

Advantages of a Pilot Study

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A pilot study is a “pre-study” of your fuller study. You may think of it as a miniature version of your project. You may limit it by your using fewer subjects than you plan to include in the full study, or you may limit it because your scope is smaller in some other way; for example, the range of types of subjects may be more limited (e.g., you use only undergraduates in the pilot when you plan to use a broader range of the general population in the full study) or the procedures may be more limited (e.g., you test people on their ability to recall a certain kind of word when in the full study you plan to examine people’s ability to recall a greater range of words). A pilot study can help you work out some of the procedural bugs even though you know it is not likely to add anything new or important to your main study. Here are some more reasons to consider a pilot study:

1. It permits preliminary testing of the hypotheses that leads to testing more precise hypotheses in the main study. It may lead to changing some hypotheses, dropping some, or developing new hypotheses.
2. It often provides the researcher with ideas, approaches, and clues you may not have foreseen before conducting the pilot study. Such ideas and clues increase the chances of getting clearer findings in the main study.
3. It permits a thorough check of the planned statistical and analytical procedures, giving you a chance to evaluate their usefulness for the data. You may then be able to make needed alterations in the data collecting methods, and therefore, analyze data in the main study more efficiently.
4. It can greatly reduce the number of unanticipated problems because you have an opportunity to redesign parts of your study to overcome difficulties that the pilot study reveals.
5. It may save a lot of time and money. Unfortunately, many research ideas that seem to show great promise are unproductive when actually carried out. The pilot study almost always provides enough data for the researcher to decide whether to go ahead with the main study.
6. In the pilot study, the researcher may try out a number of alternative measures and then select those that produce the clearest results for the main study.

7. **Especially for students:** If the researcher is a student planning to continue beyond the master's degree, the master's research may sometimes serve as a pilot study for later research to be carried out as part of a doctoral program.
- . The less research experience the student has, the more she or he is likely to profit from a pilot study.
 - . Because of that possibility, the student should attempt a pilot study whenever possible, even if it must be limited to only a few cases or to a population limited in scope in some other way.

Here are a couple of sources you might find helpful if you want more information. Day's book is more in-depth and geared toward writers of professional papers. Meriwether's is more basic and how-to, and is aimed more toward writers of college-level research papers.

Day, R.A. (1979). *How to write and publish a scientific paper*. Philadelphia: ISI Press.

Meriwether, N. (2001). *12 easy steps to successful research papers* (second ed.). Lincolnwood IL: National Textbook Co.