

STAGE 2 · RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

Research Development Guide

Building the Habits of a Researcher

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the research development stage of your mentorship journey. This resource is for you if you are considering a scholarship, postgraduate study or a future in research. Strong researchers are not only people who know a lot. They know whose work matters in their field, they read it carefully, and they can see what has not yet been answered.

This resource is completely free. You don't need to be an expert to begin, only curious, consistent, and willing to read closely and think honestly about what you find.

Who This Is For

This stage is for you if any of the following describes where you are now:

- You are preparing scholarship or postgraduate applications and need to show that you understand your field.
- You are emailing potential supervisors but receiving no replies. Reading their recent work lets you write to them specifically about what they are investigating.
- You are carrying out experimental testing and want to connect your results to what others have already found.
- You are a current research student in geotechnical engineering and want structured guidance on reading and critiquing the literature.

The Idea Behind This Exercise

Before an engineer builds, the ground is investigated: its layers are studied, its strengths and weaknesses are understood, and only then is a foundation designed. Research works the same way. Every new idea is built on ground that others have already surveyed, and a literature review is your site investigation.

This exercise is called strategic because every choice is deliberate. You choose researchers whose work genuinely connects with your interests, you read what they are investigating now, and you summarise it briefly enough that you must decide what really matters. Most importantly, you look for limitations. Where a study stops is often where your own research question begins.

Purpose of This Resource

This resource helps you build four habits that support scholarship and postgraduate research readiness:

- **Finding:** identifying active researchers and research groups in your field.
- **Reading:** engaging regularly with current, published research.
- **Summarising:** explaining evidence clearly, accurately and in your own words.
- **Questioning:** thinking critically about what should be investigated next.

How to Complete This Resource

1. Read the assignment brief: 'Strategic Literature Review Exercise.'
2. Identify researchers and research groups whose work interests you, and keep a simple record of them.
3. Read 2–3 recent papers each week and review each one using the six-part format in the brief, in no more than two pages.
4. If you are one of my mentees, upload the two reviews you believe are your strongest at damilolaakinniyi.com/mentorship/mentee-submissions/ before our next meeting.
5. Come prepared to explain how you identified the limitations and why you proposed the further work.

Learning Outcomes

By completing this exercise, you should be able to:

1. Identify active researchers and research groups whose work aligns with your interests and goals.
2. Read recent research papers purposefully, focusing on the problem, method, findings and unanswered questions.
3. Summarise research accurately and concisely in your own words.
4. Build accurate academic referencing habits.
5. Critically evaluate research by identifying justified limitations and explaining why they matter.
6. Propose specific, logical further work that could become the starting point of your own research ideas.
7. Strengthen the reading and writing foundation needed for scholarship applications, research proposals and postgraduate study.

Why This Exercise Matters

Scholarship applications, research proposals and conversations with potential supervisors all ask the same underlying question: do you understand the field well enough to contribute to it? Each review you write is practice in answering that question. Over time, your reviews become a record of what you have read, what you have questioned, and where your own research interests are taking shape.

A Message from Damilola

Good research begins with good questions. My role is not to hand you a research topic, but to help you build the habits that will let you find one worth pursuing. Read with curiosity, write with honesty, and trust that your understanding will deepen with every paper.

— **Damilola Bashir Akinniyi**