This material is linked to the issue of undertaking experiments discussed in Chapter 1 of the book by Opie and Brown (2019).

***‘An investigation to prove that using a word processing program helps students with their writing.’***

This question is not only fraught with difficulties, but at the research level we are working at, a result is, arguably, unachievable. Over the timescale typically available for your research, you might, over a few weeks, observe a class or two seemingly enjoying using the program. Interviewing some of the students you observed might indicate that they felt it helped them with their writing skills. Tests on these students might even indicate there seems to be a general improvement in the number and speed at which they can put sentences together correctly. Do these findings answer the research title?

The answer is ‘they do not’. What they do, and no more, is indicate that there appears to be some positive value in using a word processor to help students with their writing. If you were going to try and obtain categorical proof for your research question, although it is doubtful if you ever could, you would be looking at issues such as working with hundreds of classes, catering for age, gender, race, social class, academic background, home and school environment, language use in the home, access to resources etc. etc. and carrying out a longitudinal study over several years. Clearly a research task not feasible within the timescale typically allotted.

This may sound very discouraging, but let us change the research question to

***‘An investigation to ascertain whether using a word processing program helps students with their writing.’***

Now your research can be influential. The evidence you collect can certainly answer this question and, depending on where it was carried out; over what timescale; with what age and gender students; and access to resources (although looking at all these aspects would not be appropriate) provide an indication to others whether it would be worth looking at your research in the context of their own teaching. I’ll leave you with a couple of questions.

Which of the above two research questions would seem of most value in having an impact upon day-to-day educational practice and helping to inform wider considerations for the use of word processors to help students with their writing?

If thisresearch was done in a very high achieving all boy’s school, with just 12 students, how would this impact upon your view of the research?

Opie, C. and Brown, D. (eds) (2019)*Getting Started in Your Educational Research: A Student’s Guide to Design, Data Production and Analysis*. London: Sage.