

Open research group

ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science
Lancaster University

Camera on, sound off if possible



Opportunity for next week: 5 min. presentation

What scientific processes (methods, protocols, assumptions etc.) do you use in your research?

Or

What are the challenges in your field?

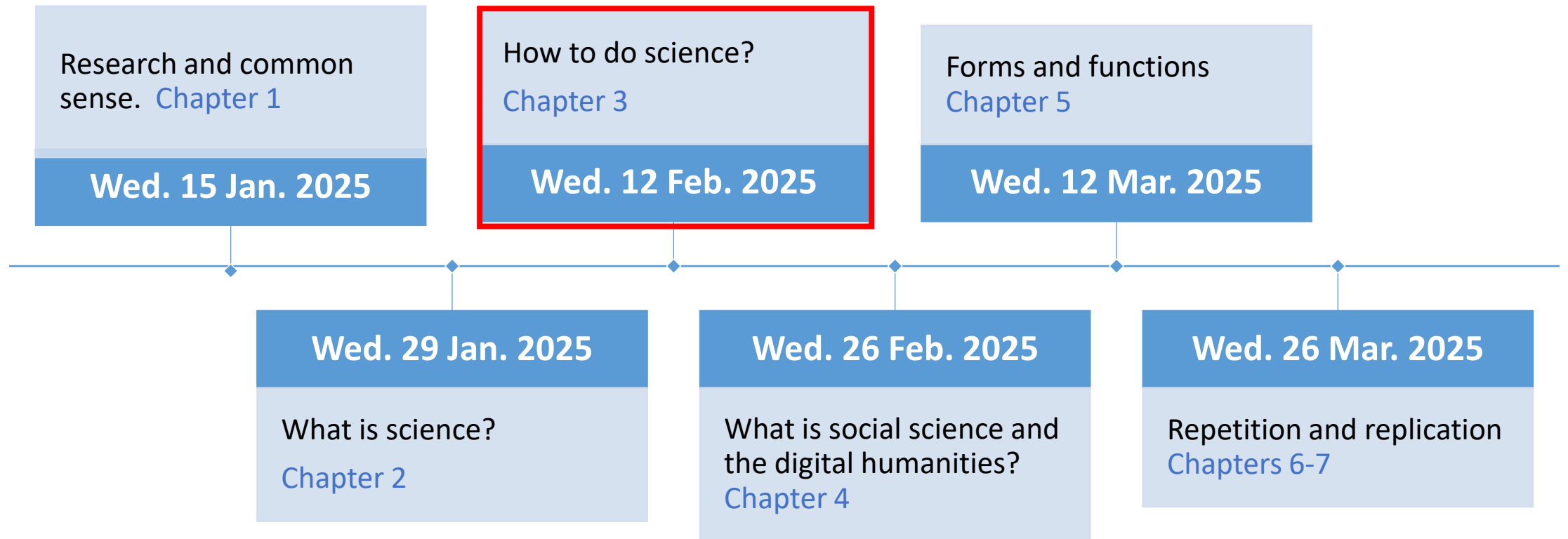
Or

What motivates/frustrates you about the current university environment?

Or

Have you seen anything interesting on the news/in recently published research?

Topics: spring term



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3.7 The Hair Shirt of Honesty

While all of this sounds very promising on paper, it must be said that **such honesty** can be **difficult** to find in any science, let alone corpus linguistics. On the one hand, being honest about limitations can provide a warrant for destructive criticism and a ready defence for dogmatists to use – their misplaced certainty can appear appealing when pitted against the honesty of the scientific method, though Popper warns that ‘none of our “anticipations” are dogmatically upheld’ (Popper 2002a: 278). On the other hand, **being honest about limitations may be a dispiriting experience for some** as they view it as a moment where they must don sackcloth and sprinkle ashes on their heads and confess their sins. Yet the myopia of the dogmatists and the misplaced feelings of guilt of those who feel they should be perfect should **be resisted and set aside**. What is important is not perfection, for **perfection**, in the form of irrefutable proof, **is unattainable within science**. What is important is measurably better (in terms of narrower range) and demonstrably more subject to falsification through testing (in terms of increased empirical content) findings.⁵⁶ The overall goal, we might say, of a system within Popper’s view of science is that it should **not be ‘true’**, rather it should be **‘sufficiently precise to be capable of clashing with observational experience’** (Popper 2002a: 116) and hence being falsified. In pursuit of that goal, we take our ideas and **‘Using all the weapons of our logical, mathematical, and technical armoury, we try to prove that our anticipations were false – in order to put forward, in their stead, new unjustified and unjustifiable assertions’** (Popper 2002a: 279) because **‘We do not know, we can only guess’** (Popper 2002a: 278).

Fundamental Principles of Corpus Linguistics

Tony McEnery and Vaclav Brezina





Which one does a scientist wear?

Discuss in groups

1. Why does falsification matter when doing science?
2. Which of these statements is open to falsification:
 - a) Children from poorer backgrounds in the UK are less likely to attend university.
 - b) We can explain social processes by reference to material conditions, class struggle and capital dynamics.
3. Do you find it difficult to write Limitations section of your research papers? If so, why?