



Description

Are you working on a [new research project](#)? We know that you are excited to start, but before you dive in, make sure your study is feasible. You don't want to end up having to process too many samples at once or realize you forgot to add an essential question to your questionnaire.

What is a Pilot Study?

You can determine the feasibility of your research design, with a pilot study before you start. This is a preliminary, small-scale “rehearsal” in which you test the methods you plan to use for your research project. You will use the results to guide the methodology of your large-scale investigation. Pilot studies should be performed for both qualitative and quantitative studies. Here, we discuss the importance of the pilot study and how it will save you time, frustration and resources.

“You never test the depth of a river with both feet”

– African proverb

Components of a Pilot Study

Whether your research is a clinical trial of a medical treatment or a survey in the form of a questionnaire, you want your study to be informative and add value to your research field. Things to [consider in your pilot study](#) include:

- **Sample size and selection.** Your data needs to be representative of the target study population. You should use [statistical methods](#) to estimate the feasibility of your sample size.
- **Determine the criteria** for a successful pilot study based on the objectives of your study. How will your pilot study address these criteria?
- When recruiting subjects or collecting **samples** ensure that the process is practical and manageable.
- Always test the **measurement instrument**. This could be a questionnaire, equipment, or methods used. Is it realistic and workable? How can it be improved?

- **Data entry and analysis.** Run the trial data through your proposed [statistical analysis](#) to see whether your proposed analysis is appropriate for your data set.
- Create a **flow chart** of the process.

How to Conduct a Pilot Study

Conducting a pilot study is an essential step in many research projects. Here's a general guide on how to conduct a pilot study:

Step 1: Define Objectives

Inspect what specific aspects of your main study do you want to test or evaluate in your pilot study.

Step 2: Evaluate Sample Size

Decide on an appropriate sample size for your pilot study. This can be smaller than your main study but should still be large enough to provide meaningful feedback.

Step 3: Select Participants

Choose participants who are similar to those you'll include in the main study. Ensure they match the demographics and characteristics of your target population.

Step 4: Prepare Materials

Develop or gather all the materials needed for the study, such as surveys, questionnaires, protocols, etc.

Step 5: Explain the Purpose of the Study

Briefly explain the purpose and implementation method of the pilot study to participants. Pay attention to the study duration to help you refine your timeline for the main study.

Step 6: Gather Feedback

Gather feedback from participants through surveys, interviews, or discussions. Ask about their understanding of the questions, clarity of instructions, time taken, etc.

Step 7: Analyze Results

Analyze the collected data and identify any trends or patterns. Take note of any unexpected issues, confusion, or problems that arise during the pilot.

Step 8: Report Findings

Write a brief report detailing the process, results, and any changes made.

Based on the results observed in the pilot study, make necessary adjustments to your study design, materials, procedures, etc. Furthermore, ensure you are following ethical guidelines for research, even in a pilot study.

Ready to test your understanding on conducting a pilot study? Take our short quiz today!

Importance of Pilot Study in Research

Pilot studies should be routinely incorporated into research designs because they:

1. Help define the research question
2. Test the proposed study design and process. This could alert you to issues which may negatively affect your project.
3. Educate yourself on different techniques related to your study.
4. Test the safety of the medical treatment in preclinical trials on a small number of participants. This is an essential step in clinical trials.
5. Determine the feasibility of your study, so you don't waste resources and time.
6. Provide preliminary data that you can use to improve your chances for funding and convince stakeholders that you have the necessary skills and expertise to successfully carry out the research.

Are Pilot Studies Always Necessary?

We recommend pilot studies for all research. Scientific research does not always go as planned; therefore, you should optimize the process to minimize unforeseen events. Why risk disastrous and expensive mistakes that could have been discovered and corrected in a pilot study?

An Essential Component for Good Research Design

Pilot work not only gives you a chance to determine whether your project is feasible but also an opportunity to publish its results. You have an ethical and scientific obligation to get your information out to assist other researchers in making the most of their resources.

A successful pilot study does not ensure the success of a research project. However, it does help you assess your approach and practice the necessary techniques required for your project. It will give you an indication of whether your project will work. Would you start a research project without a pilot study? Let us know in the comments section below.

Category

1. Career Corner
2. PhDs & Postdocs

Date Created

2019/02/13

Author

eneditor