What should be included in your research folder?

a. All research information and data gathered (ideally with an indication of the date gathered)

b. All quotes, clearly and fully referenced with complete bibliographic information

c. Analysis pages – notes about your thinking on interpreting and analysing what you have read

d. Reflections pages – a kind of ongoing diary where you record your changing thoughts and standpoints towards your topic

e. Theory and argument pages – where you make note of particular theories that you and other authors have on different aspects of your question

f. Emerging themes pages – a good research report will be sub-dividing into sections, each looking at different themes or elements of your question. Themes will emerge as you dig deeper into your project and you will need to make a note of all of your thoughts about this

g. Calendar – you could add your timetable to your research folder

h. Keep a record of all references, citations and quotes – do this by hand on paper, manually in Excel or Word, or by using Endnote or Zotero or one of the other academic referencing programs

i. Keep a bibliography from the very start – as above, Endnote or Zotero could manage this for you, but equally you can keep a bibliography manually. The important thing is you need to remember to do this from day one of your project and not miss anything out

Tip: Getting the most out of your research folder: As you will have noticed in the list above, a research folder not only helps you physically manage and handle your data, it is also vital that you use it to record your thoughts through the research journey. What this means is that analysis starts at the beginning of your project and does not stop until you have handed in your project. Recording your changing thoughts about your arguments, theories and analysis will make writing it all up in a research report so much easier.