Research Methodology:
Research topic, title and problem

Starting your research journey with the first three steps.

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The niche area of the School of Accounting reads as follows:

“The effective management of SMMEs”
The niche area of Accounting

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How will you define the term ‘effective’?
The niche area of Accounting

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When a business is effective, it performs. When it performs, we need to measure its performance.

Performance is measured in terms of:

- Non-financial measures (survival, sustainability, etc.)
- Financial measures (profitability, liquidity, solvency, etc.)
The niche area of Accounting

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How will you define the term ‘management’?
The niche area of the School of Accounting reads as follows:

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Management has to do with the Planning, Organising, Leading and Controlling of all business components.

As soon as there is some form of measurement, you will be able to manage (you can not manage what you can not measure).
The niche area of Accounting reads as follows:

“The effective management of SMMEs”

How will you define the term ‘SMMEs’?
The niche area of the School of Accounting reads as follows:

“The effective management of SMMEs”

SMMEs are defined by the Small Business Act No. 102 of 1996 of South Africa (1996) as:

“[s]eparate and distinct business entities, including co-operative enterprises and non-governmental organisations, managed by one owner or more which is predominantly carried on in any sector or sub sector of the economy”.

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From the niche area, you will need to develop a research topic and research title.

- **Research topic**: An area of focus that falls within the perimeter of a niche area, which directly relates to a particular discipline (field of study). (e.g. SMME sustainability)

- **Research title**: A specialised area of focus that falls both within the boundaries of a research (delineation) and the perimeter of a niche area, which directly relates to a particular discipline. (e.g. The effect of micro-economic factors on the sustainability of SMMEs operating in the fast food industry in Cape Town)
From a soft-drink dispensation, the topic can be seen as the “name” of a soft drink, whereas the title is the “flavour” of a soft drink.

- **Name:**
  Fanta (*topic*)

- **Flavour:**
  Mango and Passion fruit - limited edition (*title*)
In essence your research topic should relate to the niche area in the following way:

“The effective management of SMMEs”

60% focus (performance measures) 30% focus (how, what, etc.) 10% focus (delineation)

After you have come up with a suitable topic, make it more specific so that you have a research title. (keep in mind your field of study)
According to Watkins (2008:23) a research title should have the following characteristics:

- Short, descriptive and to the point.
- Identify the main variables of the research.
- Allude to the area of study.
- Attract the attention and interest of the reader.
- Make academic sense.
The research problem

- Watkins (2008:35) explains that a research problem pertains to a particular problem within the research environment, which will form the primary focus of a research study.
  (a real-life problem which can be mitigated and/or solved)

- Remenyi, Williams, Money and Swartz (2009:46) intonate that the research problem should be a clear, unambiguous statement (perception) that is relevant to the research title, research topic, the identified niche area and respected discipline alike.
  (e.g. It is perceived that SMME sustainability is adversely affected by both macro-economic factors and micro-economic factors)
Due to the fact that the research topic, title and research problem is critical to start-off with a research project, Bruwer (2012) has developed a framework to guide students in formulating the latter. This is the PPWF-Framework:
Starting your research journey

- **Passion:** A researcher should be familiar with the ‘basics’ of his/her respective discipline – in essence the researcher needs to find five areas within his or her discipline of which they are passionate about. The reason for this is that a practical research project needs to be conducted over a certain time-frame. Hence, if a researcher chooses areas which are personally regarded as ‘boring’ the research will also tend to become very bored and enthusiasm will be lost. A good indicator of possible ‘areas of passion’ is by taking into consideration all subjects that were done in a previous and/or current qualification. It is of paramount importance that these subjects chosen should ‘link’ to the relevant field of study of the researcher.
Problem statement: Of the five identified ‘areas of passion’ the best three should be ‘linked’ to the identified niche area of the School of Accounting and the discipline of the student at hand. This ‘linkage’ between the ‘areas of passion’ and the niche area is regarded as a short paragraph where a thorough explanation of each chosen ‘area of passion’ is given. This is done to justify the intended study to form part of the main discipline at hand, and that it maps to the niche area. A good indicator of whether an ‘area of passion’ is appropriate for research purposes is when it can be easily ‘linked’ to the niche area and the discipline.
Wording the topic: After the latter, three draft problem statements will be evident. A problem statement is a real-life problem that exists in the practical world, which is to be researched with the main intention to mitigate and/or possibly solve it.

With these draft problem statements ready for use, the next phase is to word the provisional topic adequately. It is important to keep in mind that the provisional topic should stem from the ‘linkages’ made to the niche area and relevant discipline. If a provisional topic is not evident from the ‘linkages’, it serves as a ‘sign’ that the provisional topic is not truly adequate.
Starting your research journey

- **Formulating the research title:** Lastly the research needs to choose the best provisional topic with which a researcher feels most comfortable with and most passionate about.

Essentially the best provisional topic is to be modified slightly so that it reads ‘perfectly’ - only one provisional topic should be chosen to ‘modify’ into a suitable research title. It is important to ensure that the research title is very specific (industry, geographical area, etc.).
Conclusion

- By understanding the first three steps to start-off your research journey (through means of the PPWF-Framework), you will be able to improve your logical reasoning and gain confidence in the process.
References

