



Getting Started on Research: Writing a Research Proposal

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Research is a process that needs to be actively **managed**. Being **strategic in your preliminary planning**, being **organized and prepared**, and **creating the mental space necessary for research** are important parts of the process (**O'leary, 2017**).



Objectives

This lecture

- ▶ **takes the student through the research proposal cycle,**
- ▶ **shares insights and provides tips on how to structure each of its components.**
- ▶ **addresses the key elements of the research process : choosing a topic, formulating the title, writing the introduction, stating the problem and the purpose for the study, identifying research questions and hypotheses, and advancing methods and procedures for data collection and analysis**



It is worth keeping in mind that

Research is systematic which required **reading, planning, committment and perseverance.**

Planning is a very essential step that leads to successful research; therefore, preparing a **sound research proposal** is required for any kind of research.

Research proposal

A **research proposal** is a brief document that **contains a research work plan** which is intended to convince the academic committee that you have a **worthwhile research project** and that **you have the competence to complete it**.

The proposal mirrors the research process itself and therefore, like research, your proposal must represent a **coherent and integrated process** (Boden, Kenway & Epstein, 2005, p.44).



A Research Proposal Aims to Convince the Reader that Your Project Is:



- ✓ **Important**
- ✓ **Based on strong academic basis**
- ✓ **Well thought out in terms of its research methods**
- ✓ **Feasible**



Good research proposal

A good research proposal depends not only on **the quality of the proposed project**, but also **on the quality of writing**; therefore, it **should be clear and coherent**. What you should keep in mind is to ensure its acceptance and ultimately the research success. Something not to forget is to prove that the research is **feasible in terms** of:

- ▶ the available **time and resources**;
- ▶ **access to data**;
- ▶ the **researcher's experience and expertise**;
- ▶ ethical, legal, environmental, and safety issues (Denscombe, 2012, p.1).

Before one embarks on preparing a proposal, he/she should have a research topic.

**Steps in
deciding about
a topic**

brainstorm general topics that genuinely interest you

do some background reading on the general topics

read extensively about it

refine it into a precise and narrow research topic

ensure it is significant and will make contribution

consult your supervisor or other professionals in the field for advice

formulate a particular answerable research question



Characteristics of distinctive proposals

The success of a proposal will depend on how far it can show that the research will have:

- ▶ *originality* that makes it different from what has already been done;
- ▶ *timeliness*, addressing current issues and being up-to-date;
- ▶ particular *relevance* for the evaluators ;
- ▶ *wider application*, linking the findings with more general practical or theoretical concerns;
- ▶ *precision*, avoiding any ambiguity or vagueness relating to definitions, data or planning (Descombe, 2012, p. 31).



Organization of the research proposal

Introductory section

- Cover page
- Title Page
- Abstract (not always required)
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures
- List of Tables

Main body

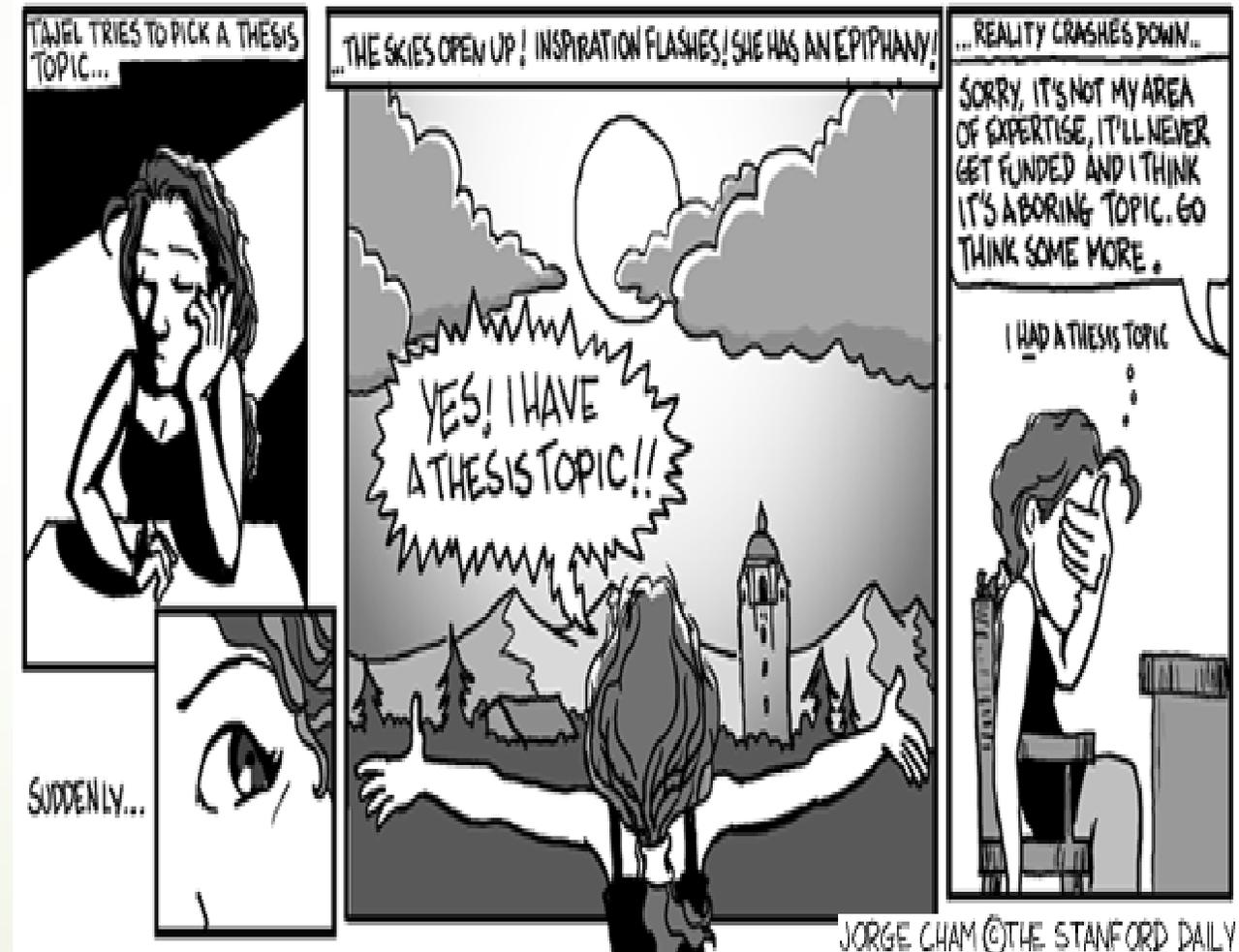
- Introduction
- Problem statement
- Purpose statement/ Aim of the study
- Research questions and /or hypotheses
- Review of literature
- Research design/ Methods and procedures
- Significance of the study
- Delimitations of the study
- Ethical statement
- Preliminary outline/ Layout and overview of chapters
- 3.15 References
- Timeline/ Plan of work

The cover page

the cover page contains all the necessary information of the proposed research. It can be formatted according to the the APA style including the title of the research, the author's name, the affiliation, the course, the supervisor's name and the due date.

The title

The title should be of **current importance** providing benefit to the field in which you are conducting the study. It should also be **with a single interpretation** and formulated with simple language so that people cannot be distracted and to avoid ambiguity.



Introduction

The introduction is the part which introduces your study and most importantly provides readers with the background information for the proposed research. Its purpose is to establish a framework for the research, so that readers can understand how it is related to other research (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 96).

Statement of the problem

A problem might be defined as the issue which exists in literature, theory or practice that leads to a need for the study (Creswell, 1994; p. 50).

- which will make it easier to understand and give some background on what is already known about it. It seeks to answer the questions :
- What is already known about the problem?
- where does the problem arise ?
- whom does it affect
- Why does the problem matter?

The statement of the problem allows the researcher to describe the problem systematically, to reflect on its priority and to point out why the research on the problem should be undertaken.



Literature review

The literature review is an important section in a research proposal as it enables the researcher to gain an understanding of the existing research on the selected topic.

Very simply, it needs to address the following main issues:

What is known about the research problem?

What are the gaps?

Where and how does the proposed research fit into this picture?



Purpose statement /Aim of the Study

The aim(s) of the study should convey clearly what you want to achieve through your research tightly related to the title.

This section starts with the broad aim stated very clearly followed by specific objectives. This can be written as a single paragraph or a list of aims/objectives in a logical order.

Action-oriented words such as 'to investigate, to describe, to analyze, to determine, to find out, to ascertain can be used in formulating the aims and specific objectives



Research questions and or hypotheses

- ▶ *As research questions allow the researcher to further narrow down the purpose of his/her study, the first thing to do is to refer to it to ensure that they are tightly related. Narrowing, clarifying and even redefining research questions are essential to the research process (O'Leary, 2004). Good research questions need to be:*
- ▶ *interesting in the sense that they address current issues;*
- ▶ *relevant in relation to the aim;*
- ▶ *sufficiently narrow (specific) so that they can be answered.*
- ▶ *Broad questions can be difficult if not impossible to be addressed without breaking them into specific answerable questions.*



Qualitative / Quantitative research questions

Keep in mind that quantitative questions differ from qualitative questions.

- ▶ In asking a quantitative research question, you need to determine if you intend to describe data, compare differences among groups, assess a relationship and if a variable predicts another or effects another.
 - ▶ Qualitative research questions seek to explore, discover and understand meaning; they are broader than quantitative research question.
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Hypotheses

- ▶ Quantitative hypotheses, on the other hand, are predictions the researcher makes about the expected relationships among variables (Cresswell, 2014 p.132).
- ▶ In qualitative research, the hypotheses may be generated as the researchers gain insights into what is being studied.
- ▶ Quantitative hypotheses may take the form of null and alternative. They can be one-tailed (directional) or two-tailed (non-directional) (refer to last year lecture for more details).



Research design / Methods and Procedures

In this section, you describe **how** you are going to answer the formulated questions.). It includes:

- ▶ the research approach to be used in the proposed study;
- ▶ the methods of collecting data;
- ▶ the population and sample
- ▶ and the data analysis procedure



Significance of the study

In this section, you need to convince the reader that the findings can lead to new methods or strategies at dealing with the problem of investigation.

- ▶ The answers to the following question might help you to write this part.
- ▶ What drives the need for such a study
- ▶ Why is it worth doing?
- ▶ Who cares for its results?
- ▶ Whom will this study benefit. (Gruba & Zobel, 2011).

Delimitations of the study

Delimitation addresses how a study will be narrowed in scope, that is, how it is bounded. This is the place to explain the things that you are not doing and why you have chosen not to do them (Pajares 2007).

Ethical statement

This section is not required in all types of research except if it includes research subjects, mainly people as participants. Some ethical issues are present in almost all projects such as anonymity and confidentiality of data and the use of results. The key principles of research ethics contained in the codes cover three broad areas:

- ▶ No harm to participants
- ▶ Voluntary consent
- ▶ Scientific integrity (Descombe, 2012, p. 135)



Preliminary outline/ Layout and overview of chapters

Proposals include a preliminary outline mentioning the content of chapters. This can be done based on the extensive review of literature.

References

► Timeline/ Plan of work

A plan of work may be required by some institutions specifying the completion dates of the different parts. This cannot only convince the supervisory committee that your project can be realized in terms of the allotted time, but it can help you to manage your time adequately.



Page lay out

The general page layout of your research proposal should be an A4-size page with 0.5 inch (1.27 cm) margins on all sides/ preferably 2.5 on each side

- ▶ Times New Roman is the preferred font.
- ▶ The title and chapter headings are in 14-point Times New Roman Bold. The other headings and body text are in 12 point Times New Roman.



Tips on writing

- ▶ Coherence is a very important aspect in writing which reflects the extent to which sentences and paragraphs “flow” together. Writers best achieve coherence by
- ▶ Moving from “**old**” (familiar) information to “**new**” information.
- ▶ Put the most important information at the end of the sentence (stress position).
- ▶ Keep the subject and verb together.
- ▶ Starting sentences with **short, easily understood phrases**.
- ▶ Using “**stock**” **transitional phrases** (“however,” “therefore,” “in addition,” “on the other hand”) that signal to readers a shift in topic or emphasis. (For more tips on transitions, see Purdue’s Online Writing Lab: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/574/01/>).



Using **pronouns** to refer back to previously introduced information (e.g. this+noun) and/or the use of **recycling**, or the repetition of key words or phrases (Graduate Writing Center of the Center for Excellence in Writing).

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