**Dissertation/Thesis Methodology Template**

Thanks for downloading the template. **Here’s what you need to know:**

This document provides a generic template for the methodology chapter/section in a typical dissertation, thesis, or research project. While the **exact requirements will vary between universities** and degree programs, this template should help you get started with the generic essentials. Be sure to follow any instructions or guidance provided by your university to ensure you’re aligned with their specific requirements.

In each section, we’ll briefly **explain what that section is all about** and the essential things that you **need to achieve there**. We’ll also provide links to additional videos and blog posts that will help you conquer each section with confidence.

If you’re new to research, a good starting point would be to watch our YouTube video covering the methodology chapter: <https://gradcoach.com/how-to-write-the-methodology-chapter/>

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If you need **1-on-1 assistance** with your dissertation or thesis, feel free to [book an initial consultation](https://my.gradcoach.com/book/new/) with us to discuss private coaching for your project.

Good luck with your research!

***Grad Coach***

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# Opening/Intro Section

As the very first section of your methodology chapter, the purpose of this section is to remind the reader of the golden thread underpinning your dissertation or thesis. If you’re not familiar with the golden thread, [watch this video](https://gradcoach.com/research-aims-objectives-questions/).

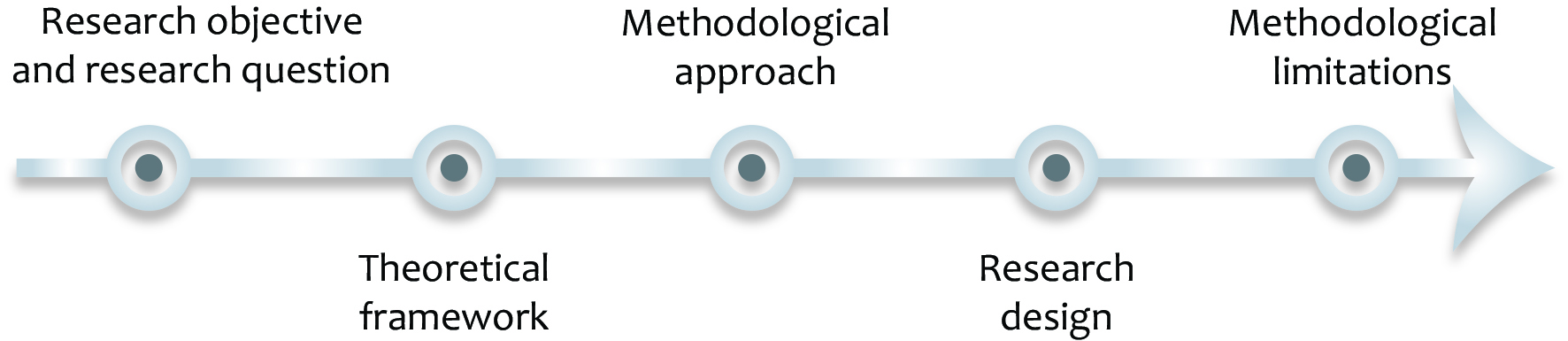
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You’ll want to include in this section:

* A sentence reiterating your specific **research problem.**
* A sentence or two repeating your research **aims**, **objectives**, and **questions** (i.e., your golden thread).
* A sentence outlining the **layout** of the chapter (what you’ll cover, in what order).

Importantly, this section needs to be **concise**, so don’t ramble on here. It’s just an opener, so keep it short and sweet. You might also consider using a visual aid to concisely present the layout of the chapter – here’s an example:



**Tip**: Apart from the opening section, the rest of the methodology chapter is usually written in **past tense**, as you’re describing what you already did.

# Research design

It’s now time to get into the heart of the chapter – the research design. When you’re writing this section, the goal is to **present** (in detail) your research design to the reader. Also, it’s super important to **explain** and **justify** all your design choices in a way that is clear and logical.

Essentially, this section should demonstrate **why** the study you’re doing needs to be done in **this specific way.** In other words, how your design helps you achieve your research aims, objectives, and questions, which in turn will address the **research problem** (which you outlined in the opening section).

## Research philosophy

A research philosophy represents the underlying beliefs or world view of how data should be gathered, analyzed, and used. This is the **highest-level design choice**, so logically it needs to be discussed first.

There are several different research philosophies that exist, and many are **specific to certain disciplines**. So, be sure to have a good understanding of the disciplinary norms and typical methodological approaches in the studies covering similar ground as yours. Broadly speaking, the two most common research philosophies are **positivism** and **interpretivism**, and these two research philosophies motivate significantly different approaches to research.

Again, the research philosophy is the core of your study and serves as the **foundation** of all your other research design choices. So, it’s essential that you know and understand which philosophy you’ll adopt and are also able to justify this choice. If you’re uncertain, get clarity **before you move forward** with the rest of your design.

**Recommended Resource**: [How to choose a research methodology](https://gradcoach.com/choose-research-methodology/)

## Research type

After you’ve identified, explained, and justified your research philosophy, the next section of your research design section will typically be the research type.

In this section, you first need to indicate if your research study took an **inductive** or **deductive** approach:

* With **inductive** research, theory is generated from the collected data (i.e., from the ground up), and tends to be **exploratory**.
* With **deductive** research, the research process starts with established theory (based on the literature review) and builds onto it (or tests it) using the collected data and tends to be **confirmatory**.

In other words, inductive research is suitable when you’re trying to develop a theory, especially when there’s very little existing research in the area. Conversely, a deductive approach is more suitable when you’re wanting to assess whether a theory applies within a certain context, or you wish to test a set of hypotheses derived from the literature.

Next, you’ll need to discuss whether your study adopts a **qualitative**, **quantitative**, or mixed-methods approach. There is a relationship between this section and the previous one:

* Studies that are exploratory in nature often utilize a **qualitative** approach.
* Studies that are confirmatory in nature typically utilize a **quantitative** approach.
* Studies comprising research questions that are **both** exploratory and confirmatory in nature will often utilize a mixed-method approach.

This is not set in stone (there are always exceptions), but it’s something to keep in mind to ensure alignment. Whatever your research type, it’s crucial that it **aligns with the research philosophy** in the previous section. For example, a positivist philosophy usually translates into a research type that utilizes a deductive, quantitative approach. So, be sure to explain and justify your research type choices and how they match up coherently with your research philosophy.

**Recommended Resource**: [Qualitative vs quantitative vs mixed methods](https://gradcoach.com/qualitative-vs-quantitative-research/)

## Research strategy

The next layer of the research design section is the research strategy. Your research strategy can be thought of as your **action plan** because it refers to how you will conduct your research in practical terms, based on the three elements of your golden thread.

There are many research strategies, but some of the common ones include **experiments**, case studies, ethnography, **grounded** **theory**, action research, and **phenomenology**.

As before, your research strategy should align with the previous aspects of your methodology. That is, you need to be able to explain with precision and justify how your research strategy lines up with your research type and research philosophy to tackle the three aspects of your golden thread.

## Time horizon

This next sub-section will be quite short and in some university programs it does not require a full section (i.e., it can be merged into another section), so be sure to check what the norms are for your institution by looking at past dissertations/theses.

At the simplest level, time horizon simply refers to the **number of times** data will be collected within your study. The two kinds of time horizon choices are **cross-sectional** and **longitudinal**:

* A cross-sectional time horizon means that the data are collected at one point in time only.
* A longitudinal time horizon means that the data are collected from the same sample at multiple points in time.

In most cases, a cross-sectional time horizon will be the practical choice, as the short timeline involved in a dissertation or thesis makes longitudinal research impractical. However, as always, you must **explain** and **justify** your choice, and it must align with your previous research design choices.

**Recommended Resources**:

* [What is a cross-sectional study?](https://gradcoach.com/what-is-a-cross-sectional-study-research/)
* [What is a longitudinal study?](https://gradcoach.com/what-is-a-longitudinal-study/)

## Sampling strategy

Once you’ve discussed the time horizon, the next section is typically the sampling strategy. Sampling simply refers to **who** (or what) you’ll be collecting data from. The right sampling strategy depends on what you are trying to achieve in your study, and it should align with the previous research design choices.

In this section you need to **describe** and **justify** which sampling approach and method you used in your research study. The two approaches are probability (randomized) and non-probability (non-randomized).

* **Probability** sampling methods:
  + Simple random sampling
  + Cluster sampling
  + Systematic sampling
  + Stratified random sampling (SRS)
* **Non-probability** sampling methods:
  + Convenience sampling
  + Purposive sampling
  + Snowball sampling
  + Quota sampling

An important factor here is generalizability. If your research aims involve generalizing your findings to a population, you’ll typically need to make use of a probability sampling method. However, practical factors and limitations will also play a role. Whatever the case, you must be able to explain **what** your sampling strategy was, **why** you selected it, and **how** many participants it yielded.

## Data collection method(s)

Now that you’ve laid the groundwork regarding the broader aspects of the research design, this more focused section needs to convey **how** exactly you’ve collected the necessary data.

What exactly you’ll discuss depends on whether you took a qualitative or quantitative approach:

* For quantitative research, this is the section where you’ll write about the **survey** you undertook, the **experiment** you created and ran, etc.
* For qualitative research, this is where you’ll write about the **interviews**, focus groups, ethnography, etc. that you conducted to collect data.

In this section, the **details really matter**, so don’t hold back. Explain exactly how you went about choosing, designing and refining your data collection method(s). Again, remember to **justify** how you collected the data and why you chose that particular method. As always, this justification needs to be tightly linked to the research problem, research aims, objectives and research questions. In other words, you need to highlight how your data collection method was the right “fit” for your golden thread.

**Recommended Resources**:

* [Interviewing Basics – 5 common mistakes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sp_IQlBtxt0)
* [Survey Design Basics – 5 common mistakes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHJmQQJtEoU)

## Data analysis method(s)

The final crucial part of your research design section is the data analysis methods or techniques. In this section, you need to explain how you went about analyzing the data you collected.

As with the previous section, you need to be **specific**, **detailed** and **clear** about your analysis methods, and you also need to **justify** each decision. You’ll also need to explain how you **prepared** your data for analysis and what kind of software you used (if any).

* For **qualitative** studies, this is the section where you’ll mention steps such as transcription, coding, and analysis. Also, you’ll specify what kind of qualitative analysis method (e.g. content analysis, thematic analysis, discourse analysis, etc.) you adopted.
* For **quantitative** research, you’ll explain which statistical tests you undertook, including the descriptive and inferential tests (if applicable).

In short, you’ll need to explain in this section how your data analysis lines up with all of the previous research design decisions to address your golden thread.

**Recommended Resources**:

* [Qualitative data analysis 101](https://gradcoach.com/qualitative-data-analysis-methods/)
* [Quantitative data analysis 101](https://gradcoach.com/quantitative-data-analysis-methods/)

# Concluding summary

Now that you’ve presented, explained, and justified all your methodological choices, it’s time to wrap up the methodology chapter with a brief concluding summary.

In this section, you’ll want to concisely **summarize** what you’ve presented in the chapter in a paragraph or two maximum. Also, make sure that you are including only what you’ve already discussed in your chapter, meaning don’t add any new information.

Finish by including a sentence indicating what the purpose of the next chapter is, typically the results from the study. This provides one-liner will provide a smooth transition from this chapter to the next.

Here’s an example of what this might look like in practice:

*This chapter commenced by restating the research objective and question,* *thereafter presenting a hypothesis-driven theoretical framework in response to the research question. A quantitative methodological approach was argued for based on the correlational nature of the study, access to data, and contextual appropriateness. The next chapter will apply the chosen methodology to analyze the data and test the hypotheses.*

# Additional (free) resources

Here are a few more resources you might find useful while working on your methodology chapter:

* [Research methodology 101](https://gradcoach.com/what-is-research-methodology/) (video & article)
* [Saunders’ “research onion” explained](https://gradcoach.com/saunders-research-onion/) (video & article)
* [Free dissertation/thesis template (Word Doc)](https://gradcoach.com/dissertation-thesis-template/)
* [Free dissertation writing course (online)](https://gradcoach.com/dissertation-course/)

If you would like **1-on-1 support** with your dissertation, thesis or research project, check out our [private coaching service here](https://gradcoach.com/dissertation-coaching/).