

Crafting Compelling Research Proposals: A Companion for Students

27/06/2024



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Creating an engaging research proposal is a prerequisite and a cornerstone for initiating and completing a dissertation or thesis in the academic process. A well-structured research proposal is a framework and a snapshot plan for a successful research journey with scholarly contribution and potential (Floridi, 2024). Such research proposals are a tool and a gateway to gaining research grants. However, the art of writing it often goes unnoticed. This guide aims to shed light on the research proposal process and equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to create exceptional proposals, ultimately steering them towards research success.

Comprehending the Objective of a Research Proposal

A research proposal acts as the substructure for a dissertation or thesis. It is a detailed life cycle outlining the rationale and all expected research activities to bridge the knowledge gap. It specifies the research question, methodology, literature review, and importance of the study (George, 2022; Locke et al., 2014). For students, developing a proposal is relevant to prevent avoidable errors in research. Students may need a well-developed proposal to maintain focus on research and deliver sound empirical knowledge. Acknowledging the significance of a carefully constructed proposal is the initial move towards achieving academic success.

Essential Elements for a Research Proposal

A standard research proposal will include some elements. The elements are not limited to the following but depend on what

some institutions or grant-awarding bodies require. Hence, I will discuss briefly the eleven essential elements of a first-class research proposal.

1. Title: Students must carefully choose a clear and concise title that accurately reflects their research topic. Please note that a suitable title emerges from reviewing relevant literature, demonstrating that the students have identified the knowledge gap. The student's research interest, as is the supervisor's, is also essential. The project should be in an area the supervisor has expertise in because it is joint work. Social mapping or diagnosis, life experience, and other factors can help determine a suitable title.
2. Abstract: This is a short description of the proposal. Students are expected to write this section after completing the proposal, but it is sometimes optional. Some students may want to write at the end of the study since the research process is flexible.
3. Background: This is a portion where students give a brief situational analysis of the phenomenon using a funnel-like approach, i.e., generic to specific. Students are to make presentations from global and local perspectives. Relevant statistics are appropriate for this section. For example, students can include global, regional and local data in this section. The background should be linked to the statement problem.
4. Statement of Problem (SOP): This is crucial to the research proposal. Students are to be specific about the research focus and then state what has been done, what has yet to be done, and the implications of what has yet to be done that necessitate the proposed research. Hence, the gap in the research focal interest area will be exposed, which heralds the roadmap for the research questions to be raised. Also, this section should be brief and ideal to be the

students' words. Hence, a maximum of one page to one and a half is advised. Experienced researchers prepare statements of problems within a page. Researchers are becoming fashionable in referring to a few empirical articles to identify what has been done in the focal area. The students can reference 5-7 empirical research to prevent turning this section into another literature review. Also, the focus should be on one problem, not problems.

5. Research questions are essential for any proposal's foundation. They should be clear, concise, focused, and detailed to direct the research yet broad enough to contribute significantly to the field of study (George, 2022). The students will ask relevant questions representing the knowledge gap they want to fill. A research question is broader and can generate many objectives. Please note that research questions are compulsory. Vital research questions can be used in place of hypotheses. Hence, all studies must have research questions, but not all studies can have hypotheses.
6. Research hypotheses: In proposal writing, hypotheses are developed from suspected relationships between variables. A hypothesis can be null or alternative. A null hypothesis (H_0) asserts that there is no relationship or difference between variables, while an alternative hypothesis (H_1) projects a suspected relationship or difference between variables. The hypothesis can relate positively or negatively (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022). Students develop hypothetical speculations from information gathered from the existing literature and identify gaps in knowledge. More importantly, the nature of the study would determine the need for hypothesis setting.
7. Research Objectives: Objectives are the intention or purpose of the study, coined from the research questions. The general objective is drawn directly

from the title, while specific objectives indicate the breakdown of the study focus. Therefore, there is a general objective with at least four specific objectives. The objectives should be concise and clear. The objectives must be SMART, i.e. Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

Clarity of objectives would help students navigate the study, and in the end, it would be easier to ascertain that the research attained its purpose (Hazari, 2024).

8. Significance of the study: Students must project why the proposed research is relevant. The explanation is premised on the potential impact of the proposed research after its completion.
9. Review of Literature: This part assesses previous and relevant studies on the subject, emphasising areas the upcoming study intends to contribute to. It shows how well the student understands and is dedicated to sharing new ideas. The students are to review events, periods, locations, methods, findings and sample sizes. The section should engage in a theoretical framework and establish a research gap. Students should exercise caution not to copy and paste but actively engage the reviews. Students are expected to share their critical thoughts from the review at this stage.
10. Methods: Outlining the study's approach and design is essential. The nuances of combining any possible options in this section depend on the nature and context of the research (Hazari, 2024). Students are responsible for selecting and discussing how they will conduct the study in the following context.
 - Research design: This is a significant driver of the study, where students decide the type of study they are about to carry out, which are descriptive, exploratory,

experimental, explanatory, and quasi-experimental.

- Approach: It encompasses adopting qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. The specific approach adopted would depend on the kind of research the student is engaged in.
- Sample size and determination: Students can determine their sample size through standardised formulas such as Cochran and Yamane. They can also purposively determine sample size, especially in a qualitative study. Sample size in qualitative study can change once the saturation point is reached.
- Instrument Data collection and field procedure: Students are to state the data collection instrument for their study. The primary data collection instrument includes a questionnaire, interview guide, checklist, and observational guide. For secondary data, it includes published data and a review of a document, such as a policy document. Students are to state how they will get to the participants, such as House-to-house or organising a meeting venue.
- Techniques for analysing the data: The student will present a careful analysis plan. This approach guarantees that the research can manage and produce scientific evidence from the research inquiry.
- Ethics considerations: The proposal should carefully describe how the students will ensure that the study adopts the world's best ethical practices, such as benevolence, nonmaleficence, respect for

persons, and confidentiality.

- **Timeline:** A good proposal will state planned time estimates for each research activity since the research is time-band. Timeline allows the students to monitor their progress and celebrate research milestones.
- **Budgets:** This is optional at different levels, premised on whether the work received a grant. Hence, the student is expected to present the research cost. Grant bodies are always interested in this section. It must demonstrate students' credibility; hence, the section should be developed with the current and prevailing prices of the items/services required. Also, explain and justify the need for each item or service that needs to be paid for.
- **Expected outcomes:** Students are to suggest the likely outcomes of the empirical engagement.

11. **Reference:** This section remains crucial for all scientific engagement. Students should be aware of the format required by their institution. For instance, the Fairfield School of Business required students to use the Harvard Reference Style. Students can use different referencing tools to generate the desired references in a standardised format. The referencing tools include Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote, RefWorks, etc.

Tips for Writing an Effective Research Proposal

- ✓ Starting early is one of the best ways to set yourself up for success. By initiating work on your proposal well before deadlines, you are giving yourself the gift of

time for revisions, improvements, and unforeseen challenges. This proactive approach can significantly improve the quality and outcome of your research proposal.

✓ Remember, you are not alone on this journey. Seek advice from your professors, especially your supervisors, who are experts in your field of interest. Their guidance and feedback can be invaluable in shaping your research proposal. Do not hesitate to reach out. They are always ready to support you.

✓ Perform a comprehensive literature search: Utilise databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and PubMed to locate pertinent research articles. Read extensively and analytically to recognise literature deficiencies/gaps/lacunae.

✓ Develop your approach: Detail the process of gathering and assessing information. If quantitative techniques are being used, seek advice from statisticians.

✓ Consider the importance: Clearly explain the relevance of your study. Consider the potential impact on policy, practice, or theory in your field.

In conclusion, understanding the purpose and components of a research proposal can help students turn the daunting task into an opportunity for personal growth and success. Students can develop proposals that lead to successful dissertations and theses by concentrating on the research question, conducting a comprehensive literature review, carefully outlining the methodology, and stressing the importance of the study. Remember that the proposal is more than just a necessity- it is a crucial step towards becoming proficient researchers and academics.

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