



Writing a research proposal

Introduction

During your time at university you may be required to write a research proposal before undertaking a final year dissertation. Similarly, if you plan to complete a PhD, you will be required to submit a research proposal as part of your application.

This resource highlights some basic issues that you should consider when writing a research proposal.

What is a research proposal?

A research proposal is a piece of formal writing to show a detailed plan of how a proposed research problem can be investigated.

A research proposal should:

- Discuss whether a chosen area of research is appropriate to be researched by using appropriate methods in a certain time scale

Ensure you are well prepared and can identify any potential obstacles that could affect research success

Key elements

There are key elements that you will need to address in a research proposal:

- A description of the research problem
 - An argument as to why that problem is important
 - A brief review of literature relevant to the research problem
 - A description of the proposed research methodology
 - A description of how the research findings will be used
 - A timeframe for undertaking the work
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Getting started

You need to:

Choose a topic which is related to your interest / degree (for some courses, students may be given a research topic)

- Brainstorm to narrow down the topic into something manageable
- Check the feasibility of your topic through undertaking a preliminary literature review
- Arrive at something to research which is novel / original and of interest to you
- Gather some literature to cite in the proposal
- Learn about research methodology and methods

Writing the proposal

It is difficult to be prescriptive and state exactly how to structure a research proposal because some variation exists between subject areas.

The following therefore provides a basic outline of sections that are commonly included within a research proposal (it is, however important that you make sure that you follow your own departmental conventions).

1) Title / Working Title of the Topic Area

This should be as precise as possible, but it is likely to be adjusted later. At this stage, make sure it is short (usually less than 10 words), meaningful and relevant to your topic.

2) Introduction

You should briefly outline the general background of the research to help readers to understand clearly what the research will be about. You then need to outline how your proposal is organised.

3) Literature Review

You should demonstrate a good understanding of work already done in this area and critically analyse and evaluate previous studies. In addition, you should identify any theoretical or methodological gaps and describe how you intend to fill the gaps.

4) Aim and Objectives

Since you have introduced the main research topic, in this section you should detail how you are going to address your research question(s). You may include:

- **Aim(s)** - a general statement and should reflect the intention or purpose of your chosen area of research (*what you want to achieve*)

- **Objective(s)** - statements / the steps you are going to take to answer your research questions (*how you are going to achieve the aim*)

5) Methodology

In this section, you should provide a detailed plan of the research procedures based on the aims and objectives, such as; sample, methods, data analysis, and ethical considerations. You need to demonstrate you have a good understanding of different research methods available to you and justify why you choose a specific approach.

6) Dissemination

In this section, you should briefly describe your expected contribution and how the findings will be used. For instance, will you present the work at a conference or write an article for a journal?

7) Timescale

You should work out and show a realistic time frame for the research. This could be presented in a number of ways - such as a Gantt chart.

8) Reference list and / or bibliography

This should be written so that it is in line with your faculty guidelines and conventions.

Remember: a reference list is NOT the same as a bibliography. Ensure that you submit what is requested.

Please note: Not all research proposals follow this exact format and the above information must be treated as a guide. Always check and follow your unit handbook / departmental guidelines.

Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit: I



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