

Literature review

- Read selected information, critically evaluating what you read (Chapter 12).
- Look for 'chains': how does one piece of research or set of ideas give rise to the next? Trace briefly how a subject developed over time.
- Write brief notes about the development of the research on that topic until now. Note the key 5–10 pieces of research that have had most influence on the subject. Chart briefly how each piece of research influenced others in the chain.
- Identify how your project or dissertation will follow on from what has gone before. What will it add to knowledge about the topic or methods?
- Write this up in your introduction.

Research design or methodology

The research design refers to the way in which you will conduct your research. This includes matters such as:

- the information and data you need
- ways of collecting this
- if relevant, the number and type of people you want to interview or to take part in experiments
- what, exactly, you want those people to do
- how to design questions to achieve only the exact data you need.

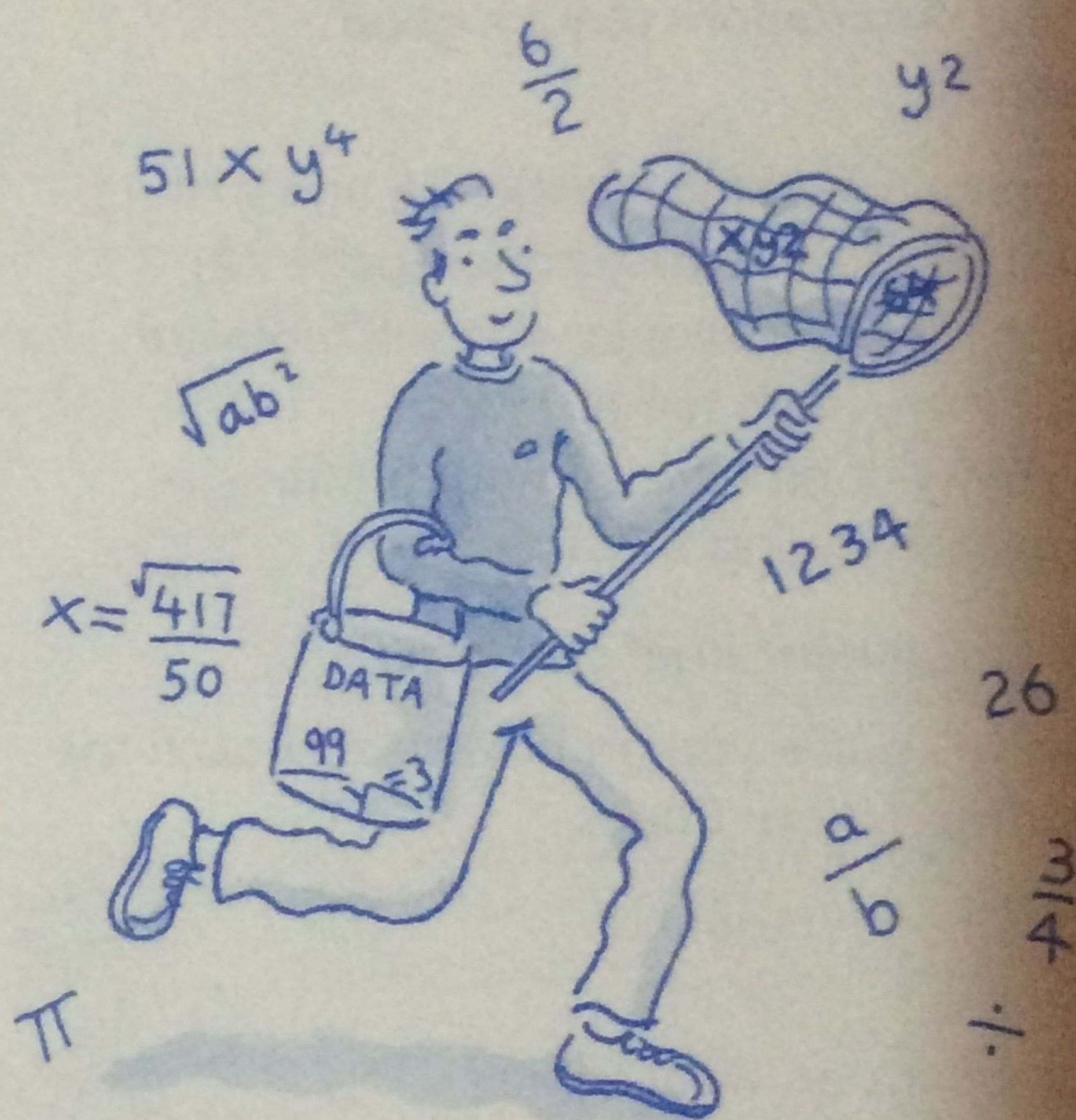
Most projects and dissertations use data that you have generated or collected yourself, through observation, experiment, questionnaire, or similar. Alternatively, however, you may use printed materials (such as government data or historical sources) and consider these from a new perspective.

Each subject has its own conventions about acceptable research methods. Your tutors will give you details of these. Journal articles will give you a good feel for how material and data are generated and analysed in your subject. However, basic principles – of being accurate, as objective as possible, and avoiding distortion – are common to most subjects (page 181 and Chapter 12).

Collecting, collating and analysing data

Plan to collect enough data to achieve convincing and reliable results. Collecting and analysing data is time-consuming, however, so take advice on what is the acceptable minimum for your subject. Having too much data is not helpful for student projects: it simply means that time is wasted in collecting, sorting and selecting from information that you cannot use.

Design forms to collect information in a way that helps you collate it quickly (pages 259–60). Once you have collected your information, organise it into charts or tables so that you can interpret it. Look for patterns and trends. Make relevant comparisons. Your tutors will be looking to see how well you make sense of your findings.



Drawing conclusions

Identify whether the research hypothesis was supported or not. If not, are there any evident reasons for this? Make recommendations, if these are required.

Writing a report

Write sections of the report as you complete each set of related tasks. Different sections of reports require different writing styles – further details are given on pages 265–7.