Write a research proposal

A research proposal is a short document written to inform others about the proposed area of the research. Generally, you will be required to write a research proposal for acceptance into research degree candidature. In some departments this document is called a **transfer report**.

This is the document that determines the potential significance and viability of your project for a PhD and whether you, the candidate have the capacity to undertake the study.

It is advisable to write your research proposal with the guidance of your supervisor. That way you will be made aware of any particular requirements in your field of study.

How Will Writing a Research Proposal Help YOU?

Writing a research proposal may be a requirement of your faculty, but it can be a valuable personal process too. It will help you to structure your thoughts and your proposed project. It will allow you to focus on the research question and its purpose, what is involved in the project, as well as providing you with a clear plan of how each stage of the research will be undertaken, and the anticipated outcomes. This initial piece of writing will also help you to identify problems that you may encounter along the way, and direct you to think about how you will manage those kinds of issues.

Before you start writing the proposal, ask yourself:

- What is the main research question?
- Is the research question worth answering?
- Will this make an interesting and worthwhile project?
- Will the findings be of interest to others?
- Can I justify undertaking this study?

The Purpose of a research proposal

- To propose a research project that is worthwhile and will result in a significant contribution to knowledge
- To formulate a detailed plan of the project including methodological approach and theoretical framework
- To ensure that the proposed research is achievable within the required time and with the available resources
- To demonstrate that you have adequate expertise and experience to undertake the project.

A suggested format for an effective research proposal

(Check with your supervisor whether there is a particular format that is recommended in your discipline)

1. **Introduction**

   Present the context for the proposed research by outlining the background field and by reviewing some of the existing research. Establish the need for further research and in particular for the project that you are proposing.

2. **Research Aims**

   Clearly state aims of the research project. What will you achieve in this research project? Identify the value, significance and contribution of the proposed work. The findings will need to extend knowledge in the field.

   Consider some possible implications of the findings.

3. **Literature Review**

    Review relevant previous studies. This will be a brief overview, not a comprehensive review of the literature like the one that you will present in your thesis. It will serve to provide a context within which your research will be situated, and whereby you can demonstrate the need for your particular research. Describe the theoretical framework you have chosen to use in your project.

4. **Research Plan**

    Provide a careful plan of the proposed research to demonstrate that the project is feasible, can be completed within the required time, and will provide useful evidence to achieve the research aims.

    The plan may include the following sections:

    General methodology
    Outline and justify the proposed methodology. Discuss the rationale for your selection of research paradigm, research techniques, materials, equipment, testing procedures, data collection, proposed analyses, etc.

    Research Questions
    Present the research questions that the proposed study will investigate and answer.

    Hypotheses
    State the hypotheses that will be tested (if relevant).

    Stages in the Research
    Provide a detailed explanation of the stages in the research and the major tasks to be undertaken within each stage of your work. Show that you have considered the best methods to achieve the aims.

    Scope and Problems
    Identify the scope of the proposed research- and an appreciation of possible problems that may occur along the way.

    Resources Required
    Identify the resources needed to conduct the research and their availability.

    Time Lines
    Establish that the research can be completed in time.

    References
    Provide a list of all references that you have cited in the proposal.

    Remember, your research proposal is an important preliminary work which will form a framework for your final project. Moreover, it is the document that may determine your acceptance into or continuation in the doctoral program.