

Lesson 19

Design a Study: Non-Experimental Research Methods Practical



Lesson Objectives

- All students **will** formulate a plan for the research practical.
- All students **should** design their method of data collection (e.g. questionnaire, interview schedule, behaviour checklist, etc.)
- All students **could** conduct a pilot study in preparation for their research practical.

Key Terms

- Non-experimental methods
- Observation
- Questionnaire
- Interview
- Correlation

Extension activity:

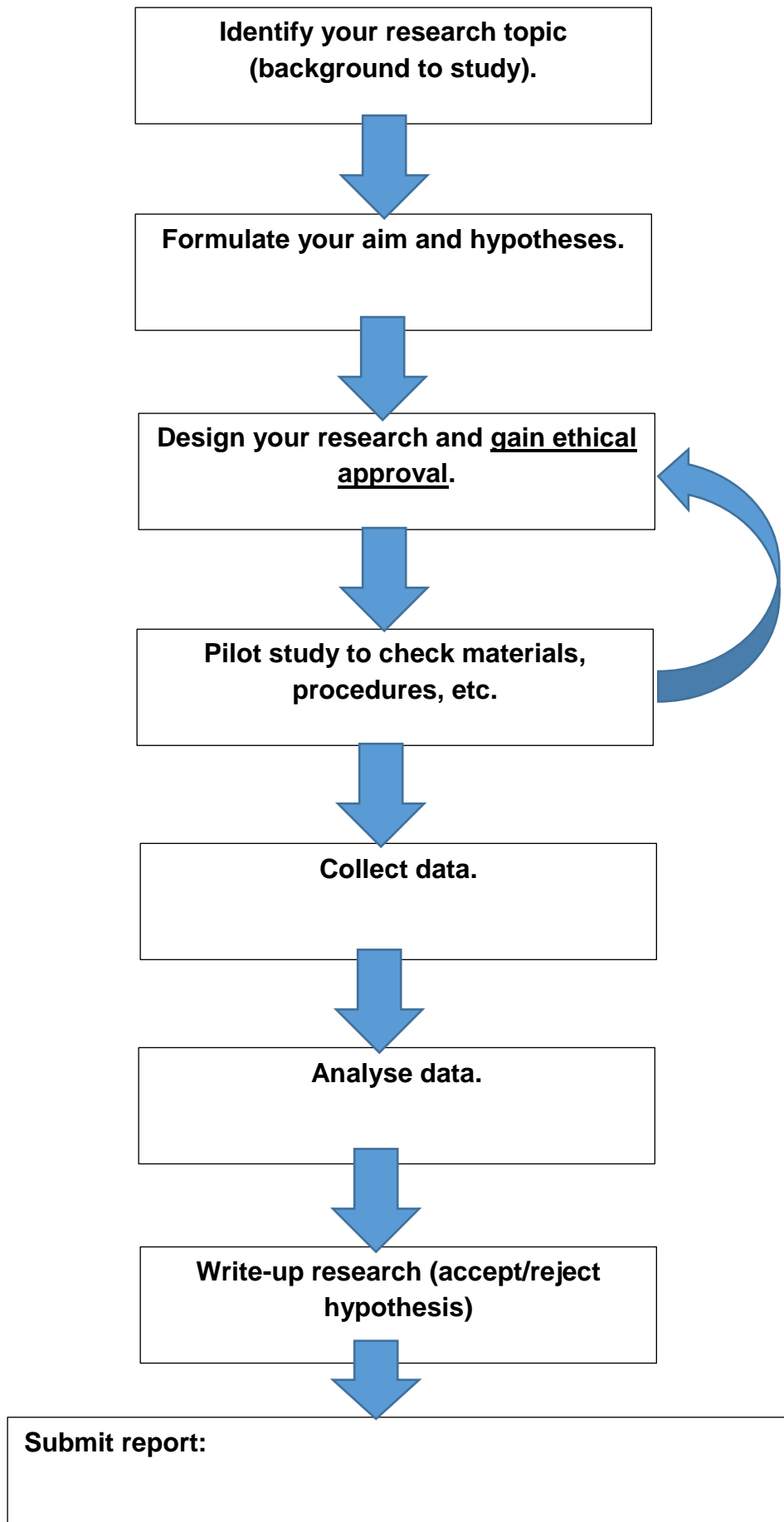
- Designing studies and practical research are the best ways of deepening your understanding of research methods (a point that the AQA Psychology examiners are fond of making). Explore your textbook for ideas for research activities that you can do during independent study (e.g. the green-haired girl book has a 'practical corner' at the end of each chapter.)



Questions to guide your thinking...

- What research does your study relate to?
- Which non-experimental method is most suited to the aim of your study?
- How many participants will you need and how will you recruit them?
- How will you summarise and present your data?
- How will you ensure that your research is ethical?

Research Practical Flowchart:



Checklist for this Practical Report:

Section of Report and Content	✓
<p>Title: Describes the study (usually in one sentence).</p>	
<p>Abstract:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → This will be a maximum of 100 words. → It should be written in the past tense. → It is a short summary of the whole investigation and should include your aim, hypothesis, method, results, conclusions and implications (e.g. for future research). 	
<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → This will be in the region of 150 words (Note: This is shorter than the previous practical report). → Include a brief review of the background issue and/or research (theories or studies) that are relevant to your study. → End with a clear statement of the aim and research hypothesis for the study. 	
<p>Method</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Include sufficient detail so that other researchers could replicate your study: → Design e.g. research method used and any controls. → Participants: How many, gender and other relevant information; sampling method (e.g. opportunity sample). → Materials/Apparatus – Any materials used in the study. → Procedure – A ‘recipe-style’ account of everything that happened in the study, including a record of any briefing, instructions to participants and debrief. → Ethics – an explanation of how these were addressed within the study. 	
<p>Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → A summary of key findings. → Includes descriptive statistics such as tables, graphs and measures of central tendency. 	
<p>Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → In the region of 300 words. → Summarises and explains findings in written form. → Accept/reject your hypothesis. → Similarities/differences to previous research. → Limitations of the research. → Implications for further research or practical applications. 	
<p>References: An alphabetical list of every author/resource you have used in your investigation.</p>	
<p>Appendices: Where any materials or raw data are presented (e.g. copy of questionnaire).</p>	

Ethics

You should make every effort to ensure that your participants are treated correctly, with respect and that you adhere to the BPS guidelines for dealing with ethical issues in research.

You **SHOULD NOT** proceed with piloting your study without ethical approval from Corinne.

The Association for teaching psychology has provided the following table of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' for student practical research:

Dos	Don'ts
Be sensitive to feelings of participants; treat them with respect. Be polite and friendly, and show gratitude for their participation. Use respectful language in written reports.	Don't intimidate participants or put them under pressure to take part. Don't embarrass or humiliate them. Don't abuse the 'power' of the researcher role.
Make sure that you plan (and carry out where applicable) all routine ethical procedures, i.e. informed consent, withdrawal, debriefing, confidentiality etc., which apply to the research.	Don't treat ethics as a 'bolt-on'; ethical awareness and practice are key in developing research skills and an understanding of psychological research in general.
Recognise that there will be ethical issues that are specific to your particular study.	Don't forget to describe and evaluate these in your written reports / presentations
Avoid sensitive topics, as these involve greater risk of harming participants.	Don't ask people about personal experiences of sensitive topics such as their mental health, relationships, sexual behaviour, drugs, violence, abuse, trauma, discrimination, etc.
Approach other students (16+) and staff at your school / college to be participants.	Don't use vulnerable people as participants, i.e. under-16s, people with learning disabilities, mental health problems or brain disorder.
Collect data from participants in a safe, familiar environment, preferably within your school / college.	Don't approach people to be participants in the street, shopping mall, pub or club, or other public place.
Tell your teacher as soon as possible if a participant appears to be distressed or unwell, or if they ask you for help or advice.	Don't try to give 'psychological advice' to any participants, as you are not qualified to do so.
Adopt a 'minimal risk' approach; consider all possible risks to participant well-being and take steps to minimise these.	Don't make an assumption that a task or procedure is 'harmless', even if it appears so at first sight.

- **Naturalistic observations** should only take place where people would expect to be in public view. The usual requirements regarding informed consent withdrawal and briefing do not apply (although awareness of the ethical issues raised should be included in the write-up).
- To put informed consent and right to withdraw into practice is to provide participants with an information brief (and if appropriate, a consent form) setting out the details of the research – see the guidance on these in the lesson 5 handout.
- **Questionnaires** might include a brief advising the participant that by completing the questionnaire they are agreeing to the use of their data for the stated aim.