

Research Proposal

An Introduction to Academic Research Writing

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*"Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought."
- Albert Szent-Györgyi, Nobel Prize Laureate*

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Why Research Matters

Perspectives from leading scholars

1

"Research is creating new knowledge."

— Neil Armstrong

Astronaut & Engineer

2

"The great tragedy of science — the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact."

— T.H. Huxley

Biologist

3

"Research is formalised curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose."

— Zora Neale Hurston

Author & Anthropologist

4

"No research without action, no action without research."

— Kurt Lewin

Social Psychologist, Pioneer of Action Research

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The Importance of Research

Why conducting rigorous research is essential for academic and societal progress

01 Advances Knowledge

Research builds the body of human knowledge and challenges existing assumptions

02 Informs Practice

Evidence-based practice in healthcare, education and policy depends on quality research

03 Solves Problems

Research provides systematic methods to identify, analyse and resolve real-world problems

04 Drives Innovation

Scientific and social breakthroughs emerge from rigorous inquiry and creative thinking

05 Critical Thinking

Trains scholars to question, evaluate and interpret evidence with intellectual rigour

06 Career Development

Demonstrates higher-order thinking skills essential for postgraduate and professional growth

"The purpose of research is not to find answers; it is to ask better questions. — Margaret Mead, Anthropologist"

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What is a Research Proposal?

A research proposal is a structured, formal document that explains:

WHAT you plan to research (topic) | **WHY** it is worth researching (justification) | **HOW** you will investigate it (methodology)

Topic

What specific problem, gap or phenomenon will your research investigate?

Justification

Why does this matter? What value does it add to knowledge or society?

Methodology

Which methods, tools and approaches will you use to find answers?

"The research proposal is, in essence, an argument for your own work. - Wayne Booth, The Craft of Research (2016)"

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Components of a Good Research Proposal

01

Concise Summary

A coherent overview of what you aim to do, why, and how - in clear, direct academic language

02

Core Research Questions

Sets out the central issues or questions your research addresses - focused and researchable

03

Literature Context

Discusses current state of knowledge and ongoing academic debates in your subject area

04

Originality & Contribution

Demonstrates what is new, distinctive or significant about your proposed research

"A good proposal is not just a plan — it is a demonstration of your intellectual capacity. - Creswell, J.W. (2014) Research Design"

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Structure of a Research Proposal

The correct sequential order of sections

1

Title

2

Abstract

3

Table of Contents

4

Background & Introduction

5

Aims & Objectives

6

Research Question

7

Literature Review

8

Research Methodology

9

Time Scales

10

References

11

Appendices

"Structure is not a constraint on thinking — it is the framework that makes thinking visible. — Punch, K.F. (2016) Developing Effective Research Proposals"

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Selecting a Research Topic

1

Personal Interest

Choose a subject you are genuinely curious about - sustained motivation is essential for long-term research

2

Future Career Plans

Align your topic with professional goals - research in your field adds real career value

3

Gap in Literature

Identify what has NOT been studied, or where existing research is limited or contradictory

4

Working Title

Craft a focused, descriptive working title that signals the scope and direction of your study

"If we knew what we were doing, it would not be called research, would it? - Albert Einstein"

Key Stages in Planning a Research Proposal

1

Focus

Identify your precise research focus - be specific and avoid broad generalisations

2

Critical Reading

Engage with the literature; demonstrate critical thinking throughout your writing

3

Support

Build convincing, evidence-based arguments supported by scholarly sources

4

Methodology

Demonstrate sound understanding of appropriate research methods for your topic

"Research is a systematic inquiry that is designed to inform practice. — Kathleen Collins (2010)"

Writing the Introduction

What your introduction must achieve

1

Overview of Topic

Introduce the broad subject area and establish the academic context for your research

2

Research Focus

State clearly what your research is looking at specifically - narrow from general to specific

3

Significance

Explain why the research is important and what gap in knowledge it addresses

4

Aims & Objectives

Set out the aims (broad goals) and objectives (specific measurable steps) of your study

5

Research Questions

State the precise question(s) your research will answer - clear, focused, and researchable

"A well-crafted introduction not only informs but also persuades funders and readers to support your research. — Ridley, D. (2012) The Literature Review"

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The Literature Review

Introduction

- Define your topic and provide context
- State your point of view for the review
- Explain the sequence of the review
- State the scope — what is and is not included

Main Body

- Organise literature around common themes
- Link your topic to the wider subject area
- Move from broad to specific focus
- Demonstrate critical engagement with sources

Conclusion

- Summarise key aspects of existing literature
- Evaluate current state of knowledge
- Identify significant gaps and flaws
- Link your research to existing knowledge

"A literature review is not just a summary — it is a critical analysis that positions your research in the field. — Boote & Beile (2005) American Educational Research Journal"

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Scholar Perspectives: Literature Reviews

1

"Scholars who are able to review the literature, synthesise it and use it to frame their study are better researchers."

— Creswell, J.W.

Research Design (2014), p.24

2

"Researchers who have mastered the existing literature can more clearly identify the gaps their work will fill."

— Hart, C.

Doing a Literature Review (1998)

3

"The quality of the literature review reflects the quality of the researcher's scholarship."

— Boote & Beile

American Educational Research Journal (2005)

4

"Reading without reflecting is like eating without digesting."

— Edmund Burke

Philosopher & Statesman

Methodology

Qualitative

Understanding meaning & experience

- Interviews & focus groups
- Case studies
- Observations & ethnography
- Thematic & content analysis
- Grounded theory

Quantitative

Measuring & testing hypotheses

- Surveys & questionnaires
- Controlled experiments
- Statistical analysis
- Structured observation
- Secondary data analysis

Pro Tip: Your methodology must align with and be justified by your research question. — Braun & Clarke (2013)

Ethical Considerations

Upholding integrity in your research

Ethics Form

Complete the institutional ethics form before any data collection or research activity begins

Harm Avoidance

Ensure your research causes no harm to people, animals, organisations or the institution

Data Protection (GDPR)

Protect all personal data collected; always comply fully with GDPR regulations

AI Use Declaration

Declare any use of Artificial Intelligence tools - including ChatGPT - transparently

Anti-Plagiarism

All submitted work must be original; cite all sources using Harvard referencing only

Data Confidentiality

Protect participant identity; maintain confidentiality of all sensitive data collected

"A proposal without ethical consideration is not research — it is a risk. — BERA (2018) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 4th Ed."

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Famous Research Quotes

Wisdom from prominent researchers and scholars

"The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance — it is the illusion of knowledge."

— **Daniel J. Boorstin**

Historian & Librarian of Congress

"An experiment is a question which science poses to nature, and a measurement is the recording of nature's answer."

— **Max Planck**

Nobel Prize-winning Physicist

"Research means that you don't know, but are willing to find out."

— **Charles F. Kettering**

Inventor & Engineer

"I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious."

— **Albert Einstein**

Theoretical Physicist, Nobel Laureate

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References & Harvard Referencing

References are mandatory — they demonstrate credibility, scholarly depth and that your work meets Level 5 academic standards. Always use **Harvard referencing (UWTSD Guidelines)**.

Credibility

Shows your arguments are grounded in reputable, peer-reviewed scholarly sources

Integrity

Proper citation protects against plagiarism and upholds academic honesty

Dialogue

Positions your research within the wider academic conversation in your field

Evidence

Demonstrates you have read widely and from authoritative, credible sources

Harvard Format Example:

Creswell, J.W. (2014) Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches. 4th ed. London: SAGE.

"There is no such thing as a failed experiment, only experiments with unexpected outcomes. — R. Buckminster Fuller"

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Language, Grammar & Academic Writing

Getting your tone and style right

What?

State exactly what you are investigating

Why?

Justify the importance of the research

When?

Provide clear timescales for each stage

How?

Explain your methods and approach

Whom?

Identify your participants or audience

Academic Writing Tips:

- Use assertive language - prefer 'will' over 'might'
- Use future tense for planned work, past tense for reviewed literature
- Maintain formal academic tone - avoid colloquial expressions
- Proofread carefully for punctuation and grammatical accuracy

"Good academic writing is about clarity, precision and argumentation. — Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb & Joseph Williams, The Craft of Research (2016)"

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Key References & Scholar Insights

"The research proposal is a form of strategic writing — precision matters."

— **Creswell, J.W. (2014)**

Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative & Mixed Methods, 4th Ed.

"Doing literature reviews well is critical for establishing the credibility of your research."

— **Boote & Beile (2005)**

Scholars Before Researchers, American Educational Research Journal

"Your methodology is a statement of your epistemological and ontological position."

— **Braun & Clarke (2013)**

Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide

"A proposal without ethical consideration is not research — it is a risk."

— **BERA (2018)**

Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 4th Edition

Thank You

Any Questions or Feedback?

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Key Resources:

Creswell (2014) Research Design | BERA Ethical Guidelines (2018)

UWTSD Harvard Referencing Guide | Boote & Beile (2005) Literature Reviews

Hart (1998) Doing a Literature Review | Punch (2016) Effective Research Proposals

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