

11

Writing your research proposal

CHAPTER CONCEPTS

- WHAT IS A RESEARCH PROPOSAL? • WHAT ARE THE FORMAL REASONS FOR WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL? • THE ELEMENTS OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL • HOW LONG SHOULD A PROPOSAL BE? • DIFFERENT TYPES OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL • THE VOICE OF YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL • CRAFTING YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL • THE TITLE
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The development and writing of a proposal is an essential part of all research. Research supervisors and research committees, along with research funding bodies, often insist that before you begin your research you develop, over a short period of time, a proposal for your research. Often this developmental period consists of you examining ideas for research, analysing possibilities and drafting a research proposal. An important part of this stage is consulting with and taking advice from your supervisor. Remember that your supervisor will have more experience than you with research and will therefore be able to guide you, in ways which will save you time and effort, to a workable topic for research. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to look at the following questions about research proposals:

- 1 What is a research proposal and why is it necessary?
- 2 What does a research proposal look like?

- 3 What are the contents of a proposal and how should they be arranged?
- 4 How is a research proposal normally judged?

Your research proposal will be based on your suggested design for your research (Chapter 10). Your research design will have been based on defining your topic, stating the research questions (Chapter 3), a search and review of the literature (Chapter 6), selection of an appropriate methodological approach (Chapters 7 and 8), identification of the possible ethical issues (Chapter 9) and selection of tools to collect, and techniques to analyse, your data (Chapter 10).

What is a research proposal?

A proposal is a *plan* that you have chosen to follow in order to achieve your intended outcomes – the completion of your research. A proposal is like a map that will help you navigate your journey along the research process. It will:

- ♦ give directions on what needs to be done, when and how and in what order;
- ♦ show you what transport is best suited for your research journey in terms of which methodological assumptions to use and which data collection techniques will be reliable; and
- ♦ provide milestones for measuring how far you have gone with your research and how far you have to go to complete it.

Your research proposal is therefore a working document that shows to others what decisions you have made about:

- ♦ defining your topic to limit its scope (definitional analysis);
- ♦ what methodological assumptions you intend to use and those you have rejected (argumentation analysis and argument construction);
- ♦ what approaches to research you intend to employ and those you will not (methodological analysis);
- ♦ your choice of data collection techniques and how they will result in reliable and valid findings (instrument analysis);

- ♦ the existence of the data and its accessibility (source analysis); and
- ♦ potential problems and ethical issues (risk analysis).

Your proposal will have argumentative and persuasive elements because you are required to demonstrate that you can analyse a topic (topic analysis) and argue for the need to study that topic (justification) in the ways you have suggested (methodological assumptions and approaches). At this stage in your research this argument is largely based on an *indicative* analysis of the literature (current research and theory) on your topic. In Chapter 6 I showed you how to do a search and review of the literature.

WHAT ARE THE FORMAL REASONS FOR WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL?

There are a number of very good practical, personal and intellectual reasons for writing a proposal for your research. Your research proposal will help you to:

- ♦ *explain* to your supervisor and research committee what you intend to research, why you believe the research needs to be done and how you intend to research the topic (research design);
- ♦ *demonstrate* to your supervisor that you have developed the necessary skills of literature analysis and argumentative analysis to analyse a topic and find a gap in our knowledge requiring research (skills and capabilities);
- ♦ *construct a plan* for your research that will enable you to *imagine* the process as a logically interconnected series of tasks which are based on reliable and valid research techniques, recording of activities and analysis; and
- ♦ *understand* the importance of ethics and risk analysis and provide a justifiable, workable position and contingency plans.

Your research proposal should reflect the thought and analysis you have done to pose questions capable of being answered by the research you are proposing, in the ways you have identified. As a map it is your guide, and

The what, why, how, when, where and who of a research proposal:

What	you intend to research
Why	the research is needed
How	the research will be done
When	the research will be done
What	resources are needed
Who	you will talk to
Where	the data is
How	to access the data
How	the data will be analysed
What	the outcomes may be

as the reader and creator of this map you are responsible for its implementation. This means using it properly in ways which do not compromise your integrity and honesty. It also means adapting it to accommodate the circumstances and opportunities you encounter on your research journey. Like all maps there is a certain amount of latitude for changes in the route; alternative ways of reaching a destination, even for changes in the destination itself. All research proposals are open to change, change that is often demanded by the realities of everyday life. Any change must, however, be thought about and the opportunities weighed against what will be lost and, importantly, must be justified not only in terms of your personal objective but of the ethical standards expected of a professional researcher. Hence we can say that a research proposal is a document that explains to others and yourself what you intend to research, how, why and when you will research it, and what you will do if something goes wrong.

THE ELEMENTS OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

All research proposals demand time to ensure that they exhibit a coherent, integrated and structurally sound argument to answer fully the 'what', 'why', 'how' and 'when' questions. My approach to the research proposal is one of construction through reflection, analysis and discussion with others. This approach involves looking to identify what elements are required, working on them, arranging them and then integrating their contents to ensure the whole has coherence. Figure 11.1 indicates the main elements of a typical research proposal. It attempts to show the interrelatedness of the elements and the ways in which you should aim to link the contents to achieve integration and coherence.

Achieving coherence in any kind of writing is no small achievement. A research proposal is constructed incrementally and is a process of collecting materials, drafting, writing, editing and rearranging. This in part explains why this chapter is where it is in this book; you need to know about research and methodology and have done some analysis, thinking and reflection before you begin your proposal. You may note that there are some elements not shown in Figure 11.1, such as ethics, risk analysis, a timetable and resources. This is because I want to get across the relationships between the elements shown in terms of the justification and title. You may want to add boxes on ethics, risks and a timetable for yourself to see what kinds of relationships they have with the others. In the sections which follow we will look at these, providing examples from research proposals. Before we do, however, something needs to be said about the common questions often asked about research proposals.

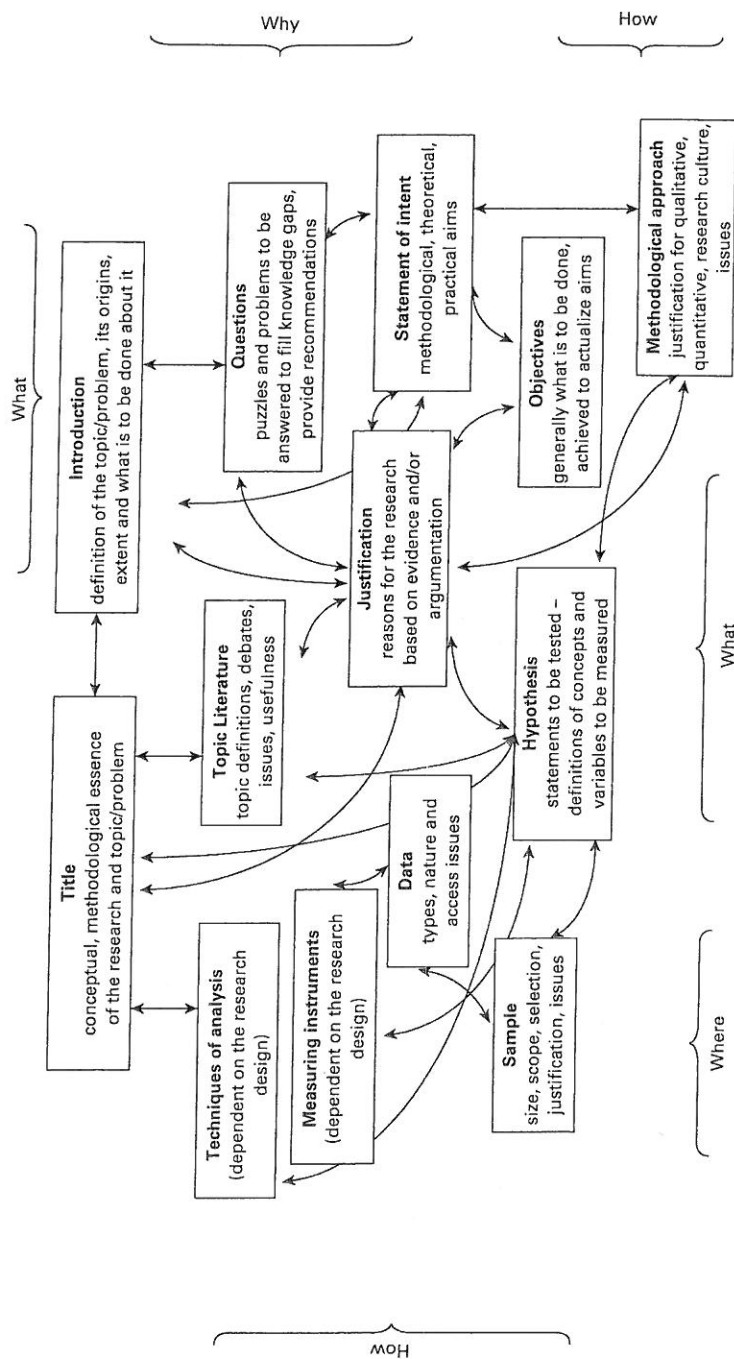


FIGURE 11.1 THE INTERRELATED ELEMENTS OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

TABLE 11.1 INDICATION OF LENGTH FOR A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Criteria	Length
Introduction	1 page
Aims and objectives	Half page
Topic justification	1–2 pages
Scope and limitations	Half page
Literature review and citations	3–6 pages
Methodology and data collection	2–4 pages
Ethical considerations	1–2 pages
Risk analysis	1–2 pages
Schedule	Half page
Resources	Half page
References	As required

HOW LONG SHOULD A PROPOSAL BE?

The question of how long your proposal should be depends on the requirements of your university. Table 11.1 provides an indication of how much in page space using 12-point type and single-line spacing can normally be expected from a research proposal. As you can see from the table, and from some of the extracts included in this chapter, you have very little space to communicate clearly, coherently and succinctly the pre-research and analysis you have been doing for two or more months.

Table 11.1 presupposes, for the sake of clarity, a typical structure for a proposal. The thing to notice is that the contents should be as brief as possible, without the loss of meaning.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Although I have said that the research proposal you write will depend on your topic and the conventions for your university, there are some working structures you can

those being researched. Similarly, it can be useful to include an indicative outline of your dissertation if doing quantitative research. Whatever final structure and content you decide on, however, must be a coherent expression of your overall research design.

THE VOICE OF YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

As you work on your research proposal, writing and editing it (often adding more text than you take out!), you may find that you and your research become 'one'. What I mean by this is that you begin to see how to do the work. There is a certain pleasure and excitement in being able to see what you can achieve and this gives you ownership of your research, often in ways which become, for the time being, a means of defining yourself – a *masters* research student. You become a part of the picture that you have drawn, that is, of your research proposal; you too are in the frame. The voice you give to this position and relationship may become a problem. As a piece of writing crafted by you, do you write in the third person, divorcing yourself from the very thing you are creating, using such phrases as 'the researcher', or do you use 'I will'? The choice is not, in practice, an either/or. Using the first person, especially 'I will', can be repetitive and uses up valuable space. Using the third person often adds a sense of the ridiculous and certainly does not make a proposal 'scientific'. The problem is often caused by explaining where your research topic originated in the past tense, and combining this with saying what you intend to do in the future tense. When explaining the origins of your topic, especially if it is based on a personal observation, then some use of the first person is, I suggest, legitimate. There are many famous examples of this, but one of the most famous is that given by Albert Einstein on how he thought up a theory that changed the world. Einstein did not develop his theory of general relativity by careful observation, experimentation or testing of hypotheses, but while lying back on a hill on a summer's day. Looking up at the sky with half-closed eyes, he noticed that the sunlight broke into thousands of tiny beams through his eyelashes. He wondered what it would be like to take a ride on one of those sunbeams and imagined himself taking a journey, at the speed of light, through the universe. Of course, you cannot travel on a sunbeam at the speed of light, but his imaginary journey was one of his starting points for the mathematics he subsequently worked out to describe the physics of light and time. Einstein could do little other, if he wished to tell the truth, than say, 'I imagined ...', to explain the origins of his theories. In other sections of your proposal a neutral tense can be employed. Here is an example to illustrate this:

Popular romantic novels may not be literary fiction but those who dismiss them often do not recognize that there is more to them than a love plot and happy ending. Jay Dixon (ex-employee of Mills and Boon) argues that popular romance 'come out of the oral storytelling tradition rather than the tradition of the written word ... literary style is irrelevant ... this kind of writing is, for the most part, intuitive'. (Smullen, 1999)

The voice here is relatively neutral and is being used to imply the nature of the argument for the research. The same kind of voice can be used in the title to give a strong indication of any argument or methodological position. Figure 11.2, for example, indicates a possible bias against popular romantic fiction by public librarians, yet has a sense of research to find out, even test, if the statement in the title has any validity:

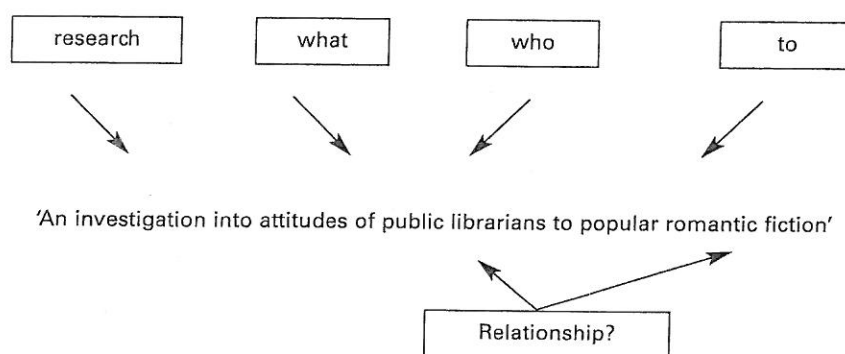


FIGURE 11.2 PUBLIC LIBRARIANS' POSSIBLE BIAS AGAINST ROMANTIC FICTION

It is a matter of using a little common sense to achieve an appropriate balance between sounding ridiculous and sounding egotistical. Words and phrases to avoid therefore include 'I hope to ...', 'the research ...', 'in my opinion', and 'I wish to ...'.

Crafting your research proposal

Some university research committees hold to the belief that a research proposal ought to follow a definitive structure explaining a methodology based on hypothesis testing and written in the third person. The only reasons I can give for this imposition is the belief that a certain structure, methodology and style is equated with 'science'. Such beliefs may be traced to the academic research socialization of members of research committees, but such

an imposition is a *belief* and, from my own experience, can exhibit all the restraints and closing down of critical and creative thought of a fundamentalist religion. If you intend to use a methodological approach that is not common to a department, be prepared for resistance. Hybrid approaches, adding some qualitative elements to a predominantly quantitative approach, are usually accepted but again, from my experience, there are serious gaps in knowledge among the social science community of the spectrum of methodological debate and positions; the emphasis is still, in some institutions and disciplines, on maintaining a belief in the methodology of positivism, especially hypothetico-deductivism and its variants. This often manifests itself in simplistic renditions of the objective/subjective, quantitative/qualitative dichotomies and criticism of proposals which do not adhere to the formula. If these comments are taken as criticism, it may also be taken that there is something to criticize. In this section I will outline typical arrangements for two kinds of research proposal, but I want to make it clear that, whatever arrangement you decide on, it should be appropriate for your topic and research methodology. It is your research and your research proposal and therefore your responsibility to craft it and defend it against preconceived notions. For these reasons I emphasize that a research proposal is crafted, rather than written to a formula. In what follows, some of the key sections, not covered elsewhere in this book, have been selected for further explication.

THE TITLE

From the title 'An investigation into attitudes of public librarians to popular romantic fiction' we can tell 'what kind' of librarians and 'what kind' of fiction. The title might also have an added sub-title to say from what country and possibly region the librarians would be selected – for example, 'A questionnaire survey of West Midlands branch librarians'. This says there will be a questionnaire survey, presumably postal, of public librarians working in branch as opposed to central libraries. The reasons, it will be expected, will be found in the main body of the proposal. The aim is to arrive at a title that describes what your research is about in the fewest words possible. To some degree your title is a 'working one'; one that at this stage in your research works to describe what you are intending to do. Whatever title for your research you start out with may, of course, change by the time you finish your research and have written it up into your dissertation. It may be the case that any change in title has to be approved by your supervisor or research committee.

THE INTRODUCTION

All research proposals should start with a short introduction giving the proposed topic for research. This may seem obvious, but so many sections labelled 'introduction'

TABLE 11.3 INTRODUCTION TO A RESEARCH PROPOSAL
FOR A TRADITIONAL DISSERTATION

Introduction	Comments
Women's magazines have been traditionally regarded as ideological ephemera which have little or no information content (1). Magazines aimed at women have been published for over 300 years and approximately 7.4 million women's magazines are sold each week, with about 150 different titles available each month. It is not surprising that they are one of the most significant yet least studied social institutions of our time (2). An indicative search of the literature seems to confirm that the informational role of women's magazines is almost wholly ignored and this is despite titles such as <i>Cosmopolitan</i> (3) and <i>Red</i> being aimed at working women. It could be proposed that women's magazines post-feminist movement (4) would be less ideological and more informational. This research will, therefore, aim to examine the proposition that women's magazines are devoid of <i>verifiable</i> information content and examine, through a sample-based comparison, the assumption that women's magazines prior to the late 1960s were more ideological than are current titles.	The summary of the gap in the literature is not always possible at the beginning. The topic 'information' is implicit at this stage. The scale of the phenomenon is shown through basic statistics. The Vancouver system of numerical citing of ideas and sources is used. Lack of understanding of the phenomenon is stated again and backed by reference to the literature search. The assumption that there would be differences between pre- and post-feminist movement magazines is introduced as a framework for comparison and as an assumption to be investigated. What is meant by 'information' and 'verifiable' will need clarification. The final sentence states that this is historical comparative research. Note that we are being asked to consider looking at something familiar in a new way.

Source: Adapted from Oliver, 1998 ('Health information in women's magazines').

often fail to do just this. An introduction should be a broad overview of your main argument, hypothesis (if you have one) or problem, and show, establish or define the problem, give examples of it and its extent, say what solutions were tried and why they failed, and indicate what research might be done and how. In Table 11.3 you can see an introduction to a traditional dissertation based on the analysis of information content in popular women's magazines.

The arrangement you use for your introduction is a matter for you to decide but, as we have just indicated, it needs to have a logical sequence. One way of determining an appropriate sequence is to think about and decide on what kind of problem you are researching. Are you trying to show that some problem exists and are therefore attempting to argue for research into it, or attempting to say that solutions to an established problem have, in some ways, failed and therefore require a different kind of approach, or claiming that definitions of an existing problem or phenomenon are inadequate, and therefore a different definition (respecification) is required? There may be elements from each of these in your research and in such a case you will need to distinguish them from each other. In Table 11.4 you can see an introduction to a work-based dissertation that argues for the need for reliable evidence in clinical decision-making. Although a little too brief, it combines elements from two of the orientations by referring to an existing problem and focusing attention on a possible solution. The need to make choices between competing priorities and forms of treatment are identified and a solution is suggested in the form of information which is accurate, timely and valid.

THE SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The degree of breadth and depth you intend to include in your research is a part of your scope. This means weighing up what you can do with how much time you have – include in the calculation your own skills development needs. In a piece of masters research you will only have time to do a limited number of things, so therefore you must acknowledge the constraints of time and your skills. In order to do these, think about including a short section on the scope or parameters you have identified for your research. This may mean you limit your research to a particular sample, geographical region, language, or time-frame and in particular set the themes you identified in your research questions. By setting out the scope of your research you are letting your reader know what you will and will not include in your research. In different parts of your proposal you will be able to explain further the reasons for the limitations you have placed on your research. Your scope should answer, as a minimum, the ‘who’ and ‘where’ questions. The extract in Table 11.5 is an example of a scope that says who will and who will not be included, where the research will be done and on what topic.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH

The research you are undertaking is being carried out for a primary purpose and this is to contribute to your masters degree. But as a piece of research, what is it you want

TABLE 11.4 INTRODUCTION TO A RESEARCH PROPOSAL
FOR A WORK-BASED DISSERTATION

Extract	Comments
It is acknowledged (1) that one of the main problems confronting health care professionals remains the huge body of available evidence and the lack of time to read, and the skills to assess the value of, this information. For example, a general physician would currently need to examine 19 articles a day, 365 days a years, to keep up to date with his or her speciality. In a nationwide study of 600 clinicians and 100 opinion leaders in the United States (2), only 5.3 per cent searched computerized information sources regularly, although more than a third said they searched occasionally. In the United Kingdom (3) general practitioners may see an average of 125 patients per week and, during each consultation, several queries concerning diagnosis, prognosis and treatment might arise. Thus a practitioner could make some 25,000 clinical decisions each year. However, because of lack of time, GPs generally fail to keep up with the research literature and change their practice as a result (4). For hospital medical staff, reading time per week has been reported as 90 minutes for medical students, zero minutes for house officers, 20 minutes for senior house officers, 30–45 minutes for registrars, 45 minutes for consultants and 30 minutes for older consultants (5). As a result, it has sometimes taken many years for important new research findings to become established and for patients to see the benefits. One example is the long delay before the proven advantages (in the late 1980s) of thrombolysis following a heart attack were recognized and the treatment became established practice.	The scale of the information problem confronting medical practitioners is established through a series of illustrations from the literature. The literature is used to show common agreement about the nature and cause of the problem. The illustrations are grounded with reference to actual groups of practitioners. An example of the effects of the problem is given, which is effective. It indicates the consequences for other advances if nothing is done.

(Continued)

TABLE 11.4 (CONTINUED)

Extract	Comments
Even once this treatment became established, and despite definitive and confirming results, several studies in the 1990s found that many eligible patients still failed to receive thrombolysis (6). Clearly, if doctors are to keep up to date, information must be clear, succinct and easy to access from their workplace. This will necessitate a change to the delivery and form of research information to medical practitioners. What is needed are bulletins, in text and electronic formats, of statements and evidence supporting them which will give succinct information on the benefits of new practices. This may provide health professionals with the confidence to change established practices in the light of proven research findings so that patients can benefit sooner rather than later from research.	A recommendation is made to address the problem. The benefits of this proposed solution are outlined for practitioners and patients alike.

Source: Adapted from Weightman, 1998 ('Evidence into practice: A study of the professional attitudes to the "Health Bulletins" in Wales').

to achieve? We have already said that masters research is not strictly about making a discovery or adding new knowledge, but there is, for many masters students, a clear conviction that their research should *do something*. Clough and Nutbrown (2002: 6–14) looked at this commitment research students have to their research. They grouped the reasons given by their students for doing research into the following:

- ♦ researching to bring about change;
- ♦ researching for self-development; and
- ♦ researching for understanding.

What we are looking at here is an important part of any research proposal, and this is answering the 'so what' and 'for whom' questions. These questions mean: 'What is the point or purpose of your research and who may benefit and how.' The students

TABLE 11.5 STATING THE SCOPE OF YOUR RESEARCH

Extract	Comments
The project will focus on library and information services for qualified information agents working within the NHS community Trusts, general medical practices and dental practices in South West England. Services to postgraduate medical and dental practitioners are also included. Where acute and community trusts have merged only the library services to community staff will be included. Library and information services to nursing and medical students will be excluded as will be services to primary care professionals funded directly by local authorities (e.g. psychologists). Medical information services for patients are also excluded.	The range of occupations which could possibly be included in such a study are wide, due to the complex structure of health services. The focus for inclusion is allied to services to specified and identifiable practitioners within the NHS trust in the region. An explanation somewhere else in the proposal may be helpful to map the structure of services within the health care sector in order to show its complexity.

Source: Adapted from Fowler, 1996.

Clough and Nutbrown talked to have a clear sense that their research should answer questions about the relevance of their research. The core feeling Clough and Nutbrown bring out of their discussion is that research students want their research to bring about some changes to practice, policy, professional development or to doing research itself.

In Table 11.6, Evans's justification for her research attempted and succeeded in saying a lot about her intentions in a very limited space. Her argument is fairly clear due to its structure and the use of conventional devices to establish a situation. That situation being the need to do more if a current policy initiative is to be successful. Her purpose is to do research to develop an understanding among professional information workers of the key concepts on which major national and local policy developments are based. If this is done, she argues, her profession will be better placed to implement effective change through better informed interpretations of policy for organizational

TABLE 11.6 IDENTIFYING THE RELEVANCE OF YOUR RESEARCH

Extract	Comments
The public library system in the United Kingdom is one of the most extensive and developed in the world. Visiting the public library is the fifth most popular activity in the United Kingdom, making it much more popular than visiting the other cultural institutions such as museums and art galleries. However, a number of high-profile pieces of research and government reports agree that public libraries and information professionals have missed many opportunities relating to the library's role in a sophisticated, complex, multicultural country. The research shows that the advent of information communications technology, changing industrial, commercial, and educational patterns, has not been addressed by the public library. In particular the research suggests that public libraries have an insufficient strategic direction because of the absence of a National Steering Organization, given the primacy of the cultural and educational role they are generally expected to fulfil. The sector has, it is agreed, benefited from the formation of the Library and Information Commission in 1995. In the same year the review undertaken for the Department of National Heritage reported an improved sense of purpose and direction and status of the public library system. The cultural role, however, has, arguably, received very little attention and in particular lacks clarity and definition yet it is considered extremely important by many professional librarians and government bodies. Government policy on the cultural role of the public libraries will have an important influence on the future of the library system and professional librarians' understanding of their role. This research will explore the understanding and interpretations professional librarians have of the present and future cultural work of public libraries in the West Midlands in the UK.	The size, scale and importance of the public library system is established. References to recent research literature provide the foundation for the argument that an opportunity is being lost. The changing and increasingly complicated nature of the problem is indicated. What is missing to address change is stated. Developments already in place are mentioned but found insufficient. The insufficiency is attributed to a lack of understanding of a major concept, that is culture. The benefits of a focus on the understandings of culture are outlined.

(Continued)

TABLE 11.6 (CONTINUED)

Extract	Comments
This will be placed in the context of the national government agenda for public information. This research will make a timely and relevant contribution to understanding the ways in which a major government centralized policy is understood and interpreted by a local library system during a time of transition and change both within the organization of the public library system and in the status of professional information workers.	The reasons for the research are formulated and the context given. The benefits are reformulated in terms of national, local and professional outcomes.

Source: Adapted from Evans, 2000 ('The cultural role of public libraries').

strategy. Notice there is a political element in Evans's justification. Her intent to bring about change is essentially political: she aims to make an impact on how a group of professionals 'see' something and therefore change how they may devise and enact courses of action based on their changed understandings. Therefore the management of this project would require careful consideration and sensitivity not only to avoid overt bias, but also to ensure that all relevant ethical matters are clearly accounted for. So we can see how Evans employed a structure to establish a problem, identify some attempts to deal with the problem, find fault with those attempts, identify a cause of the fault, state what would need to be done and what the benefits of her research might be. She does all of this and also manages to place her research into a contemporary organizational and political context.

One way of thinking about your justification is to examine what you intend to achieve by doing your research. Evans wanted to bring about change to professional practice through understanding an important concept. Change is a common element of most justifications. You may intend to bring about a better or a different understanding of a theory or concept, or bring change to certain actions and behaviours. These two general intentions are not mutually exclusive, as though the former is characteristic of the academic dissertation and the latter of the work-based dissertation. The example in Table 11.6 shows that the understanding and investigation of interpretations of a concept often have a direct impact on the implementation of an organizational strategy. The key questions for your justification include:

- ◆ What is the nature of the problem?
- ◆ How extensive is it?
- ◆ When and where did it begin?
- ◆ What will happen if nothing is done about it?
- ◆ What are its possible causes?
- ◆ What can be done about these causes?
- ◆ What will the benefits be of doing something?

You are attempting, in addressing these questions, to make a persuasive case which establishes that you have a real problem for your research and that the research you suggest will have benefits. These benefits do not, of course, have to be practical. Intellectual outcomes are equally legitimate and in many cases are the foundation for many others.

THE INDICATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter 6 we looked at reviewing the literature on your topic. In this section I want to show you three examples of indicative reviews from the main types of dissertation. The first extract (Table 11.7) is from a literature-based research proposal. The researcher, Kellie Snow, had a deep and longstanding interest in the legend of King Arthur. She took this interest to identify her general topic, turning it into an analysis of the bibliographic sources on the legend. As you can see, this kind of research places high demands on the researcher. Knowledge and familiarity with an extensive and sometimes difficult literature is required and this sometimes means, as in Snow's case, having the ability to read and translate from a number of languages. But as you can also see from Table 11.7, the elegance of her knowledge is more than adequately expressed in her indicative review of the literature.

In Table 11.8, the second extract is from a review of the literature for a traditional dissertation. Ellen Smullen, who wrote this review, turned her pre-existing attitudes on popular romantic fiction into her topic and looked to survey her peers on their attitudes to the genre.

TABLE 11.7 LITERATURE REVIEW FROM A LITERATURE-BASED RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Extract	Comments
The earliest <i>recorded</i> mention of an Arthur comes in <i>The Gododdin</i> by bard Aneirin, which probably dates back to the seventh century. However, it only mentions a great British warrior, and as the earliest manuscript still in existence is from the thirteenth century, the true value of this is debatable. The first significant mention comes in the <i>Annales Cambriae</i> (<i>The Welsh Annals</i>) and <i>Historia Brittonum</i> (<i>History of the Britons</i>) in the eighth or ninth centuries, but in both cases yet again he features only as a leader of battles, who 'perished' at Camlann along with Medraut (Mordred). The bard and prophet Merlin also appears in these, but is not related to Arthur in any way. Geoffrey of Monmouth's <i>Historia Regum Britanniae</i> (<i>History of the Kings of Britain</i>, c. 1136) is the first work to portray Arthur as a <i>king</i>, and also to feature other characters which are still popular in the myth today. He wrote the first 'story' of Arthur, <i>claiming</i> to have gained the information from an ancient book given to him by his patron, and from the <i>Historia Brittonum</i>. Geoffrey followed this work with <i>Vita Merlini</i> (<i>Life of Merlin</i>, c. 1150) focusing on the bard's adventures from Welsh literature and further developing his character. The degree of historical proof in these works is debatable because, as Snyder remarks, 'Geoffrey's writings rely on an immense body of vernacular tradition and outright fable which is impossible to date and authenticate', plus there are his own probable frequent exaggerations. However, his works make Geoffrey key to the development of the Arthurian 'myth'. The focus of this project is English language literature, but in these early cases others must be included as they are fundamental to the origins of some of the features of the myth.	As with many pieces of research that involve an analysis of biographies, this one is also a chronology. An attempt is made to identify key historical works and to say, briefly, what each contributed to the development of the myth. It is common also with this kind of research to state the names of authors and their publications. Most of these works will not, of course, be available for consultation in your local academic library. It is more the case that you would have to make special arrangements with organizations like the British Library to consult such rare documents. However, it is increasingly possible to consult these kinds of documents in electronic format.

(Continued)

TABLE 11.7 (CONTINUED)

Extract	Comments
The French writer Wace was the next significant author of Arthurian material. His chronicle <i>Brut</i> (1155) follows that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, but the Round Table and the hope of Arthur's return from Avalon are also introduced. Layamon translated <i>this</i> into English between 1199 and 1225, but made his own additions by bringing the focus back to Arthur's struggle against the Saxons, probably to appeal to the British audience. Various Welsh and Breton works exist from around this time also, recording the oral traditions of their people and providing references for writers such as Geoffrey and Wace. Stories related to that of Arthur such as Culhwch and Olwen, Tristan and Iseult and particularly Merlin emerge from these. The characters Guinevere, Mordred, Bedivere and Kay also first appear in Welsh writings, though not in the specific guise in which they are now known. French romance writers added more episodes and angles to the Arthurian story, turning its appeal to tales of 'love, magic and manners' as well as military accomplishments. However, in this group of writings Arthur becomes a benevolent leader who fades into the background to allow for the stories of other characters, and his problems are also no longer foreign invasions, but enemies that are within. Chrétien de Troyes, the most significant of the French writers from this time, tells in particular the stories of Eric and Enid, Lancelot and his affair with Guinevere, and the story of Perceval. He is also the first writer to mention Arthur's court, 'Camelot', and the 'Grail' that the knights went in search of. All of these stories bring out the idea of chivalry that later writers would focus on.	To some degree the writer expects the reader to know something of the legend or myth. In a similar way, some of the characters and authors are also expected to be known about. Although the purpose of this research is not stated, its indication is present in the review – being to map and analyse the development of the myth in what has become a substantial corpus of writings.

Source: Adapted from Snow, 2002 ('Structural analysis of sources on Arthurian legend').

TABLE 11.8 AN INDICATIVE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE FROM A TRADITIONAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Extract	Comments
Arguments expressed in the literature against public libraries stocking romances are numerous and complex, but mainly focus on their literary quality, formulaic style and the fact that they are mass-produced commodities, belonging to a 'consumer society, not to a truly Literate and Literary society (1)'. Romance novelist and former librarian Jane Anne Krentz believes that to criticize romances on these grounds is to criticize them for all the reasons that they work (2). Krentz argues that many who criticize romances have never attempted to read one, so their assumptions and bias are not based on a sound understanding of the conventions and complexities of the genre (3). Librarian Kristin Ramsdell has done a great deal of work on romance fiction in an effort to legitimize the genre and encourage greater understanding among the library profession (4). She believes that romances are often judged as substandard because of their immense popularity, and because they differ from literary texts which place importance on language, characterization, and thematic complexity (5). Mosley et al., (6) in their award winning article in defence of the romance novel, state that many librarians conveniently overlook the fact that classic authors such as Charles Dickens produced serialized novels specifically aimed at the lower-paid masses, novels that in our culture are considered to be great literary works: Sometime, somewhere, somehow, someone drew an imaginary line and created 'lowbrow' and 'highbrow'. Occasionally, an author who's been dead long enough can cross from 'lowbrow' to 'highbrow', as is the case with Charles Dickens, who wrote serialized novels in his day (7).	This review begins by stating a common argument and position against popular romantic fiction. It also highlights some contrary views against this argument. Positions which have a positive attitude towards popular romantic fiction are succinctly summarized. The notion of high and low culture is introduced as a basic cause of prejudice against this genre. The case of Dickens is highlighted to show the historical origins of popular fiction and that he was quite well aware of its popularity.

(Continued)

TABLE 11.8 (CONTINUED)

Extract	Comments
Individual taste in novels and perception of what accounts as cultural enrichment are very subjective, and are subject to change. Supporters of the romance genre believe that it is not the place of the librarian to 'judge cultural relativity, but ... to provide a service relative to our culture' (8), and that to judge romances against literary works is ridiculous, as romances, such as those produced by Mills and Boon 'have never claimed to be classical literature' (9). Jay Dixon (10), in her text, <i>The Romance Fiction of Mills and Boon 1909-1990s</i>, believes that it is unfair to dismiss series romances as trash purely on the basis of their literary style, and that romances should be judged by their own criteria rather than compared against literary novels. Frances Whitehead, ex-editorial director for Mills and Boon agrees, asserting that the novels do not need to apologize for what they are, and that they keep countless women amused and happy regardless of their apparent lack of literary merit (11). Criticism of romances on the basis of their literary style originates from the belief that these types of novels; if read exhaustively, could limit people's knowledge, moral outlook and language skills. Social historian Richard Hoggart agrees with this criticism, and has stated that it is a common myth that readers of romances will move on to reading more 'improving' literary texts, as they are far more likely to keep reading more of the same (12). Hoggart is strongly in favour of libraries returning to their educational role and increasing their stock of literary texts (13). Politician Roy Hattersley is not so convinced, and has expressed the concern that if libraries exclusively stocked literary and 'improving' texts, they would lose the accessibility that they currently enjoy (14).	Key words and phrases are introduced to indicate the problems of making judgements about any kind of literature and implicitly about readers of popular fiction. Further examples from literature of positive attitudes to popular fiction are now introduced and show there is a research literature that runs counter to the popular view that popular fiction is sub-standard. A number of points and observations are briefly mentioned, which can form the basis of further detailed argument. Famous cultural critics are introduced and their competing arguments summarized in terms of the high and low culture debate.

(Continued)

TABLE 11.8 (CONTINUED)

Extract	Comments
Public library borrowers would ultimately vote with their feet and go elsewhere for the books that they want to read, and it will be the public library that would suffer. Hattersley also believes that public libraries should be working towards '... demolish(ing) the myth that books are the preoccupation of a cultural elite. Reading was meant to make us glad ... all of us' (15). Librarians tend to protect works of classic fiction, and concentrate cutbacks on popular fiction, but Hattersley believes that there is danger in this logic, as the popular genres do a great deal in keeping communities reading and turning the pages (16). Peter Mann (17) has conducted a lot of research into books and their readers/borrowers, and his research reveals that there is a great deal of misconception about the readers of romances and that the novels play an important part in keeping people interested in reading:	The role of the librarian is now introduced. Based on initial statements in this review, librarians are seen as holding the high-culture position.
The fact that while we all declare the way TV has ousted the printed word, it is Mills and Boon with their print run of millions who are in the front line of keeping people reading and off the headline. (18)	Given that popular romantic fiction is the most borrowed of items from the library, librarians' reasons for stocking it are indicated. Further research on reading is now introduced. The focus librarians have is shown to be on developing readers' reading abilities. This implies that readers of popular romantic fiction are unable to read high-brow fiction.
Part of the justification for stocking popular fiction in public libraries has been that it brings in borrowers who can then be encouraged into reading other types of fiction (19). This is an important point, especially in an age where libraries are actively involved in reader development schemes (20), and are aware of the important position they have in encouraging literacy among their communities. Rachel Van Riel's consultancy firm Opening the Book has been particularly important in this area, helping librarians to encourage borrowers to explore beyond their usual reading, and diversify tastes beyond genre and brand loyalty (21).	

(Continued)

TABLE 11.8 (CONTINUED)

Extract	Comments
Opening the Book has also been influential in helping libraries recognize that readers of popular fiction are not passive, but are voracious readers with very specific needs and tastes. Stuart Hannabus (22) has commented on the dangers of librarians overlooking the complexity of the romance genre in his article <i>Resources for Love</i>, and Kristin Ramsdell has worked towards raising awareness of the importance of stock selection and reader advisory work when dealing with romances and their readers (23). Concern has been voiced in the literature about reader development schemes that librarians will be tempted to promote only 'good' literature, but Van Riel (24) insists that the manipulation is not to shape individual tastes, only to open up access to a greater variety of books. It is still up to the reader whether they like the books recommended or not. Culture Secretary, Chris Smith, also believes that libraries are well placed to encourage reading, but should be careful in their approach, avoiding condescension and paternalism and opting for encouragement: If the library or librarian is wagging a metaphorical finger at the reader saying: 'you are reading rubbish, you really shouldn't be. Here is a good, improving book — we think you ought to be reading this', that is the worst possible way of getting people to appreciate the wonders of great literature. (25) Librarian attitude has been pinpointed as vitally important when advising readers on their choice of fiction (26). Kristin Ramsdell notes that the condescending attitude of librarians can seriously affect their borrowers, and that despite disparagement of romance being a 'time honoured tradition in many library circles' (27) this is no reason to continue unethical bad practice. The romance novel is still hugely popular and is unlikely to disappear (28), despite the suggestion that many librarians would like to see 'bibliographic euthanasia' for the genre (29).	The emphasis therefore from the library, librarians and government is to encourage reader development. The general view that popular fiction is sub-standard has therefore been reiterated and shown to be institutionalized. A number of dissenting voices from within the library profession are identified, but not before the general attitude of the library profession has been reiterated. The critical view of a popular romance is developed by looking at sources from outside the library and information profession, at critics who see the genre as promoting serious unwanted outcomes in readers.

(Continued)

TABLE 11.8 (CONTINUED)

Extract	Comments
Cathie Linz, Mary K. Chelton, Kristen Ramsdell and Shelley Mosley, are just a few of a growing number in the library profession who believe that it is time to legitimize this outcast genre, and give dignity to the reading choices of romance readers (30). However, some criticisms about stocking popular romances in public libraries go beyond concerns of literary merit, and are much more sinister in nature (31). Series novels, such as those published by Mills and Boon, have been criticized for promoting sexual stereotypes (32), and are acknowledged as being racist and homophobic (33) even by those who enjoy them. In recent years there have been attempts to rectify these problems, and new sub-genres have emerged (such as ethnic and multicultural series) to reflect more realistically today's society. Supporters of series romances insist that the books are very important in communicating the changing values of society to people who would read very little else, and that as a medium of communication, this is justification enough for stocking them in the library (34). Some disagree with this point, insisting that by stocking series romances, libraries are legitimizing and reinforcing the dubious values that such books include: Rubbish is popular, and it is necessary to state why it is lethal: it provides an escape from the real and actual world. It depicts a two-dimensional world in which there is no poverty, unemployment, vandalism, drug dependence, failing family relationships and injustice before the law. It is an opiate; it positively undermines the determination to change the status quo. (35) This statement reveals that, for some, popular romantic fiction has had an all too convincing victory over the censors, and that a stronger line in stock selection is believed to be necessary and justified.	Such critics see librarians as actively promoting sexual and racial stereotypes and homophobia because they stock popular romances. The 'popular' from the point of view of such critics is equated with rubbish. Popular romances are said to be rubbish because they are not considered to reflect real life (whatever that is). Ironically, the critics are calling for popular romance to be censored. The basis for the research is therefore established: to examine the views of public librarians to popular romantic fiction.

Source: Adapted from Smullen, 2002 ('Survey of librarians' attitudes to popular romance books').

TABLE 11.9 AN INDICATIVE REVIEW FROM A WORK-BASED RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Extract	Comments
The existing structure of library support for the NHS has developed over the past 30 years (1). Many of the regional library services were put in place to support postgraduate medical and allied education during the 1960s (2). Health service libraries were furthered by the government recommendation (3) which stated services should be multi-disciplinary and available to all professional groups. At this point libraries were funded by hospitals as part of their contribution to a postgraduate and continuing medical education of their staff. Education, training, research and development in the NHS are funded by a 17 per cent levy on health authorities and postgraduate medical education, and the funding for libraries has been largely derived from this route.	This review begins by giving a brief chronology of information service provision within the NHS. It attempts to show that NHS library services developed in an ad hoc way and that funding for them has been provided from within and from other programmes.
Library services in the South Western regions developed largely along parallel tracks, in line with the national initiatives just described. The first postgraduate Medical Centre librarians were appointed in the early 1970s. Very early on the libraries in each region joined to form inter-lending networks, and document-supply mechanisms were also established. These mechanisms resulted in semi-formal arrangements which were based on reciprocal need for access to extended resources. Since the original merger in 1994 the two major library networks have begun to integrate some of their activities. Eight joint operating frameworks combined to form the South and West Regional Library and Information Network in 1996. This merger has highlighted a number of ongoing issues and problems in the provision of library and information services. These include information for research and development, information for non-medical education and, training, resource sharing, and, most importantly, financing of information services.	The nature of the problem is to look from a regional perspective based on the researcher's place of work. Some of the key issues and problems perceived in the workplace are listed and seen as general issues and problems facing health care libraries at a national level.

(Continued)

TABLE 11.9 (CONTINUED)

Extract	Comments
A number of independent, NHS-generated and government reports have also highlighted these major problems, not least those of providing and financing a co-ordinated information service within the NHS and to those working in public health, social care, and other professions related to health care. To date very little detailed information has been gathered on the resource and management issues related to specific library and information services, in order to identify responsibilities for funding and management of services. The situation today is one of general confusion over which department, unit or sector within health care is ultimately responsible for library and information services. This is exacerbated by the problem of how this information can best be obtained, given the wide variety of libraries and their geographical spread.	The problem is then summarized, with an additional point being made that solving the problem will have difficulties in itself in terms of conducting the research.

Source: Adapted from Fowler, 1996 ('Library and information service provision to NHS community-based staff').

In the third extract, shown in Table 11.9, you can see a literature review for a work-based dissertation. Christine Fowler, an information worker in the NHS, took as her topic the provision of information by NHS information services to health practitioners. Her basic premise was that all organizations need information and that those based on research need it even more. The literature review she did for her proposal was long and complex, looking at the literature on recent changes in the NHS, government policy and at the arguments for the role of information to health care professionals. The extract in Table 11.9 shows the literature related to health care libraries.

THE METHOD SECTION

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the reasons behind your choice of methodological tradition, approach, procedures and tools for the collection and analysis of your data. There is often some confusion over what some of these terms mean and how they should be used. In this book I have used the following terms and phrases in the following ways:

- ✦ by *methodological tradition* I mean the choice you have made between positivist and non-positivist traditions;
- ✦ by *methodological approach* I refer to a choice and balance between experimental and non-experimental and qualitative and quantitative;
- ✦ by *research culture* I refer to choices between historical, feminist, comparative and other cultures of research;
- ✦ by *technique of analysis* I refer to types of analysis such as content, discourse, category and other forms of analysis.

The problem with writing this section is attempting to describe your overall approach, the methods and procedures you will use and at the same time show how you arrived at the decision on which combination to employ.

We looked at research questions along with hypotheses and propositions in Chapter 3.

This is often called the *logic of justification*. If you go back to Chapters 7 and 8 where we looked at the logical assumptions and the consequences of methodological choices, you will see just how important it is to explain the reasoning behind your choices. It is not sufficient simply to describe what you will do; you need to explain how you elected to take one approach rather than another and at the consequences this might have for the research. This involves looking at the design of your research as a whole and not just at the collection of data but at what kinds of data you have, and how it can be managed, sorted, analysed, presented and interpreted, in terms of your overall methodological approach. It is often your research questions which guide the inquiry process and not the data or data collection tools or analysis itself. Your research questions are the hub or the centre of your research and of your research proposal; the ways in which they are worded give direction to your methodological assumptions, methodological approach, kinds of data you deem necessary and form of analysis. Your research questions form a frame or skeleton which hold the rest of your research proposal and research together. In the extract shown in Table 11.10 you can see the part of the section that deals with how the data is to be collected.

The extract in Table 11.10 is a paraphrase. We could reasonably expect the actual dissertation to run to about four pages and include summaries of, and citations to, debates about the pros and cons of the survey approach, the validity and reliability of questionnaires and interviews, along with political sensitivity when using senior

TABLE 11.10 METHODS SECTION OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Extract	Comments
It is proposed that this research is based on a survey approach: a survey of the relevant literature, a questionnaire of key decision-makers and follow-up interviews (1). The combination of these three techniques is designed to get an appropriate balance between breadth and depth in order to achieve a valid description of the current state of understanding and interpretation of the concept of culture (2). The organization and execution of the postal survey will be undertaken in July and responses are expected within four working weeks. The use of a standardized questionnaire will avoid the problem of varying quality of interview data (3). They will also provide an opportunity to gather some quantitative data which can be used to construct questions for follow-up interviews (4). The literature on questionnaire surveys (5) is generally agreed that questionnaires alone are an insufficient technique for gathering valid data even though they may be reliable if properly constructed and conducted. There is no need for a sample of key decision-makers because at the national and the local level all relevant persons have agreed to take part in this research. This includes all the senior management teams of public libraries in the West Midlands region, chief executive of the Library Association and his senior management team, and a representative from the policy formation unit of the Department for National Heritage. In this respect the population will be a purposeful sample and will require the techniques developed to interview elites (6). Having established, from the literature review, the subject areas to be explored, the postal questionnaires will allow a close examination of the subject based on a combination of specific and general questions. Questions would be either of the closed or open type and based on the guiding questions for this research project (7).	Three main sources of information and data are identified, including the literature. The issues of balancing breadth against depth is mentioned. Timing and reasons for a structured questionnaire are given. Note the citations, which will presumably be used in the dissertation with others to provide fuller explanations for the method. Access to subjects is explained along with who they will be. Sampling issues are dealt with and the nature of the status of subjects is mentioned – possibly to indicate that certain techniques may have to be employed.

(Continued)

TABLE 11.10 (CONTINUED)

Extract	Comments
A pilot questionnaire (8) has already been tested in the field and a final design of the questionnaire is nearly ready. Given that the chief executive of the Library Association will be acting as my sponsor for this research and has already contacted the subjects it is anticipated that the questionnaire will have a high if not 100 per cent response rate. A coding frame for the questionnaire has been constructed and is appended to this proposal (9). The total number of questionnaires expected to be completed is 24 therefore it is not expected that software will be required to analyse the results. Based on three pilot interviews (with staff from my department) it is feasible to conduct interviews with all 24 subjects in the time available. An opportunity to conduct most of the interviews over a week period has presented itself in the form of a national conference for public librarians. Twenty of the respondents will be attending the conference and have agreed via my sponsor to set aside up to two hours during the conference. The final version of the interview schedule will not be prepared until all questionnaires have been analysed (10). The interviews will be, however, structured, to allow some control of the course of the conversation, to maintain the focus on the relevant issues and problems surrounding the concept of culture (11). It will be possible for respondents to explain their understandings and interpretations, and will be encouraged to base these on their own organizational policies and courses of action (12). There will also be an opportunity for a second round of interviews, should this be necessary, with a much smaller group (13), approximately six subjects, to follow up further issues raised in the questionnaires and the first round of interviews.	The form of the questions is stated along with the pilot. A key person for the research is identified by post and organization because they are important for gaining sufficient access to subjects. Levels of response rate are mentioned and there is therefore no need to explain what will be done if the rate is too low. When the subjects will be interviewed is stated, but the problems this may create are not mentioned. Reasons for using interviews are indicated and relate back to the need for depth, which is augmented by the mention of the possibility for further interviews.

Source: Adapted from Evans, 2000 ('The cultural role of public libraries').

persons in organizations as a source of your data. In your dissertation you will have an opportunity to amplify on your methods and to discuss the methodological approach you chose to use. In your research proposal, however, you will only have the space to give an indication of what data collection tools you intend to use, how you will get access to the data/subjects, what some of the technical problems might be and how you will analyse the data.

THE ETHICS SECTION

In Chapter 9 we looked at ethics in terms of doing research and emphasized that an analysis of your personal ethical standpoint and the needs of your research are important parts of the whole research process. Your proposal should include a set of brief statements on how you intend to conform to accepted ethical codes, and should detail what particular ethical issues and problems you will need to deal with in your research. In Table 11.11 you can see such a statement.

There is, as you can see in Table 11.11, a certain number of 'usual ethical issues and problems' and this represents the basic contents to be included in your ethics section. The main point is to state what the specific ethical issues are in terms of your research. More details could have been included in this statement, linking each problem to a specific part of the research. You may want to look back to Table 11.6, where we introduced Ceri Evans's research, and think about what kinds of ethical issues and problems might emerge from her research.

THE TIMETABLE

In Chapter 2 we looked at how you can begin to identify the tasks and estimate the time needed to complete your research. This timetable or schedule should be included in your proposal to show your supervisors that you have made a realistic estimation of the time your research will take you. Your schedule should also include time for writing up your dissertation and, importantly, time for unforeseen happenings – like illness, relatives visiting and holidays. A typical way of presenting your schedule is shown in Figure 11.3.

There are other ways to present your timetable, such as in a Gantt chart or by using various kinds of software such as *Project Manager*. But whatever way you choose, it must indicate the sequence and relationships between the major groups of tasks to be achieved to meet the target dates.

TABLE 11.11 STATEMENT OF ETHICAL ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

Extract	Comments
This research will need to attend to the following ethical issue and problems: confidentiality of subjects and protection of their identities and places of work; maintaining independence from possible attempts by interested parties/bodies to bias results; ensuring security of data during and after completion of the research. These key issues and problems will be addressed by: using the university's formal procedures including sending standard agreements and letters of consent on confidentiality to all subjects; sending a copy of this research proposal to all parties so that they are fully informed about the intent of this research; ensuring non-disclosure of subjects by using numbers in place of names, and of their respective organizations by using letters in place of names; only myself and my dissertation supervisors will have access to the data. Subjects will have the right, as stated in the letter of consent, to withdraw from this research but will not have the right to edit or censor the final dissertation so long as their identity/organization has not been revealed nor has there been any other breach of the agreement.	The key issue and problems are stated. These may become problematic in the course of the research or change altogether. Therefore they are largely the 'obvious' matters for attention. Using the university's or a professional organization's formal code can be an effective way of conforming to accepted standards. How you ensure non-disclosure needs to be determined in advance. The rights of subjects are indicated, but so to are your rights. Is it ethical for a key informant to withdraw near the end of your research, perhaps making it impossible to complete, when you have not infringed any ethical code or agreement?

You may have noticed that the schedule in Figure 11.3 allows time for slippage, when you take more time than expected on a task, and allows ample time for writing up and doing production jobs in the three to four weeks prior to the handing-in deadline. A key piece of advice I annually give to my masters students is to expect the unexpected – whatever can go wrong has gone wrong for your predecessors. Moreover, do not think you can print off your dissertation in an afternoon. The pagination, printing and checking page numbers and all the other minor jobs take, on average, about three days. Plus, of course, you will have to get at least two copies bound and, if you do not hand them in yourself, you should allow plenty of time for the post – twice the normal delivery time.

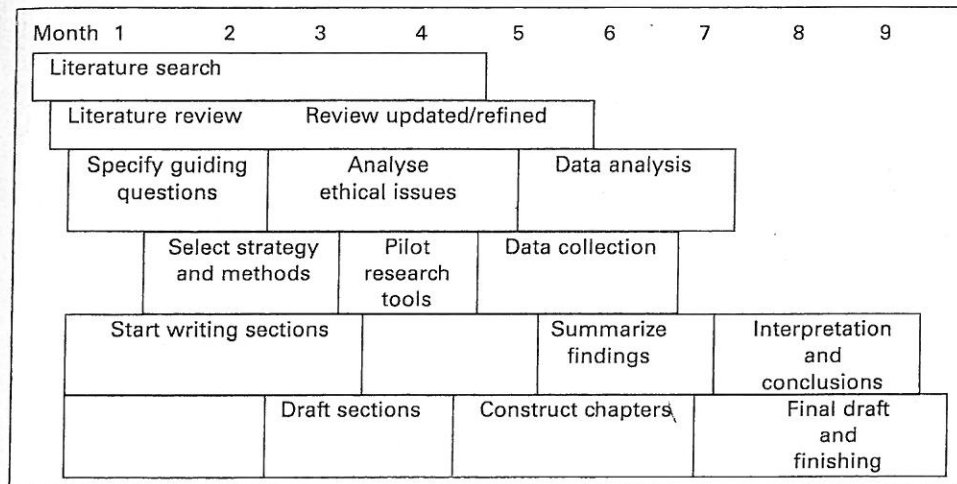


FIGURE 11.3 SAMPLE TIMETABLE FOR YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

SHOWING COHERENCE

If your proposal has been carefully crafted, then it should have a logical structure; this means it will have coherence between the different parts and their contents. The discourse is the language and vocabulary of your methodological approach, your research design, and your approach to specifying a topic or problem. The discourse (or vocabulary) is not an empty shell of phrases and words (buzz terms) to be included, but a set of tools to be used in ways which can demonstrate your proficiency at applying them appropriately. To do this is to display your reasoning in a way that allows the reader – and you – to see the flow, sequencing and logic of your overall approach. One way of achieving this is to lay out your initial proposal as shown in Table 11.12.

Table 11.12 shows a logical sequence of questions about a puzzle. It shows three chapters of a dissertation in outline form. Each chapter attempts to attend to a related problem through the guiding questions which you have stated to help you construct a topic or problem for your research. The fourth column on process and product highlights the kinds of skills, capabilities, qualities and attitudes you will need to synthesize 'doing-thinking-doing', in order to make decisions on how best to move forward and further into your research. Although this practice is not common in all universities, envisioning your dissertation in this way can be very useful. It can give you a clearer idea of the dissertation you will be taking to your research committee and the research journey you will be undertaking. In summary it will help you to:

TABLE 11.12 SHOWING COHERENT THINKING ABOUT YOUR PROPOSAL

Issues	Guiding questions	Explication/ explanation	Process/products	Chapter in dissertation
Starting out, uncertainty	How can I understand the range and variety of definitions and uses of the concept 'culture'? What has the literature to say?	During this initial stage I see the main task as identifying the meaning of the concept through its use in the literature, especially in anthropology and sociology. Immersion in the literature will be needed across the social sciences.	Close reading of key texts in anthropology (e.g. Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard) should contextualize the use of the concept as a phenomenon for research/description rather than for simulative definition. An analytical review of the concept as used in the literature will be the main tangible product.	Chapter 2 will be the review of the concept culture as used in the literature. It will focus on how culture as a phenomenon has been researched and described and what methodological assumptions have been made by researchers (ethnographers).
Equivocality about the concept	In what ways do key government policy documents use the concept 'culture' when talking about public library services? How do these uses relate to those in the academic literature?	This stage will involve analysis of policy documents relevant to the cultural agenda of public libraries. The emphasis will be to extract the intent of the concept in the context of its use.	Using rhetorical analysis/reading techniques, the review of policy documents should result in the usage of the concept. This will provide a major part of the relevant discourse for constructing relevant questions for the interviews.	Chapter 4 (Chapter 3 was an explanation/explication of the methodology and research procedures) will describe the use of the concept in policy documents. The focus will be on extracting the discourse of the documents to see if there are any assumptions being made about what culture is or should be.

(Continued)

TABLE 11.12 (CONTINUED)

Issues	Guiding questions	Explanation/ explanation	Process/products	Chapter in dissertation
Problems of gathering reliable and valid understandings	What kinds of understandings do senior figures in the library profession have of the cultural role of public libraries? How do these understandings relate to those in policy documents?	The challenge in this stage will be to get access to senior figures in the information profession. My contacts – chief executive of the Library Association and member of the LIC – have agreed to arrange introductions. I will be guided by the tacit uses of culture in the literature/policy documents to construct appropriate discourses for interviews.	Using my 'sponsor' – arrangements will be made to interview key figures in the library world including the sponsors themselves. Their understandings and interpretations will be recorded and probed and any documents/policies/programmes initiated will be collected for analysis.	Chapter 5 will report on the interviews with senior figures in the information and library profession. It will present an aggregated set of responses based on the themes which emerged from the analysis of the documents and the literature. Documents collected in the field will be listed and subject to comparative analysis in Chapter 6.

- ♦ identify what things and tasks you may encounter on your way;
- ♦ arrange the literature into sections to deal with different issues, concerns and problems;
- ♦ narrow down your research to make it manageable;
- ♦ identify key landmarks and risks;
- ♦ identify key stakeholders and groups; and
- ♦ identify different approaches and specify the logical connectivity of your approach.

Assessment of a research proposal

In most cases the research proposal is part of the assessment for an accredited course of study. For this reason the ways in which your research proposal will be assessed need to be taken into account when you prepare your document. This has certain problems, not least that the assessor may have preconceptions as to what structure should be used. I have already said, quite strongly, that the structure should be a matter for you to decide. This means there is potential for conflict between what your supervisors expect and what you deem necessary. The main way to address this is to be clear from the outset with your supervisors about what kind of research you intend to do. As you work on your proposal, consult with them on a regular basis about the reasons for the structure you are intending to use for your proposal. This should encourage you to explain and justify your choices in ways which help you to incorporate all the necessary elements to meet the assessment criteria.

TYPICAL CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING THE PROPOSAL

In this section I want to suggest some criteria that are often used to assess a research proposal, my purpose being to orient your work towards meeting them in ways which suit your research and the bureaucracy of a research committee. Table 11.13 provides a snapshot overview of the formative criteria that could be used for the overall assessment of your proposal.

TABLE 11.13 OVERVIEW OF CRITERIA FOR A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Criteria	Description
1 Aims and objectives	Aim(s) and objectives form a coherent set. Aim(s) show clear intention and can be actualized by the objectives which are logically sequenced.
2 Literature review and citations	Identification of key sources, authors and arguments to place the topic in an historical perspective. Summarizing and evaluating different ideas and arguments. Showing a command of the subject/topic vocabulary. Citations are consistent, correct and detailed.
3 Topic rationale	Use of argumentative structure with sufficient evidence and data to justify and provide a rationale for the topic. Use of the literature to provide authority or/and indicate direction of the topic.
4 Methodology and data collection	Overview of methodological approach with identification of appropriate data collection techniques which are briefly assessed. Justification is provided by reference to the literature and the definition and scope placed on the topic.
5 Argumentation and critical awareness	Argumentation analysis shown in rationale, literature review, scope set for the topic and justification of methodology and data collection techniques.
6 Presentation and succinctness	Clear, systematic and structured with very good grammar, spelling and clear arrangement.

READER'S QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED IN YOUR PROPOSAL

Another way of approaching this problem is to think about it from the standpoint of a person assessing your proposal, asking yourself whether it answers the basic questions the reader will raise. Using your peers as proxy-assessors can be a useful way of gaining

the kind of insight and understanding of assessment necessary to meet the criteria set. It will also provide you and your peers with an important learning opportunity from which you can acquire a much broader and deeper understanding of what makes for a good research proposal. Here are some possible questions to help you begin this exercise:

- ◆ *Title:* Does it indicate the topic, approach and key concept?
- ◆ *Introduction:* Does this seem complete? Is the topic established, are facts given and the approach justified? Is it clear and succinct?
- ◆ *Statement of the problem:* Is the problem clearly stated and its parameters defined? Is the background clear and used to show the nature of the problem?
- ◆ *Research questions:* Are these clear and systematic? Are they fully related to the problem statement? Are they answerable with research?
- ◆ *Justification:* Is this clear, well argued, using evidence and data? Are the research questions logical outcomes from the justification? Is the problem statement consistent with the conclusions of the justification? Is it appropriate for the definition of the problem?
- ◆ *Indicative literature review:* Is there a clear structure? Are citations correct? Are key concepts, theories and findings identified? Does it make logically, justified conclusions for research?
- ◆ *Feasibility:* Is there enough time to do the research? Has the student the necessary skills and abilities? Is the data accessible and able to be analysed appropriately?
- ◆ *Risk analysis:* Have the risks been identified? Are contingency plans identified? Are these realistic?

These are the kinds of questions most readers would address to a research proposal even though the criteria for assessment may be expressed as shown in Table 11.13 or Table 11.14. What you need to try and achieve is an assessment of your proposal in terms of seeing if it 'hangs together'. This means looking to ensure that the different elements are integrated and all focused on researching the topic/problem.

TABLE 11.14 ASSESSING THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE TOPIC

Topic justification	Grade
Excellent use of argumentative structure and evidence to demonstrate, through analysis, the importance of the topic, the need for research, kinds of questions requiring answers and what benefits such answers may bring. Effective and efficient use of the literature to provide authority and backing to claims.	Excellent
Good justification of the topic but <i>may</i> lack full use of argumentative structure <i>or</i> evidence to demonstrate a thorough topic analysis. Importance <i>or</i> benefits of the research <i>may</i> require a small amount of clarification. More <i>or</i> better use should have been made of sources to provide authority and backing.	Satisfactory
Relevant topic identified but lacks convincing argument to link analysis with research questions or hypothesis stated. Little use of sources to provide authority and backing.	Poor

The proposal should be:

- ♦ *rational*, to show the research has been reasoned out;
- ♦ *informative*, in that it provides enough detail for the reader to understand the proposal;
- ♦ *persuasive*, to gain support for the research;
- ♦ *demonstrative*, to show the appropriateness of the work proposed; and
- ♦ *realistic*, to show that it is capable of being achieved.

In Table 11.14 a particular element of a proposal has been selected for attention – the justification of the topic. There may be similar tables of criteria for ‘argumentation’,

'presentation', 'risk analysis' and so on. The problem for assessors is that the more specific the criteria, the more mechanical the assessment is, leaving little latitude for interpretation and exercise of professional judgement – something some people see as an advantage. The more formative (open) the criteria, the more scope there is for innovative and creative research proposals.

Using the various assessment criteria can be a way to constructing a good research proposal. It is, however, very difficult to interpret and meet formative assessment criteria in any literal way. The various tables of criteria in this chapter will help you express the vision you have for your research. Use them to give substance to how you have envisioned your research. In this way you will have a better idea of exactly what it is you will be doing, what tasks, issues and problems you may encounter on your way, how to manage what you produce, including developing contingency plans for what may go wrong and, of course how to specify the logical connectivity of your research design.

SUMMARY OF THIS CHAPTER

The purpose of this chapter has been to bring together many of the elements required for designing a research project. The focus has been on constructing a proposal for research. The key points which have been made include:

- ◆ A research proposal is the map which will help you to navigate on your research journey because it contains all your analysis, preparation and pre-emptive planning.
- ◆ There is no definitive structure or content for a research proposal. Each proposal is a unique document crafted by an individual; your proposal says something about you as a potential researcher.
- ◆ A good research proposal is clear, structured, succinct and answers a series of key questions. To achieve some of this you need to think about the reader of your proposal.
- ◆ Most research proposals require several drafts, edits and re-writes before a satisfactory one is ready. There is no such thing as the perfect research proposal.