

Research Proposal Guidelines

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Every discipline has a different format for the research proposal. You should follow the format that is standard for your field and that your faculty mentor prefers. The program guidelines that follow are a general overview intended to help you get started with your proposal.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

A. Make sure the proposal starts on a general level with some type of introductory remarks before going into the details of the specific research question you are proposing. This can be accomplished by providing a frame of reference, a definition, or a discussion of the significance of the topic in the field.

B. Provide a statement of the question, issue or general problem that you are examining. A common problem in research proposals is for the author to delay too long in stating the specific research question. Make sure the research question is stated no later than the end of the second or third paragraph. Make sure the research question is fully stated in one place.

C. Discuss what other studies have said about your research topic and how your research relates to that of other scholars who have written on the topic.

PART II: LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The literature review is written to place your study within the context of existing knowledge and other studies in your discipline. It gives recognition to other scholars and it also allows you to point out what is new about your research. Be sure to indicate if you are building on a previous study or a well-established theory; addressing certain gaps in knowledge that exist; or adding to existing knowledge by doing a study with a different or more complete methodology.

B. Ideally, at least five other studies should be discussed in the literature review. After you have written the literature review read it carefully and make sure it is clear. Notice whether you can easily determine how the proposal is building on earlier studies, as well as exploring a line of research that is new.

C. When you mention other studies they are usually cited by the author's last name and the date of publication. For example: "Another important study in the area (Chan and Gibbs, 2003) found that..." Later on, in the bibliography, you will provide a full citation to all the studies you cited in your proposal.

PART III: METHODOLOGY / THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Provide a full description of your general research design, as well as the specific methods and procedures used in your research project. The methodology should be sufficiently detailed so that it can be replicated. If you are following a methodological approach developed by others, cite the relevant

studies. Provide *diagrams*, charts, and illustrations as appropriate for your discipline. List the instrumentation you used and provide a diagram of the experimental setup.

B. Describe your theoretical approach or type of analysis, if applicable (structural or phenomenological, etc.). Discuss the types of sources used (primary or secondary texts, interviews, surveys, personal notes, etc.).

C. Explain the details of your methods. For example: how you made measurements; the concentrations and amounts you used; how you selected your research subjects; psychological tests used; a copy of your survey questionnaire; an explanation of statistics used; a definition of your focus in terms of historical period or framework; etc.

D. Explain any limitations that your study has in terms of the reliability and applicability of the results.

PART IV: BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES

(Also known as “Works Cited,” “References,” or “Literature Cited”)

A. On a separate sheet, list the articles or books that you have cited in your proposal.

B. Generally this is done in alphabetical order by the last name of the author. However, each field has different format requirements. If your mentor has not already told you the style to use, the best thing to do is look at research articles you have been assigned to read.

Now, for yourself:

EDITING YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

After you have written the first draft of your proposal, and before you turn it in to your mentor, check for the following (do this for subsequent and final drafts as well):

1. Make sure your proposal has section headings: Introduction, Methodology, and Bibliography. The Literature Review can be part of the introduction, or a separate section with its own heading.

2. The quality of the writing in the proposal (and the research paper) is important. Check for the following common errors:

(a) Are the sentences too long? You can improve your writing immensely by using shorter sentences.

(b) Are the paragraphs too long? This is a common problem that makes it harder to read a paper.

(c) Is any of the writing awkward, vague, long-winded, or too informal? The best writing is concise, to the point, and without a superfluous word.

(d) Avoid inadvertent plagiarism: have you cited your sources each time you express an idea that is not your own?

(e) Have you utilized the correct style for citing articles or books? Adopt the citation style of the major journals in your field or the one your mentor prefers.

Best of Luck

Dr. Zia