

WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

WHAT IS A RESEARCH PROPOSAL?

A Research Proposal is a document written by a student in the beginning stages of their postgraduate degree. For example, a PhD student will usually write their Research Proposal in the first six months of their degree.

The length of the Research Proposal will vary from degree to degree, and discipline to discipline. An Honors student might write a Research Proposal of 2,000 words, whereas a PhD student might write a Research Proposal of 10,000 words. Parts of the Research Proposal (for example the Literature Review) are most often later incorporated into the thesis.

Shorter Research Proposals are sometimes written by students during the application process (i.e. before they begin their degree). This article focuses on the detailed Research Proposals written by students during their degrees, but it contains information that will be relevant to students who are writing proposals as part of their applications.

WHY WRITE A RESEARCH PROPOSAL?

Research Proposals are often a compulsory part of a postgraduate degree, and a requirement that students have to meet in order to continue in their studies. The supervisor, faculty or department's acceptance of the Research Proposal is required before students can go on to complete their research and write their thesis.

Writing a Research Proposal performs an important function, which is why they are required by universities. A Research Proposal allows students to focus, define and narrow their research plans in preparation for writing their thesis.

Your research proposal should help with the following:

- Demonstrate your desire to engage in worthwhile research in a particular field
- Provide a context and background for the research you will undertake
- Allow you to increase your understanding of your topic or field

- Allow you to establish your theoretical framework
- Help you to select a methodological approach for your research

WHAT SHOULD MY RESEARCH PROPOSAL CONTAIN?

Each Research Proposal will be different, depending on the topic you are studying, your discipline, the university you are studying at, and your supervisor's preferences. It is important that you check with your supervisor about what components your Research Proposal must contain. Below is a guide to the components that are normally included in a Research Proposal. In some ways it can be viewed as a 'mini-thesis' since it uses a similar structure.

- Cover page
- Table of contents
- Abstract
- Lists of figures, tables and abbreviations (if necessary)
- Introduction
- Chapters that include the following information:
 - Background and need for the study
 - Purpose and aims of the study
 - Review of the literature
 - Research design
 - Timetable or plan for the research
 - Proposed thesis structure
 - The significance or expected outcomes of the study
- Conclusion
- Appendices
- References

COMMON MISTAKES STUDENTS MAKE WHEN WRITING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

- Make sure you work hard to avoid these common mistakes:
 - Failing to provide the correct context for the research question
 - Failing to provide the scope and limitations of the research
 - Failing to refer to the most important studies (in the Literature Review)

- Failing to present the contributions of other researchers accurately (in the Literature Review)
- Failing to remain focused on the research question
- Failing to develop and maintain a convincing and coherent argument
- Providing an inappropriate amount of attention to certain aspects (i.e. too much detail on unimportant things and too little detail on important things)
- Writing a Research Proposal that is not well structured and organized, and that consequently does not flow well
- Lack of or incorrect referencing
- Failing to follow the correct formatting and style guidelines
- Failing to stick to the word limit (i.e. the proposal is too long or too short)
- Submitting a Research Proposal that contains grammatical and other errors that could have been corrected by a professional thesis editor!

THE FINAL STAGE: PROFESSIONAL EDITING

Once you have completed writing your Research Proposal, it is strongly recommended that you have it professionally edited prior to submitting it to your university. It is vital that your Research Proposal is presented in the best possible way, since it must be accepted if you are to go on to complete your degree.

If you choose to have your Research Proposal edited by one of our thesis editors, and then go on to include sections of it in your final thesis, simply let us know which sections have already been edited and we will not charge you again for these when you submit your entire thesis to us for editing. We will simply ensure that these sections are formatted correctly and are consistent with the remainder of the thesis.

Our qualified and experienced thesis editors have assisted thousands of students with their Research Proposals, ensuring that they are accepted and that students go on to undertake their research and write their thesis. Contact us today to find out how we can help.