

October 2018

### **Structure of the Research Proposal**

While the regulations regarding the proposal submission have not changed, in the following you will find a detailed recommended structure for writing the proposal.

These guidelines are only suggestions, and the structure of the final proposal should be decided upon and accepted by the thesis supervisor.

A proposal is essentially a road-map that should help lead you on the path to a completed research study, with sufficient information that allows readers to assess the validity and usefulness of your proposed study. An effective proposal is also judged on the quality of your writing and, therefore, it is important that your writing is coherent, clear, and compelling. Language is our principal tool for conveying ideas.

**Regardless of the research question you are investigating and the methodology you choose, all research proposals must address the following questions:**

1. What is the question and what is its breakdown—what, in other words, are the smaller questions that form part of the whole?
2. **What do you plan to accomplish?** Be clear and succinct in defining the research question and what it is you are proposing to research.
3. **Why do you want to do it?** In addition to detailing your research design, you also must conduct a thorough review of the literature and provide convincing evidence that it is a topic worthy of study. Be sure to answer the "So What?" question. The focus here should be on the innovation, or new knowledge, that your study offers, and on its significance (the "so what?").
4. **How are you going to do it?** Be sure that what you propose is doable.

Fundamentally, the entire proposal is there to support the question: What the question is, how you will answer it, why we should care, and how it is related to existing research.

Note that this proposal is not an essay going over everything you have learned about the topic; instead, you must choose what is relevant to help explain the goals for your study.

The document should be no more than 12 A4 pages long, excluding a title page and bibliography, double spaced; Times New Roman or Arial; font 11; and normal margins (2 cm).

### **Suggested structure for the proposal:**

#### **Title**

- Student's personal information
- Names of advisor/s
- Research Title

#### **Presentation of the research question**

In this section you should introduce the issue to be discussed. Approach writing this section with the thought that you cannot assume your readers will know as much about the topic as you do. This includes:

- Most importantly: A clearly articulated research question.
- The historical background of the phenomena you wish to study.
- Descriptions of the main actors.
- Presentations of the theoretical context for the study.
- If necessary, provide definitions of key concepts or terms.

The goal of this section is to present the actual proposed study and give the reader an indication of how the research is to be carried out. That is, to convince the reader that your overall research design and methods of analysis will correctly address the research question and that the methods will provide the means to effectively interpret the potential results. Your design and methods should be unmistakably tied to the specific aims of your study. Therefore it should answer the following questions:

- What are the primary sources?
- Are there any limitations to data collected?
- What is the research design and methods?
- Why are you using these specific sources and methods?
- Are there any expected pitfalls in acquiring the sources or in the methods?

## **Preliminary structure of the proposal**

### **Review of relevant literature**

In this section the author presents the main academic writings on matters related to the research topic. While some description of key sources is important, the literature review is not merely a bibliographical list. Its goal is to situate your research question in the existing field of knowledge: How does existing literature help provide background and a basis for your research? What, on the other hand, remains unanswered (and perhaps un-asked) in the existing scholarly literature that you hope to address?

Other goals of the literature review include:

- Presenting the student's mastery of the relevant literature. That is, awareness of the current state of knowledge and an understanding of key lines of argument and debates on the topic / issue.
- Presenting the ability of the student to detect the academic fields related to the study.
- Comparing and contrasting the various arguments, theories, methodologies.
- Demonstrating to your readers that your work is original and innovative.
- Explaining the contribution of the current study in relations to the existing knowledge on the topic.

### **Presentation of the innovation of the proposed research**

This section should answer why this research is important, what is its significance, and why should someone reading the proposal care about the outcomes of the proposed study? That is, answer the "so what?" question.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion reiterates the importance or significance of your proposal and provides a brief summary of the entire study.

### **Bibliography**

As with any scholarly research paper, you must cite the sources you use in composing your proposal. Cited works should always use a standard format that follows the writing style advised by the discipline or that is preferred by your professor.

**Signatures: The student, advisor/s, and chair of the Teaching Committee (Few sentences)**

### Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Failure to be concise; being "all over the map" without a clear sense of purpose.
- Failure to cite landmark works in your literature review.
- Failure to delimit the contextual boundaries of your research [e.g., time, place, people, etc.].
- Failure to develop a coherent and persuasive set of questions for the proposed research.
- Failure to stay focused on the research question; going off on unrelated tangents.
- Sloppy or imprecise writing or poor grammar.
- Too much detail on minor issues, but not enough detail on major issues.