

How to Conduct Research

So, you wanna do some research? Here's a handy guide with facts and tips shamelessly borrowed from the Canadian School Libraries Research Toolkit.

To learn more, check out the entire kit: canadianschoollibraries.ca/research-toolkit/

WHY RESEARCH?



"Why do school libraries matter today, particularly in the context of an educational world that increasingly relies on diverse, complex and often conflicting sources of information?" The answer lies in student outcomes – specifically, what school librarians can do in their instructional practices to ensure those outcomes.

Todd, R. (2008). *Evidence-based manifesto: If school librarians can't prove they make a difference, they may cease to exist.* *School Library Journal* 54(4).

1. **Do we matter?** Do school libraries make a difference?
2. **To measure outputs.** Great opportunity to count things: classes coming to library, books circulated, programs offered, etc.
3. **To measure outcomes.** What did the students, teachers or other stakeholders gain from the lesson, presentation, initiative?
4. **To measure impact.** What are the larger effects over time? For example, are student grades increasing now that they know how to research more deeply?

What do you want to know?



Quantitative: This is anything you can count. It could be number of students coming to the library or a vote to choose the one book everyone should read.

Qualitative: This information fills out the how and why behind the numbers to help tell meaningful stories and to drive future programming. Data collected could be survey responses, photographs, video and student work.

What's your question?



Consider what is happening in your library, in your school and across the district when developing a research question.

- Three possible types of research questions:
1. **Descriptive:** a snapshot of what is happening
 2. **Comparative:** measuring one thing against another
 3. **Causal:** measuring the effect of something

Check out the Question Formulation Technique to help develop questions: rightquestion.org/what-is-the-qft

How to gather information



Counting: Your library information software collects so much information.

Interactive Displays: Set up a display which asks question of the day

Photos and Video: Record events or conduct spontaneous interviews

Surveys: Top tips for designing surveys:
1. **Identify the goals.** Be clear about what you want to learn.
2. **Develop the questions.** Make sure they repeatedly show the same result, and measure what they are supposed to measure.
3. **Test your questions** before using them.

Focus groups: Follow a specific protocol. Learn more at bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/vpsa/pdf/assessment/focus.pdf

Analyzing the data



What story do the numbers tell? **Ask critical questions** about your numbers.

For example, more students choose memoirs over fiction. Why? How will that change collection development?

Coding is the process of labeling and organizing your qualitative data to identify different themes and the relationships between them.

Learn more at getthematic.com/insights/coding-qualitative-data/

Do you want to **measure big changes** or **just do a quick check** on what is happening in your library learning commons space right now?

Start small if overwhelmed! Build up to bigger and more complex research.

Literature review. Take time find out what research is out there. If your school board does not have access to databases, then check with your public library.

Use your research question as a guide to organize your planning: what data do I need to collect, how will it be analyzed, how will the results be shared?

Consider using a **Logic Model, Gantt chart** or favourite project-planning app to map out your plan.

Make a plan

Sharing the results



Presentation: create a report, PowerPoint, workshops, or video, or share on social media

Visual representation: use online tools, sketchnote, draw a picture, or create an infographic

Use the results to **make a change** and plan new research