A successful thesis requires a strong research question and advanced research skills.

**Characteristics of a successful researcher**

To become a successful researcher, you must:

- Have something to say that your peers want to listen to
- Be aware of what your peers are doing globally
- Have the imagination and judgement to discover where you can make a contribution
- Discover a niche for your research
- Be aware of appropriate research techniques (and the limitation of each)
- Be able to communicate the results of your research effectively in an academic and professional environment
- Be aware of the ethics of your discipline and work within them.

**Finding a research question**

The research question begins with a broad question that is later refined into a researchable question. The research question directs all subsequent planning and analysis.

There are four steps in the process of finding a suitable research question:

1. **Analyse the current situation**
   - Explore and understand the literature base of the area
   - Be aware of your own interests, capabilities, limitations and preferences
   - Do you have access to resources such as subjects, facilities, time, funding and expert advice?
   - Be aware of the political, social, and cultural environment of your field.

2. **Generate possible research questions**
   - Brainstorm possible research questions
   - Discuss ideas with colleagues
   - Note suggestions for further research in papers and reports
   - Identify gaps and unanswered questions in the literature
   - Think creatively.

3. **Evaluate possible research**

   Possible research should be evaluated in terms of:

   - The extent and nature of the literature
   - Your own interests, capabilities, limitations, and preferences
   - Access to resources such as subjects, facilities, time, funding, expert advice
   - Its significance
   - The political, social, and cultural environment in which the research is to be conducted
   - Its potential to open interesting and relevant lines of enquiry
   - The ethics of the research design.
4. Select the research question

- Identify and eliminate the questions you evaluated as having least potential
- From the remaining questions, choose the one that satisfies most evaluation criteria and is most interesting to you.

Being original

Originality is not as difficult to achieve as it might seem. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I adding to knowledge in a way that has not been done before?
- Am I continuing a previously original piece of work?
- Am I carrying out an original piece of work designed by my supervisor?
- Am I providing a single original technique, observation, or result in an otherwise unoriginal but competent piece of research?
- Am I showing originality in testing someone else's idea?
- Am I carrying out empirical work that has not been done before?
- Am I making a synthesis that has not been made before?
- Am I using already known material with a new interpretation?
- Am I trying out something in my country that has previously been done only in other countries?
- Am I taking a particular technique and applying it in a new area?
- Am I bringing new evidence to bear on an old issue?
- Am I being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies?