Cryer’s guide has successfully been designed to inform students about how to engage with research. Cryer’s material covers all aspects of the research process and will be invaluable for undergraduate and postgraduate students. Chapters two, three and four would be helpful for undergraduate students thinking of continuing their education (Phillips and Pugh, 2000). For postgraduates, especially MPhil and PhD candidates, the issue of choosing a research topic and the institutional and department’s ability to supervise it is raised. Cryer suggests, ‘Check what a department can provide for you as a student and feel comfortable’ (20). Preparation is crucial, not only having some idea of the research topic, but being prepared personally for the consequences a research project can have on core (family) and peripheral (workplace) relationships.

Research training, both within an institutional and wider World Wide Web (www) context is mentioned, followed by the beginnings of the research project. This includes, ‘… reading around a subject and identifying unanswered questions and controversies’ (62). A PhD is about the ability to argue a case coherently. A literature review should only be used to support arguments. It should not be used to collate lists which look impressive but do not move understanding forward. A research paradigm or school of thought should be chosen complementing the selection of relevant literature. A supervisor guides the student through the research process and the relationship needs to be developed and nurtured. Supervisory meetings should be two-way dialogues whereby the student can develop ideas. What if the relationship goes wrong? Cryer suggests that the situation needs to be handled delicately. She warns, ‘mud sticks’ but there are institutional and
National Postgraduate Committee (NPC) guidelines for those students who need them. Cryer also mentions the need for support throughout the book which can be used for informal purposes and be mutually beneficial for groups of researchers (Armstrong et al., 2000; Race, 2001).

Cryer discusses methods concerning record keeping, planning, organisation and time management. She then gives advice on how to handle advice, in this case, comments received from a supervisor or at an academic conference. One of the most useful chapters of the book gives information on producing reports and drafts for the final thesis. Another important chapter prepares the researcher for the employment market. Key, specialist and team skills are highlighted (171-174). The issue of research originality is raised with tips for the reader on how to capitalise on things if they go wrong. Creative-thinking provides inspiration for the researcher that might be struggling, as is information on flagging. The penultimate chapter prepares the student for the viva/oral examination and conducting yourself. Cryer states that the experience is essentially a thesis defence and it is worth finding out as much as you can about internal and external examiners work. Cryer points out: ‘Remember, you are the world’s expert on your work, and your supervisor and the resources of your department should have provided you with sound support throughout your period as a research student’ (246). The book ends with a very useful list of www sites. The reader is warned that www sites do change their addresses. Indeed the national academic mailing list service has recently changed from mailbase to jiscmale (jiscmail.ac.uk). The further reading, select bibliography and reference sections will also prove invaluable to all research students.

References