

Let the computer help you research

Research Using IT provides a step by step guide to how the computer can be used for all of these stages.

TABLE 1.2

Typical pattern	Basic example of how a computer could help you
1. Original reason for research	Brainstorming software, such as Mind Manager.
2. Decide on a specific topic/area	Use the Internet/library computers – see what's around, seek ideas, other publications, and so on.
3. Identify objective	Word process lists, reviews. Forward plan using your lists – is what you plan feasible? You can copy relevant bits and replan if necessary. Keep notes saved (you will be able to automatically copy them into the research paper later – saves rewriting).
4. Decide and plan how you are going to find the information you need	Use online facilities at libraries. Keep records/notes in the required format from the outset ready for your eventual report and the bibliography of books – this alone will save you hours of work at the end. Word process the relevant quotes that you might use from the books/magazines as you proceed, save these under easy to find file names and incorporate later into document. Saves finding/writing out twice or using small card index systems (very time consuming). Computers will also search out 'keywords' for you, simplifying searches for specific topic information you've recorded.
5. Negotiate access/ permission	Write letters using a word-processing package, mail merge and/or email facilities. Write report explaining the aims of your research to enclose with letters. Generate automatic labels for envelopes.
6. Devise paperwork needed	Design questionnaires. Design grids for your use recording verbal responses to interview questions, tick boxes, checklists and forms
7. Research around the topic	Use multimedia to your advantage: online books, online encyclopedias, CD-ROM, computer videos, college and/or university campus networks links. Use scanners. Don't forget intranet and Internet facilities.
8. Decide timescale and/or number of staff to	Keep totally on top of recorded information

be involved and carry out and record questioning	and word process a record of each day's work. Once more, the advantage of having this immediately on computer is that you can copy parts of it straight into your research paper later.
9. Analyse information obtained	Input information straight into database and draw out statistics needed immediately (no need for counting or maths on your part). Use spreadsheet package to draw pie or bar charts easily, or work out averages and so on.
10. Presentation of findings	Using the word processor to bring all the above together into your research paper. Using a multitude of useful functions, such as the word count facility (you will no doubt be working to a maximum number of words). Using desktop publishing functions to give your paper a professional look.
11. Finished research paper	Using presentation software to project pertinent points, charts, diagrams and so on on overhead projectors/screens for personal presentations. Designing eye-catching publicity using desktop publishing software. Using online facilities to advertise your research findings. Using word processors to write letters, mini-reports to publishers, magazines, external funding sources.