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Answer

9.0 OBJECTIVES

- Emphasize how aims are to be accomplished
- Must be highly focused and feasible
- Address the more immediate project outcomes
- Make accurate use of concepts
- Must be sensible and precisely described
- Should read as an ‘individual’ statement to convey your intentions

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Before any research project begins, detailed plans are essential. Designing and planning a whole research project involves choosing a researchable, significant topic and preparing a well-developed research proposal. Both of these activities need to be carried out under the guidance of your supervisor/s and the earlier this planning takes place in your candidature the better. During this time your supervisors will advise on methodological issues and reading material that will help you to refine your research project. Ultimately, a good proposal serves as a valuable direction finder that helps the researcher to get going on their project with more confidence.

After admission to candidature, you as a higher degree research student are required to refine your preliminary research proposal and present for approval a more detailed proposal. This will occur within the first six months of candidature for full-time students and within twelve months for part-time students, either proceeding or as part of your Confirmation of Candidature, a process which ensures that only research studies that meet the rigor required will be allowed to proceed. Choosing and developing a researchable topic and securing a tight fit between methodological framework and nature of the problem to be researched involves a high level of conceptualization. Discussions and negotiations between you and your supervisor at this stage are therefore of vital importance.

A research proposal should be viewed as more than the outcome of a formalized procedure. It tests in particular your ability as a researcher to conceptualize clearly and to plan and organize carefully and thoroughly. It must be done well in order to do justice to the research idea, and to ‘sell’ the idea. It needs to be kept in mind however, that your plan need not be rigidly adhered to as opportunities to refine your topic arise, unforeseen circumstances come your way or if unexpected data or sources of data arise. The importance is to have a clear sense of direction right from the start.

9.2 DEVELOPING YOUR TOPIC

The purpose, structure and format of a proposal will depend on the disciplinary area in which the proposed research is located. Proposals vary considerably in format and length but around 3,000 words would be desirable for proposals in the social sciences and humanities and less so for many of the experimental sciences. While a proposal format is fairly standard for quanti-

tative studies, for qualitative studies there is no one set format. However, some basic principles guiding preparation of a good research proposal are worth noting.

First, the topic chosen must be of some significance in your field of interest. In other words, the topic must be justifiably well worth researching. Next and importantly, two principles guiding the choice of topic which are elaborated below are interest and feasibility. Examine carefully the following to determine to what extent your chosen topic meets the criteria:

9.2.1 It must be interesting to you

It takes great interest in a topic to sustain enthusiasm and enjoyment, and hundreds of hours of effort. There must also be some excitement about the topic. It may or may not be relevant to your current work position but if it is, more interest may ensue.

9.2.2 Ask questions about your topic

- What do I already know about this topic?
- Who was involved in it? (inventor, victim, instigator, bystander)
- Brainstorm on your topic:

Talk to your professor, classmates, and friends. Think about your class discussions and reading assignments; did anything spark your curiosity? Browse the Subject Guides in your subject area.

If the topic is a current event or social issue browse newspapers, general interest magazines, and online sources such as <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/>

9.2.3 Define Your Topic

Researching a topic that is too broad or too narrow can turn into a very frustrating experience. If your topic is too general, you will find an overwhelming amount of information and will need to focus your topic. If your topic is too specific, you will find very little information and will need to broaden it.

9.2.4 Broaden a Research Topic

Sometimes a research topic is so specific that you cannot find adequate information to fulfill the requirements of the assignment. In this case, it is time to broaden your topic. The techniques used to focus a general topic can also be used to expand a narrow topic.

Use ideas discovered while you were generating topics to add to your topic. For example, you could compare and contrast two ideas. Use background research, found in reference books, to find a researchable topic.

If the topic is narrowed by a factor that can be broadened, such as time period, specific population, or geography, expand the limiting factor. Go from a state to a region or county. Go from a few years to a decade or longer.

9.2.5 Select Keywords to Use as Search Terms

- ❖ Step 1. Identify the keywords and central ideas of your topic and write them down.
- ❖ Step 2. List synonyms or alternate terms for your original keywords.
- ❖ If one term retrieves too much or too little information, or irrelevant material try a synonym.
- ❖ The online catalog and databases may not recognize your original search term, but may recognize a synonym or variation on the search term.
- ❖ Step 3 Refine you search terms by using controlled vocabulary.
- ❖ Controlled vocabulary terms are standardized terms that databases or indexes use to organize information. Controlled vocabulary terms yield very specific results. Most databases and indexes give users a way to look up their controlled vocabulary terms by using the “help” or “Search Tips”
- ❖ Library of Congress (LC) Subject Headings are the controlled vocabulary of the library catalo.

9.2.6 Using Search terms

Step 1. Identify keywords from original topic and research question	Step 2. Generate synonyms for keywords	Step 3. Look up controlled vocabulary terms
Environmental protection	Conservation	Environmental policy Environmental impact analysis Conservation of natural resources
Toxic Dumps	Pollution Waste disposal	Pollutants
America's	America American U.S.	America United States
Cities	Towns	Urban cores Inner cities Land use -- urban Capital cities

9.2.7 It must be feasible in the time allocated

Do you, for instance, have the time and human resources to pursue this topic? If you live, say, in a city, plans to carry out a study requiring extensive fieldwork in rural areas may not be practical (depending on how much time could be spent traveling and costs involved). Family considerations are also important to consider.

9.2.8 It must fit within financial and other resource constraints

A clearly laid out budget in the proposal should indicate what costs will be involved. Other resources (e.g. technical, statistical and analytical skills) required to complete the project, should be clearly indicated.

9.2.9 It must be within your competence

Familiarity with an issue or phenomenon, and some background in appropriate research methods, should, at the very least, save time and give you a greater sense of direction and confidence. If you strongly wish to pursue a topic that requires expertise you do not possess, plan additional work time and, perhaps take relevant course units to acquire those skills.

9.2.10 It must be sufficiently delimited

Setting realistic boundaries helps you organise your literature search and produce a specific problem statement that has a well-argued theoretical rationale. The topic area, for instance, might be organizational effectiveness but the problem might be expressed in terms of the effectiveness of team-based management where a case study could be carried out of say, three different organizational settings that operate on team-based principles.

9.2.11 It must be manageable in size

Consider carefully the word limit that is imposed on your thesis. It is a good idea early on to develop an outline of potential chapters, keeping in mind the word limits that are set.

9.2.12 It must have the potential to make an original contribution to knowledge or practice in the appropriate area

Questions need to be considered about the significance, value or potential use of your research. You will need to ascertain what is expected of the research findings and what contribution they will make (e.g. generating new knowledge, contributing to the literature or improving practice).

9.2.13 It must be able to meet all ethical, legal and risk assessment requirements

Issues such as securing permits from government or other agencies and UNE ethics committees, protecting the privacy of individuals involved in your study, ensuring intellectual property and likely access to information, need to be considered carefully. Any risk assessment procedures required to be carried out must be clearly indicated.

9.2.14 Keep Track of Sources

Have you ever found and lost an important source? To prevent sources from slipping away note the citation information for a potential source as soon as you find it. Be consistent in how you save citations and the format you use. Citing sources accurately and in the citation style of your paper (APA, MLA) will save your time by preparing you for the later stages of research paper writing: in-text citations and the bibliography.

9.2.15 Suggestions for organizing notes and citations

- Open a Word document at the beginning of each research session and type in citation information and other notes as you find them.
- E-mail search results and copies of electronic journal articles to yourself.

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- Store all articles, citations, and notes related to the research paper in a single folder or envelope.
- Always write your name on diskettes, you could even include your phone number.
- Save more than one copy! Use your T drive and diskettes so that you have saved a copy of your hard work in more than one place.

9.3 Creating a good research proposal

Most novice researchers ask what an outline of a proposal might look like. If exemplars of good proposals are available, it will pay you to study these before you set out developing yours.

You would do well to keep the following principles in mind when developing your proposal:

1. A good proposal explains clearly three elements – what research is intended, why it is being researched and how the researcher proposes to carry out the research.
2. A good proposal is straightforward. The first words are of vital importance. They need to get to the point directly without ‘beating around the bush’. There should be a succinct statement of what the study proposes to do at the start (written in the future tense), something like, ‘This study will examine ...’ or ‘This study aims to...’.
3. A good proposal uses clear and precise language. While not meant to be a literary masterpiece, all readers with knowledge of the subject need to be able to understand exactly what is meant in the most concise language possible.
4. A good proposal should be clearly organized. It should be written in simple, logical, prose with clear headings and subheadings to mark out major sections.

What follows is a general guide for putting together a more highly developed proposal in the social sciences areas.

9.4 GUIDELINES FOR CREATING A WELL-DEVELOPED RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The following elements are important to include:

9.4.1 Research topic

- Title of the project
- Nature of the problem or issue under examination (the focus of the study)
- Proposed aims and objectives and research questions/hypotheses

9.4.2 Background and context of the study

- How did the problem or issue arise?
- Why is this important area to study? The significance of the study needs to be stated and comments on the practical and/or theoretical value of the research included.

- Include any underlying assumptions.
- Provide definitions of key terms or concepts used.
- Point out the limitations imposed (the boundaries set).

9.4.3 Methodology

- A tight fit between aims of the study and research strategy chosen must be evident.
- Include statements on:
 - research strategy (e.g., qualitative, quantitative) and justification for approach;
 - research methods (e.g. survey, case study, ethnography, experimental);
 - tools of data collection (e.g., questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis);
 - location and availability of data;
 - methods of data analysis and interpretation;
 - ethical implications (if relevant); and
 - any problems that may be encountered in the conduct of the research.

9.4.4 Literature review (or a general introduction to the topic of 3-5 pages if in experimental sciences)

- Familiarity with the relevant literature needs to be demonstrated.
- A précis of relevant literature needs to include:
 - what is already known on the topic;
 - what gaps need to be filled;
 - how the study relates to, builds on or differs from previous work in the topic area; and
 - Theoretical considerations (what theory/is from the literature would help to develop a meaningful conceptual or analytical framework?)

9.4.5 Proposed timeline/milestones

A schedule indicating plans from commencement right through to submission needs to be provided.

9.4.6 Resources needed and available

Resources needed should be listed, their availability checked and a budget proposed before beginning the project.

9.4.7 Select bibliography or references

When you have completed preparing your proposal, it would be a good idea to self-evaluate what you have produced. A checklist for doing so appears in what follows.

9.4.8 Evaluating your research proposal

Circle your ratings according to the following criteria

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Choice of problem	(insignificant)	1	2	3	4	5	(significant)
Statement of problem	(unclear)	1	2	3	4	5	(clear)
Questions/hypotheses developed	(unclear)	1	2	3	4	5	(clear)
Knowledge of previous work	(poor)	1	2	3	4	5	(excellent)
Critique of relevant literature	(poor)	1	2	3	4	5	(excellent)
Key concepts defined	(poorly defined)	1	2	3	4	5	(clearly defined)
Theoretical framework	(nonexistent)	1	2	3	4	5	(developing)
Mode of inquiry	(inappropriate)	1	2	3	4	5	(appropriate)
Importance in topic area	(unimportant)	1	2	3	4	5	(important)
Likely significance of findings	(low)	1	2	3	4	5	(high)
Research plan	(vague)	1	2	3	4	5	(detailed)
Scope and limitations	(unrealistic)	1	2	3	4	5	(realistic)
Proposal structure	(poorly organised)	1	2	3	4	5	(well organised)
Consideration of ethical issues	(nonexistent)	1	2	3	4	5	(strong)
Persuasiveness	(low)	1	2	3	4	5	(high)
Writing style	(obtuse)	1	2	3	4	5	(precise)
Interest engendered	(low)	1	2	3	4	5	(high)
Argument in support of - the significance of the problem	(nonexistent)	1	2	3	4	5	(strong)
- the choice of research strategy - the way the research problems	(nonexistent)	1	2	3	4	5	(strong)
stated (in relation to the literature reviewed)	(nonexistent)	1	2	3	4	5	(strong)
- limitations on the conclusions	(nonexistent)	1	2	3	4	5	(strong)

9.5 LET US SUM UP

This section should be only one or two paragraphs long, emphasizing why the research problem is worth investigating, why your research study is unique, and how it should advance existing knowledge.

Someone reading this section should come away with an understanding of:

- Why the study should be done,
- The specific purpose of the study and the research questions it attempts to answer,
- The decision to why the research design and methods used where chosen over other options,
- The potential implications emerging from your proposed study of the research problem, and

- A sense of how your study fits within the broader scholarship about the research problem.

9.6 KEY WORDS

1. **Objective:** mention the more immediate project outcomes
2. **Purpose of the Study:** Clearly identify the goal of the study in one precise sentence
3. **Feasibility:** The state of degree of being easily or conveniently done
4. **Methodology:** explains each step the experimenter will take in order to conduct his or her research.
5. **Literature review:** provides the background for the research problem and illustrates to the reader that the researcher is knowledgeable about the scope of the theory.
6. **Research Design:** Include the proposed research design of the study, whether it is a survey, experiment, observation, secondary data of analysis, etc.
7. **Hypothesis / Research Questions:** Research questions ask what relationships exist between the different variables in the study, while the hypothesis predicts the relationship between variables.
8. **APA:** American Psychological Association
9. **MLA:** Modern Language Association
10. **Citations:** a quotation from or reference to a book, paper, or author, especially in a scholarly work

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHOOSE THE CORRECT OPTION FROM THE GIVEN BELOW

1. What is the main advantage of producing a written research proposal?
 - a. Helps keep people employed.
 - b. Informs all interested parties.
 - c. Helps the institution
 - d. Helps the credibility
2. All of these may appear in a research proposal, but which one will ALWAYS appear?
 - a. Marketing objective
 - b. Business objective
 - c. Research objective
 - d. Creative objective
3. Which word fills all the blanks in this extract ?

We talk about generating_____, testing_____, rejecting

 - a. hypotheses
 - b. questions
 - c. objectives
 - d. aims
4. The timing section of a proposal will NOT include:
 - a. deadlines for submitting the final report.

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- b. guidelines on ethics.
- c. deadlines for ending data collection.
- d. progress report dates.
- 5. Good research proposals will always:
 - a. provide respondent names and addresses.
 - b. focus on the Harvard style.
 - c. Consider all possible research that had previously been done on the topic.
 - d. focus on addressing the research objectives.
- 6. The proposal's literature review is important because:
 - a. The tutor insists upon it.
 - b. It shows that you are knowledgeable about the literature that relates to your research topic
 - c. It looks authoritative.
 - d. It is expected by the university.
- 7. Which proposal section is intended to describe the purpose with a full statement of the research question?
 - a. References
 - b. Literature review
 - c. Introduction
 - d. Proposed Method
- 8. Which ONE of these phrases is best avoided in a proposal?
 - a. The intention is to complete the study by.....
 - b. This research seeks to.....
 - c. This research draws upon the work of.....
 - d. I hope to.....
- 9. Which ONE of these is best avoided in a proposal?
 - a. Accurate spelling and grammar.
 - b. Careful use of correct gender terms.
 - c. Jargon
 - d. Short, clear sentences.
- 10. The final research report is NOT:
 - a. future secondary data
 - b. a research proposal
 - c. a basis for decision-making
 - d. tangible evidence of a research project
- 11. What helps to agree timing, agree resource allocation and also draws boundaries?
 - a. The questionnaire
 - b. The observation form

- c. The final report
- d. The proposal
- 12. What is a research design?
 - a. A way of conducting research that is not grounded in theory
 - b. The choice between using qualitative or quantitative methods
 - c. The style in which you present your research findings, e.g. a graph
 - d. A framework for every stage of the collection and analysis of data

9.7 BOOKS SUGGESTED

1. McGranaghan M. Guidelines on Writing a Research Proposal. [Last accessed on 2016 Jun 25]. Available from: <https://www.2.hawaii.edu/~matt/proposal.html> .
2. Research Proposal. [Last accessed on 2016 Jul 04]. Available from: <http://www.web.stanford.edu/~steener/gendertech/assignments/ResearchProposal.pdf>.
3. <http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/researchproposal>
4. <https://www3.dbu.edu/uwc/documents/HowtoWriteaProposalTemplate.pdf>

ANSWER

1-b, 2-c, 3-a, 4-b, 5-d, 6-c, 7-c, 8-b, 9-b, 10- b, 11-d, 12-a.