

# How to develop a QADOR

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QADOR<sup>1</sup> is an acronym for: Question-Answer-Definitions-Outline-Relevance. This is basically what your introduction should include, and when it is clear in your mind, you are probably ready to start putting words on paper (or screen).

You might not use the same five elements for a book review, report, or critique, but research begins with an answerable question. And to answer a question you need a plan, which we call a research design.

Go through the following mental exercise to develop your research design on a single page. Don't take more than about 15 minutes and one page. Then put it aside and do it again. It helps to do this with a friend and explain it. When you can explain your research design quickly and effectively to a partner, you are probably approaching a robust design.

1. Question. Go back to your topic or general subject and reframe it as a question. If you have a question and it's not going well, revise the question. It should be specific, but succinct.
2. Answer (and general or higher-level theory). Imagine what an answer to this question might look like. What body of theory or empirical evidence suggests that this is a plausible answer? Established theories help you avoid reinventing the wheel

What is a theory? "A supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained." (OED) Almost all your papers will need to acknowledge theories at some level, usually ones which have been explicitly mentioned in class. A higher-level theory explains a wide range of phenomena at a general level, e.g. the rational actor model. A lower-level theory addresses specific circumstances, e.g. declining states may choose to fight before they are overtaken by rival powers.

3. Definitions, operationalization and data. Refine the definitions of the concepts you are using in the question and the answer, so that you can operationalize these questions as variables (see examples). Operationalizing a variable means describing it in such a way that it can be definitively categorized or measured. What are you explaining (the dependent variable) and what are you using to explain it (the independent variables)?
  - a. What theories (substantive or lower level theory) or prior studies that you know of suggest that this is a likely relationship between the variables? (These theories or studies may be further down the "ladder of theory" than the ones identified above

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<sup>1</sup> QADOR is not a recognized acronym, it is just something I find useful in explaining the process.

- b. Data. What kind of variables are they? Are they categories, or are they relative (moving on a scale)? Can you measure change in both variables?
- 4. Outline of sources and methods. This will lead you towards an outline of your final paper.
  - a. Sources. Now consider where you might find the data to measure these variables or put the cases into categories. Try to summarize the sort of data that you might collect in a table or chart.
  - b. Method. Building on your data and sources, how can you organize the information to test your answer or explore your data? The most likely form will be MSSD or MDSD (Caramani, Ch. 3).
- 5. Relevance. Now explain the relevance of this pattern of data to your answer, and to a particular audience, i.e. why is this research worth doing?

Stop the clock. Put all your work aside. After a suitable break, repeat the exercise, with the same topic, but think of different variables, sources of data, or other aspects that you might vary. It will look different each time you pick it up. Do this exercise two or three times (short laps) before you commit a lot of time to one approach.