

WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

What is a research proposal?

A research proposal presents and justifies a research idea. It analyzes and synthesizes the existing research about a particular topic and describes the writer's own idea for a new study, based on (an) assessment of gaps or problems in the research literature. It answers three questions: (1) what the project is, (2) why it is important, and (3) how it will be handled. More precisely, a proposal is a demonstration of a commitment to an extensive study.

Before starting:

Answer the following questions before starting to work on the proposal:

- ✓ Are you familiar with other research in related areas?
- ✓ Do you have a clear understanding of the project?
- ✓ Do you have the ability to go through the steps and complete the project?
- ✓ Do you have the motivation to go through ALL the steps?

YES to all the questions means you are ready to write your research proposal!

Defining the project:

Keep these in mind when defining the research project through the proposal:

- ✓ Make sure you are a benefit to those who are participating in the research.
- ✓ Choose your methodology wisely. Will it be qualitative (i.e., based on interviews and questionnaires) or quantitative (i.e. based on statistics and numbers)? Sometimes a combined methodology can make the most sense. (e.g. You can combine a qualitative preliminary study with a quantitative main study.)
- ✓ Decide on where you will conduct the research.

Preparing the proposal:

The appropriate length for dissertation and thesis proposals depends on the limits and the frame of your study. Often they are limited to 10-15 pages.

- 1) Read other proposals in your own field. This can give a clear image about many things; mainly, the organisation, headings and the conventions of your own field.

- 2) Organise around a set of questions. The questions must be selected to frame the research.
- 3) Narrow down the project. A broadly-defined project can be unmanageable.
- 4) Prepare the first three chapters of the dissertation:

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction states the problem, i.e. describes the aim or purpose of the study. It must convince the reader that it is interesting and that there is a reasonable expectation of results. Also, it gives relevant and correct background information to demonstrate the writer's knowledge of the field by the organisation of previous work into sensible categories.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A good review is a well thought-out, critical analysis of prior work. The best time to do a literature research is when preparing the proposal to make sure of two things: this research is needed and the chosen methodology is appropriate. While doing the search, it is a good idea to photocopy relevant articles and put them into logical and sequential order to make use of when writing the review.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The methodology part should include the list of specific aims and be complete and procedural. There should be enough information and detail to let the reader know that an approach with some reasonable chance of success has been developed. As this is a proposal, the future tense should be used.

- 5) Include a title on the proposal to help the reader understand the nature of the work.