

'Wisdom begins with wonder' (Socrates)

Agree or disagree?

1. Studying is all about answering questions
2. We are able to advance knowledge through the process of rational enquiry
3. Exercising rational enquiry is about asking for information
4. Harnessing the ability to ask good questions can help me become more employable

Research

Having chosen Edinburgh, you have joined a research-intensive university and an academic community of world class academics, with truly global and pioneering research achievements. Studying with us, you have therefore embarked on an exciting journey of research and enquiry, through which you are offered the potential to create new knowledge and opportunities for learning. These journeys are quite personal: you will be engaged in research in many forms and ways, and with various degrees of intensity. With 22 Schools and such wonderful diversity in disciplines, each of us will experience research slightly differently. **What does research mean to you? What is the understanding and culture of research in your discipline?**

Regardless whether your research 'happens' in the archives, libraries, through field work, or in laboratories, whether you are just starting on your undergraduate programme, or completing your dissertation or doctoral thesis, your research journey at the University starts with respecting the principles, methods, standards, values and boundaries of your own disciplinary research and recognising the importance of the wider issues that may inform the way you approach it: these may be economic, legal, ethical, social, cultural or environmental issues. Before you can make contribution to the development of your subject/discipline or sector, before you can create new knowledge, break new ground or enhance understanding, we obviously need to critically assess what has been done before and recognise that there are also limitations to our own knowledge, limitations as to how we can approach our research and the extent to which we can challenge knowledge. While your School will provide guidance on research skills specific to their discipline, you can also do a lot of reading yourself: there is a range of resources available, from generic



Exercising rational enquiry

information on finding and evaluating sources in the IS section of our website¹, through to resources aimed at postgraduate students and developed by the Institute for Academic Development².

Enquiry

The action of ‘enquiring’ is most commonly associated with ‘asking for information’ and we do that a lot in our personal, professional and academic lives, whether through e-mail, phone or face to face. However, exercising rational enquiry involves not only asking questions of a given subject, but also weighing up evidence and considering options, being reasonably sceptical. In academic contexts, you may use rational enquiry:

- as the means by which you would consider the validity of certain data when e.g. proving a hypothesis.
- as a reflective process that leads to certain actions or decisions.
- as part of a process that is necessary to fully understand arguments, theories or models in an academic context. Enquiring into reasons *why* can help to uncover biases and separate opinion from fact.

1. How important is exercising rational enquiry in your discipline? When do you use it? For what purpose?
2. Asking the right question engages the mind and has the power to enhance understanding or create new knowledge. Through reflecting on your own experiences of rational enquiry and questioning at the University, you have a great opportunity of becoming more employable. How can you translate and use your skills in questioning and rational enquiry into the context of your career or context/sector in which you would like to work/or are working already? Think of at least 5 reasons why good questioning skills are beneficial for your career or professional practice.

¹ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/students>

² <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/institute-academic-development/postgraduate/doctoral/resources/researchskills>
<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/institute-academic-development/postgraduate/taught/learning-resources/lit-search>