

Aims and Objectives

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Aims and objectives

It is often useful to consider your research questions in terms of aim(s) and objectives.

The aim of the work, *i.e.* the overall purpose of the study, should be clearly and concisely defined.

Aims:

- Are broad statements of desired outcomes, or the general intentions of the research, which 'paint a picture' of your research project
- Emphasize what is to be accomplished (not how it is to be accomplished)
- Address the long-term project outcomes, *i.e.* they should reflect the aspirations and expectations of the research topic.

Once aims have been established, the next task is to formulate the objectives. Generally, a project should have no more than two or three aims statements, while it may include a number of objectives consistent with them.

Objectives are subsidiary to aims and:

- Are the steps you are going to take to answer your research questions or a specific list of tasks needed to accomplish the goals of the project
- Emphasize how aims are to be accomplished
- Must be highly focused and feasible
- Address the more immediate project outcomes
- Make accurate use of concepts
- Must be sensible and precisely described
- Should read as an 'individual' statement to convey your intentions

Here is an example of a project aim and subsidiary objectives:

Aim

- To critically assess the collection and disposal operations for bulky household waste in order to identify factors, which contribute to performance and technical efficiency.

Objectives

- To critically assess bulky waste operations by local authorities, including volumes/types of materials arising and current disposal/recovery routes.
- To classify and evaluate the operation of furniture recovery schemes nationally.
- To make recommendations to improve the operational effectiveness of, and to maximise recovery opportunities of bulky waste collection.

Aims and Objectives should:

- Be concise and brief.
- Be interrelated; the aim is what you want to achieve, and the objective describes how you are going to achieve that aim.
- Be realistic about what you can accomplish in the duration of the project and the other commitments you have
- Provide you and your supervisor(s) with indicators of how you intend to:
 - approach the literature and theoretical issues related to your project.
 - access your chosen subjects, respondents, units, goods or services.
 - develop a sampling frame and strategy or a rationale for their selection.
 - develop a strategy and design for data collection and analysis.
 - deal with ethical and practical problems in your research.

Aims and Objectives should not:

- Be too vague, ambitious or broad in scope.
- Just repeat each other in different terms.
- Just be a list of things related to your research topic.
- Contradict your methods - *i.e.* they should not imply methodological goals or standards of measurement, proof or generalisability of findings that the methods cannot sustain.

At the conclusion of your project you will need to assess whether or not you have met your objectives and if not, why not. However, you may not always meet your aims in full, since your research may reveal that your questions were inappropriate, that there are intervening variables you could not account for or that the circumstances of the study have changed, *etc.* Whatever the case, your conclusion will still have to reflect on how well the research design, which was guided by your objectives has contributed to addressing your aims.

**Activity 20: Aims & Objectives**

This activity provides you with the opportunity to receive feedback on your proposed research aims and objectives. Now open your log book and complete Activity 20.

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