**Research Limitations**

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Research limitations are, at the simplest level, the **weaknesses** of the study, based on factors that are often **outside of your control** as the researcher. These factors could include things like **time**, access to funding, **equipment**, data or **participants**. For example, if you weren’t able to access a random sample of participants for your study and had to adopt a [convenience sampling strategy](https://gradcoach.com/sampling-methods/) instead, that would impact the generalizability of your findings and therefore reflect a limitation of your study.

Research limitations can also emerge from the **research design itself**. For example, if you were undertaking a **correlational** study, you wouldn’t be able to infer **causality** (since correlation doesn’t mean certain causation). Similarly, if you utilised online **surveys** to collect data from your participants, you naturally wouldn’t be able to get the same degree of rich data that you would from in-person **interviews**.

Simply put, research limitations reflect the **shortcomings of a study**, based on practical (or theoretical) constraints that the researcher faced. These shortcomings limit what you can **conclude** from a study, but at the same time, present a foundation for **future** **research**. Importantly, **all research has limitations**, so there’s no need to hide anything here – as long as you discuss how the limitations might affect your findings, it’s all good.

## ****Research Delimitations****

Research delimitations are similar to limitations in that they also “**limit**” the study, but their focus is entirely different. Specifically, the delimitations of a study refer to the **scope of the research aims and research questions**. In other words, delimitations reflect the choices you, as the researcher, **intentionally** make in terms of what you **will** and **won’t** try to achieve with your study. In other words, what your research aims and research questions **will** and **won’t** include.

As we’ve spoken about many times before, it’s important to have a **tight, narrow focus** for your research, so that you can dive deeply into your topic, apply your energy to one specific area and develop meaningful insights. If you have an overly broad scope or unfocused topic, your research will often pull in multiple, even opposing directions, and you’ll just land up with a [**muddy mess of findings**](https://gradcoach.com/dissertation-introduction-mistakes/).

So, the delimitations section is where you’ll clearly state what your research aims and research questions **will** **focus on** – and just as importantly, what they **will** **exclude**. For example, you might investigate a widespread phenomenon, but choose to **focus your study** on a specific age group, ethnicity or gender. Similarly, your study may focus exclusively on one country, city or even organization. As long as the scope is well justified (in other words, it represents a novel, valuable research topic), this is perfectly acceptable – in fact, it’s essential.

**Scenarios**

**Scenario one:** you are conducting a research on movies can enhance students’ use of vocabulary. You will use the experimental design to collect your data (the true experimental design).

**Limitations:** For some reasons, you could not collect two groups of the same level and therefore, you deviated to use one group design and not the two groups design. In here, you have *methodological limitations*. You can also state *population limitations* as you could not gather two groups. There are also *theoretical limitations* where you have limited access to the theories you should discuss in your research. *Data analysis limitation* also occur when your sample size is small and cannot obtain correct statistical measurements.

**Delimitations:** your delimitations may include your focus on vocabulary, its justifications, and not for example speaking skills. You can be more specific in your delimitations stating if you are going to focus on subtitles and why. You also need to justify the type of vocabulary you are targeting in your study, is it any vocabulary? Is it specific? Technical? Advanced? Simple? And why? Maybe you should answer this question: why you are focusing on students? Why not immigrants or businesspersons or like to learn English?

**Scenario two:** you want to conduct a research on the use of mobiles as a teaching/learning tool to help students learn English grammar.

**Limitations: ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………**

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**Task:** write the limitations and delimitations of your own research.