Approaching Research in Speech and Language Therapy

Research Working Group of the Northern Ireland Speech & Language Therapy Partnership
STARTING YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT

Introduction

1. As a Speech and Language Therapist you are not alone in your interest in research. Research activity has always been acknowledged as having a vital contribution within our profession, and has been encouraged by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) since its formation over fifty years ago. The primary focus of all such research is to improve our understanding of communication disorders and the quality of the speech and language therapy practice. The NHS, too, is striving to achieve a research based health care system.

2. In considering research activity there are a wide range of options open to you. Research can be undertaken alongside or separate from your clinical and other work responsibilities. It can also be undertaken collaboratively with colleagues from your own and/or other disciplines. The extent of your research may vary from a single case study to a large scale investigation involving many people. It may be undertaken over a short or long time period, on a part-time or full-time basis. There is an option to suit your interest and personal needs. Do not be alarmed if you find it impossible at the outset to determine where you might start or what you need to do first. There are many avenues of help and guidance available to you.

3. These notes have been written by Speech and Language Therapists and they are intended to help you start off in the right direction, by identifying information sources and posing questions which you ought to ask yourself and others both at the outset and throughout the process of conducting your research enquiry. They have been written to help you, as an individual practitioner, develop a realistic and practical approach to research activity, either within your clinical work or more formally within a post-graduate programme, and to avoid the pitfalls into which others have fallen. Specifically these notes aim to support research defined as a protocol-based project, aimed at producing new knowledge (as differentiated from audit or literature review).

4. You should feel challenged, not threatened, by the prospect of conducting research. If you have not already carried out a project as an undergraduate, certainly many of the clinical and administrative skills you have developed in daily clinical practice are readily transferable into research activity. In fact, the skills of clinical problem solving are fundamental to solving research questions.
5. As with your clinical work (and most other activities) identifying potential problems and knowing where to find practical assistance will go a long way towards achieving a successful outcome. Conducting research can bring a very real sense of achievement and personal satisfaction, as well as making a contribution to your profession, its clients, society and your own personal log!

6. This short guide is intended to help you to achieve these aims and approach research at the level you choose with confidence.

Finding a research topic
Where do I start?

7. Firstly you need to think through what has motivated you to consider doing research.

- it may be that an interesting client or group of clients has encouraged you to ask a question relating to clinical practice or the nature of the presenting disorder.

- your motivation may have arisen because of the state you are at in your career or personal life, leading you to consider your professional development.

- you may be registered on an academic course which requires you to undertake a research project.

8. There are several ways of identifying and refining a research question:

- read relevant literature

- consult other researchers and colleagues - this may also include attending Specific Interest Groups

- keep a list of problems/issues as they come to mind and then explore the feasibility of one of these

- if you are embarking on a major research project, you may wish to read about the research strategies of potential funding bodies and modify your research question appropriately. See Appendix A - Strategic Documents to Consider

- RCSLT identified priority areas for new research, see the RCSLT website, www.rcslt.org. The NHS also identifies priority areas - NHS R&D website, RCSLT priorities document.

- choose a topic which you find personally interesting.

Time should be set aside at this stage for careful consideration of the research question.
When you have started!

9. It is essential that you read and reference relevant literature systematically. You may have begun to do this but it is likely to have been in an *ad hoc* manner. Good research is informed by a review of current literature and all projects, no matter how big or small, require a review of the literature.

10. You should be systematic about referencing your reading and your notes from the start - it saves time later on. Establish a system of filing and cross referencing now. It is very time-consuming and frustrating to search for the source of some important word of wisdom when you are at the last stages of writing up. See Appendix B *Filing System*.

Searching through the literature

11. One way is to find the most recent publications concerning the problem/issue. Go to the reference list at the end of the articles or books and expand your search from there. Another is to access a database using key word searching. Your library should be able to help in this (see below).

12. The purpose of looking through the literature is to establish a rationale for your research questions, i.e. arguing why your question is an important one at this stage and clarifying that it has not already been answered. It will also inform your choice of research methodology.

13. If your research question is based more on clinical experience, then you need to do some reasoning in qualitative methodologies to help give you a focus for evaluating it objectively.

14. You will need access to a library and, at this stage, your best friend will be the librarian who is trained to help you through the process of searching for relevant literature.

Access to library facilities

15. You need to explore resources in your own Trust or Unit, local library facilities, local university libraries and consider registering as a health & Social services/Department of Health reader. All libraries have an inter-library loan facility - you need to look into any costs of using this facility. RCSLT currently has an agreement with the UCL Human Communication Library for RCSLT members.

16. Computer literacy is essential, and the use of the internet is now regarded as essential. For those not familiar with using information technology it may be worthwhile investigating basic/intermediate courses in computer skills (often accessible through your Trust or library facilities or local FE College evening classes).

Resources for the project

17. It is very useful to consider the resources needed to carry out the research project early on in your planning. The more preparation you put in now, the more enjoyable the research will be. No speech and language therapist will have all the resources immediately available. In order to assist you in your
consideration, we list a range of questions to consider under the following headings:

- personal ability/knowledge/skill/motivation
- time
- funding
- access to clients/subjects/data
- administrative and technical support
- library resources/support
- professional/managerial permission and support

You will probably not have the answers to all of these questions - you will need to access people who will be able to help you. People are usually very willing to give of their time and expertise if you know the questions to ask. See Appendix C People Who May Help.

**Personal Ability/Knowledge/Skill**
Have I the academic ability, knowledge and practical skills necessary to undertake the identified project- taking into account the need to persevere, collect, evaluate and analyse information? If not, how can I develop these to an appropriate level?

Have I the appropriate level of knowledge vis a vis research methodology and statistical compilation or where can I access this? Have I the clinical experience/knowledge appropriate to the proposed project?

What gaps are there in my knowledge/skill base relevant to the project and how do I go about filling these gaps?

Have I the appropriate skill to submit a research proposal if required, write up the findings, present the outcome etc.

**Time**
How long will the process realistically take from the research idea to completion? Do I have any appreciation of the timing for each stage and each element of the process?

How much personal time am I willing to commit to the project over the estimated period? Are there personal time constraints in terms of the completion time? Are there personal constraints on the time available to me on a weekly/regular basis?

How much employer time can I realistically negotiate?
How much time will be required to disseminate and share findings at a local/national/international level?

Do not underestimate the need for adequate thinking time at all stages. It is often appropriate to multiply your estimate by at least two.

**Funding**

Do I have any perception of the totality of funding required? Funding might be needed for
- hardware/software
- administrative and clerical support
- printing
- travel costs
- clinical cover
- time
- library fees
- registration fees
- research indemnity insurance

Do I need to ask advice on costings? If so, from whom?

What funding sources exist locally/nationally/internationally? Where will I find out about such sources?

Am I prepared to fund a part or all of this project personally?

**Ethical issues**

Access to Clients/Subjects/Data/Legislation

Do I need direct or indirect access to clients/subjects? If so, what/whose permission do I need?

Is access confined to speech and language therapy clients/data in my own Trust or is access required to clients/data in other Trusts? What process should I follow?

Is access required to clients/data of other professions within or outside my own Trust? What process should I follow?

Is the research likely to require another group(s) of subjects, e.g. as controls/comparisons? How do I access such a group? What/whose permission is required?

Are there any legislative issues to consider, such as data protection, or consent and copyright procedures to comply with?

What ethical principles are involved in my project? Does my project need to go to an **Ethics Committee** for approval to undertake the research? It is vital to check this out now.
Early and continuing consideration of these issues is essential to the success of your work and can greatly influence what research you may realistically undertake and the timescale. See Appendix D Ethics and Confidentiality.

**Technical and Administrative Support**
What general and specific materials are required? e.g. stationery/test equipment What do I need to purchase and at what cost?

What technical resources are required and who will use them? (e.g. audio-visual equipment.) How is the equipment insured?

Who can advise me on what hardware and software packages I require to store, analyse data and print results? Am I already familiar with such techniques or will I need instruction? Where can I get support and advice regarding appropriate data collection and statistical analysis?

Who will input the data and type the research results?

**Library resources/Support**
Do I have the necessary working documents and literature on hand during the period of the research?

What local and regional libraries/library systems will facilitate my research project and how do I access them? What are the procedures/costs for access through my workplace?

How can I access national/international library resources? See "searching the literature," above.

**Professional/Managerial Permission and Support**
With whom do I need to consult prior to submitting my research proposal? Do I need to consult with them in order to seek permission or in order to keep them informed?

Do I require on-going line-managerial support in terms of:
- funding
- accessing other Board/Trust resources
- regular discussion regarding progress
- time/clinical support/cover

Do I require support from any other professional colleagues, e.g. as a mentor, as peer support?

Do I require a Supervisor? Why, and who should it be?

For this area, please read Appendix E, Role of Manager, Mentor, or Supervisor.

It is vital that you have a clear understanding of what support you require before getting into the middle of the project.
THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Writing it Down
1. Now that you have thought about your area of research and clarified the research project, you should now commit it to paper. Most people find this an anxious time. However, it does not have to be as detailed or as comprehensive as you might imagine. You are not expected to have the answers yet!

2. There are two documents you will write:

   - An outline of the project for your own purposes which acts as a working document.

   - A research proposal which will be given to others, e.g. for funding; for consent.

The working document
3. The key word to remember here is outline. This outline allows you to put down in a logical form, the many thoughts and ideas you have considered in earlier sections. A possible structure to this working document might be:

   a. How would you currently describe your research question(s)?
      What areas of the literature do you think that you need to research?
      This may be only one or two main areas but as you read more and more references, the areas will sub-divide further and further.

   b. What possible methodology/methodologies do you think you might use to answer the research questions(s)?

4. You may not be able to be specific about the details of the methodology at this stage. In fact, in a multi-stage project you may only speculate what the subsequent methodology may be.

5. You may have recently studied research methodology (e.g. within undergraduate or postgraduate studies) but if not, it may be worth considering undertaking a Short Course in the subject or a Master's module.

6. It is essential to speak to someone whose background is in research methodology in order to check out specifics, e.g. How large should your sample be, if you are hoping to make predictions from the results of the larger population?

7. There are some excellent books available describing both quantitative and qualitative research.

   c. What possible results might you get and how might they be interpreted? This section will be vague. You will be identifying and refining the previous sections before checking that the results can be analysed in a way which answers your research question.
8. It is essential to make sure that a project is set up to provide results in a form which can be analysed as fully and extensively as possible. It is important at this stage to think about the implications, application and dissemination of your research result(s).

9. You should explore the appropriateness of the following methods/techniques qualitative versus quantitative, descriptive, longitudinal efficacy, single-case, cohort/case series, linguistic, psychological, observational, interview/questionnaire.

10. If you are involved in collaborative and/or funded research, you need to negotiate and agree issues such as ownership and publication rights. On the working document it is essential to superimpose the questions, solutions and strategies you have thought through in the section on "Resources," i.e. access to subjects, dedicated research time during your working week.

11. Commit to paper an overall plan but expect that this will become more closely defined as you begin the research. It is also very useful, and in short term projects essential, to make the plan time-based. The process will always be slower than you expect.

12. Start to draw up an immediate action sheet with a realistic time frame. It is important to consider if you need to go through an Ethics Committee. Telephone now to find out when and how often the Ethics Committee of your Trust or higher education institution meets. See Appendix D Ethics and Confidentiality

The research proposal
13. The key word here is proposal. It is a statement of what you are proposing to do - however, it also has a marketing function. You may be using this written proposal to request management support, peer support, resources, including funding or access to an academic route. You should at this point, lodge the title of your proposed research with RCSLT who may be able to provide you with useful contacts.

14. Clarity is essential. You may be tempted to include a lot of specific speech and language therapy terminology in order to make it look more impressive. Don't! Keep it short. Proposals should be concise.

15. You will have already spent a great deal of time on the process so far but often the words on paper do not appear to do justice to your reading and creativity. This is hopefully just your perception. Usually one loses the ability to evaluate the proposal impartially by this stage. Ask a friend to read it through to check it is easy to understand - even if the reader is not a speech and language therapist.

16. The proposal should be structured in such a way that the following questions are clearly addressed.
• What research questions are you proposing to investigate?
• Why is this a relevant question?
• What other research has been, or is being, done in the same area and how will my research extend or fit in with this?
• How do you propose to investigate the question?
• What is the possible application or value of such research?

17. Proposals are used to register for a higher degree in higher education institutions. It is useful to have some sample proposals to study before submitting yours. Most academic departments will be able to show you some proposals which have been used by previous students for registration.

18. Speech and language therapy projects traditionally have used quantitative methods but more and more health care professionals, including speech and language therapists, are using a range of methodologies. It is important to acknowledge that qualitative methods can be rigorous but you might encounter some opposition to some qualitative methodologies as the more medical model dominates, and research committees might be unwilling to broaden their thinking. There have, however, been recent shifts in thinking and a more eclectic view of research has been promoted within Health and Social Care and Education. Action Research should also be considered as a useful methodology for speech and language therapists.

19. Proposals also form the substance of requests for approval and resourcing the research.

20. It is important to have thought through the resource questions raised in the section on Thinking about Resources.

21. If you are hoping to raise funding from a body outside your Trust or higher education institution, such as a charity, voluntary organisation, government department, or publisher, then you might need to seek internal administrative and financial support. This is because grants are usually funded three-months in arrears and therefore your project may need to be financially managed by the appropriate department within your employing authority.

22. Proposals should also address the fifth question:

What are the resource implications?
To increase the chance of being successful, it is helpful to research a funding body's bias and preferred application format. Most funding bodies have a comprehensive application form, which will include your research proposal.

23. It is worth noting that multi-disciplinary research may be more favourably considered by some funding bodies.
24. It is helpful to contact the funding body before completing the application in order to find out as much as possible about how they evaluate applications. The information gained may help you to highlight aspects of the proposal that are particularly important to that funding body. This also means that emphasis, style and format will be modified from application to application. Funding bodies may be helpful in developing the application prior to submission. However, large funding bodies are swamped with requests for funding. For major projects you may need the formal support of an experienced researcher with a history of successfully completed projects.

25. Many experienced researchers having funding applications rejected, so do not be disheartened if yours is not immediately successful. Try again. There are a variety of sources of funding.

CARRYING OUT YOUR RESEARCH

Managing your time
1. It is helpful to remember that you have already started to work on the project - as covered in the previous sections of this booklet. Regardless of whether it is a small or large project, it is still a daunting or an exciting moment, depending on your personality. It is helpful to know yourself well. Are you a steady type who will work in a disciplined way or are you like the rest of us - working best in bursts while under pressure and putting off difficult tasks until tomorrow?

2. It is useful to read a time management text book. Time management is essential. You must make "space" for the research and be ruthless about maintaining that space.

   - Balance your job, research and personal life in a way which suits you - one speech and language therapist can work best two evenings a week, whereas another works every other weekend; one might work better in the morning, another in the evening.

   - If you have been given time out of your regular work commitments - make sure you differentiate between research and clinical time. It is not to your benefit to use research time to do clinical work, regardless of the clinical demand. Obviously using clinical time for your research is also not appropriate. Talk to your manager.

3. Three key areas need to be handled well in order that your research will proceed more smoothly and that you will enjoy it.

Organising your research
4. How you organise the mechanics of the research depends on skills outlined earlier in this booklet. It is important to create workspace for yourself, eg unplug the phone, put a "do not disturb" sign on the door; arrange child-minding before you start.
5. You will already have been reading articles and books to do with your research area. Check the format for the references now, if you have not already done so.

6. Establish a system of filing and cross-referencing now. It is so time consuming to search for the source of some important reference when you are in the last stages of writing up. Write down every reference you use in the format in which it is to be reproduced in your finished article, and make a note of what the references refer to. See Appendix B *Filing System*.

**Working with your supervisor**

7. Working with your supervisor and/or mentor effectively needs thought and clear communication of the expectations you and they might have. It is really worthwhile to discuss perceptions and establish a consensus before you get into the middle of the project. See Appendix D, *Role of Manager, Mentor and Supervisor*.

**How you develop and use peer support**

8. Developing peer support allows you to have a sounding board for those ideas or opinions you want to try out while they are being formulated. Peer support is also just that - support you when the going gets tough and prevents you from getting downhearted.

9. This support may be formal or informal, it may be with one other person or with a group - all that matters is that you do not feel isolated. However, avoid the supporter who brings you down - some people unfortunately can have a negative effect.

10. By this time you will have put a great deal of thought and effort into the project. Do not be dispirited, most people reach a hiatus at some point. If you are very swamped or bored by it, put the project down and give yourself a break. You will come back to it refreshed.

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**SHARING AND DISSEMINATING THE RESULTS**

**Why should you inform anyone about your findings**

1. Once you complete your research project, you may want to bury it in the bottom drawer because you cannot bear to look at it again, or tell everyone about it. Most people act the first way and, as a result, some very good research never gets published.

2. Our strong advice to you is to share it Research which does not come up with the expected results is just as important as research which has clear cut conclusions.
3. Other people, clients, even your family have contributed in various ways and you owe it to them to disseminate your findings. We have thought of the following reasons for disseminating your results:

**Personal reasons for sharing and disseminating your findings**
- advance your thinking and conceptual development
- make a contribution to the knowledge base of your profession
- gain an academic award
- achieve a sense of completion and personal satisfaction
- extend your opportunities for personal and professional development by attending conferences, making professional contacts, attracting resources for further study/research and establishing a track record.
- develop a range of presentation skills

**Professional reasons for sharing and disseminating your findings**
- advance shared knowledge in profession
- earn respect from colleagues
- by documenting research problems or pitfalls you help others avoid them
- gain feedback on your work - validation and/or constructive criticism
- stimulate new research questions or debate
- fulfil commitments to your sponsors, participants in your project, employer and peer supporters

4. Once you are ready to report on your research project, you need to decide to whom you are going to report it.

**How and to whom should your results be reported**

5. In deciding how you are going to make your results public, you should consider the following:

- who has a right to/demands to know about this? e.g. course committee, funding agency
- who wants to hear about it? i.e. colleagues or others who have an interest in the question you investigated
- who needs to hear about it i.e. whether they are interested or not
- who else might be willing to listen, e.g. potential publishers, others working in the same field of research.

6. Once you have decided on your audience, you need to consider whether the mode of delivery is to be written, oral, or both.

7. If it is to be in writing, then look at journals and magazines which might be interested. Make sure you check their requirements on content, style and layout. Think carefully about the target readership and modify your style accordingly. See Appendix G, *Guidelines on Written Presentations*.

8. If it is to be an oral presentation, then you need to prepare carefully
- begin with audiences you know will be supportive and constructive e.g. friends or an interested naive audience, moving on to Specific
Interest Groups, other professional groups and then national and international conferences
- think carefully about the audience and their motivation, state of knowledge, interest, etc.
- confirm in your own mind what key points you want to get across
- check what facilities are available in advance
- check your talk again to make sure you are highlighting your key points
- use a style of presentation which suits you and the environment. Once you gain confidence you can experiment with different styles.
- bring a handout on your talk, with your name and contact address clearly visible
- if it is a formal conference, bring a hard copy of your presentation for possible inclusion in written proceedings. See Appendix H, *Guidelines on Oral Presentations*.

9. Most researchers feel that their project is not as good as others - most of us lack confidence, but you will have put so much thought, hard work and time into it that you really should share it.

10. Now that you have successfully completed your project, it might be worth encouraging a colleague to undertake a research project or contemplate doing further research yourself.

11. The profession needs clinically-led research, owned and carried out by speech and language therapists in the field.

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**Appendix A**

**STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS TO CONSIDER**

1. RCSLT Research Priorities document

2. Regional and local NHS Strategies/Trust Purchasing Prospectuses (contact the relevant agency)


5. Ad hoc Research Opportunities (usually advertised locally, in the RCSLT Bulletin from time to time, or over the SLT-Research e-mailing list).
Appendix B

A FILING SYSTEM

You will need to be able to record and cross reference details of articles. You will also want to refer to your notes from articles and also to add some classification of the articles into topics and, as you get further into your reading, sub-topics. A card index system is very useful although frequently people will use a computer database, such as access, or reference manager.

Index System
You need to organise your NOTES on the article.
- File notes on large cards under the topic and sub-topic headings.
- Small cards are filed separately alphabetically, once you have read the article.
- Articles themselves are filed alphabetically.

Appendix C

WHO MAY HELP

There are many people who may be able to offer you timely advice and support. Think carefully about whom you should talk to for information and guidance, why you should consult them and for what purpose, before you ask to meet with anyone.

These people may include:
- your colleagues/peers
- your manager
- Specific Interest Groups (contact details available from RCSLT)
- Research Officers in your Trust/Board/Authority
- Management Development and Training Unit staff in your employing organisation
- the RCSLT Policy Lead for Research
- Social Services Training Department Staff
- Staff of Charities or Voluntary Agencies
- Regional Research and Development Board
- Local Workforce Confederation
- Speech and Language Therapy staff at your local university
- Research Librarian
- Statistician
- Finance staff in your employing organisation

Appendix D

ETHICS AND CONFIDENTIALITY

What is ethical approval?
In general research involving direct or indirect access to NHS information, clients and/or records require approval of the Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC). You should be able to find their website address. LRECs advise on the ethics of
research projects and pay particular attention to patient/client confidentiality and safety.

In addition, if you require access to personal client data, you should adhere to the relevant data protection information (access via the NHS website) and to the RCSLT Code of Ethics 1988.

**Why is ethical approval necessary?**
Ethical approval protects the client, your employer and you as the researcher, by ensuring your plans are formally endorsed and ethically acceptable.

You should initially discuss your research proposal with the appropriate professional (usually the Speech & Language Therapy Manager), who is responsible for the provision of services to the relevant client group.

You are also advised to consult relevant personnel in the Training and Research Department of your own Trust/higher education institution, to ascertain local policies or guidelines and procedures.

Therapists requiring access to information on clients from another Trust or employer must liaise with the relevant Speech & Language Therapy Manager in the first instance.

**Who gives ethical approval?**
A Research Ethics Committee may exist within your employing authority or the local university or universities may have ethical committees which function in collaboration with your employing authority.

Such a committee will have a membership drawn from people who collectively have wide experience of the medical and allied professions and of the ethical, research and related issues which arise in research work involving human subjects.

**How do I apply for ethical approval?**
You must complete an application form provided by the relevant Research Ethics Committee.

Be sure you adhere to any guidance given regarding the submission of a proposal and if possible seek the advice of someone who has already had a proposal agreed by the Committee and/or your supervisor.

It is vital for you to find out how frequently the committee meets, in order to submit a timely application.

In any proposal for a research project, informed consent of the client(s) and/or carer(s) is essential and is your responsibility.

Appendix E
ROLE OF THE MANAGER, MENTOR AND SUPERVISOR

Role of the Manager

The line manager of Speech and Language Therapy staff normally has responsibility to:
- promote and facilitate research and a research culture within the department
- encourage local funding for research and appropriate locum cover
- identify priority areas for research relevant to the profession and service delivery.
- provide appropriate levels of support for staff undertaking research
- raise awareness of service commissioners about the importance of research
- establish working protocols with researchers
- ensure that any employer requirements are met, e.g. registration, research indemnity, research governance.
- regularly meet with any staff member undertaking research to be kept informed of progress and any problems encountered.
- endeavour to help the research to find solutions to any problems

Role of the Mentor

The main role of your mentor is to help you to reflect on your research and its context.

The mentor should:
- provide support for you which is objective and trustworthy
- foster in you a self-managed approach to learning and development during the research process.
- highlight how learning opportunities can be taken by you through the performance of research tasks and through relationships with other individuals both inside and outside the work organisation.
- encourage and stimulate you through challenging and clarifying aspects of the work.
- help to resolve any issues arising from undertaking research in the workplace.
- reinforce your self-confidence if you are experiencing difficulties with some aspects of the research process.
- provide know-how and contacts appropriate to the project.

The mentor is not
- another tutor or adviser
- a problem solver
- another line manager
- a dumping ground

Researcher-Mentor Relationship

It is vital that confidentiality is a core characteristic of the relationship. The relationship will frequently depend on identification of times for meetings. On occasions the mentoring relationship does not work effectively and it should be agreed from the outset of the relationship that either party can terminate the arrangement at any time.

Guidelines for the Researcher-Mentor Relationship

1. The mentor will only intrude into your personal life by invitation.
2. The mentor will not make excessive demands on your time.
3. You will not make excessive demands on the mentor's time.
4. You will only use the mentor's authority with the mentor's consent.
5. The mentor will assist you in achieving objectives but the researcher takes ownership of the process and the outcome.
6. You must make sure you communicate your needs clearly to the mentor.
7. You must avoid conflicts of authority between your immediate line manager and your mentor.
8. You must recognise the limitations of the mentoring relationship and the importance of learning to stand on your own two feet.

**Mentor-manager relationship**
There is no formal relationship between your mentor, your line manager and you. Your mentor is not expected either to report to your line manager on any matter to do with the mentoring relationship or to approach your line manager should you be experiencing difficulties.

Conversely, your line manager is not expected to intercede with your mentor. However, a tripartite meeting may be arranged to discuss the ongoing research or learning needs if this appears necessary.

**Attributes of a good mentor**
1. Commitment to making himself or herself available to the research and to sufficient time to performing the mentoring role.
2. Trustworthiness to provide the personal and supportive relationship the researcher needs.
3. Objectivity to stimulate and motivate the research without the constraints of the line relationship.
4. Patience to listen to and assist the researcher to tackle and overcome (not solve!) the difficulties which he or she may be facing.
5. Assertiveness to prompt the researcher to set and adhere to research objectives.
6. Experience to help the researcher identify opportunities and solutions.
7. Interpersonal skills to build up a good rapport with the researcher.
8. Openness to accept the challenges to existing ideas which may be posed by the researcher.

**Role of the supervisor**
*Why have a supervisor at all?*
Research is exciting and challenging but it should be approached with the same rigour you would give to your professional practice to ensure that clients were given the best quality care and treatment, respecting their rights. By virtue of the fact that you are using people, clinical data and other information for research purposes there are particular additional codes of practice you must follow. It would be unwise and unethical to proceed alone without having your procedures validated at each stage and to that end, the supervisor has an important quality assurance role.

Most researchers, not only first timers, become very wrapped up in their research - it can encompass both your emotions and your intellect. You need to be able to stand back from it and to be objective. It is a major part of your supervisor's role to help you to do this. Also for your research to be valid it needs this objectivity no matter what
methodology is selected. Your supervisor to a certain extent is there to protect you from getting too carried away - as well as from other potential hazards! Although you must take responsibility for your actions, your supervisor will advise (and on occasions advise against) particular courses of action. Inevitably there will be high and low points during the process. You will need to talk through the problems with someone who understands them. Your supervisor will be able to help you plan your time. By bringing specialist knowledge of the research area and methodologies the supervisor can guide you to develop your ideas and chart your way along the path from formulating a statement of the problem, to an eventual result and conclusion.

Your supervisor can be the ally who enables you to succeed with the least difficulty and the most enjoyment. You owe both to yourself and your profession to conduct your research in a professional manner, which means accountably. Supervision is part of this.

You need to approach the task of getting a supervisor with much the same consideration you would give to choosing a partner. You may well experience many emotions during the course of the research - there are inevitably successes and failures, so a trusting relationship is important.

Your supervisor must be someone you can communicate with - i.e. is accessible, "talks the same language" and for whom you have respect professionally. This means you must be in a position to make regular contact with your supervisor personally and by telephone or e-mail. You must feel that you value his or her opinions and be prepared to take guidance from that person.

Your supervisor may be someone with a particular specialist expertise in the topic area - if so then additional help may be needed with methodologies or statistics - this is usually not difficult to access. Ideally the supervisor has knowledge of appropriate research methodologies as well as relevant academic and or clinical expertise. If you need to access extra supervision for specific methods or expertise then it should be made clear where each role begins and ends to avoid possible conflicting advice. Experienced researchers may have their own particular fixed ideas, as do most people. Clear communication is important.

Your supervisor is heavily involved at the early stage of designing the research; in a consultative capacity while it progresses, and then has a major role in advising regarding presentation of findings in the report, or thesis.

Your supervisor will expect you to come prepared to each consultation with your suggestions for proceeding and is not there to make your decisions for you. In the initial stages the supervisor should advise regarding the viability of the project topic and guide you towards a suitable design and methodology.

Your supervisor should help you avoid pitfalls and make you aware of potential problems as they see them. You may have to negotiate with your supervisor which particular avenues should be pursued and which left. The supervisor has a responsibility to you to guide you but you also have a responsibility to share with your supervisor what you are doing and to keep the supervisor informed. If you deviate from the original agreed plan then you must discuss this with your supervisor. This is
in your own interests if you are carrying out a marked piece of work, such as for a higher degree, as your supervisor is also usually one of the markers! There is usually also an External Examiner.

By agreeing to supervise your research, the supervisor has a stake in that research and where access to subjects or clients is involved, will also have a shared ethical responsibility. It is usual for resulting publications to have the supervisor as a co-author. At that point the supervisor reserves the right to edit the work and to agree whether or not to be a co-author.

A supervisor, however, is not responsible for editing your project if it is being submitted as part of a degree requirement (postgraduate or undergraduate). Nor is it the supervisor's job to proof read it for you but if given adequate time most supervisors will read carefully all work submitted to them - usually as each stage is completed and will make suggestions regarding your drafts.

Your supervisor will probably ration time with you so you must use it wisely - always arrive prepared, on time, having completed what you agreed to do and the supervision process will be stimulating and rewarding for both parties.

**Do I need a supervisor?**

Perhaps you feel that having completed an undergraduate dissertation you would like to "have a go at some research" on your own or perhaps you feel that not having already done any research you would rather "read up" about it and not bother someone else. You may not like the idea of sharing your thoughts or, "being supervised" or you may be anxious for someone to share them with. No matter how you feel about having someone to supervise your research project, it is almost always advisable to do so, unless your research is part of a larger project already adequately externally validated and supervised.

**How do I get a supervisor allocated to me?**

In many situations you will have some say in who your supervisor will be - even within taught courses. If you register for a higher degree, or continuing education course, the selection of a supervisor will be made in accordance with the course regulations. If you are approaching research from within a clinical context and are not registering for a particular award, then you should approach your line manager to assist you in making the appropriate arrangements. It is quite good to have some ideas as to who might be a suitable person so that negotiations can take place with the appropriate authorities. Supervision is a time consuming role and should be properly negotiated with employers. This will ensure that neither party feels that it is an imposition. A contract may be advised - although there needs to be some flexibility to meet the needs of the research and demands upon both parties.

**What is the relationship between supervisor and other support systems I might have?**

Usually the supervisor's role is seen as the guiding hand. Most organisations will have a Code of Practice for supervision. Make sure that you, and the supervisor, are familiar with these. Supervisors often do provide a level of emotional support but this may be something needed over and above the supervision of the research process.
You may therefore wish to use a mentor (see Appendix "role of Mentor") whose role is much more that of an emotional supporter. However, roles and specific responsibilities must be specified at the outset to make sure that no-one ends up confused or as piggy in the middle!

Appendix F

WRITTEN PRESENTATIONS

Consider at a very early stage what potential written papers your study may yield and plan how to progress these.

Discuss your work at the outset with others who have knowledge and experience of the process of getting papers published. Contact your mentor, experienced colleagues or your local academic institution for advice.

Begin to scan journals and identify key people in relevant publishing fields in order to ascertain what issues may be of current interest to them and how your work might fit these.

Select a publication or medium which is consistent with the level, purpose and focus of your research.

Before drafting your paper, read the detailed guidelines very carefully from each potential publication. These will specify the required format for presentation, e.g. work limit, typing style, reference style, line spacing, format for tables, etc, as well as the submission process.

Check the regulations or restrictions carefully attached to giving oral presentations at formal conferences, as well as the copyright for written reports. These vary widely and may influence your choice of publication or presentation forum. For example, you may be required to acknowledge a conference presentation in subsequent written articles, or the conference may reserve the exclusive rights to future publication of your work.

Observe the rules for achieving clear, accurate and concise report writing.

Appendix G

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Content
When preparing your content, ensure that is directed to the audience expected - their prior knowledge of the subject, etc. so that you can pitch it at the right level.
Your presentation, however, should be understandable in its own right to the audience. It should, therefore, have an introduction and a conclusion. If you are
presenting a paper at a conference which accepted your paper from an abstract, make sure that the paper reflects the abstract submitted.

**Presentation**
It is up to you whether you prepare headings or detailed notes, work from cards or a paper. Whichever method you use, number your pages and have an easy method of passing from one to the next. It may help to position a table or chair where you can place finished notes. Choose what works for you - but try not to read verbatim from pages of script, so that you can make and maintain contact with your audience.

**Visual Aids**
Check in advance what is available and what needs to be requested in advance or brought with you. Usually a laptop computer or overhead projector and often a slide projector are provided but other equipment may need to be specially arranged. It helps to have everything well labelled, numbered and catalogued for instructing a technician or a colleague regarding their presentation - or for showing yourself.

Usually you have to set up powerpoint, slides or video in advance. When possible, have a trial run. Technicians may or may not be readily available so check this in good time.

Presentations should be of professional standard, and nowadays this is generally accompanied by a powerpoint or similar screen presentation. Generally it is better to have clear, uncluttered screens which do not contain too much information.

Check that they are easily interpreted and that you know how to use your tables, graphs and other diagrams to illustrate and clarify your work to your audience. Know which facts you want to focus on and draw out from any figures or tables and, if you are likely to need to point to them, check how to operate powerpoint or other audio-visual aids. Make sure you check the equipment you need will be there beforehand and that you know how to work it.

**Timing**
Adhere very closely to the time allowed. The Chair is normally instructed to keep rigidly to a timetable. Where several papers are being presented in succession, there is often no room for overrunning. Do not run the risk of being cut off before you have reached your conclusion.

Questions may be taken at the end of your presentation or at the end of a series of presentations so you need to check whether or not the time allowed includes questions and when questions will be invited.

**Practice**
It is always a good idea to have a trial run through. It can help to practise in front of colleagues and friends who can give constructive criticism and this will assist you to adjust your presentation to suit the timing allowed. Remember also that the speed at which you deliver your paper can be affected by nerves - so do practise and time it at an appropriate rate, allowing for explanation of diagrams, using an overhead projector, etc. More people underestimate the time it takes to deliver a paper than over-estimate it.
Good luck - the sense of achievement afterwards can be quite exhilarating and encourage you to go onwards and upwards, making many new friends and useful contacts as well as adding to your knowledge, interests and professional development.

This booklet was written by the Research Working Group of the Northern Ireland Speech and Language Therapy Education Partnership (June 1996)

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