

Sections of a Research Proposal¹

Title Page

- Title of the research (the title should not contain more than 8 words)
- Your full name and student number
- Supervisor's name
- Date of submission

Abstract

The proposal should start with an abstract of not more than 200 words. The abstract should concisely summarise the study. It is recommended to write the abstract only after the proposal is finalised.

General Introduction

A good title will clue the reader into the topic but it cannot tell the whole story. Follow the title with a strong general introduction. The introduction provides a brief overview that tells a well informed (but perhaps non-specialist) reader what the proposal is about. It might be as short as a single page, but it should be very clearly written, and it should let one assess whether the research is relevant.

Here you give a brief explanation of the context that gave rise to this research project, and the reason for your choice of topic. Point out where there are 'gaps' in existing knowledge of the problem or where you disagree with current analysis of the issue. Furthermore, in this section, you need to introduce and define key concepts that you are going to use in the study.

Research Questions/Research Problem or Hypotheses

Here you state what the question is that you are trying to answer or the problem that you are trying to address in your study. Research questions, research problems or hypotheses should flow from the above general introduction and background to the study.

Aims and Objectives of the Research

What are you trying to achieve? What are your aims? What are your objectives?

Scope of the Research

Here you delimit your research, identifying the specific aspect of a topic, a case or group who are the subject of the research, the geographic location and the time period if necessary.

¹ Research proposal should be between 2000-4000 words for Masters studies and 4000-6000 words for PhD studies. For the purposes of this application, the format and layout should remain the same, but the word count can be 1000-2000 and 2000-3000 word respectively.

Significance of the Research

Why is this work important? Show why it is important to answer the above mentioned research question or a problem. What are the implications of doing it? How does it link to other knowledge? How does it stand to inform policy making or advance the field?

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to situate your research in the context of what is already known about a topic. At this point, it does not need to be exhaustive; however, it needs to show how your work will benefit the whole. It should provide the theoretical basis for your work, show what has been done in the area by others, and set the stage for your work.

You need to draw on a limited number of key sources, and show that you are familiar with the published discussions or analysis of the subject. In a literature review section of the proposal, you should give the reader enough ties to the literature that they feel confident that you have found, read, and assimilated the literature in the field. It should probably move from the more general to the more focused studies, but need not be exhaustive, only relevant. A good literature review will also point to the gaps in the existing knowledge.

Methodology

This section should make clear to the reader the way that you intend to approach the research questions and the techniques and logic that you will use to address it. Is this an exploratory or some other type of a study? Are you going to use qualitative or quantitative methods or a mix of the two? Why is the selected method appropriate for your study?

Limitations of the Research

Are there any limitations that you can think of? For example, interviewing only 30 people from a large community is a limitation in the research but it may be justified due to time limitations, etc. Reflecting on this is not diminishing the study, but it shows that you are aware of the limitations.

Time-frame

This section needs to provide a time-frame for executing the proposed study, from conducting a literature review, preparing for field research, conducting interviews or administering surveys, to writing up and finalising the study.

References

The candidate needs to include a list of references to articles and texts included in the proposal as well as those that will become seminal reading as the research progresses. The Obiter referencing style needs to be used.