

How to Write a Research Proposal?

Most students and beginning researchers do not fully understand what a research proposal means, nor do they understand its importance. To put it bluntly, one's research is only as good as one's proposal. An ill-conceived proposal dooms the dissertation.

A research proposal is intended to convince others that you have a worthwhile research project and that you have the competence and the work-plan to complete it. Generally, a research proposal should contain all the key elements involved in the research process and include sufficient information for the readers to evaluate the proposed study.

Regardless of your research area and the methodology you choose, all research proposals must address the following questions:

1. What you plan to accomplish?
2. Why you want to do it?
3. How you are going to do it?

The proposal should have sufficient information to convince your marker that you have an important research idea, that you have a good grasp of the relevant literature and the major issues, and that your methodology is sound.

The quality of your research proposal depends not only on the quality of your proposed dissertation, but also on the quality of your proposal writing. A good research project may run the risk of rejection simply because the proposal is poorly written. Therefore, it pays if your writing is coherent, clear and compelling.

The following offers a framework for preparing your Dissertation Research proposal, and for discussion with your supervisor. Write in the spaces shown.

Title

In your research proposal, have you provided evidence that you have thought about the area you wish to investigate? The title and topic area should be relevant to your MBA. The topic should be something that interests you, since you will have to concentrate on it for many weeks. You must choose a subject on which you can easily acquire primary information (documents, interviews, questionnaires, etc.) and for which there is a body of academic literature to investigate and synthesise when identifying research questions. It should be concise and descriptive. For example, the phrase, "An investigation of . . ." could be omitted. Often titles are stated in terms of a functional relationship, because such titles clearly indicate the independent and dependent variables. However, if possible, think of an informative but catchy title. An effective title not only pricks the reader's interest, but also predisposes him/her favourably towards the proposal.

Title

Creating worlds for film using traditional and modern methods

Key Questions

Have you thought in depth about the key research question you will address? It is important that you have gone further than just picking a generic topic area to be researched, and that you have decided which aspect of the topic you might investigate in detail. It is important to try to make this process as specific as possible. Narrow questions are easier to investigate successfully; a broad topic may evoke so many conflicting issues that giving an adequate amount of attention to all of them in the time available might be impossible. However, please note that too narrow a topic may mean that the Dissertation will lack empirical breadth or analytical depth.

What is the main aim of your research?
Write one or two sentences that summarise the overall objective of your Dissertation



To find out if it is possible for a student to create a set with little to no budget that can lead to starting my own business.

Identify the research questions that flow from this main research aim. You need to ask yourself if you can find answers easily to them. Can you get access to information that can lead to possibly answering the questions raised. If the answer is 'no', then you need to identify questions where more information is available. This is a small scale research project and you should come up with suitable questions.

Question 1

can quality worlds be built on a low budget
using traditional methods?

Question 2

what would it take to showcase my skills and
turn this into a business?

Question 3

Are traditional methods of making better than
modern methods?

Background

What is the background to your interest in this topic area and in pursuing this research area ? Summarise briefly the reasons why this topic is likely to be of interest to the business community and also why it is of interest to you.

The main purpose of the introduction is to provide the necessary background or context for your research problem. How to frame the research problem is perhaps the biggest problem in proposal writing.

If the research problem is framed in the context of a general, rambling literature review, then the research question may appear trivial and uninteresting. However, if the same question is placed in the context of a very focused and current research area, its significance will become evident.

Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast rules on how to frame your research question just as there is no prescription on how to write an interesting and informative opening paragraph. A lot depends on your creativity, your ability to think clearly and the depth of your understanding of problem areas.

Some considerations:

1. Try to place your research question in the context of either a vogue area, or an older area that remains viable.
2. Brief but appropriate historical backdrop.
3. The contemporary context in which your proposed research question occupies the central stage.
4. Identify "key players" and refer to the most relevant and representative publications.
5. In short, try to paint your research question in broad brushes and at the same time bring out its significance.

The introduction typically begins with a general statement of the problem area, with a focus on a specific research problem, to be followed by the rationale or justification for the proposed study. The introduction generally covers the following elements:

1. State the research problem, which is often referred to as the purpose of the study.
2. Provide the context and set the stage for your research question in such a way as to show its necessity and importance.
3. Present the rationale of your proposed study and clearly indicate why it is worth doing.
 - I. Has the study been done before?
 - II. Will the study benefit patients advance understanding or influence policy?
4. Briefly describe the major issues and sub-problems to be addressed by your research.
5. Identify the key independent and dependent variables of your experiment. Alternatively, specify the phenomenon you want to study.
6. State your hypothesis, theory, (Please do not confuse the hypothesis with the statistical null hypothesis.)
7. Set the boundaries of your proposed research in order to provide a clear focus.
8. Provide definitions of key concepts. (Wong, 2005) (Calgary University, 2004)

Background

I have a big interest in film, construction and making as well as have a desire to start my own business. I know a fair bit about film, construction and making but need to expand on that knowledge. Business would be something I need to learn about from the beginning though.

Literature Review

In this section of the research proposal, you need to outline what previous research has been done on the topic and how it has guided or informed your research. You also need to include a theoretical framework that relates to the research area you are looking at.

The literature review serves several important functions:

1. Gives credits to those who have laid the groundwork for your research.
2. Demonstrates your knowledge of the research problem.
3. Demonstrates your understanding of the theoretical and research issues related to your research question and their relative significance.
4. Shows your ability to critically evaluate relevant literature information.
5. Indicates your ability to integrate and synthesise the existing literature.
6. Provides new theoretical insights or develops a new model as the conceptual framework for your research.
7. Convinces your reader that your proposed research will make a contribution to the literature.

Most students' literature reviews suffer from the following problems:

- Lacking organization and structure
- Lacking focus, unity and coherence
- Being repetitive and verbose
- Failing to cite influential papers
- Failing to keep up with recent developments
- Failing to critically evaluate cited papers
- Citing irrelevant or trivial references
- Depending too much on secondary sources
- Writing an essay

Your scholarship and research competence will be questioned if any of the above applies to your proposal.

There are different ways to organize your literature review. Make use of subheadings to bring order and coherence to your review. For example, having established the importance of your research area and its current state of development, you may devote several subsections on related issues as: *theoretical models*, *measuring instruments*, *etc.*

Notes

What previous research has already been done on this topic?	I looked at film methods using model making.
Who did it, when and perhaps why?	George Lucas used model making to create Star Wars as it saved on budget.
What conclusions did previous researchers reach?	This was a good method for doing this although new methods can be more cost effective using new technologies.
How relevant are these conclusions today generally and for your own research?	I don't want to use too many modern methods as I feel traditional craft skills will be lost.
How will your research build on previous research? How is it similar or different?	I will focus more on traditional.
What theories, models or practices are particularly relevant to prepare or analyse your research topic and findings?	I'm not sure on this.
How has previous research influenced your own intended	It has opened my eyes to different methods I never thought about.

Methodology

In the research proposal, you will not go further than the Methodology section. You need to discuss the methods you intend to adopt to gather information in pursuit of answers to your research questions. Note down brief answers to the following questions:

- Where and how will you gather any secondary data? Is it easily available?
- Where, how and when will you gather primary data, if applicable? Remember it may be difficult to collect primary data !!

Secondary data

Books and video

Primary data

I will attempt to contact those that do this as a job

Research

You will also need to think about the overall theoretical nature of your research. This material will be presented and discussed in your Research Methods module. You will also need to consider research approaches including:

- Quantitative/Qualitative
- Applied/Basic
- Deductive/Inductive

This material will also be covered in the Research Methods module.

In the box below, summarise your overall research approach including type of research and research approach.

I plan to look at all methods of construction and making including modern methods as well as how these can be showcased for a portfolio to showcase as a business. I will also work out what is the most cost effective methods and the best quality look for the lack of budget.

Results

Obviously you do not have results at the proposal stage. However, you need to have some idea about what kind of data you will be collecting, and what statistical procedures will be used in order to answer your research question or test your hypothesis.

Evaluation

It is important to convince your reader of the potential impact of your proposed research. You need to communicate a sense of enthusiasm and confidence without exaggerating the merits of your proposal. That is why you also need to mention the limitations and weaknesses of the proposed research, which may be justified by time and financial constraints as well as by the early developmental stage of your research area (Wong, 2005).

Time scale

You also need to think about the time scale for the Dissertation. When you are thinking about the data collection stage, allow ample time for time, as if you are trying to arrange interviews or to collect data from questionnaires, it can take longer than you think to organise.

References

Have you fully and clearly identified the major references? These should be listed using the Harvard System.

Some of the assessment considerations

Overall Quality of the Study

1. Good research question
2. Appropriate research design
3. Rigorous and feasible methods

Quality of the Proposal

1. Informative title
2. Self-sufficient and convincing abstract
3. Clear research questions
4. Scholarly background and rationale
5. Relevant previous work
6. Appropriate population and sample
7. Appropriate measurement and methods
8. Sound analysis plan
9. Ethical issues well addressed
10. Realistic timetable

Quality of the Presentation

1. Clear, concise, well-organized
2. Helpful table of contents and subheadings
3. Good schematic diagrams and tables
4. Limited typographical errors

(Adapted by C.House & Calgary from Hulley & Cummings, 2005)