

# How to Write a Research Proposal

“A well-written proposal will ease the process of obtaining institutional and ethical approval and will increase your chances of obtaining funding for your project.” (Verhoef & Hilsden, 2004: pg.2). There is truth in this statement because the proposal is the document through which we must convince other people that there is merit and value in our work, so that they will give us the necessary permissions and support we need to do our research. How effectively we are able to convince others to support us, depends upon how well developed and convincing our proposal is.

Developing a research proposal starts with identifying your general area of interest, and then developing a focused research question about some problem, challenge or ‘unknown’ within this area. The next step is to provide a review of relevant literature within which you explore what is known about the area, as well as what is unknown or contested. In so doing, you demonstrate how your research will address a gap in our knowledge. Then, drawing on effective methods from similar studies, you will then present a detailed description of how you intend to explore this question, and what you will do with the data you collect.

**Typically, a proposal will have the following structure:**

- Title
- Introduction
- Literature review (and possibly a theoretical or conceptual framework for social sciences research)
- Rationale/motivation, aims and objectives
- Methodology/description of techniques/experiments/analyses
- Ethical considerations
- Timelines (work plan) and Budget
- Anticipated research outputs (e.g., conferences and publications)
- References
- Appendices (consent and assent forms, interview schedules)

When drafting your proposal, bear in mind that your readers may also have to read many other proposals. Therefore, **it is imperative to ensure your proposal is well structured and clearly written.** This care and attention to detail will make a positive impact on your reviewers.

## Guiding Principles for Postgraduate Research Proposals

### Contents:

- Provide a clear description of the research problem or topic and indicate how this research will benefit society or contribute to the research community
- Present a well-structured, critical literature review
- Convince the reader that the research is worth supporting (rationale)
- Be clear, objective, succinct, and realistic in your research questions, aims, and objectives
- Provide a thorough and detailed explanation of your proposed methods

### Style:

- Write a short, descriptive title
- Provide a clear structure for your text (include a table of contents and numbered section headings)
- Adopt a formal or professional academic writing style including, consistent citation, proper paragraphing, and explanations for any acronyms or jargon used.
- Include appropriate tables and figures to support and add to your written words.

**Reference:** Verhoef, M.J. and Hilsden, R.J., 2004. Writing an effective research proposal. Compiled by the FHS Writing Lab, 2024



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