# Formulating research aims and objectives from research questions

Research questions should reflect the sources from which your interest is derived e.g.: **an area or topic in which you have an interest**. For example, appraisal systems and ideas or issues which you wish to explore in detail such as women's experience of appraisal problems such as:-

* the 'glass ceiling' effect in promotion/advancement
* questions arising from experience, reading the literature,
* Do women feel that the glass ceiling effect is embedded in appraisal systems?

You should clearly state the nature of the problem and its known or estimated extent. If possible you should locate your questions within the context within which it is to be studied e.g. - do women at a particular company/institution feel that the glass ceiling effect is embedded in the internal appraisal systems of their company/institution?

Having selected your research topic and questions, the next stage is to begin designing and planning your research project, the focus of which is usually expressed in terms of **aims and objectives.**

## Aims:

Broad statements of desired outcomes, or the general intentions of the research, which

* 'paint the picture' of your research proposal and 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

* do not need to be numbered

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 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 and be sensible and precisely described
* are usually numbered so that each objective reads as an 'individual' statement to convey your intentions

For each specific objective you must have a method to attempt to achieve it.

The development of a realistic time schedule may help to prioritize your objectives and help to minimize wasted time and effort.

**Aims and Objectives should:**

* be presented concisely and briefly
* be interrelated. The aim is what you want to achieve, and the objective describes how you are going to achieve that aim.
* make sure that each aim is matched with specific objectives
* be realistic about what you can accomplish in the duration of the project and the other commitments you have.
* the scope of your project must be consistent with the time frame and level of effort available to you
* provide you and your assessors with indicators of how you:
* intend to approach the literature and theoretical issues related to your project
* intend to access your chosen subjects, respondents, units, goods or services and develop a sampling frame and strategy or a rationale for their selection
* will develop a strategy and design for data collection and analysis
* you will deal with ethical and practical problems in your research

**Aims and Objectives should not:**

* be too vague, ambitious or broad in scope: though aims are more general in nature than objectives it is the viability and feasibility of your study that you have to demonstrate and aims often present an over-optimistic picture of what the project can achieve
* just repeat each other in different terms
* just be a list of things related to your research topic
* spend time discussing details of your job or research site - it is your research study your assessors are interested in and you should keep this in mind at all times.
* contradict methods, that is, they should not imply methodological goals or standards of measurement, proof or generalizability of findings that the methods cannot sustain

Remember:

* at the conclusion of your project you will need to assess whether or not you have met your objectives and if not, why not.
* you may not however 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 that was guided by your objectives has contributed to addressing your aims.