

The Research Proposal in Thirteen Parts¹

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Abstract

A proposal is a serious statement of intent to look into a question or phenomenon and a plan about how to conduct the search. There are seven aspects to completing a written proposal for a graduate thesis or project.

- 1. General and specific focus**
- 2. Relevant literature and conceptual framework**
- 3. Methodology**
- 4. Ethics**
- 5. Timetable and Ways of Working**
- 6. References and Appendices**
- 7. Formal Approval**

To help prepare, and eventually implement a clear, feasible research proposal, there are six relationships that need attention including: (1) relationship with oneself, (2) with a supervisory committee, (3) with representatives of institutions and the institutional expectations, (4) ioio

I research activities.

The Purpose of a Proposal

The proposal is a serious statement of intent to look into a phenomenon and a plan about how to conduct the search. Students engage in research under the supervision of faculty and with the guidance of others. Thus, the proposal is a statement of intent and a plan that needs to be accepted, useful, and feasible for all parties. Some people think of the proposal as a clear star to guide a voyage of discovery; the proposal thus is used to chart a course and ch Pr

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But a proposal cannot and should not attempt to specify exactly everything that will be done or what is expected. A graduate thesis or project proposal is not a blueprint or a recipe to build a particular product nor an advertising campaign to convince others of the worthiness of an idea. Nor is it a set of sleuthing techniques to solve a puzzle. The intent of the proposal is to construct a feasible plan for you to explore, understand, or test a concern about which you are

To reach the specific focus, it helps to describe the nature of the general concern and reason for interest in a specific topic. Introductions or prefaces to proposals can include a description of a client or a coalition approaching you with a problem such as the imminent change in the law affecting taxation in municipalities. Or there is your own pressing interest in the absence of any information about fathers parenting children. Or, the specific focus can emerge from a curiosity of how citizens go about debating health policies in public arenas. Key to a proposal is the transformation of a general line of inquiry into a specific focus, whether a hypothesis testing a directional relationship between two concepts or a clear question about one particular concept that you do not know the answer to. Often early drafts of proposals begin with several questions, and it takes work and several more written drafts to clarify what is the specific line of inquiry. Important but subsidiary questions may become interview questions or frameworks for observations and analysis of documents. It helps to ask oneself: if I had to choose between several questions, which one do I really want to know something about.

2. The Relevant Literature and Conceptual Framework .

One part of the literature review is to examine scholarly and professional publications, both theoretical and empirical, that directly supports or challenges the proposed specific focus. Literature may also be included that bears upon your focus, and sets it in context. Reading the literature helps you differentiate what is known from what is not known. Writing about the literature in the proposal builds the argument of why your specific focus is worth doing.

The second part of the review is sometimes called the conceptual framework. This includes the specific definitions of the unit of analysis, such as the age of the persons in the sample or boundary around a case study. In a quantitative hypothesis-testing proposal, the variables to be tested are clearly defined. In qualitative, exploratory, or hypothesis generating proposals the debates on several, but not more than three or four key concepts are reviewed. For example, a student in Studies in Policy and Practice debated the various ways scholars theorize key concepts such as “for profit” and “public consultation” in the conceptual framework of a thesis proposal on how citizens in British Columbia oppose the framing of “for profit” health care in presentations made to the government committee on the *Patients First: Renewal and Reform of British Columbia’s Health Care System*.

3. The Methodology.

This is often a large section of the proposal. Many books and articles are written about it. How one approaches the following three parts to the methodology depends on how one understands methodology and how to use it, and the characteristics of the specific approach selected. (i) It includes a section on design and matters related to epistemology. Key here is an argument why you picked a design and how that design helps answer your specific research focus. Both you and your committee need to be convinced that the design or methodological approach selected is better or most suitable (and feasible) compared to others that are less relevant or appropriate to the study focus. (ii) There is a section on data collection methods, including sampling procedures, particular methods of collecting what type of data, from whom, how and why, and specific instruments or procedures to collect information. In historical and documentary research, for instance, a careful list of sources are expected and why some are included while others rejected. In quantitative research, it is expected the sample size and recruitment will be justified on particular standards. In observational naturalist inquiry, the decisions taken to select what will be observed, when, where, and how need description. (iii) The third section is on analysis. What will you do with the data? How will you go about

organizing, inspecting, transforming, comparing, and interpreting? Draft possible tables and charts that present possible relationships between several variables or categories. What statistical tests are appropriate, and which ones are not? What analytical processes are relevant to making sense of the information and help to account for patterns? What are the possible points of comparison or juxtaposition of paradoxes that will explicate what is going on in the data?

4. The Ethics.

There are two aspects to ethics: making claims and establishing research relationships with persons. First are the ethics of how will you go about making claims of statistical, policy, or practical significance. Present the criteria of quality that you choose to value and that are appropriate to the design selected for the proposal's specific focus such as rigor and relevance; validity and reliability; thick, rich description; activam 558.0014 Tm(r the pTTvalidity and reliabil3213 Tm(c)Tj10

5. Timetable and Ways of Making Decisions

This is the section that specifies who is doing what, when, and where. What are the costs in money and time. What check-points will there be for evaluating how the research is progressing, what are the problems, and what changes are required. This section of the proposal may be short; sometimes it isn't written up clearly, especially as it is difficult to know how much time is needed or what decisions are required in the future. Estimates, however, are a good idea. Thinking about time and ways of making decisions, especially a process to check mid-way cannot be ignored. Sometimes writing up a budget about costs for preparing surveys, transcription costs, honorariums for participants, and the time needed for observations are helpful to the committee to clarify feasibility of sampling. This section of the proposal also reflects attention to building the relationships listed below, for example, processes about how the thesis committee will work together, how communicate, and how often they meet. In a research project with a client, it is necessary to clarify what are the responsibilities, contributions, and expectations that the client or community partner has for the student and vice versa. In a project using a community based design, what are the decisions that the community is responsible for, such as the community products from a project, and which ones is the thesis committee responsible for. When an indigenous protocol for conducting research is used, there will be discussions about who owns what information and what happens if there are disagreements about interpretation.

and written changes. At some point, the committee members indicate approval by signing a form. For other committees, a decision is made to accept a 15 to 25 page proposal, pending clarification. But rather than expecting a revised and re-submission of a proposal, memos of clarification are used to signal student's response to particular matters. Upon receipt of a clarifying memo that responds satisfactorily to issues raised, the supervisory committee indicates the proposal is approved.

Whatever approach is used, there needs to be a clear signal of formal or institutional approval. Approval means the proposal is satisfactory; that faculty, student, and possible other committee members have agreed to it; and that the student and supervisory committee members will work together towards its implementation. If there are significant changes in focus or design once the research has begun, it is the student's responsibility to inform the supervisor, and the supervisor's responsibility to ensure other committee members are aware of, and approve of these changes. Hence, the importance of building relationships of knowledge and trust, so that all parties to a proposal support its implementation, and are willing to negotiate the small and larger changes required to complete the thesis or project.

The Six Relationships Required to Finish a Proposal

Where to start? There is no one best place. There are many ways to prepare oneself to go on a voyage of learning and exploring mysteries and practical problems. What is most baffling and hidden, however, is the actual work of preparing oneself and those with whom one has responsibility to while on the voyage. Each of the following six relationships are all necessary to prepare a proposal. To implement a proposal and complete a project or thesis, further work is needed on each of the six sets of relationships.

1. Relationship with oneself.

This is a relationship that you have the most control over, and that will give you the most sustenance and power. Begin, end, and return to your relationship with yourself. What is it you think is important? What is your intent and what values are important to you as you engage in research? Honesty and kindness are key to this relationship. They help you see that of the many important questions you may want to pursue, it is possible to pursue only one specific focus in the proposal. Early drafts of proposals include several large questions that will take several thesis or lifetimes to answer.

2. Relationship with a supervisory committee.

At a masters' level there are three members on the committee, four at a doctoral level. If a thesis, the members must be members of Graduate Council at the University of Victoria. If a project, one or more of the members must be members of the community, or a "client organization" for whom the report is prepared. Usually one person serves as supervisor; sometimes there are co-supervisors. Finding committee members who are available, willing to contribute, and keen to work with you and each other on preparing a proposal and then a thesis or project is interesting and tricky. Some people find it helpful to systematically interview students and faculty about experiences, interests, ways of working, and availability. Some students are clear on who they wish to work with and why, and focus on developing those relationships. General and specific conversations are helpful. There is no obligation on a student nor on a faculty to "agree" to be part of a committee until the time is right and an invitation is offered and responded to. Most faculty and students find it helpful to prepare a 2 to 3 page draft of their general focus, why they are interested in their topic, how they wish to do their research, and if feasible. In contrast to the formal written full proposal, this early draft includes why you are considering inviting someone to be a committee member. What is it that you hope they can offer? Or, why are you interested in developing a research relationship with them? It isn't possible to know, articulate or stat

In some methodologies, research approaches, and ethical approaches to research, such as those in indigenous communities or community action research, there are “advisors” or a “community research committee” explicitly selected by the student and possibly by the community under study to accompany the student on the journey through the proposal and study. These people agree to know what is going on and negotiate what is helpful and relevant to whom. It is best to explicate and revisit from time to time their interest, capacity and responsibility as did a social work student working on a thesis who put together an advisory committee of parents whose sons had completed their probation terms and who wanted to see more help for parents in youth courts. (That same advisory committee later implemented some education workshops based on results of the thesis). What is the thesis committee responsible for in comparison to the community committee? Is there a requirement or desire to ensure opportunities to share data? Jointly interpret? Interpret and write up different aspects of a study for different audiences? Some of the programs in HSD, such as Pu 18 10.98 0o(Some of the 72001 rpremDo

- preparing physical places for holding the information;
- experimenting with possible analytic procedures including draft categories, themes, tables, semiotic squares etc.