# How to Write a research proposal

## What is a research proposal?

A research proposal outlines a case for undertaking a piece of research and how it will be carried out. Research proposals are an important first step in any research project. The process of drafting a proposal, negotiating a way forward with your supervisor/tutor and then redrafting, can be lengthy. However, it is important to remember that your supervisor/tutor is responsible for ensuring that your proposal:

* has a specific research question or enquiry.
* meets the academic requirements of your course.
* is feasible in the available time and with the available resources.

Procedures for Research Proposals vary across the university. ALWAYS check your course documentation for precise information about the forms to be completed and deadlines for submission; follow the guidance – even if it differs from what is described in this document. If in doubt, check with your supervisor.

## Key components of a research proposal explained:

Word counts and structure vary, but on average they are usually between 1500 to 2000 words and include the following:

**Title**

Sum up the objective of the research and the proposed methodology concisely.

**Research context and rationale**

Explain (supported with research) the situation that has led to the need for the research (e.g. when, what, who, why) and the reasons why this research is necessary. Also consider your own background and clarify how you are particularly well-placed or qualified to undertake this research.

**Research issue and questions**

Explain the key issues or gaps in knowledge that your research will address. Indicate what core questions your research will be answering.

**Proposed research methodology**

Explain your research design using research to justify your decisions. Typical areas of discussion:

* How research questions relate to approaches to research design in the field
* Sample group and sample methods, supported with research
* Measurement instruments or data collection procedures to be used, supported with research on why, how and when these instruments/approaches are generally used, consider strengths and weaknesses
* Data analysis techniques to be used, supported with research on why, how and when these techniques are generally used, consider strengths and weaknesses

**Use of research findings**

Explain how your research will be used. For example, it may resolve theoretical issues in your field or lead to the development of new theoretical models; it may affect the ways in which people working in the field operate in future, or influence politicians and other decision makers. Back up your arguments with details in order to build up a case for supporting the research. Give brief details of any immediate applications of your research, including any further research that may be done to build on your findings.

**A bibliography**

As in any piece of academic writing, you should list the articles and texts to which you have referred to in your proposal.

**Time plan/schedule**

Draw up a schedule that reflects a realistic appreciation of the time your research will take to complete. Do not be over-optimistic when working out time frames.

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