



## WHAT ARE OBJECTIVES?

Setting objectives is an important part of any research or study project, especially when the results are presented and discussed in a written report. When objectives are set, they clearly and concisely describe the aims and goals of a project while defining their scope for investigation. This drives choice of methodology, data collection, and provides focus when presenting and discussing results.



When setting objectives, there are a few things to consider:

1. What do objectives look like?
2. What helpful tips are there for writing objectives?

## STATEMENTS THAT SET OBJECTIVES

There are two different types of statements that set objectives. These are **general objectives** and **specific objectives**.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVE

*What is the big picture?* A general objective is a statement that communicates the overall goal of a research or study project in a single sentence. While it does need to be specific, this type of objective is always broad and usually refers to a project goal that would be achieved if most or all of the specific objectives were achieved. General objectives often appear at the beginning of a report to inform the reader of its purpose.

For example:

'This project aims to identify the most popular domestic cat food product among consumers in South Australia.'

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES



*The smaller parts that make the whole!* Specific objectives state the smaller actionable goals that lead to fulfilling the general objective. These are always more focused, with each new specific objective building from the last to create a clear plan of action. Specific objectives are often developed at the beginning of a research or study project to expand on the general objective, define the scope of the project, and to steer the focus of data collection and reporting.

For example:

More specifically, this study will:

1. Survey all consumer brands of domestic cat food sold in the state.
2. Compare the number of items sold by each brand in the last financial year.
3. Determine the brand that has sold the most domestic cat food product items.

For more about how to use **clear**, **concise**, and **precise** language when setting objectives, see the Writing Style guide.

[SEE THE GUIDE ON THE WRITING STYLE](#)

Below, you will **find five useful tips** to ensure that general and specific objectives serve their purpose in a written report.



## TIPS FOR WRITING STATEMENTS THAT SET OBJECTIVES

### 1. OBJECTIVES ARE SPECIFIC

Objectives should be **specific** and make use of **clear** and **concise** language. This helps to communicate the focus of each goal and reduce the possibility for misinterpretation.

Common mistake: This project aims to identify the most popular **cat food** in South Australia.

Not specific enough! Is this project collecting information about types of food that cats prefer to eat or commercial cat food products that are most frequently bought at a supermarket?

### 2. OBJECTIVES DEFINE SCOPE

Statements that set objectives should also define the scope of the research or study activities. This drives the ability to recognise the relevance of information and data to the project goals.

Common mistake: This project aims to identify the most popular domestic cat food product among **consumers**.

Poorly defined scope! What group of consumers are of interest? Do they live in Australia only or will data be collected from across the world?

### 3. OBJECTIVES ARE ORDERED

Specific objectives, especially when presented in a list, should be set in a logical order. This provides structure to the research or study project report and demonstrates how the general objective will be investigated.

Common mistake: More specifically, this study will:

1. compare the number of items sold by each brand in the last financial year.
2. determine the brand that has sold the most domestic cat food product items.
3. survey all consumer brands of domestic cat food sold in the state.

Not in a logical order! Specific objective 3, as shown here, must be completed first to inform the other two specific objectives.

### 4. OBJECTIVES ARE MEASURABLE

Each objective must state something that is measurable. Use action verbs, such as compare, assess, identify, or calculate that indicate measurement or evaluation. This gives clarity to the objectives as a project goal and makes it easier to determine how the objectives can be met.

Common mistake: This project **is about** the most popular domestic cat food product among consumers in South Australia.

Not measurable! How will the products be evaluated? Will the most popular product be identified? Will it be described or compared? How will this objective be completed?

### 5. OBJECTIVES ARE ACHIEVABLE

When objectives are set the intention is to fulfill them. Therefore, statements that set objectives must describe real and achievable goals.

Common mistake: More specifically, this study will:

1. survey all consumer brands of domestic cat food **ever sold**.
2. compare the number of items sold by each brand in the last financial year.
3. determine the brand that has sold the most domestic cat food product items.

Not achievable! This information is too difficult to collect realistically and would result in a very challenging (and unnecessary) analysis to achieve the next two specific objectives.