

# Practitioner inquiry in 12 easy steps



Practitioner inquiry is a simple, systematic approach to professional development that can be done by whole schools, groups of teachers or individuals. Here's how to do it in 12 easy steps:

1. **Reflect.** Think about your professional development to date. What are your strengths? What problems do you face currently?
2. **Focus.** Choose an area of your practice that you would like to investigate or develop. Keep the focus small and manageable.
3. **Formulate a research question.** Research questions should be defined as tightly possible. A useful question frame is: 'To what extent is... effective as a method for improving...?'
4. **Read around the topic.** There's no need to carry out an exhaustive literature review, but if possible, try to read at least two opposing pieces of research about your area of interest.
5. **Choose a research method.** There are many methods – attainment data, observations, interviews, questionnaires, students' work... It's a good idea to combine two or three different methods and triangulate findings – but make sure you keep it manageable.
6. **Take a baseline (optional).** Not all inquiries lend themselves to a 'pre vs. post' evaluation. However, if you wish to get a handle on whether your practice is improving over time, some form of initial baseline measure will provide a useful point of comparison. You might also consider collecting data about students not involved in the study (a control group).
7. **Plan and carry out your intervention (optional).** Not all inquiries are intervention-based; you might simply wish to find out more about an aspect of your existing practice. However if your aim is to evaluate the impact of a particular strategy, take the time to plan how to implement your intervention in a way that maximises the possibility of success.
8. **Take a post-intervention measure (optional).** If your research method involves a 'pre vs. post' comparison, how long will you wait before collecting the data – a day, a week, a month?
9. **Analyse your findings.** Once you have collected your data, take the time to sit with it. Try to understand it as deeply as possible. Discuss it with your colleagues. What does it tell you? What does it not tell you? Did you find what you expected? What conclusions can you draw?
10. **Evaluate your inquiry.** How did it go? What went well? What aspects did you find challenging? What would you do differently if you did it again? Can you use the findings to inform your practice in future? If so, how? If not, why not?
11. **Write up and share your findings.** You can do this at [praxis-teacher-research.org](http://praxis-teacher-research.org). Try to tell the story in a way that will be helpful to others working in a similar position. Aim for around 750-1000 words. You can upload additional documents (e.g. results tables) as attachments. It is advised to use the following headings: *Introduction; Research question(s); Research methods; Results and Discussion; Conclusions; Evaluation; References.*

12. **Plan your next inquiry.** What's next? Do you wish to repeat the same inquiry but do it differently this time, or in a different context? Perhaps it's time for a change of direction? Whatever you decide, stick with it: practitioner inquiry is a powerful engine for getting (even) better at what we do, and improving outcomes for young people.

