

Agricultural Extension in South Asia

Understanding Research Methods

Platform: [Coursera](#)

Duration: 4 weeks (10 - 15 hours); Self-paced

Certification: Yes, you have to pay



[Understanding Research Methods](#) is a course offered by the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London on Coursera. The course is an excellent introduction to the world of research in social sciences. Designed for beginners and those looking to refresh their knowledge, the course covers the basic introduction to research and research methods.



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One of the course's standout features is its structured approach. The content is divided into four modules, each with clear objectives and well-organized lessons. The lessons are

presented in the form of videos and additional readings. The videos are engaging and feature discussions between the instructors and other researchers, addressing each question outlined in the objectives. This approach makes it feel more like a conversation than traditional teaching, which adds a highly interactive element. The course is taught by Dr. J. Simon Rofo, Dr. Yenn Lee, and Dr. Dan Plesch, all from SOAS, University of London.

Module 1 -What Is Research and What Makes a Good Research Question?

Purpose – Formulating a research question

Module 2 - What Is a Literature Review and Why Do We Need to Do One?

Purpose – Appreciating the importance of reviewing the existing literature

Module 3 - Why Are Planning and Management Skills Important for Research?

Purpose – Understanding the importance of planning and management skills in research

Module 4 - How Do You Know You Have Been a Good Researcher at the End of a Project ?

Purpose – Producing a research proposal

The course content covers a wide range of topics, including what research is, the purpose and process of a literature review, different types of reviews and how to conduct them, various research approaches, and guidance on selecting the most suitable approach. Beyond the reading material, the insights from multiple researchers and professionals, providing diverse perspectives enrich the understanding of the subject. The course emphasizes the importance of critical thinking in the research process. It guides learners on how to approach research topics with a questioning mindset. The course also offers insightful articles discussing the history of research, how it evolved, and its significance in academic and professional settings.

After each module, you will need to complete a writing assignment as a part of the course requirement. This assignment will be graded by other learners in the course. Likewise, you are required to review and assess 4 to 5 submissions from the other learners. For example, the first activity involves formulating a brief research question, and other learners will provide feedback on your submission. You need to complete both the submission and reviews to pass the course and be eligible for the certificate. There are four such activities, one for each module. The peer review process offers exposure to diverse ideas and perspectives, helping you develop a critical eye for evaluating research. The course is entirely self-paced, and you can revisit the content anytime you want to review the topics.

The course also features a discussion forum where you can interact with your peers. In addition to the general meet and greet forums, there are module-specific forums for each module, allowing learners to engage in focused conversations. The readings provided for each module are easy to understand, and highly informative. They complement the video lessons effectively, making it easier to grasp the concepts.

During my post-graduation, as someone coming from natural sciences background, research in social sciences was a new concept to me. Even after completing my post-graduation, I felt there were gaps in my understanding of research methodologies. This course not only helped me revisit and refine the research basics I learned during my time at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, but also expanded my knowledge further.

The presentation style made the learning process enjoyable and engaging, keeping me interested throughout. The course content is structured to build on basic concepts, making it suitable for individuals who are just starting their research journey or those in need of a foundational understanding. Overall, the "Understanding Research Methods" course is an excellent choice for anyone looking to build or refresh their understanding of research methodologies. I would recommend this course to all master's students. Taking this course before starting a master's program in social sciences would help students better understand research. It covers the basics in a simple way, which would make it easier to grasp more complex topics during their studies.

For students pursuing master's in extension education, referring to the "[Manual on Good Practices in Extension Research and Evaluation](#)" along with this course would be especially beneficial in strengthening their research and evaluation skills. The manual provides additional extension-specific research in depth, which can further improve research and evaluation skills in this area.



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