Using a theory to guide a research study guides the researcher in formulating the research question, hypothesis/hypotheses that are being tested, and guides the researcher in interpreting the results. The first step in formulating a research question is determining the area of interest and a tentative focus for a study question. Once the focus is identified, it is best to go to the literature to see what has been studied, what literature gaps exist, and how you can formulate a research study that will both assist you in your clinical inquiry and be of most benefit to the profession. It is also important to identify a theory that reflects your own beliefs, values, and philosophy. It is equally important to identify a theory that naturally lends itself to guiding the study. The PICOT method is a concise method utilized to formulate a research question. (P)—Population refers to the sample of subjects that you will gather for your study. (I)—Intervention refers to the treatment that is the focus of the study. (C)—Comparison refers to the reference group that you will compare to your treatment group. (O)—refers to how you plan on measuring the effectiveness of your intervention. (T)—Time refers to the time period duration for your data collection [14].

Once your research topic’s philosophical focus and framework are identified, the next step is to determine what type of design suits your study. In general, there are three broad types of research designs. These are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative research is often termed “experimental research.” It uses statistics to measure results. Qualitative research on the other hand is a form of research used to explain people’s beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that occur in a social setting. The data that is obtained is nonnumeric. The mixed method approach utilizes a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. Some of the subtypes of quantitative include the experimental, correlational, or survey approach. The aim of experimental research is to determine cause and effect. Correlational research does not seek to find causation but correlations or associations. Survey research involves the administration of a questionnaire to a group of people. General types of qualitative research can include but are not limited to grounded theory, ethnographic, and narrative research. Grounded theory research is the study of a concept. It allows you to develop a theory concerning the concept. Ethnographic research is the study of people and cultures. Narrative research focuses on the lives of people, as they tell their own story.
Factors to consider in choosing your method of study can include what you want to study, your time limits, availability of your study sample, institutional requirements, and results of your literature search. These factors as aforementioned must be incorporated in a well-fitting philosophical focus and framework. It is in this way that your findings once incorporated into practice can generate further research.