



GUIDELINES FOR PROJECT PAPER AND THESIS PROPOSAL WRITING

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1. INTRODUCTION

This outline is intended to serve as a guide to the postgraduate students, supervisors, Departmental Heads, Departmental Postgraduate Studies Committees and the Faculty Postgraduate Studies Committee in the preparation and assessment of research proposals, research project papers and theses.

Research is a systematic process for generating new knowledge or for confirming existing knowledge. A farmer planting two kinds of sorghum side by side to compare yields, a biochemist sequencing the proteins of a new virus, a statistician analyzing the health impact of an intervention over space and time, a sociologist questioning villagers about their feelings towards family planning – all are doing research (a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic or problem area).

Each form of research offers its own perspective and follows its own set of procedures. This therefore means that besides the general guidelines on the procedure of doing research, there are variations across disciplines, meant to address specific disciplinary requirements. Even in a given discipline, research protocols may differ considerably. The format suggested below is only a guide as to what is important in compiling a research proposal and subsequently a research paper or a thesis. It is to be used flexibly both by graduate students and by the Postgraduate Studies Committee.

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2. RESEARCH PROPOSAL

A research proposal is a key step in the process of obtaining knowledge. Once the knowledge is obtained, it is processed and compiled into a research paper or thesis.

A research proposal states the nature of knowledge to be sought and specific objectives to be achieved. It should justify the need for pursuing the gap in knowledge and should specify the methods to be used in that effort, among others.

Preceding the actual body of the proposal is the front cover page information which includes the title page, date of the proposal, and name and institution of the author, table of contents matching text pages.

The title of the proposal should be as short as possible and should reflect the main thrust of the intended investigation. The substantive sections of a proposal are as below.

2.1 Background to the Study

A background to the study provides an introduction to the proposed research. It prepares the reader for the statement of the problem by contextualizing the topic. It discusses the existing body of



knowledge on the topic of the study.

2.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The statement of the research problem is a concise discussion of the nature of knowledge to be sought or of gaps in existing knowledge that need to be filled. A statement of the problem is meant to demonstrate that the researcher has a good grasp of what he/she wants to research on.

For instances, there could be a discrepancy between theoretical assumptions and actual behavior in society, the research would be to seek an explanation for that gap.

2.3 Research questions

For qualitative research there should be research questions which aim at providing adequate answers based on the data collected. These questions should derive from the problem and focus on the data to be collected and interrogate the various aspects of the gap to provide a possible explanation.

2.4. Objectives of the Study

This section requires the statement of a general/ overall objective of the study followed by a number of specific objectives.

2.5. Justification of the study

This comprises a clear statement of the value of the proposed research; it might specify the significance for solving an existing problem in society such as behavioral change or policy modification. The value could also be of epistemological nature, solving an academic/theoretical problem.

2.6. Scope and Limitations of the study

The section states what areas are included and excluded from the study. In the first place the scope determines the conceptual area in which the research is carried out and points out those conceptual areas that are not included and the reasons for that. The limitations are related to constraints related to scope, such as finances, time, geographical areas, school(s) of thought, etc.

2.7. Definition of concepts

This section deals with definition of key concepts and terms to be used in the study. It requires a list of lexical/dictionary definitions as well as operational definitions. This section can be placed at the beginning of the proposal or elsewhere depending on disciplinary orientation.

2.8 Literature Review

This section describes how the stated or a similar research problem has been approached in the past. It may also make reference to current research on the matter when there is concurrence or divergence of opinion or if it is relevant for stressing a point tackled by the research. The review should be focused (related to the topic under study) and be critical stating weaknesses and strengths of previous works. The contribution of new work should be stated.

2.9. Theoretical Framework/Conceptual framework

In this section, a theory or theories relevant to the research problem is/are critically reviewed on how the theory/theories is/are contributing to solve the research problem. It should state the specific theoretical assumptions that help to solve the problem. In case more than one theory is used the student must point out how the theories relate to each other and the value they add to the study.

The conceptual framework guides data collection and facilitates interpretation of research findings.



Either a theory or a conceptual framework is used for the research.

2.10 Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses preferably used in quantitative research are derived from the theoretical framework and/or from data. A hypothesis is a statement that expresses the probable relationship between variables. Hypotheses state what is expected to be found rather than what has already been determined to exist depending on the disciplinary orientation. Hypotheses could be used with research questions. This refers to a possible proof to be arrived at and which will stand or not after the process of reasoning and proof has been carried out. It may be proved to be true, partly true, false or partially false. In this truth lies in the added information that the research set out to seek and the gap it sought to fulfill. Thus the conclusion will necessarily make reference to the hypotheses.

2.11 Methodology

This section deals with a detailed explanation of how the research project will be carried out to answer the specific questions. According to disciplines it can include proposed study sites, sources of data and reasons for their selection; types of data to be collected; sampling methods to be used; techniques of data collection and analysis. The success of the research will to a great extent depend on the awareness of the method and its meticulous following. Library research is not methodology.

2.12 Proposed chapter outline

This section provides a tentative outline of chapters and its salient points of the thesis or project paper.

2.13 References

The reference list follows the chapter outline, and precedes the annexes, and should be consistently done according to a preferred style. Footnotes and/or in-text citations, or endnotes, should be done depending on disciplinary/departmental orientation.

2.14 Appendices and Annexes

Any appendices should be listed here and they should be referenced in the text. The annexes could include time frame of the project, photographs, maps, anticipated budget, questionnaires, if applicable and research permits, if necessary.

2.15 Proposal Size

The proposal shall be formatted as follows: 1.5 line spacing, font 12, and 1" (one inch) margins. It should be twenty-five (25) pages maximum, including bibliography/references. The student should submit a hard and a pdf formatted copy to the faculty or department, as the case may be.

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