

# Doing Research Whilst Working as a Librarian

Kirsty Thomson  
Academic Librarian  
University of Dundee  
[@kirsty\\_thomson](#)



# Outline

A research project I'm involved in.

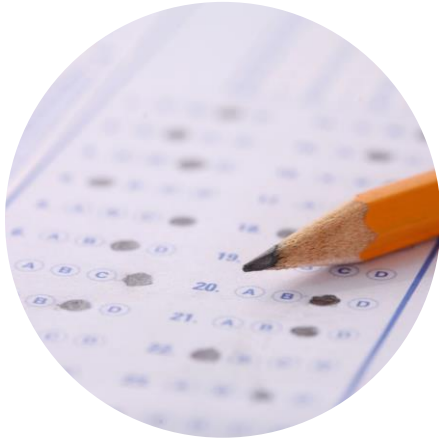
Advice and tips.

Suggestions for getting more involved with research.

# Research Project

- Involved in a research project on “*Library, Information and Knowledge practitioners' experiences, skills and confidence in taking part in research as part of professional practice*”.
- Some very experienced group members.
- But this was the first “proper” research I’d done for over a decade.

# The project so far ...



Questionnaire and interviews



Quantitative questionnaire analysis finished.



Qualitative analysis for questionnaire and interviews underway.



Dissemination: various conferences, report being written, papers being planned.

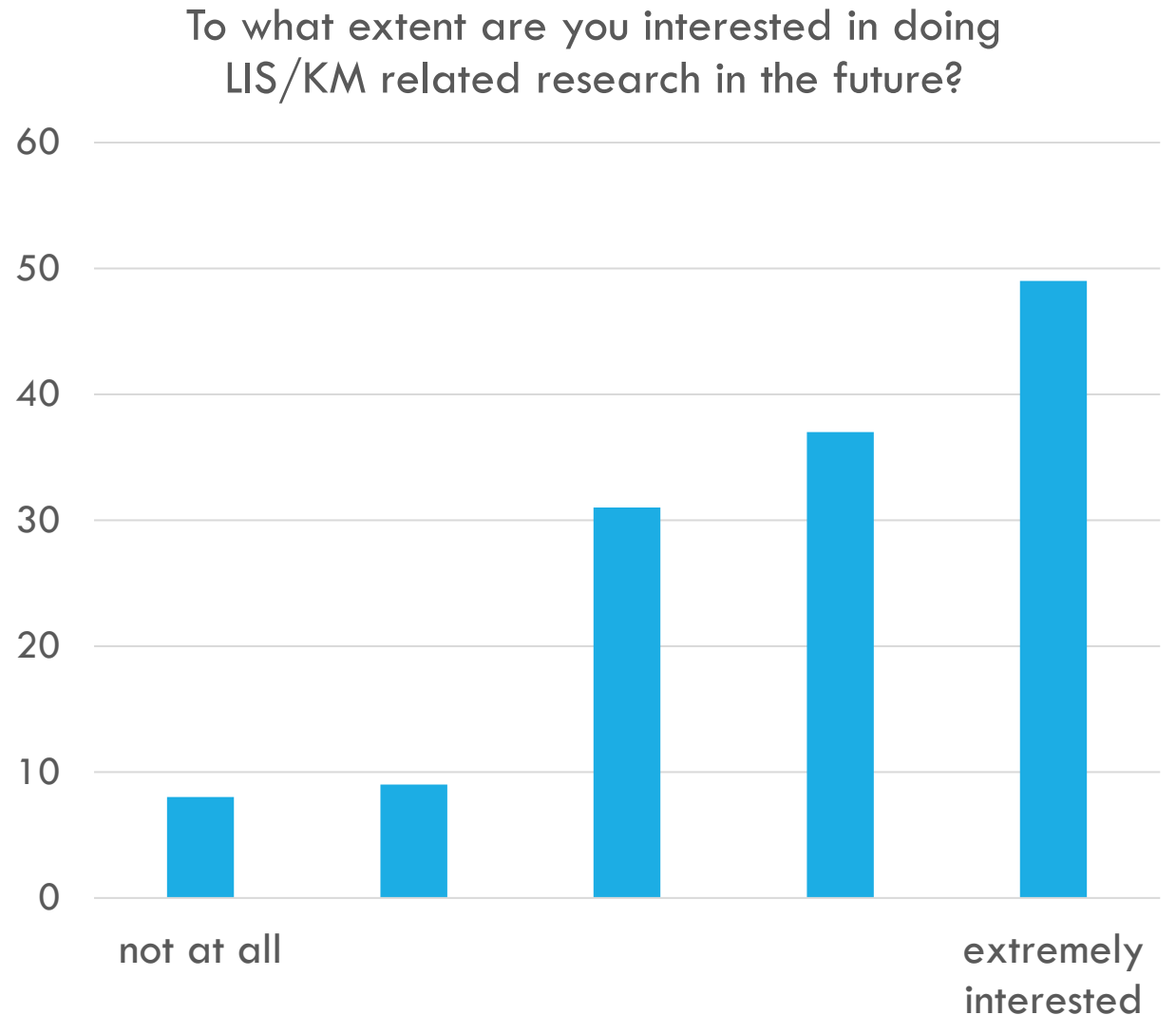
[quantitative = choosing from set answers, can be analysed numerically  
qualitative = open questions, answers in own words.]

# Survey results

- 278 survey responses; 134 described themselves as university librarians.
- Survey was for library, knowledge and information workers – using “librarian” as shorthand on these slides.
- Self-selecting, so not a random sample.
- Demographics appear to match CILIP membership.

# Do university librarians want to do research?

- Our questionnaire found ...
- How can we get involved?



# I want to do research, but it's not part of my job ...

- Is it definitely not part of your job?
- You're probably already doing research at work:
  - user ed feedback.
  - library annual survey.
  - focus groups.
  - projects for qualifications ...
- Could any of these be formalised into a research project?



# Research at work

- Is there something you're about to do that would be useful for other librarians?
  - e.g. do more students sign up for workshops from email A or email B?
- You could start with a small project and present at USTLG.
- Or turn a qualification research project into a paper.
- Or go big, with a secondment or research fellowship, e.g. <https://mypad.northampton.ac.uk/fellowship/>

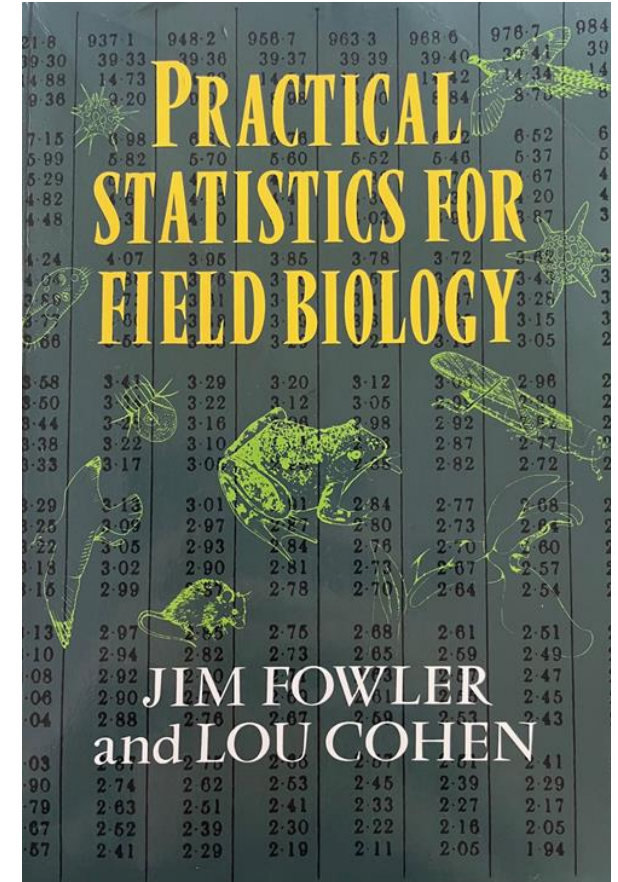


# Important: ethics approval

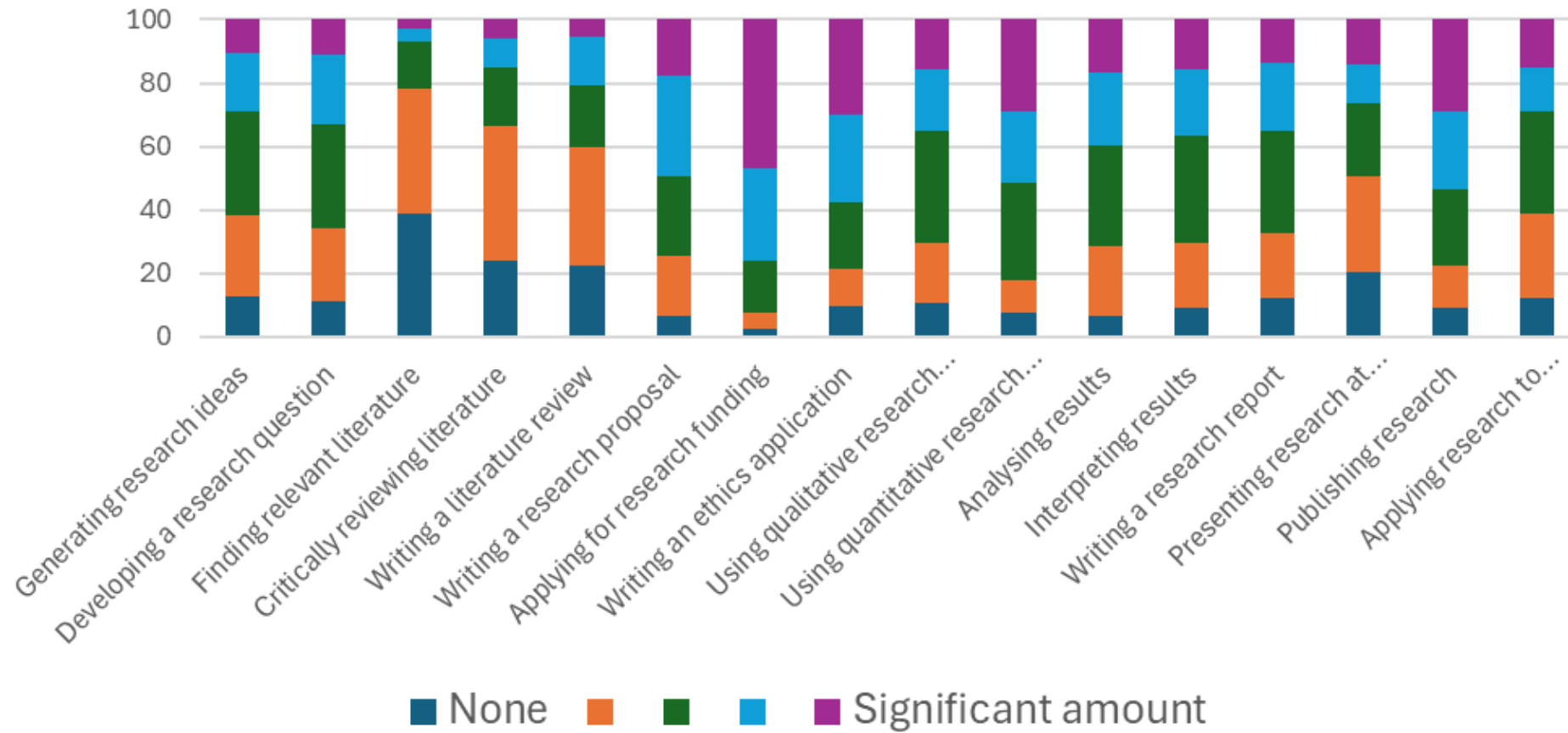
- Research with human participants (or using their data) will need ethics approval, and the participants will need to give informed consent.
- You will need to apply for ethics approval before you start.
- Your uni will have a department who deal with this.
- You will be asked to consider things like:
  - where will the data be stored?
  - who will have access to it?
  - could the research have a negative impact on the participants?

# I don't know how to do research ...

- You probably have better research skills than you think.
- Beyond literature searching, librarians are often good at:
  - planning, and thinking multiple steps ahead.
  - gathering information to support decisions.
  - seeing both sides of debate.
- Who could you work with?
  - team members with different backgrounds.
  - what about ex-colleagues, and doing something comparing institutions?
  - would an academic colleague want to look at a teaching intervention?



## How much support do you need to develop proficiency in the following research activities?



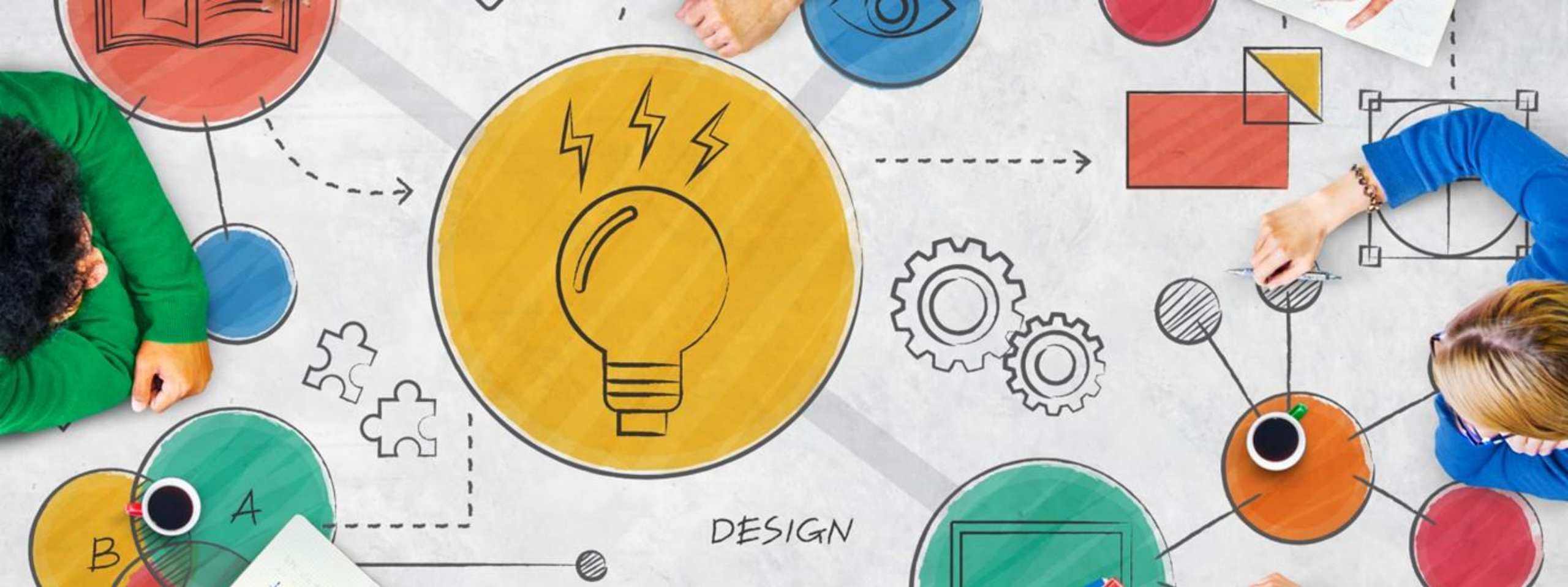
# Support needed?

- Confident in:
  - finding relevant literature.
  - critically reviewing literature.
  - writing a literature review.
  - presenting researching at meetings, conferences, etc.
- Not confident in:
  - applying for research funding.
  - writing an ethics application.
  - using quantitative research methods.
  - publishing research.



# Training ideas

- Workplace
  - can you observe training aimed at postgrads/early career researchers?
  - research support librarians.
  - mentoring scheme.
- CILIP
  - Short courses on “making research approachable”, “how to plan research” and “doing research” on CILIP’s eLearning hub.
  - LIRG organises free lunchtime webinars on research skills: 21<sup>st</sup> June – Narrative Inquiry - <https://bit.ly/4bxEl5a>
- Online
  - SAGE Research Methods, LinkedIn Learning, etc.



# Tips

# Data gathering (1)

- We piloted our questionnaire but didn't uncover all the issues.
  - if your pilot participants are similar to each other, they will give similar answers.
  - instead, consider getting them to answer with fake personas/random answers, so that you uncover issues.
  - get some non-librarians to help with testing?
- Make questions straightforward for participants, and for researchers.
  - not at all interested → very interested
  - disagree → agree

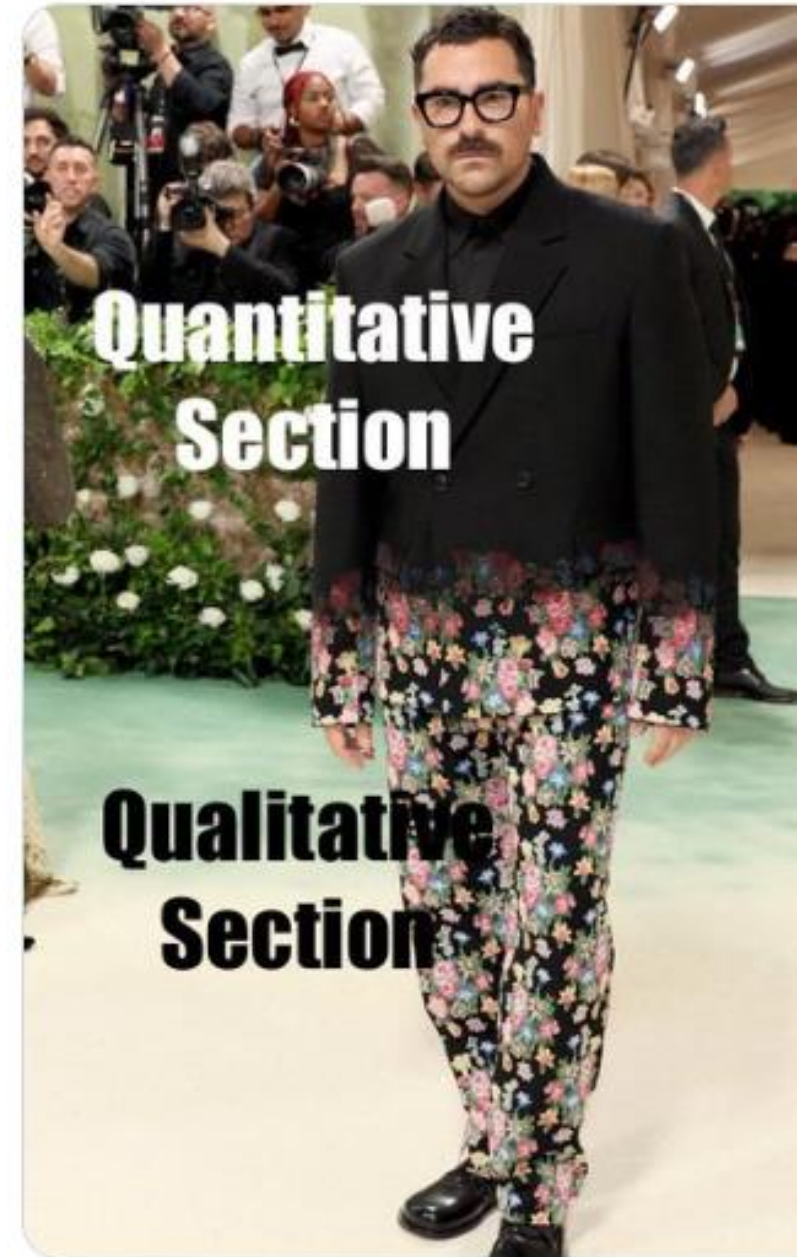


Jack Meyer @Jackbmeyer · 21h

Writing a mixed method paper like

## Data gathering (2)

- Think about analysis when designing your project.
  - what data will you need to test your hypotheses? (Avoid confirmation bias/leading questions.)
  - qualitative or quantitative study?
- We have an overwhelming amount of quantitative data.
  - did we ask too many questions?
  - were the questions too granular?





# Example of a difficult to analyse question

- We asked:
  - What year did you/or will you complete your first professional LIS/KM qualification?
  - answers were: blank, 1995, 2005, 2024, etc.
- For analysis, specific year didn't matter – we needed recent or non-recent.
- We should have asked:
  - If you have a professional LIS/KM qualification, did you receive this:
    - six or more years ago
    - five or fewer years ago
    - not applicable
- Working with real data = genuine skills development.

# Finishing your project

- There will never be enough time!!!
- Working in a group means tasks can be split up:
  - accountable to other people – positives and negatives.
- Sometimes other work (or life) takes priority – be prepared for research projects be delayed or cancelled, especially if they are an add-on to a full-time job.
- Discuss your dissemination plan at the start of the project:
  - what do you want to produce? How will you divide up writing tasks?
  - what is a realistic timeline (with padding)?
  - how will you divide up credit? CRediT – contributor roles taxonomy - <https://credit.niso.org/>

# I want to do research but don't have a topic ...

- LIRG currently funding a researcher to look at:
  - *what future developments will libraries in the UK need to significantly engage with, in the next ten years.*
  - *which of these areas are most critical for us to understand and require in-depth focused research to support this (and thus benefit from funding).*
- This project is at the writing up stage. For updates, follow
  - LIRG blog: <https://bit.ly/4aaKKr3>
  - LIRG twitter @ciliplirg



Kirsty Thomson  
kthomson003@dundee.ac.uk

Questions?