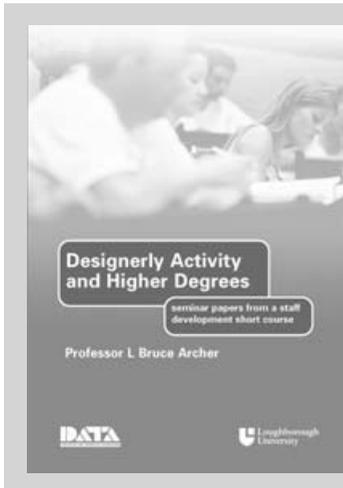


## Review: Designery Activity and Higher Degrees: seminar papers from a staff development short course.



<b>Title:</b>	Designery Activities and Higher degrees: seminar papers from a staff development short course.
<b>Author/Editor:</b>	Professor L Bruce Archer
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<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Rhoda Coles, PhD Student, Loughborough University.
<b>Orders:</b>	Tel: (+44) (0)1926 470007

As the title suggests, this document is derived from a series of seven seminars produced as a guide for design students and their supervisors wishing to engage in research activities. It was developed as part of the development programme in the Department of Design and Technology at Loughborough University for members of staff who had no experience of formal academic research.

Seminar One provides a reflective look on the development of further education for industrial designers and the emergence of academic rigour to what was once considered a vocational discipline.

Although research programmes are specific to individuals, departments and universities, Archer's rich overview of their nature and purposes in Seminar Two does not leave the reader left wanting. However, as a designer and inherently being more adept at learning from visual stimuli, I felt the information would be better suited to a table of some sort.

Archer then takes a closer look at what is involved in carrying out research and seminar three takes us through categories of research activity and their definitions. He then revisits research history and explains the paradigm shifts of the scientific research approaches that take us from Baconian traditions through the

Popperian revolution and the principles of verification, falsification and problem definition to a succinct and useful summary of the requirements of modern approaches to tackling a research project, or in Archer's appropriate term, a mission.

Seminar Four feels misplaced and would have benefited from being integrated into the previous chapters. Here the discussion moves to research within the humanities traditions, presenting an overarching 'good practice guide' of sorts and then revisits the Popperian paradigm and the nature and purpose of degrees, within this context.

Seminar Five discusses the applicability of research within the art or design and technology arena, it provides distinctions between research as, about, for the purpose of and through art and design and technology and the implications of each. Validity is highlighted as an issue through descriptions of action research or 'the designery mode of enquiry', generality, conventions and recognition, which all provide indispensable information from Archer's expanse of valuable prior experience.

The need for systematic enquiry led by clear goals and an outline of a core project trajectory make up Seminar Six. Here Archer shifts the focus from university based research to

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industrial and other professional projects. The content is invaluable and allows for consideration of how skills learnt during the quest for a research degree can be applicable 'in the real world'. The construction of an outline contents page I have found immensely useful throughout my research study in organising and to some extent reviewing the state of affairs. This is a skill I can trace directly to this paper, having read it when I was in the early stages of developing my research study. Archer has, however, left out the need to document one's theoretical position and subjectivity which he describes as essential in Seminar Four.

My one criticism is the importance placed on the development and amendment of time plans. I have always felt that the time taken to do this could be better spent conducting the activities that would otherwise be rejected in favour of planning them! I do find, however, that updating my contents outline, taking stock of what has been completed and what still needs attention (usually linked with the need to tidy my desk to allow space for work to continue) is a useful activity and could be considered as a rough and ready form of time planning.

Seminar Seven is my favourite of the series as he takes a humorous approach to describing the examination, or viva voce for a research degree, how to handle them adeptly and how to tackle any tricky situations such as 'handling the examiner who has got it all wrong'. This chapter was extremely useful as it also provides insight from the perspective of the examiner, or 'interrogator', as well as giving requirements for the student under interrogation.

The construction of this series of seminars covers an enormous amount of ground and allows individual researchers to take what they require and adapt it to their individual studies as they progress. Archer has a fantastic depth of knowledge which is dry at times and some of the discussions may be better suited to a paper on the history and development of research methods rather than in this guide. Its conception as a sequence of seminars rather than a paper as such can forgive this series for its occasional repetition of subject matter and this does allow Archer to introduce areas and explain what is involved and then to develop the discussion to address their value and worth.

By the end you will have no doubt of the framework required to conduct a successful research study, develop it through to completion and be confident to subject it to the rigours of examination and reading by peers.