



WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Your proposal does not permanently set what you will do. It is a starting point and throughout your research you will probably adjust and change your position. You will be able to trace the development of your ideas and measure the progress you have made by referring back to your proposal.

Your research proposal:

- gives you an opportunity to think through your project carefully, and clarify and define what you want to research
- provides you with an outline to guide you through the research process
- lets your supervisor and department or faculty know what you would like to research and how you plan to go about it
- helps the department choose an appropriate supervisor
- gives you an opportunity to receive feedback from your supervisor and others in the academic community as well as possible funders
- serves as a contract between you and your supervisor and the university
- can be submitted to an ethics committee to gain ethical approval
- can be submitted to a scholarship committee or other funding agency

The process of developing your proposal includes:

- choosing a topic
- narrowing and focusing your topic
- formulating research objectives or questions and ideas for analysis
- outlining the key literature in the topic area
- deciding on research methodology, research design and methods
- proposing an approach to data analysis
- proposing a format e.g. how many chapters and suggested chapter headings
- developing a timeline
- developing a budget and resources you will need
- developing a bibliography

Writing a research proposal can be a demanding, frustrating, challenging and time-consuming process - but it can also be exciting!



Related resources:
Literature Review
Writing an Abstract

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Suggested format of your research proposal

Title page	Include your name, department and supervisor/s, title: Proposal for Thesis, and thesis title
Table of Contents	
Abstract	Include an outline of your proposal, what your research will involve, research questions or hypothesis, research methods and how you will analyse the data.
Background	Set out why you chose your topic - what prompted your interest in the topic; the links with previous research; ways your thesis is different or unique; and states the research objectives, questions or hypothesis.
Theoretical framework	Review of the relevant literature you have read so far sets your research in context. It identifies the direction you will take from among the possible theoretical directions. Include a bibliography at the end of your proposal.
Research methodology	Identify the methodology that underpins your research and give a rationale for your approach. You may need to identify the research paradigm and epistemologies that underpin your research. Show how you have used your review of the literature to construct your own research methodology.
Research design and methods	Outline how you are going to get your data. By reading widely you will be familiar with methodologies followed by previous researchers and will have explored possible research methods. You will be aware of problems others have encountered and will be able to design your research and adapt methods for your research. Outline the methods you will use and problems you anticipate. Outline whether your research is

qualitative or quantitative, whether you are using triangulation, statistics, interviewing, questionnaires, experiments, observations etc. If humans or animals are to be used, outline the ethical considerations and your application to the university ethics committee.

Analysis and discussion

Suggest what you are going to do with the data. Outline the aims of your research again and ideas you have on how you are going to analyse the data. Include any tools for analysis you intend using or trying out.

Format

Outline the format of your thesis. Suggest how many chapters you will have, chapter headings and the order of presentation.

Timeline

Include a timeline to guide you and keep you on track. For example, estimate the time needed for tasks and assign tasks for each month.

Budget and resources

Outline the resources you need and propose a budget.

Bibliography

Katie Nimmo, postgraduate student at Victoria University, borrowed an analogy from E.R. Doctorow who compared writing a novel to driving a car at night.

"You can only see as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way".

Writing a research proposal, suggests Katie, is turning on the headlights.

References

Morris, Mathews, K. & Nimmo, K. (2001). Writing a research proposal. *Postgraduate seminars 2001*.

Roundtree, K. & Laing, T. (1996). *Writing by degrees: A practical guide to writing theses and research papers*. Auckland, NZ: Longman.