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Master of Business Administration

LCMB7035 - Dissertation

Dissertation Proposal Structure

Introduction

A dissertation proposal is a critical first step in the research process for your MBA dissertation. It serves as a blueprint for your study, outlining what you intend to research, why it matters, and how you plan to carry it out. More than just a preliminary document, the proposal demonstrates your ability to define a clear research problem, engage with relevant literature, and design a feasible and academically sound methodology.

Crafting a strong proposal is essential not only for gaining approval to proceed with your dissertation but also for setting a solid foundation for the entire project. A well-developed proposal helps clarify your thinking, identify potential challenges early, and ensure your research remains focused and manageable. It also provides an opportunity to receive valuable feedback from your supervisor before committing to the full dissertation.

To do it right, choose a topic that aligns with your interests and career goals, and ensure it addresses a real-world issue or gap in the literature. Be realistic about your scope, time, and resources, and maintain academic integrity throughout. A recommended dissertation proposal structure is provided below to help you organise and develop your proposal effectively.

How to develop the dissertation proposal

To develop a good dissertation proposal, you are advised to:

1. Choose a focused, relevant topic

- Ensure the topic is relevant to your programme and pathway.
- Confirm that the topic has sufficient depth and allows you to make a meaningful contribution to the subject area.
- Choose a topic that genuinely interests you and aligns with your academic or career goals.
- Ensure the topic is specific enough to be manageable within the given timeframe and word count.
- Consider current trends, gaps in the literature, or real-world business problems.
- Check that the necessary resources (research papers, books, articles, etc.) are accessible—for example, not restricted by paywalls.
- Confirm that the data required for the topic is available and can be retrieved in a timely manner.
- Ensure that the data analysis techniques or tools required for the topic are accessible and suitable for your skills and project scope.

2. Develop clear research questions / hypotheses

- Your research questions / hypotheses should be concise, researchable, and aligned with your objectives.
- Avoid overly broad or vague questions / hypotheses—narrow it down to something you can explore in depth.
- Use your questions / hypotheses to guide the entire proposal, from literature review to methodology.

3. Conduct preliminary research

- Read widely to understand the existing body of knowledge and identify gaps.
- Take notes on key theories, models, and findings that relate to your topic.

- Use this research to justify the relevance and originality of your study.

4. Justify your methodology

- Choose a research method (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) that best suits your question.
- Explain how you will collect and analyse data, and why this approach is appropriate.
- Be realistic about access to data, time constraints, and ethical considerations.

5. Be honest about limitations

- Acknowledge any potential weaknesses in your study design or scope.
- Discuss how you plan to mitigate these limitations where possible.
- This shows critical thinking and strengthens your proposal's credibility.

6. Plan your timeline

- Break your project into phases (e.g., research, literature review, data collection, analysis, writing).
- Allocate time for each phase and build in flexibility for unexpected delays.
- A clear timeline demonstrates your ability to manage the project effectively.

7. Follow academic standards

- Use formal, objective language and avoid overly casual or personal tone.
- Reference all sources correctly using the required citation style.
- Proofread carefully to ensure clarity, coherence, and professionalism.

Dissertation proposal structure

A dissertation proposal usually comprises the following sections:

AI use Acknowledgement

1. Introduction
2. Literature review
3. Methodology
4. Expected findings
5. Limitations
6. Timeframe
7. Conclusion
8. References

Dissertation proposal structure clarification

AI use Acknowledgement

This is a formal statement affirming that clarify how you used AI in your work. Please use the provided acknowledgement form.

1. Introduction

This section provides an overview of your research topic and sets the stage for the entire project. It introduces the subject area, highlights the relevance of the research in a practical or academic context, and outlines the primary aims, objectives, and research questions or hypotheses. This section helps readers quickly understand what the dissertation is about and why it matters, forming the foundation for the proposal that follows.

When writing the introduction, begin with a clear and engaging opening that situates your topic in a real-world or theoretical context. Explain why the issue is significant—perhaps due to a gap in practice, an emerging trend, or a specific business challenge. Then, clearly state your research aims, objectives, and research questions or hypotheses. After that, briefly outline how you intend to explore them. Avoid going into detailed methodology or findings here; the goal is to orient the reader and spark interest in your study's purpose and direction.

2. Literature Review

This section critically examines existing research related to your topic. Its purpose is to demonstrate your understanding of the academic conversation surrounding your subject, identify gaps or unresolved issues, and show how your study will build on or challenge previous work. A strong literature review lays the theoretical foundation for your research questions and justifies the need for your investigation.

To develop this section, conduct a thorough search of academic journals, books, and credible sources.

When writing this section, start by clearly defining the scope of your review—what themes, theories, or frameworks you're focusing on—and explain why they are relevant. Organise the discussion thematically or chronologically, summarising key findings from credible sources and analysing their significance to your study. Be sure to highlight any controversies, limitations, or gaps in the literature that your research aims to address. Aim for a balanced tone that's analytical rather than merely descriptive and always cite your sources correctly.

3. Methodology

This section explains how you plan to carry out your research. It outlines the research approach, data collection methods, sampling strategy, and analysis techniques you will use to answer your research questions. This section demonstrates that your project is feasible and academically sound, showing evaluators that you've chosen methods appropriate for your aims and context.

When writing this section, begin by stating whether your research is qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods, and justify that choice based on your objectives. Clearly describe how you will gather data—such as through interviews, surveys, case studies, or secondary data analysis—and explain how participants or sources will be selected. Outline how you intend to analyse the data.

You should also address ethical considerations, such as informed consent and data confidentiality. A clear and well-justified methodology enhances the credibility of your research and demonstrates your ability to carry out the study effectively. Aim for clarity, coherence, and alignment with your research questions throughout.

4. Expected Findings

This section outlines what you anticipate discovering through your research. These are not confirmed results, but reasoned predictions based on your research questions, theoretical framework, and preliminary understanding of the topic. This section helps set expectations for what the study hopes to contribute—whether it's identifying patterns, validating a hypothesis, or offering insights into a particular business issue.

When writing this section, begin by restating your key research aim or question, then articulate what you expect to find and why. Be realistic—ground your expectations in existing literature or logical inference, not wishful thinking. You can also briefly note the potential implications of your findings, such as how they might inform practice or policy. Keep your tone confident but cautious, recognising that outcomes may differ once the research is complete.

5. Limitation

The limitations section of an MBA dissertation proposal outlines the potential weaknesses or constraints that may affect the research. These could include time restrictions, access to data, sample size limitations, or methodological challenges. Rather than undermining the project, acknowledging limitations demonstrates academic integrity and shows that the researcher has thoughtfully considered the scope and feasibility of the study. Being transparent about limitations helps set realistic expectations and strengthens the overall integrity of your proposal.

When writing this section, be concise and specific. Start by identifying any constraints you anticipate—such as limited access to participants, restricted availability of financial data, or potential biases in your research design. Then explain how these factors may affect your results or interpretations. It's important to strike a balanced tone: be transparent about what the study may not achieve but also clarify how you will mitigate these issues to maintain the study's relevance and credibility.

6. Timeframe

The timeframe section presents a realistic schedule for completing your dissertation. This is often displayed as a Gantt chart or a timeline, showing key milestones such as literature review completion, data collection, analysis, and writing.

Break down your project into manageable phases and allocate time for each task. This not only helps you stay organized but also demonstrates to your supervisor that you have a clear plan for managing your workload and meeting deadlines.

7. Conclusion

The Conclusion section of an MBA dissertation proposal provides a succinct summary of the key points you've covered and reinforces the significance of your proposed research. It helps tie together the rationale, aims, and approach, offering a final justification for why the study is worth undertaking. While brief, this section should clearly communicate the potential contribution of the research to academic or practical understanding.

When writing the conclusion, avoid introducing new content. Instead, briefly restate your research objectives, highlight the relevance of your topic, and express confidence in your chosen methodology. You can also mention any anticipated benefits or outcomes, such as how the study could inform decision-making or address real-world challenges. Aim to leave the reader with a clear sense of purpose and direction. A strong conclusion ties everything together and sets the stage for the next steps in your research journey.

8. References

The references section lists all the sources you cited in your proposal. It must follow the UWTSD Harvard style which can be found at [Cite Them Right](#).

Ensure that every source mentioned in the text, i.e., in-text citations, is included in the reference list and vice versa. Proper referencing not only gives credit to original authors but also strengthens the academic rigor of your proposal.