

## Developing hypotheses

In many universities, undergraduate students are encouraged to develop their own research ideas for their final year dissertation. Whilst this allows you to work on a project that truly interests you, identifying what you're going to research isn't always easy.

### What is a hypothesis?

- **What is it?** The research topic is the broad area you're interested in, such as conservation, climate change, renewable energy, etc.
- **How do I choose my research topic ?** Think about the topics you've studied during your degree. Was there one subject you particularly enjoyed and would like to learn more about?

### Choosing a research question

- **What is it?** The research question is the specific area you're going to research. It is more specific than your research topic e.g. what is the effect of proposed climate change scenarios on the growth and development of *Rubus ideaus*?
- **How do I choose my research question?** Reviewing literature (primary and secondary) will give you an indication of what research has been conducted on your research topic.

### If you're having problems...

- **What research have you been involved with?** You may have particularly enjoyed a laboratory practical or a small-scale experiment you've conducted. Think about what you enjoyed specifically about the experience.
- **What field trips have you been on?** If you've enjoyed a particular field visit you may be able to carry out a research project in conjunction with a larger organisation attached to the site. For example, after a visit to the New Forest you may decide you'd like to conduct a research project with the Forestry Commission.
- **What research is going on in your department?** Your lecturers will almost certainly be involved in several research projects, and within your department will be researchers, PhD students and MSc students, all conducting research projects. If one of the existing projects interests you, it may be possible to design an experiment that will complement the existing work.
- **What has been researched previously?** Your department or university library should have copies of past dissertations. Browsing will give you an idea of what research has been conducted before, and what is possible.
- **What is your career ambition?** If you know what career you'd like to follow when you graduate, you may be able to tailor your research topic and/or question to a particular industry.
- **Speak to your tutor/lecturer.** They may be able to offer more guidance and help.