

TECHNIQUES TO WRITE THE RESEARCH PROPOSALS

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Before start of any research work, a researcher has to write a research proposal. Most of the researchers do not fully understand what a research proposal means, nor do they understand the importance of research proposal. It not only promises success for the research but also show the potential as a researcher. Research proposal is intended to convince others that the researcher has a worthwhile research project and has competence to complete it.

Generally, a research proposal should contain all the key elements involved in research process. It should have sufficient information to argue that the researcher has an important research idea, and researcher has good knowledge of relevant literature and methodology to be used for research is sound. The research proposal provides a coherent and concise outline of the intended research. It allows researcher to assess the originality of the proposed topic.

A research proposal is a concise and coherent summary of proposed research. Research proposal should set out the central issues or questions that researcher intend to address. It should outline the general area of study within which research falls, referring to the current state of knowledge and any recent debates on the topic as well as demonstrate the originality of proposed research.

Research proposal also give an opportunity to show that researcher have the aptitude for research by demonstrating that researchers have the ability to communicate complex ideas clearly, concisely and critically.

A Good proposal quickly and easily answers the following questions:

- What do you want to do and how you plan to do it?
- How much will it cost and how much time will it take?
- How does the proposed project relate to the sponsor's interests?
- What difference will the project make to your university, your students, your discipline, the state, the nation, or any others concerned parties?
- What has already been done in the area of your project? Why should you, rather than someone else, do this project?
- How will the results be evaluated?

Functions of Research Proposal:

The research proposal can serve many useful functions.

- The most important is that it helps to think out the research project which are about to undertake and predict any difficulties that might arise.
- For those who are not quite sure what their focus will be, the research proposal can be a space to explore options – perhaps with one proposal for each potential topic
- Research proposals can be effective starting places to discuss projects with professionals too
- A professor who is initially sceptical about a project may be able to imagine it more easily after reading a well written research proposal (This doesn't mean he or she will approve the topic, especially if there are significant potential difficulties that haven't considered).
- Once a researcher have begun research project, a research proposal can help to remain on track and can also remind why started this project in the first place
- Researchers very often begin to lose heart about two thirds of the way into a project when their research hits a snag or when they are having problems developing a thesis, organizing the ideas or actually starting to write
- Rereading the initial research proposal, especially significance can reenergize the project or help the researchers to refocus in an effective manner.

Importance of Research Proposal:

A research proposal is a document of usually 10-15 pages that informs others of a proposed research. A reason to get the proposal right is that this can save the researchers time in the long run.

Proposals are informative and persuasive writing because it attempts to convince the readers to do something. The goal of the researchers is not only to persuade the readers to do what is being requested, but also to make the readers believe that the solution is practical and appropriate.

The proposal must assist with the identification of the following:

- The researchers proposed area of research & the originality of that research
- Adequate resources for the project
- An appropriate supervisor for the project
- The researcher ability to construct and communicate a reasoned piece of writing

Structure of the Research Proposal:

The following is a guide to an effective and coherent structure for the research proposal.

1. Title: It should be concise and descriptive.

For example,

- First page – title of the research; researcher's name; name of the institute/organization where the researcher belong; name of the supervisor, co-supervisor; date; etc.

- In selecting the title, the following points should be taken care of:
- Reflect the theme of the research
- Be self-explanatory
- Be brief
- Language be simple and unambiguous
- Be specific to a particular domain

2. Abstract:

The abstract is a brief summary of the entire proposal, typically ranging from 150-250 words. It should outline the proposal major headings: the research questions, theoretical framework, research design, sampling method, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures. A good abstract accurately reflects the contents of the proposal while at the same time being coherent, readable and concise.

3. General Introduction:

It is very important in defining the scope of the project and provides an important development of the topic summarised in the abstract and is an important opportunity for the researchers to demonstrate competence in the relevant area as well as familiarity with the field.

Its main purpose is to provide the necessary background or context for the research problem. How to frame the research problem is perhaps the biggest problem in proposal writing. If the research problem is framed in the context of a general literature review, then the research question may appear uninteresting. However, if the same question is placed in the context of a very focused and current research area, its significance will become evident.

The introduction typically begins with a general statement of the problem area, with a focus on a specific research problem to be followed by the rationale or justification for the proposed study.

- **Research questions:** It may be useful to present the research as a series of research questions to be examined by the thesis. An effective structure might be to use each question as a sub-heading to a paragraph or two of elaboration and detail on the “problem” or “issue” contained in each research question. Research questions ask what relationships exist b/w the different variables in the study.
- **Research hypothesis:** Research hypothesis are assumptions about the tentative solution of the research. These assumptions are derived on personal experience, review of the related literature, consultations / focused interviews with the experts / professionals or combination of all.
- **Chapter outlines:** It is not necessary to have a chapter structure at this stage; however it is sometimes useful to identify the progress of the research through chapters.

Generally introduction covers the following elements:

- State the research problem, which is often referred to as the purpose of the study.
- Provide the context and set the stage for the research question in such a way as to show its necessity and importance.

- Present the rationale of the proposed study and clearly indicate why it is worth doing.
- Briefly describe the major issues and sub-problems to be addressed by the research.
- Identify the key independent and dependent variables of the experiment. Alternatively, specify the phenomenon the student wants to study.
- State the research questions and/or hypotheses which are connected carefully to the literature being reviewed.
- Set the delimitation of the proposed research in order to provide a clear focus.

4. Literature Review:

Sometimes the literature review is incorporated into the introduction section. However, most professors prefer a separate section, which allows a more thorough review of the literature.

The literature review serves several important functions:

- Ensures that you are not “reinventing the wheel”.
- Gives credits to those who have laid the groundwork for your research.
- Demonstrates your knowledge of the research problem.
- Demonstrates your understanding of the theoretical and research issues related to your research question.
- Shows your ability to critically evaluate relevant literature information.
- Indicates your ability to integrate and synthesize the existing literature.
- Provides new theoretical insights or develops a new model or the conceptual framework for your research.
- Convinces your readers that your proposed research will make a significant and substantial contribution to the literature (i.e. resolving an important theoretical issue or filling a major gap in the literature).

Most researcher literature reviews suffers from the following problems:

- Lacking organization and structure
- Lacking focus, unity and coherence
- Being repetitive and verbose
- Failing to cite influential papers
- Failing to keep up with recent developments
- Failing to critically evaluate cited papers
- Citing irrelevant or trivial references
- Depending too much on secondary sources

Scholarship and research competence will be questioned if any of the above applies in research proposal. There are different ways to organize the literature review. Make use of sub headings to bring order and coherence to the review. It is also helpful to keep in mind that the story researcher is telling to an audience. It should be in a stimulating and engaging manner. Do not bore them, because it may lead to rejection of your worthy proposal.

5. Methods:

According to Wiersma, “the methods or procedures section is really the heart of the research proposal. The activities should be described with as much detail as possible, and the continuity between them should be apparent.”

The method section is very important because it tells how the student plans to tackle the research problem. It will provide the student’s work plan and describe the activities necessary for the completion of the project. The student needs to demonstrate his knowledge of alternative methods and make the case that his approach is the most appropriate and the most valid way to address the research question.

Research methods may include experiment, descriptive or historical survey, activity analysis, trend study, programme evaluation, follow-up study, document (content) analysis, case study, ethnographic (field) study, comparative and correlational; data collection tools–tests/instruments, observations, inquiry forms, interviews. Where research visits are a key part of the project, it may be useful to explain the decision to undertake the research in some place. This could include the decision to work with particular individuals.

The guiding principle for writing the method section is that it should contain sufficient information for the readers to determine whether methodology is sound. Some even argue that a good proposal should contain sufficient detail for another qualified researcher to implement the study.

Researchers need to demonstrate the knowledge of alternative methods and make the case that the approach is the most appropriate and most valid way to address research question. Research question may be best answered by qualitative research. However, people are still biased against qualitative research, especially the phenomenological variety, researchers may need to justify the qualitative method.

Furthermore, since there are no well-established and widely accepted canons in qualitative analysis, our method section needs to be more elaborate than what is required for traditional quantitative research. More importantly, the data collection process in qualitative research has a far greater impact on the results as compared to quantitative research. This is another reason for greater care in describing how you will collect and analyse your data. For quantitative studies, the method section typically consists for the following sections:

- **Design:** Is it a questionnaire study or a laboratory experiment? What kind of design do you choose?
- **Subjects or participants:** Who will take part in your study? What kind of sampling procedure do you use?
- **Instruments:** What kind of measuring instruments or questionnaire do you use? Why do you choose them? Are they valid & reliable?
- **Procedure:** How do you plan to carry out your study? What activities are involved? How long does it take?

6. Results:

Obviously the student does not have results at the proposal stage. However, he needs to have some idea about what kind of data he will be used in order to answer the research question or test the hypothesis.

7. Discussion:

It is important to convince the readers of the potential impact of the proposed research. We need to communicate a sense of enthusiasm and confidence without exaggerating the merits of research proposal. That is why researchers also need to mention the limitations and weaknesses of the proposed research which may be justified by time & financial constraints as well as by the early developmental stage of your research area.

8. Bibliography / References:

The bibliography should be a short list of the key relevant items in the area. Therefore, the researchers should know how to get:

- Related documents to be consulted / studied
- Follow technicalities in writing bibliography / references
- To present the bibliography in alphabetic order
- To present it in classified manner, manuscripts, books, journals, communication reports, newspapers, etc

Conclusion:

A research proposal should be viewed as more than the outcome of a formalised procedure. It tests in particular the student's ability as a researcher to conceptualise clearly and to plan and organise carefully and thoroughly. It must be done well in order to be faithful to the research area and to "sell" the idea. It need to be kept in mind however, that student plan need not be rigidly adhered to as opportunities to refine his way or if unexpected data or sources of data arise. The importance is to have a clear sense of direction right from the start. An exemplary proposal emerges only through a long series of efforts, during which all aspects of the investigation, from conceptual problems, methods, stages and expected results are clarified and repeatedly elaborated. Therefore, a good proposal constitutes a coherent and concrete whole in which problems, theories and methods support one another.

Common mistakes in proposal writing:

- Failure to provide the proper context to frame research question.
- Failure to delimit the boundary conditions for research.
- Failure to cite landmark studies.
- Failure to accurately present the theoretical and empirical contributions by other researchers.
- Failure to stay focused on the research question.
- Failure to develop a coherent & persuasive argument for the proposed research.
- Too much detail on minor issues, but not enough detail on major issues.
- Too much rambling – going "all over the map" without a clear sense of direction.

- Too many citation lapses and incorrect references.
- Too long or too short.
- Failing to follow the APA style.
- Sloppy writing.



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