

Framing the Research: Crafting Clear Objectives

Welcome to Week 3 of our research methods course. Today, we'll explore how to effectively frame your research through well-crafted questions, aims, and objectives. This foundational skill will guide your entire research process and help ensure meaningful outcomes.



Research Aims, Objectives, and Questions: What's the Difference?

Understanding the hierarchy and relationship between these three elements is crucial for research success:

Research **aim** is the overarching purpose of your study - the big picture goal

Research **objectives** are specific, measurable steps to achieve your aim

Research **questions** are the precise inquiries your study will answer

Think of aims as your destination, objectives as your route map, and questions as the specific directions at each turn.



SMART Objectives in Business Research



Specific

Clearly define what you want to accomplish, avoiding vague language. Example: "To identify the key factors influencing employee retention in tech startups" rather than "To study employee retention."



Measurable

Include criteria for measuring progress and success. Example: "To determine the impact of flexible working hours on productivity by measuring output before and after implementation."



Achievable

Set objectives that are challenging but realistic within your constraints of time, resources, and access to data.



Relevant

Ensure objectives directly contribute to your research aim and address the problem you've identified.



Time-bound

Include a timeframe for completion. Example: "To analyze customer feedback collected during Q1 2023 to identify three key areas for service improvement."

Examples of Well-Framed Research Questions

Strong Research Questions:

- "How does the implementation of AI-driven customer service affect customer satisfaction rates in online retail?"
- "What is the relationship between corporate social responsibility initiatives and employee engagement in the banking sector?"
- "To what extent do flexible working arrangements impact productivity in technology companies?"

Notice how these questions are specific, focused, and researchable. They clearly define variables and contexts.



Weak Research Questions:

- "Does AI help businesses?"
- "Why is CSR important?"
- "Is flexible working good?"

These questions are too broad, vague, and difficult to research systematically.



Aligning Questions with Literature Gaps



Identify Existing Knowledge

Conduct a thorough literature review to understand what's already known about your topic. Map out the current state of knowledge.



Spot the Gaps

Look for inconsistencies, contradictions, or areas where knowledge is incomplete or outdated. These represent potential research opportunities.



Position Your Research

Frame your questions to address these specific gaps, showing how your research will contribute new knowledge or perspectives to the field.



Connect to Theory

Ensure your questions relate to existing theoretical frameworks, either by testing them in new contexts or proposing modifications.

Drafting Hypotheses

Hypotheses are testable predictions about the relationship between variables. They should:

- Be clear and concise statements
- Specify the expected relationship between variables
- Be falsifiable (possible to disprove)
- Be grounded in existing theory or evidence

Example: "H1: Companies with higher investment in employee training programs will demonstrate higher retention rates than those with lower investment."



Note: Not all research requires hypotheses. Exploratory and qualitative studies often use research questions instead. Consider your research approach when deciding whether to include hypotheses.

In-Class Exercise: Crafting Your Research Elements

Draft Your Research Aim

Write one overarching statement that captures the primary purpose of your research project.

Develop 3-5 SMART Objectives

Create specific, measurable steps that will help you achieve your research aim.

Formulate Research Questions

Write 2-3 clear, focused questions that your research will answer.

Peer Review

Exchange with a partner for feedback on clarity, specificity, and alignment.

Refine and Finalize

Incorporate feedback to strengthen your research framework.