

Research proposal – an example

The following is a suggested format for a research proposal.

Cover Page

The cover page should show:

- the title;
- the student's name and student number;
- the name of the University;
- the name of the degree sought;
- the name of the principal supervisor; and
- the date of submission.

Abstract

The abstract should be self contained, concise, readable, and one page or less. It should outline what you intend to do, why you believe it needs to be done and what the results will mean in theory and in practise.

Introduction

The Background to the Study

This section sets the scene for a naive reader who knows nothing about your research.

The Significance of the Study

This section states why it is important to do the research.

The Purpose of the Study or a Statement of the Problem

This section states, in about a paragraph, what you expect to achieve by doing this research or what problem gave rise to the research. This problem statement may be presented in broad terms in qualitative studies.

Research Questions

These are unambiguous questions that the research is designed to answer.

Hypotheses

These are clear statements that the research is designed to test.

Definitions of Terms or Operational Definitions

Define any important terms used in the research questions or elsewhere in the thesis.

Review of the literature

The first phase of the literature review should be brief but give the reader enough information to understand the context of the proposed research. It may include references to previous findings and specific studies similar to the current study, and to relevant methodology.

A good literature review:

1. includes all literature that is relevant to justifying the proposed research;
2. does not include literature that is irrelevant to justifying the proposed research;
3. supports undertaking the proposed research;
4. avoids speculation and unsubstantiated statements;
5. is critical (a critical review does not merely accept previous authors' conclusions, but weighs them carefully, examining them on the basis of the weaknesses and strengths in the methodologies of the studies being reviewed);
6. is organised under subheadings;

7. forms a connected argument; and
8. has a summary at the end.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical or conceptual framework identifies variables impacting on the research questions and their inter-relationships and/or identifies theoretical and philosophical assumptions underpinning the study. The theoretical framework is often summarised as a flow-chart diagram, which shows relationships between theories, concepts and variable of the study.

Materials and methods

This section describes how you will answer the research questions. It must be sufficiently detailed so that another researcher would know from the written instructions how to collect the data.

Instruments or materials or apparatus or equipment

The name of this section will depend on the type of research you are doing. It should include any equipment that you will need for the research and/or tests, questionnaires or interview schedules. Information regarding the reliability and validity of instruments to be used in the research should also be included in this section.

Procedure

This section describes, step by step, how you will collect the data.

Data Analysis

This section describes how you will use the data you collect. It is often useful to organise this section according to the research questions, explaining how you will analyse the data to answer each question. This section must be planned before any data is collected, otherwise it may be impossible to analyse the data in such a way as to answer the questions.

Limitations

You are expected to be aware of any weaknesses in your research and show evidence of attempts to overcome them.

References

Students should consult their Supervisor regarding the choice of the most appropriate referencing style for their discipline. It is recommended that students use the EndNote or other bibliographical software so that the reference list is generated automatically by the software.

Appendices

Appendices may include a time lime, a budget or draft instruments.