



Thesis Proposal Writing



How to write research proposal?

- ✓ A research proposal is intended to convince others that you have a worthwhile research project, a good grasp of the relevant literature and the major issues, and that your methodology is sound.
- Generally, a research proposal should contain all the key elements involved in the research process and include sufficient information for the readers to evaluate the proposed study.
- Regardless of your research area and the methodology you choose, all research proposals must address the following questions:
 - ✓ **What** you plan to accomplish
 - ✓ **Why** you want to do it and
 - ✓ **How** you are going to do it.



YOUR THESIS TITLE

CONDENSING OVER HALF A DECADE OF YOUR LIFE IN ONE SENTENCE. www.phdcomics.com
JORGIE CHAM © 2006

the colon
Can't decide what to title your thesis? Use a colon!

a preposition
A good preposition tells your readers they, this is not just a futile exercise!

"Witty catchphrase" : Length-enhanced superlative verbage with prolixity in/off for Obscure topic few people care about.

witty catchphrase
Makes people think you're hip and culturally relevant. Only marginally related to the actual thesis? No problem.

the boring stuff
Nothing says "academic rigor" like a long string of dry scientific-sounding terminology and fancy buzzwords.

obscure topic
few people care about. Sad, but true.

Title
It should be concise and descriptive. Often titles are stated in terms of a functional relationship, because such titles clearly indicate the independent and dependent variables. However, if possible, think of an informative but catchy title. An effective title not only piques the reader's interest, but also predisposes him/her favorably towards the proposal.



Sample Titles

- Birds of a "bad" feather flock together: The Dark Triad traits and mate choice
- The making of Darth Vader: Parent-child care and the Dark Triad
- [Trolls just want to have fun](#)
- [Emotional intelligence and academic success: examining the transition from high school to university](#)
- [Implicit Statistical Learning in Real-World Environments Leads to Ecologically Rational Decision Making](#)
- [Healthy Out-Group Members Are Represented Psychologically as Infected In-Group Members](#)



Abstract

- A brief summary of approximately 180 - 300 words. It should include the research question, the rationale for the study, the hypothesis (if any), the method and the main findings.
- Write after you finish your project
- Written in past tense
- No citations, no stats



Guidelines on writing a research proposal

The (Longer) Standard Model

A Basic Proposal Outline:

- Introduction
 - ✓ Topic area
 - ✓ Research question
 - ✓ Significance to knowledge
- Literature review
 - ✓ Previous research; others & yours
 - ✓ Interlocking findings and unanswered questions
 - ✓ Reprise your research question(s) in this context



INTRODUCTION

- **Problem Statement** (basic difficulty - area of concern, felt need and goal to be achieved)
- Make your case here that this is a relevant issue – one that begs to be addressed.
- **Purpose** (goal oriented-emphasizing practical outcomes that "may" occur).
May not be "So I can graduate."
- What do you hope/anticipate being able to do with the results of your study?
- **Significance** (relevance, need—may overlap with the statement of problem)
- You respond to this as if somebody said about your study, "So, what?"



INTRODUCTION

- **Assumptions** (postulates)
- What will you have to assume to conduct your study?
- If survey questions, that respondents will answer truthfully, etc.



INTRODUCTION

- **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**
- A limitation is a factor that may affect the study but is not under your control such as a lack of generalizability.
- A delimitation is a factor that is under your control. You might choose to look only at teachers in a particular state or country



INTRODUCTION

- **Definition of Terms** (largely conceptual here-with citations; operational definitions may follow in Methodology Chapter).
- Use a citation for each term you define. Define all jargon and unfamiliar terms. When in doubt, define.
- End with specific **hypotheses**/predictions relating to all of the variables you have introduced or will be including



Introduction

Provide necessary background or context for your research problem.
Place your research question in the context of either a current "hot" area, or an older area that remains viable.
Provide a brief but appropriate historical backdrop along with contemporary context in which your proposed research question occupies the central stage.
Identify "key players" and refer to the most relevant and representative publications.
Paint your research question in broad brushes and bring out its significance.
Provide detailed statement of intent of the research; present and justify a plan of action



Verb Tense

- *Generally (except for introductions, summaries, and literature review), proposals are written in **future tense**, explaining what the researcher "will" do.



REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

- **Introduction** (organization of the chapter – overview).
- Tell the reader each subheading that will be discussed, followed by "A summary will conclude this section."
 - (sections/subsections should match questions).



An Effective Literature Review should

- Flesh out the background of your study.
- Critically assess important research trends or areas of interest.
- Identify potential gaps in knowledge.
- Situate the current study within a wider disciplinary conversation.
 - You are entering a scholarly conversation already in progress. Show that you've been listening and have something valuable to say
- Illustrates the uniqueness, importance of and need for your particular project.
- Demonstrate familiarity with the topic and appropriate approaches to studying it.
- Justify methodological choices.



Tips on drafting a literature review

- Categorize the literature (primary sources best) into recognizable topic clusters;
 - stake out the various positions that are relevant to your project,
 - build on conclusions that lead to your project, or
 - demonstrate the places where the literature is lacking.
- Avoid "Smith says X, Jones says Y" literature reviews – synthesize!
- Avoid including all studies on the subject.
- Avoid polemics, praise, and blame.



Literature Review

- ✓ Ensures that you are not "reinventing the wheel"
- ✓ Gives credits to those who have laid the groundwork for your research
- ✓ Demonstrates your understanding of the theoretical and research issues related to your research question
- ✓ Shows your ability to critically evaluate relevant literature information and to integrate and **synthesize** the existing literature
- ✓ Provides new theoretical insights or develops a new model as the conceptual framework for your research
- ✓ Convinces your reader that your proposed research will make a significant and substantial contribution to the literature (i.e., resolving an important theoretical issue or filling a major gap in the literature).



Tips on Drafting Methodology

- Break down your methodology into subsections.
 - selection of participants, materials, testing environment, procedure, methods of analysis, etc.
- Remember that your methods section may also require supporting literature.
- Anticipate and pre-empt the audience's methodological concerns.
 - Acknowledge major problems.
 - Reasons why methodology selected is appropriate to address research questions in study.
 - Justify your approach by showing how benefits outweigh potential problems.



METHODOLOGY

- **Research Strategy** (e.g., correlational, quasi-experimental, descriptive, etc.)
- **Research Design**
 - Between/Within
 - Explain your variables of analysis here).



METHODOLOGY

- **Population and Sample** (Define both very specifically)
 - Inclusion and exclusion criteria
- Recruitment methods
- Compensation



METHODOLOGY

- **Materials** (tests, measures, observations, scales, and questionnaires, stimuli, recording instruments)
 - Measures
 - Alphas, sample questions, scaling, scoring
 - Validity



METHODOLOGY

- **Procedures** (Field, classroom or laboratory e.g., instructions to subjects or distribution of materials; data collection and recording—everything BEFORE analysis)



METHODOLOGY

- **Data Analysis** (statistical analysis or qualitative analysis explained in detail)



BACK MATTER

- **References** (must be in APA format)
- <http://citationmachine.net/>
- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>
- **Appendices** (IRB in one appendix, each scale or measure separate appendix)



How to write research proposal?

Common Mistakes in Proposal Writing

- ✓ Failure to provide the proper context to frame the research question
- ✓ Failure to delimit the boundary conditions for your research
- ✓ Failure to cite landmark studies
- ✓ Failure to accurately present the theoretical and empirical contributions by other researchers
- ✓ Failure to stay focused on the research question
- ✓ Failure to develop a coherent and persuasive argument for the proposed research
- ✓ Too much detail on minor issues, but not enough detail on major issues
- ✓ Too much rambling – going "all over the map" without a clear sense of direction.
- ✓ Too many citation lapses and incorrect references
- ✓ Too long or too short.



DOs and DO NOTs

- DO
- ✓ Produce/prepare a professional looking proposal
- ✓ Make it interesting
- ✓ Make it informative, meaningful
- ✓ Make it easy to read
- ✓ Use clear headings/sub-headings
- ✓ Be concise, precise
- ✓ Check spelling, grammar
- ✓ Consistent formatting
- ✓ Present in accurate/acceptable format
- ✓ SYNTHESIZE
- ✓ Discuss constructs in same order throughout
- DO NOTs
- ✓ Use words that you clearly do not understand and can not define



Avoid unnecessarily complex language

- "Accordingly, the limited gaps of our knowledge of these effects lie in any untested variables that are subject to modification and replication. For instance, will these fallacious effects be demonstrated in different environments with different enhancing stimuli beyond only people's appearances?"
- "The purpose of this study is to strengthen the predictive reliability of fallacious reasoning made by people in situations where factors tangential to content specificity influence their decisions about receptively transmitted information."



Grammatical Issues

- Only
 - NOT "We only tested children under the age of 3."
 - "We tested only children under the age of 3."
- That vs. which
 - "The measure that was used had been validated".
 - "The measure, which had been validated, was used here."
- Since, While
 - Use only to convey temporal information



APA Style

- Alphabetical order
- No issue #s
- And vs. &
- "et al." after first mention
- Do not write out all names if > 5
- Page #s for direct quotes



Sophistication

- Do not use:
 - Looked at/for
 - Did a study
 - Built off of
 - Said that
 - Being that
 - Tried to
 - Supposedly



Word Use

- Affect/effect
- Higher/greater
- Agreement: "data that haven't" not "hasn't"
 - Offspring that do vs. does
 - Higher levels relate, not 'relates'



Dangling References

- This or that what???
- More than what?
- Include "that" between phrases, not "the experiments she ran" but "the experiments that she conducted"
- Be clear who "they" refers to
- "men sang more loudly than women" should be followed with "did"



Say what you mean

- Television predicted violence – those who watched television more often engaged in more violent acts than those who watched television less often
- 'Partners were more aggressive' when you mean 'individuals perceived their partners to be more aggressive'
- Women who are older will be more affectionate with their partners (compared to younger women or compared to with family members?)



Be Concise

- Don't use "also" twice in one sentence
- Don't add "or not" after "whether"
- "challenged" vs. "made more difficult"



Avoid judgment terms

- Better than – received higher scores, performed more efficiently



Punctuation

- , before which, around clauses
- ' placement
- ; - do not overuse. Use in place of commas if beginning new clause



Paragraph Structure

- Each paragraph should express a unique idea, flow from the previous paragraph and be supported with evidence and summarized
- One or two sentences is NOT a fully developed paragraph



Style Considerations: Tone

- When conveying your attitude in your writing:
 - Try to strike a consistently confident tone.
 - Avoid an apologetic or arrogant tone.



Style Considerations: Coherence

- Move from "old" information to "new" information.
- Put the most important information at the end of the sentence (stress position).
- Keep the subject and verb together.
- Start sentences with **short, easily understood phrases**.
- Use "**stock**" transitional phrases.
- Use **pronouns** and/or **recycling**.



Voice

- Active: I will conduct the bulk of the research during the six-month fieldwork period.
- Passive: The bulk of the research will be conducted during fieldwork.

Reasons to use Passive Voice:

- Your field may prefer its use, especially in describing research design and experimental activities.
- You need to preserve coherence from sentence to sentence.
- Switching from "I" to "we" for authorship



Visual Aids

- Incorporate charts, graphs, diagrams, illustrations, etc., wherever possible, permissible, or practical.



Proposal Writing and Anxiety:

- Understand that the proposal will be negotiated--be prepared to revise!
- Think of the proposal as an introduction to your thesis or dissertation.
- Remember that the proposal is not a binding contract.
- Remember that your proposal is not meant to limit ideas, but to help you think practically.
- **Talk to your advisor!**



Timeline/Plan of Work

Some things to keep in mind:

- Be aware of important dates for submitting and defending dissertations.
- Do not be overly ambitious.
- Remember that your proposed timeline demonstrates your awareness of the various elements of the study (IRB approval, travel; design, testing, and length of experiments; negotiation of entry into the study site; purchase of necessary equipment; drafting; redrafting).

