

Course : Research Research methodology

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Level : Master two

Lecture : 1

Guidelines for writing a research proposal

Research is a process that needs to be actively managed. Being strategic in your preliminary planning, being organized and prepared, and creating the mental space necessary for research are important parts of the process (O'leary, 2017).

Lecture objectives

In this lecture, the student will

- Identify the purpose and the elements of a research proposal
- Know how to structure each element

Introduction

Before embarking on research, you may be limited to being a knowledge consumer, but once confronted with the need to tackle a project at the end of your studies, you move from being a knowledge consumer to a knowledge producer, ' someone who is charged with capturing and reporting on 'truth' and this means taking on a whole new realm of responsibility and gaining competence with a host of new skills' (O'leary, 2017). In fact, you develop a set of skills in the course of research which may be a daunting journey for a novice researcher. It is worth keeping in mind that research is a systematic process which requires **reading, planning, commitment and perseverance**.

It is systematic as you move from a chosen topic to a research question, then the choice of the appropriate methodology and ultimately to conclusions. All of this is based on extensive reading of the existing literature which helps you develop knowledge about what you intend to investigate. Planning is a very essential step that leads to successful research; therefore, preparing a **sound research proposal** is required for any kind of research.

A **research proposal** is a brief document that **contains a research work plan** which is intended to convince the academic committee that you have a worthwhile research project and that **you have the**

competence to complete it. the proposal mirrors the research process itself and therefore, like research, your proposal must represent a coherent and integrated process (Boden, Kenway & Epstein, 2005, p.44).

A good research proposal depends not only on **the quality of the proposed project**, but also **on the quality of writing**, therefore, it **should be clear and coherent**. What you should keep in mind is to ensure its acceptance and ultimately the research success is to prove that the research is **feasible in terms of**:

- the available time and resources;
- access to data;
- the researcher's experience and expertise;
- ethical, legal, environmental, and safety issues (Denscombe, 2012, p. 1).

Besides, a good research proposal will help you define and formulate your research question, narrow down the study to a manageable form within the prescribed time limits (Bak, 2015, p.5)

Before one embarks on preparing a proposal, he/she should have a research topic.

The following steps can be helpful for deciding about a topic:

- Choose something you are interested in ; to do that, **brainstorm general topics that genuinely interest you** / Remember that choosing a motivating topic will sustain you during your research journey
- do some **background reading on the general topics of your interest** ;
- once you have a general topic that interests you, **read extensively about it** ;
- then, try to refine it into **a precise and narrow research** ;
- ensure it is **significant and will make contribution** to the field of knowledge ;
- consult your **supervisor or other professionals** in the field for advice ;
- **formulate a particular research question**, one that has not been asked before and make sure it is **answerable**. You should check its **feasibility** ; otherwise, it is better to opt for another topic.

Characteristics of distinctive proposals

The success of a proposal will depend on how far it can show that the research will have:

- *originality* that makes it different from what has already been done;
- *timeliness*, addressing current issues and being up-to-date;
- particular *relevance* for the evaluators ;
- *wider application*, linking the findings with more general practical or theoretical concerns;
- *precision*, avoiding any ambiguity or vagueness relating to definitions, data or planning (Descombe, 2012, p. 31).
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Structure of a research proposal

It is important to note that each university, faculty and even department has its own requirements on how a research proposal can be crafted. The typical sections of a proposal might be :

The cover page

The cover page contains all the necessary information of the proposed research. It can be formatted according to the APA style including the title of the research, the author's name, the affiliation, the course, the supervisor's name and the due date. The cover page should be double-spaced- the title centred as shown in the example below.

Title

The title is the second important element in a research proposal in a separate page.

- it should be informative and stated very clearly in order to avoid any kind of ambiguity or confusion;
- it should also match the content of the proposed research; the researcher sometimes makes modifications while stating the aims and the other parts; therefore, the title should always be reviewed after completing the research proposal to ensure that it matches its content.
- In spite of keeping the title brief, it should be precise, providing sufficient details.

The title should be of current importance providing benefit to the field in which you are conducting the study. It should also be with a single interpretation and formulated with simple language so that people cannot be distracted and to avoid ambiguity. In addition, it should not be too short or too

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The APA style, 7th edition recommends that:

- The title should be focused and succinct without abbreviations or words that serve no purpose.
- The length of the title should not be more than 12 words in length.

- the title should be written in upper and lowercase letters in bold face centered in the upper half of the page.

Wilkinson (1991, 2014) provided useful advice for creating a title:

- Be brief and avoid wasting words.
- Eliminate unnecessary words, such as “An Approach to ...,” “A Study of ...,” and so forth. Use a
- Use a single title or a double title. An example of a double title would be “An Ethnography: Understanding a Child’s Perception of War.” In addition to Wilkinson’s thoughts, consider a title no longer than 12 words, eliminate most articles and prepositions, and make sure that it includes the focus or topic of the study.

Introduction

The introduction is the part which introduces your study and most importantly provides readers with the background information for the proposed research. Its purpose is to establish a framework for the research, so that readers can understand how it is related to other research (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 96).

Statement of the problem

A problem might be defined as the issue which exists in literature, theory or practice that leads to a need for the study (Creswell, 1994; p. 50). Finding a problem can be from the literature review or the student’s own experience in the field; the latter is called a practical or applied research problem.

Another way of choosing a problem can be from other authors’ suggestions of future research in dissertations and theses.

The problem statement should put your research problem in its particular context which will make it easier to understand and give some background on what is already known about it. It seeks to answer the questions :

- What is already known about the problem?
- where does the problem arise ?
- whom does it affect
- Why does the problem matter?

The statement of the problem allows the researcher to describe the problem systematically, to reflect on its priority and to point out why the research on the problem should be undertaken.

Literature review

The literature review is an important section in a research proposal as it enables the researcher to gain an understanding of the existing research on the selected topic.

Very simply, it needs to address the following main issues:

- What is known about the research problem?
- What are the gaps?
- Where and how does the proposed research fit into this picture?
- What contribution will the proposed research add to the existing academic knowledge and how will it enrich current practises?

There is no common way of writing this part. The most important is that it should progress in a systematic way making it easier for the reader to grasp the arguments related to your study and demonstrating that your work is original.

I suggest that you can summarize the studies highlighting the pertinent details to the proposed topic. This can be done by moving from the general to the more specific studies or following a chronological order. Another thing to mention is that this part does not consist just of the presentation of an inventory of the different studies related to the topic, or their description, but the most important is to synthesize, criticize and evaluate them.

Purpose statement /Aim of the Study

The aim(s) of the study should convey clearly what you want to achieve through your research tightly related to the title. This section starts with the broad aim stated very clearly followed by specific objectives. This can be written as a single paragraph or a list of aims/ objectives in a logical order. Action-oriented words such as 'to investigate, to describe, to analyze, to determine, to find out, to ascertain can be used in formulating the aims and specific objectives

Research questions and or hypotheses

As research questions allow the researcher to further narrow down the purpose of his/her study, the first thing to do is to refer to it to ensure that they are tightly related. Narrowing, clarifying and even redefining research questions are essential to the research process (O'Leary, 2004). Good research questions need. Good research questions need to be:

- *interesting in the sense that they address current issues;*
- *relevant in relation to the aim;*
- *sufficiently narrow (specific) so that they can be answered.*

Broad questions can be difficult if not impossible to be addressed without breaking them into specific answerable questions.

- Clear and focus

Keep in mind that quantitative questions differ from qualitative questions. In asking a quantitative research question, you need to determine if you intend to describe data, compare differences among groups, assess a relationship and if a variable predicts another or effects another. Qualitative research questions seek to explore, discover and understand meaning; they are broader than quantitative research questions.

Quantitative hypotheses, on the other hand, are predictions the researcher makes about the expected relationships among variables (Cresswell, 2014 p.132).

In qualitative research, the hypotheses may be generated as the researchers gain insights into what is being studied

Refer to last year's lecture about the types of hypotheses.

Research design / Methods and Procedures

What is required in this section, considered as the heart of the research proposal, is the identification of the research approach, qualitative, quantitative or mixed- methods approach, together with a specific design and research methods. In this section, you describe **how** you are going to answer the formulated questions. It includes the research approach to be used in the proposed study, the methods of collecting data, the population and sample as well as the data analysis procedure.

Significance of the study

In this section, you need to convince the reader that the findings can lead to new methods or strategies at dealing with the problem of investigation.

The answers to the following question might help you to write this part.

- What drives the need for such a study
- Why is it worth doing?
- Who cares for its results?
- Whom will this study benefit. (Gruba & Zobel, 2011) look for reference

Delimitations of the study

Delimitation addresses how a study will be narrowed in scope, that is, how it is bounded. This is the place to explain the things that you are not doing and why you have chosen not to do them (Pajares 2007).

13 Ethical statement

This section is not required in all types of research except if it includes research subjects, mainly people as participants. Some ethical issues are present in almost all projects such as anonymity and confidentiality of data and the use of results. The key principles of research ethics contained in the codes cover three broad areas:

- No harm to participants
- Voluntary consent
- Scientific integrity (Descombe, 2012, p. 135)

Summing up, you have to ensure that the rights and welfare of the humans are protected ; you cannot oblige the participants to take part in your research, but voluntary consent is necessary. Besides, you should use suitable methods leading to trustful findings free of any kind of plagiarism.

3.14 Preliminary outline/ Layout and overview of chapters

Proposals include a preliminary outline mentioning the content of chapters. This can be done based on the extensive review of literature.

3.15 References

Use the APA style suggested by your department or your supervisor. It can be APA sixth or seventh edition.

Put the references (used in this proposal) or bibliography including the broad list of the literature you have accumulated.

3.16 Timeline/ Plan of work

A plan of work may be required by some institutions specifying the completion dates of the different parts. In describing how to write a research proposal we urged you to include a time schedule for the completion of the research project. The reason was that it is very useful to have deadlines and to try to stick to them. Schedules help you to manage your time ((Boden, Kenway & Epstein, 2005, p.60). This cannot only convince the supervisory committee that your project can be realized in terms of the allotted time, but it can help you to manage your time adequately.

2. Page Layout

- The general page layout of your research proposal should be an A4-size page with 0.5 inch margins on all sides.
- Times New Roman is the preferred font.
- The title and chapter headings are in 14-point Times New Roman Bold. The other headings and body text are in 12 point Times New Roman.

3.17 Tips on writing

Coherence is a very important aspect in writing which reflects the extent to which sentences and paragraphs “flow” together. Writers best achieve coherence by

Moving from “old” (familiar) information to “new” information.

- Put the most important information at the end of the sentence (stress position).
- Keep the subject and verb together.

- Starting sentences with **short, easily understood phrases**.
- Using **“stock” transitional phrases** (“however,” “therefore,” “in addition,” “on the other hand”) that signal to readers a shift in topic or emphasis. (For more tips on transitions, see Purdue’s Online Writing Lab: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/574/01/>).
- Using **pronouns** to refer back to previously introduced information (e.g. this+noun) and/or the use of **recycling**, or the repetition of key words or phrases (Graduate Writing Center of the Center for Excellence in Writing).

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