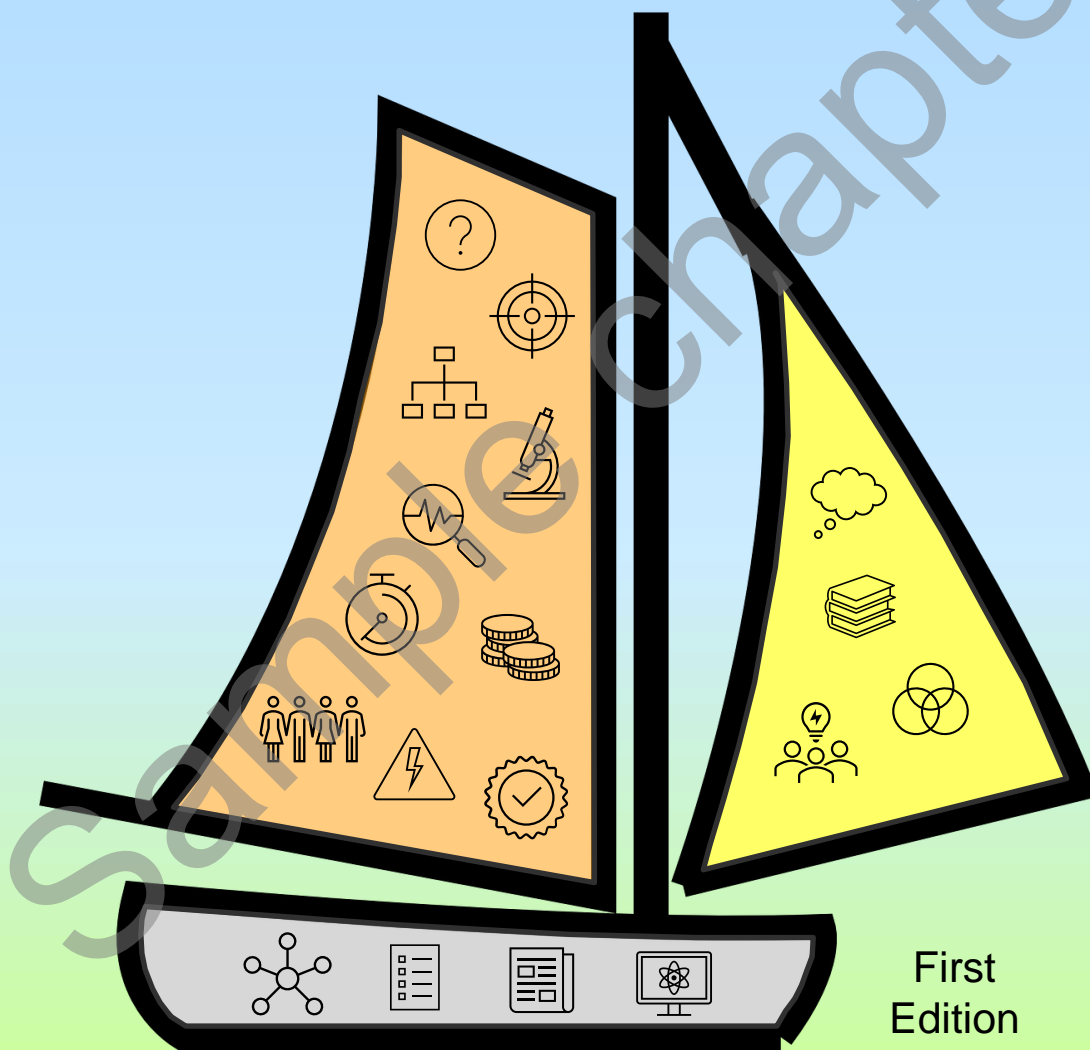**COMPASS GUIDE:**

How to Plan Your Research Project

First Edition

Dr Sandra Mandic, PhD, PMP

AGILE Research Ltd.

**Compass Guide
Research Training**

By AGILE Research Ltd.

To my wonderful family
– husband Philip McKague and children Adriana and Oliver McKague –
for being my Dream Team!

No artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in creation of the content of this publication.

Part 4: Plan Project Timeline

Many factors influence how long a research project will take. Relevant factors include time required for tasks related to setting up and managing a project team, different aspects of project planning, management of project implementation (including data collection, if applicable), data processing and analysis, and time required to prepare and deliver planned research outputs.

When planning a project timeline for your project, consider project objectives, research procedures and deliverables, as well as time required for each project component (if such information is available) and for the entire project.

Take into account the time required for managing the project team and dealing with the project risks, including unknown risks that may come up during the project.

Create milestones for your project. Project milestones represent specific stages or events within the project that could be used to track and evaluate project progress towards its completion. Project milestones should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. Include milestones for specific components of the project (for example, for participant recruitment, data collection and preparation of research outputs).
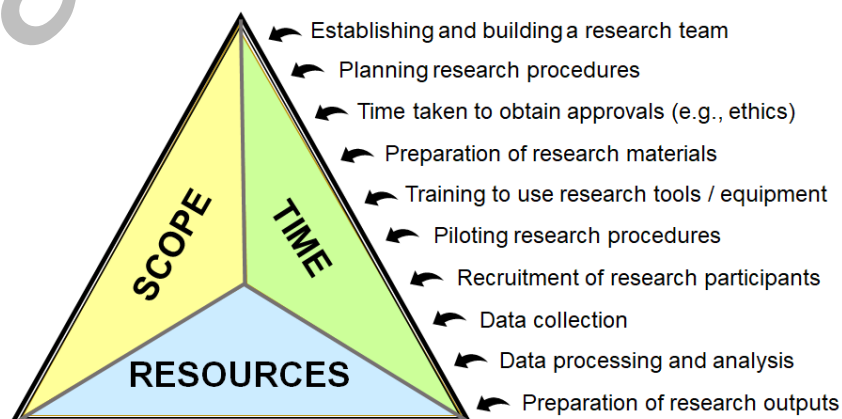
Keep in mind that research project tasks – especially data collection and preparation of research outputs – often take longer than initially anticipated. Plan your project timeline accordingly.

If your research project has specific time constraints (such as deadlines for finishing a degree or a timeline imposed by management or a research funding body), set your project finish date and work backwards to develop your project timeline.

Discuss your project timeline with someone more experienced (for example, your manager or research supervisor) to check and verify it.

Most research projects involve and require work on multiple project components – and therefore multiple milestones – at the same time. Although some milestones would need to be reached before subsequent stages of the project could proceed (for example, required ethical approval needs to be obtained before starting the recruitment of research participants and data collection), work on many other project components could – and would need to – occur simultaneously.

Factors that Influence Research Project Timeline

- Establishing and building a research team
- Planning research procedures
- Time taken to obtain approvals (e.g., ethics)
- Preparation of research materials
- Training to use research tools / equipment
- Piloting research procedures
- Recruitment of research participants
- Data collection
- Data processing and analysis
- Preparation of research outputs

SCOPE | TIME | RESOURCES

How to Develop a Project Timeline

Start planning your project timeline by keeping in mind your project end date and working backwards. Allow enough time in your project plan for checking and reviews.

Then consider project objectives, research procedures and planned deliverables. Estimate the time required for completing each project component and for the entire project.

Next, create project milestones. Make your project milestones specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. See examples of generic research project milestones for a student research project presented in the infographic on this page.

Create your project timeline based on the project milestones, estimated time requirements for each project component and the project end date. Keep in mind that research always takes longer than anticipated.

Present your project timeline using text, a table or a graph. Tables and graphs are particularly helpful for presenting timelines for projects with multiple milestones and/or overlapping periods for working towards different milestones.

Check out examples of research project milestones and timeline presented on this and the next page.
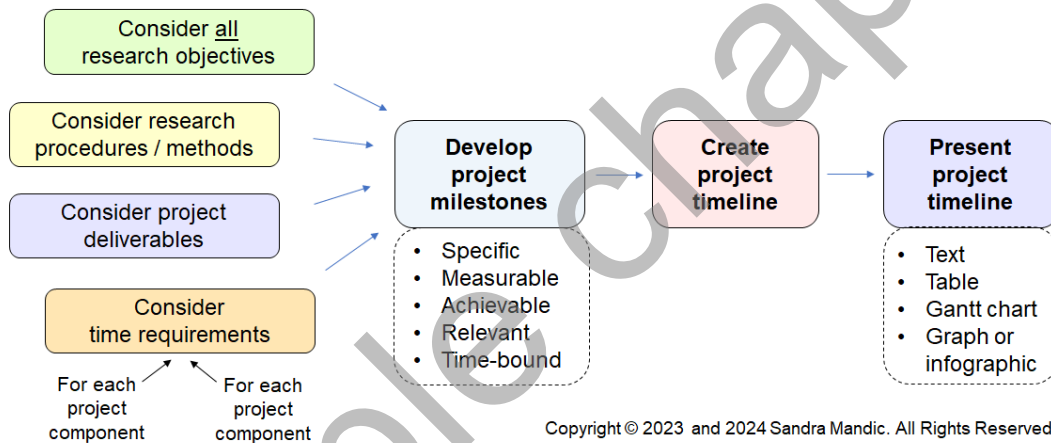
EXAMPLE **Milestones and Timeline for a 1-year Student Research Project**
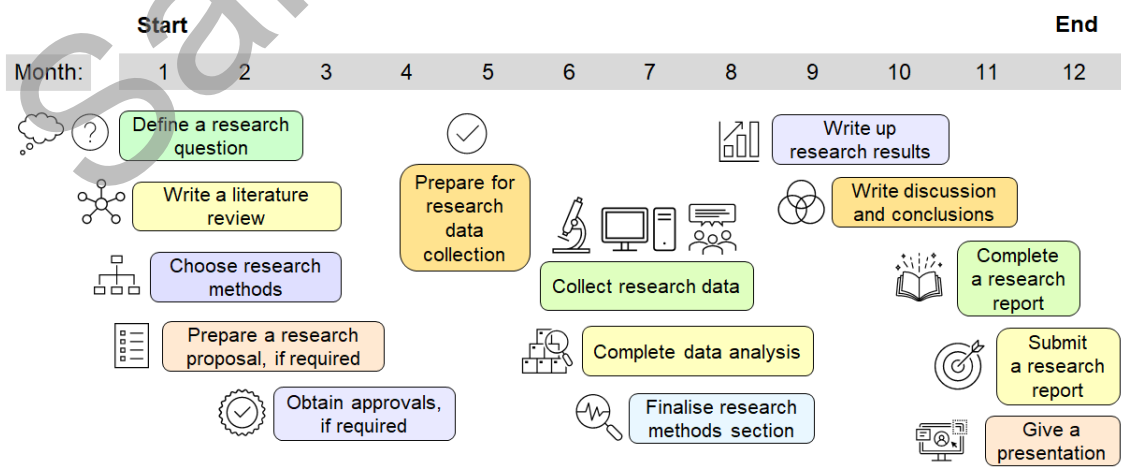
Note: This is not a complete list and not all of these milestones will be relevant for each student research project.

Research Project Planning Template
Part #4: Plan Your Project Timeline

Project title:	

Project Timeline

Project start date:		Project end date:	

Project milestones		
When planning your project milestones, keep in mind your research objectives, planned research procedures and deliverables. Plan project milestones to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.		
Month / Year	**Milestone**	**Relevant research objective(s)**

Example Project: "Residents' Opinions about Road Safety"

Project Timeline			
Project start date:	*October 2024*	Project end date:	*September 2025*

Project Milestones		
Month and Year	**Milestone**	**Project objective**
Oct 2024	*Prepare research proposal / project brief*	*1, 2, 3*
Nov-Dec 2024	*Obtain required organisational approvals and funding*	*1, 2, 3*
Jan-Feb 2025	*Design and set up the online survey*	*1, 2, 3*
Mar-Apr 2025	*Recruit survey participants and collect survey data*	*1, 2, 3*
May-Jun 2025	*Process and analyse survey data*	*1, 2, 3*
Jun-Jul 2025	*Prepare a research report summarising survey findings*	*1, 2, 3*
Aug 2025	*Publish the research report on the Council's website*	*1, 2, 3*
Aug-Sep 2025	*Present research findings to stakeholders*	*1, 2, 3*
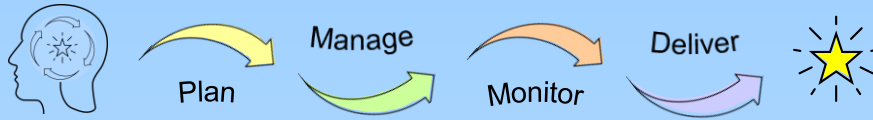
Compass Guide Research Training Resources

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How to Navigate the Research Process

Compass Guide for Beginners

Compass Guide for Postgraduate Students (and Their Supervisors)

How to Plan and Manage Research Projects

Compass Guide: How to Plan Your Research Project

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