

FORMULATING A RESEARCH PROBLEM

Formulating a research problem is the first and most important step in the research process. A research problem identifies your destination: it should tell you, your research supervisor and your readers what you intend to research. The more specific and clearer you are the better, as everything that follows in the research process – study design, measurement procedures, sampling strategy, frame of analysis and the style of writing of your dissertation or report – is greatly influenced by the way in which you formulate your research problem. Hence, you should examine it thoroughly, carefully and critically. The main function of formulating a research problem is to decide what you want to find out about.

It is extremely important to evaluate the research problem in the light of the financial resources at your disposal, the time available, and your own and your research supervisor's expertise and knowledge in the field of study. It is equally important to identify any gaps in your knowledge of relevant disciplines, such as statistics required for analysis. Also, ask yourself whether you have sufficient knowledge about computers and software if you plan to use them.