey a representative sample of the population
Does social class, gender, ethnicity, age shape how smartphones are used?	What might be some of the challenges of ensuring these groups are represented within surveys?
What importance do people place on mobile phones and smart technology?	Conduct observations and interviews with people to find out how and why they use their phones.
How is constant connectivity influencing the way people behave in public spaces, learning environments, the workplace, the home?	Do you think different populations might have different opinions about this question? How might we track this over time?
How do people in different countries use and interact with mobile technology?	Comparative social research
How is mobile technology/social media used to organise political protests, stay in contact with loved ones, map migrant journeys?	New forms of data collection are being enabled by the internet and social media

I forgot my phone (de Guzman, 2013)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OINa46HeWg8>

Have a look at this TED resource about the deGuzman film

- <http://ed.ted.com/featured/qdcZ294M>

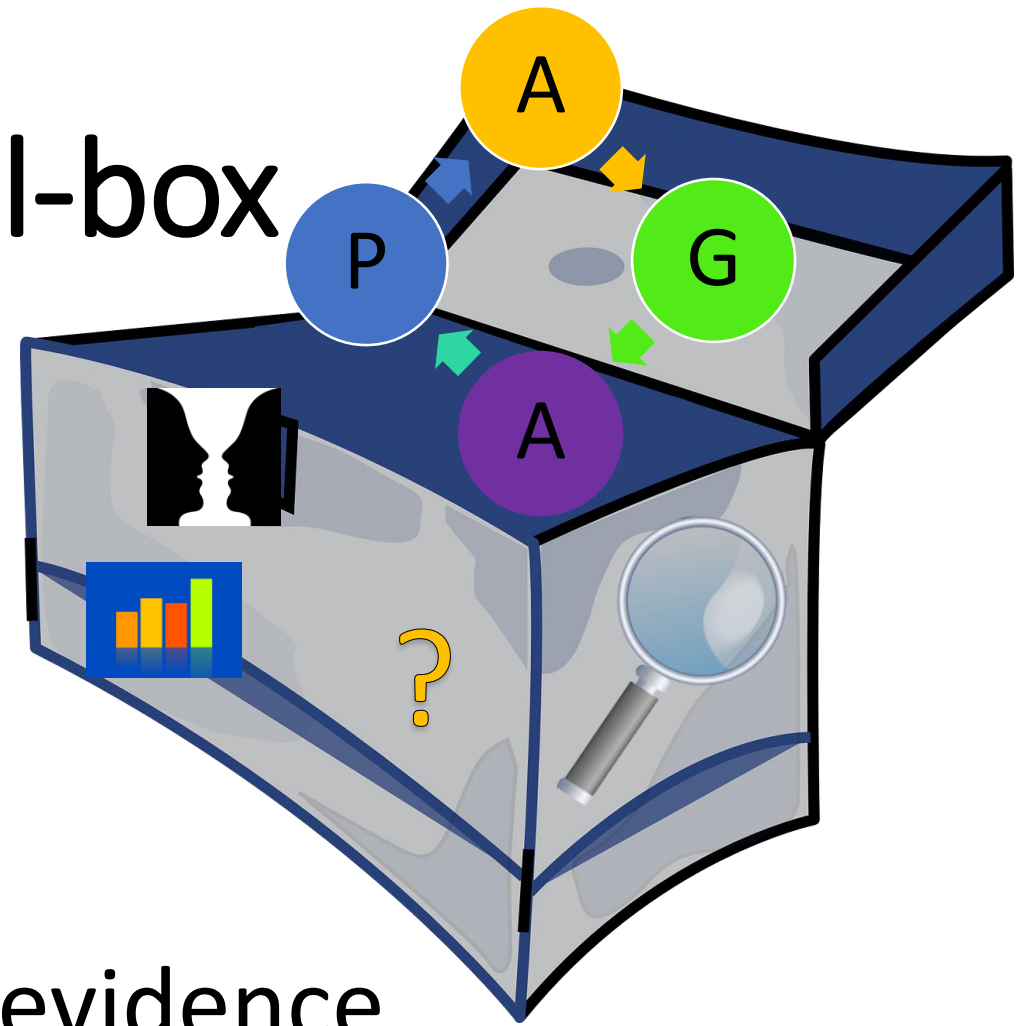
What is research?

- Oxford Dictionary (2007) definition ‘the systematic study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions’
- Social research involves ‘research that draws on the social sciences for conceptual and theoretical inspiration [...]’
 - to formulate research topics and issues
 - to interpret and draw implications from the research findings’ (Bryman, 2012: 5)

Why do social scientists do research?

- O' Leary (2017) says 'to facilitate situation improvement'
- To better understand how and why people/institutions/societies do things
- To develop/test theories and concepts about aspects of the social world
- To evaluate the effectiveness of a particular social policy/intervention
- To explore possible solutions for current problems
- To provide evidence or recommendations for best practice

The social research tool-box



Ask questions

Gather ideas and data

Analyse and evaluate the evidence

Present answers to your questions

Each compartment in the tool-box contains a number of elements

A	Formulating research questions Thinking critically What can you ethically study? Reviewing existing evidence
G	Planning a strategy Writing a research proposal Which methods and tools should you use? How to sample? Gathering the data
A	Generating statistics from numerical data Searching for themes and narratives in textual data Role of the researcher in analysis of data How good is your analysis?
P	How will you present your findings? Answering your research question What message are you trying to convey? Who is your audience? What will your research 'do' or how will your research be 'put to work'?

The research process (Kumar, 2014: 36)

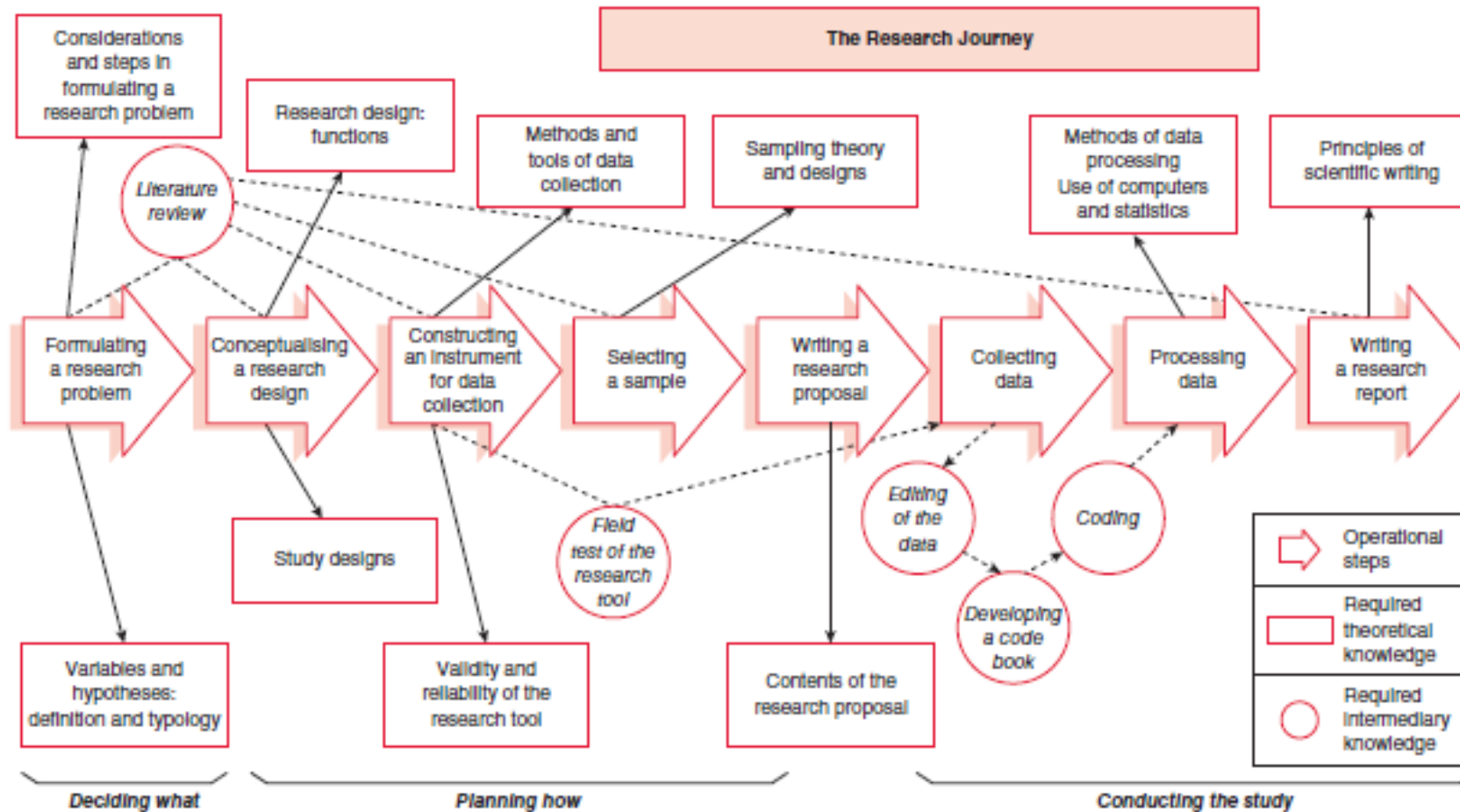


Figure 2.2 The research process



Each of these elements are used to structure this course: Autumn Term

Week	Topic	Part of AGAP
2	The social research tool-box	Introduction to AGAP
3	Asking research questions	A
4	What does it mean to think critically? Ethics and the research process	A
5	How to design a study	AG
6	Conducting a literature search PRACTICAL WEEK	AG
7	Writing a research proposal	AG
8	Gathering data: Sampling and data collection	G
9	Quantitative methods: Surveys, experiments and secondary data	G
10	Employability: The relationship between methods and career choices PRACTICAL WEEK	AGA
11	Quantitative methods: How to design survey questions	G

Each of these elements are used to structure this course: Spring term

Week	Topic	Part of AGAP
16	Qualitative: Interviews and focus groups	G
17	Qualitative: Ethnography and observations)	G
18	Emerging data collection: Participatory theatre and Big data	G
19	Mixing methods	G
20	Quantitative analysis PRACTICAL WEEK	A
21	READING WEEK	////
22	Qualitative analysis	A
23	Presenting research findings – tables and graphs	P
24	Presenting qualitative data – descriptions, stories and typologies	P
25	After Method PRACTICAL WEEK	AGAP

Remember...



Reading for this week

- 'I <3 my phone: technology and social networks' in J. Johnston, K. Cairns & S. Baumann (2016) *Introducing Sociology using the stuff of everyday life*, New York & London: Routledge, pp245-272

Points to reflect on whilst reading and discuss in the seminar

1. How have sociologists used mobile phones to study feelings of togetherness?
2. What additional questions might you ask about mobile phones and mobile technology?
3. Try to turn these general questions into sociological research questions

- Social research
- AGAP

Keywords