

RESEARCH PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this document is to give dissertation students practical guidance about their thesis proposal. In addition to some general comments, the actual structure that should be followed in presenting the proposal is also outlined.

The research proposal can serve many useful functions. The most important is that it helps the student to think out the research project he/she is about to undertake and predict any difficulties that might arise.

For those who are not quite sure what their focus will be, the research proposal can be a space to explore options. Research proposals can be effective starting places to discuss projects with supervisors, too. A supervisor who is initially sceptical about a project may be able to imagine it more easily after reading a well written research proposal.

Your research proposal should answer the following questions:

- What? This includes problem statement, research question, research objectives and key definitions.
- Why? The justification and objectives of the research.
- How? Indications of the type of methodology and data the research will use.
- Whom? Who will benefit from this research, which audience is it aimed at?

In preparing your thesis proposal, please be aware of the following points:

- Reading: in order to write the proposal you are expected to have read at least two or three articles relevant to your topic (to be included in the Bibliography).
- Writing: in writing the proposal (and the thesis) you should make an effort to adopt a style similar to that found in the academic articles you have read.
- Length of proposal: Up to six pages (one and a half spacing).

2. STRUCTURE OF THE PROPOSAL

(1) Title

Give your project a working title, which may or may not become the title of the thesis

(2) Background and overview

Explain your interest or any previous work you have done on the topic. Also, describe any reading or any personal experience that has led you to want to research on the topic. You should also include

a short statement explaining the benefits which you think will be derived from the research you are proposing.

(3) Problem Definition

From the wider background, you have just described you should select a management problem and explain it clearly.

(4) Research Question

Your management problem must be converted into a research question, e.g. the relationship between pricing and certain customer segments or the relationship between IT outsourcing and staff morale

(5) Research Methodology

Discuss the kinds of sources you hope to consult and the methods you will be using to extract and process the information you will be gathering in as much detail as is possible at this stage. As the project is underway you might find the need to revise your methodology. You must explain how you will be collecting the data you need in order to address your research question. If you are conducting questionnaires or interviews you should explain what sample you will be using (size, criteria, method) and also how you will be approaching the people in your sample. You should also give an indication as to whether you will be testing hypotheses quantitatively or using qualitative methods, such as interviews or semi-structured questionnaires.

(6) Problems and Limitations

Describe the problems you expect to encounter and how you hope to solve them. For example, texts might be unavailable, people you hope to interview might be unwilling to participate, you might not have enough time, etc. Try to imagine every possible problem so that you have contingency plans and the project does not become derailed.

(7) Bibliography

List the books and articles that you have already consulted. It is important to keep full bibliographic records of the books and articles that you use and quote in your text, so that when the time comes for writing up you do not waste valuable time looking for such information.

(8) Timetable

Summary of Research Methodologies

Area of Research:

Legend

✓	Appealing
×	Unappealing
–	No Opinion
?	Possibility

Choosing Your Research/Topic: What type of cook (researcher) are you?

Relation to Topic	Research Method	Brief Overview
1	Action Research	Action learning and collaboration
2	Appreciative Inquiry	Action research that leads to developmental changes
3	Case Study Research	Observation and analysis to determine patterns
4	Casual Comparative Research	The use of variables to determine outcomes
5	Content Analysis	Quantifies and analyzes data and make inferences
6	Correlational Research	Collects data to determine relationships between two or more quantifiable variables
7	Critical Incident Technique (CIT)	Studies focus on human behavior and quantifying it
8	Delphi Research	Using data/findings to predict future problems and foresee solutions
9	Descriptive Research	Utilizes elements of qualitative and quantitative research to gather data for correlational, developmental, and observation studies
10	Design-Based Research or Decision Analysis	Links process to outcomes
11	Ethnographic	Investigation of cultural norms, beliefs, patterns, and social structures
12	Evaluation Research	Determines effectiveness of current programs and evaluate different areas such as outcomes, costs, etc.
13	Experimental Research	Variables are manipulated and results are analyzed
14	Factor Analysis	Uses a statistical approach to analyze interrelationships
15	Grounded Theory	Uses theory to explain a process or action to discover the implicit in data

16	Hermeneutic Research	Activities and things are studied for what they mean
17	Historical Research	Utilizes elements of qualitative and quantitative data to show meanings and significance of activities, etc.
18	Meta-Analysis Research	Data are collected from several sources to find patterns that will guide future decisions or actions
19	Narrative Research	Data is collected through stories that reports on individual experiences
20	Needs Assessment	Systematic process of asking questions and comparing answers for developing new programs, etc.
21	Phenomenography	Empirical research designed to answer questions about thinking and learning
22	Phenomenology	Qualitative research based on lived experiences
23	Quasi-experimental	Involves manipulation of one or more independent variables
24	Q-Method	Systematic study of subjectivity
25	Regression Discontinuity Design (RD)	Determines effectiveness of current program or treatment
26	Retrospective Record Review	Data is collected to compare two similar groups
27	Semiology	Research focuses on the meaning of symbols that models after human thoughts and actions
28	Situational Analysis	Postmodern approach to grounded theory that seeks to reveal complex connections
29	Trend Analysis Research	Research focus is on prediction and forecast of future direction or trends
30	True Experimental Research	Research situation isolates variable of interests and controls

Note: Column two is unique to the researcher. ✓, x, - ?