

10 KEYS TO EFFECTIVE RESEARCH



- 1. Get focused.** A comprehensive [literature review](#) and/or environmental scan, citing reliable sources (e.g., articles from peer-reviewed journals, business journals, professional associations), will help you determine what's already been done, what's missing, and how your research might fill the gap. Narrow your general research topic into a very specific research question. [Begin with the end in mind](#) to ensure your question aligns to your research goal.
- 2. Know what you're measuring.** Clearly identify the things you'll be investigating (i.e., your variables) and define each very specifically. For example, if you're investigating experiences of new moms, you'll need to define what "new mom" means. You'll also need to define what type of experiences you want to learn more about.
- 3. Understand research ethics.** A course on research methods and/or ethics will introduce important research polices (e.g., the [Tri-Council Policy Statement](#)). Throughout your study, adhere to ethical research practices (e.g., obtaining informed consent, respecting confidentiality and anonymity, storing data appropriately) and, if required, have your study approved by a relevant ethical review board.
- 4. Select appropriate research method.** Your research question will guide your methodology; however, consider both qualitative and quantitative methods . A mixed-methodology can help provide a fuller picture of your data.
- 5. Choose, or develop, data collection tools.** You may need to create an interview protocol or online survey to support your data collection process. If you're using a new tool, it's advisable to pilot the tool with a small group and, if necessary, adjust before using with your larger group. If you're using an existing tool, ensure you have permission to use. If you're running a focus group, plan ahead – know what information you need to collect from participants. Ensure you have a clear agenda and that space (i.e., location) has been determined, day/time is set, and catering is arranged.
- 6. Reach out to participants.** Outline your sample population and reach out them in a way that fits. Although an email notification/invitation may work for some, perhaps your sample population doesn't have regular access to computers. Consider putting invitations up at community resources centres/libraries or asking colleagues to distribute to potential participants on your behalf.
- 7. Collect your data.** A longer data collection period doesn't necessarily guarantee more responses; sometimes a short survey period prompts a quick response. If possible, avoid times that may be particularly busy or when individuals may be away (e.g., summer vacation). Set yourself a target goal for data collection (e.g., number of participants, regional representation) and monitor responses to help ensure you reach your goal.
- 8. Organize and analyse data collected.** Transcribing interviews, downloading survey results, and clustering/ coding responses is all part of the data analysis process. Use appropriate data analysis procedures, as stipulated by your methodology. Consider using software such as SPSS or NVIVO to aid in data analysis.
- 9. Interpret findings and communicate results.** Your raw data will need to be interpreted in light of the existing literature. Results should be communicated clearly and concisely, keeping your audience in mind.
- 10. Outline next steps.** Remember, one study cannot cover everything, it simply adds to the body of existing research either furthering understanding or challenging existing constructs. There will always be limitations and next steps which your research should address.

