

# **MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA)**



## **RESEARCH PROPOSAL WORKBOOK FOR STUDENTS**

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## What should I Expect?

Before you start you should expect:

- To make mistakes
- To write and rewrite your research proposal many times. Nobody gets it right the first time
- To spend many hours reading books and journals relating to your topic
- To spend many hours discussing your research with others
- To have your work criticized
- To feel confused and even hopeless at times.

## Why do I need a Research Proposal?

Research proposals have different function. Some of these are:

- To convince people like other researchers, organisations, managers, CEOs and supervisors that your research is worth reading. You convince people of the value of your work by showing them how your research will make a difference to the organization, sector or country
- To demonstrate expertise in a particular area of study. You want to convince people that you have enough understanding of your research topic to be able to do the research properly.
- To demonstrate competency in a particular area of study. It is important that your research proposal convinces the reader that you have all the necessary skills to carry out the proposed study. You do this by describing an appropriate and feasible research method

- To serve as a planning tool.



**Activity:**

List the reasons why you will need a research proposal.



### How do I Start?

You need a clear research topic. You may get your research topic from different sources:

- Observation of the world: Often you will notice a peculiarity in your world and start to wonder about it. Sometimes this produces a research question. For example, in South Africa, the scientist Prof Makgoba stated that his foundation and orientation towards the sciences, were well established in the village and country side where nature was a big laboratory.
- Theory: in many areas of management there exists competing theories. That is different theories that explain the same phenomenon in different ways.
- Previous research: no study answers all the questions that we want to ask about a particular subject. New research findings always inspire new research questions. Sometimes, it is because these findings are surprising or because they conflict with existing theory or other research findings. For example. Philosopher and sociologist Michael Foucault spent close to thirty years demonstrating that many fundamental ideas about human nature and society, which people usually understand to be unchanging vary with the course of history.
- Practical concerns: very often you will be confronted by a problem in your own life or become aware of problems facing others in the community. Research is aimed at solving immediate problems in the world. For example, home delivery and internet shopping

- Personal interest: you may have your own special interest and this interest will inspire your research topic. For example, you want to start a trucking business



### Activity

List the sources you will use to get your research topic



### How do I choose my Research Topic?

It is a good idea to generate several possible research topics and then choose the best one. After all, you would not go into a shop and buy the first shirt you saw. You will look at several shirts, compare them and purchase the one that suited you the best. Well, the same applies to your research topic.

Every research topic has strengths and weaknesses and the choice of the 'best' topic is a subtle one.

The following is a list of criteria which can be used to judge the usefulness of your research question:

QUESTIONS	YES	NO
Do you have access to the information needed		
Does your topic have a suitable theoretical background.		
How might this research contribute to research methodologies used in this area		
How interesting is the topic to you		
Do you have the skills or can you develop them		
Do you have the necessary time, financial support and equipment		
Does the topic meet the criteria laid down by RBS		
Is the topic challenging to meet your study requirements		
Does the topic have potential to generate further research for yourself and others in your field		





### Setting the Limits on your Research

Having decided upon a suitable research topic, it is crucial that you define the research topic unambiguously.

This involves the following exercise:

1. You must provide explicit definitions for all concepts used in the title. It is important that you, everyone involved in the research and the examiner understand the topic in precisely the same way.
2. You must specify the limits of your study in a way that makes it clear. A common mistake is to define the topic too broadly or set no limits and then find, that the resources required for such a large study are not available.

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Too often we find a potential good research topic and we stop our explorations. The initial topic is only the starting point for deeper and ongoing exploration.

Exploration: means finding out as much as possible about the research topic.

To be a good explorer you need to develop certain skills.

**Activity**

List the skills that you will require to complete your research dissertation.



### **Literature Search and Reading [Skill 1]**

Reading is your highest priority at this stage of your research. Make sure that you read broadly and deeply, so that you can be sure that you have established the best possible foundation for your research.

Find suitable references by:

- speaking to your tutors
- speaking to other researchers working in your field
- speaking to other researchers from other disciplines who can give you interesting perspectives which might not be available within your discipline
- searching journals that relate to your topic
- using subject indexes and abstracts
- looking at reference sections of key books and articles related to your topic
- spending time in the library
- searching the internet



### Activity

I will obtain my references by:



### Problems with Reading

1. There is too much to read. I cannot keep up.
  - Reading takes time but is time well spent. Make sure that you create time for reading
  - Make sure that your reading time is uninterrupted
  - Make a list of all articles and books you think you should read.
2. There are too many ideas. I cannot make sense of all of them.
  - Find a general article or book that will provide a 'map' of the theoretical landscape.
  - Try to fit all your subsequent reading onto the 'map'
3. I do not understand what I am reading.
  - Find an introductory text that introduces the main concepts and theoretical language in your area
  - When reading a text try to 'pin down' the concepts or arguments that you do not understand. Make a point to discuss this the article with an experienced researcher

#### 4. I forget everything that I read

- Make sure that you have a proper 'map' of the theoretical territory. If you have a framework into which you can fit new information, you will find it easier to understand and remember
- Take clear detailed notes of everything that you read. Always keep the topic in mind.



#### Activity

Reading problems I will encounter:

### Critical Thinking [skill 2]

It is important that you think long and hard about your research topic and the particular questions you plan to investigate.

Use the following questions to guide you:

- What made me choose this particular topic for my research
- What assumptions am I making about the research topic

- How valid are these assumptions
- Can I think of different ways of thinking about the topic



### Debate [Skill 3]

Thinking about research projects is an excellent way to develop your thinking. This is true when discussing your topic with other researchers. However do not limit your discussion to these people. Even people with little expertise in your field of work may be able to make helpful suggestions or ask the questions that will stimulate your creative processes.



### Activity

List some of the people you can discuss your research with



### Computers and the Internet [Skill 4]

Today, computers are one of your most powerful tools. Developing good computer skills will enable you to;

- Do your word processing, which saves you time and money and means you can produce the quality of work that you desire
- Enter and analyze data using quantitative and qualitative software packages
- Make effective use of the internet as a networking tool, source of information and medium of conducting research.

The World Wide Web gives you access to vast range of resources.



### Activity

The resources I could use on the World Wide Web include:

1. Online library catalogues
- 2.
- 3.

**Record Keeping [Skill 5]**

Another important skill to develop is that of keeping good records.

Often you will reading something but will not know where you read it. If you have kept a detailed record of your reading, you should be able to track those 'lost' references down.

Make reference cards to keep detailed records of your reading.

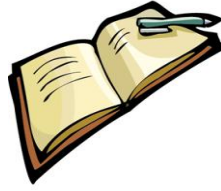
<b>Research on:</b>
<b>Author [s]</b>
<b>Year of publication</b>
<b>Title of article/ chapter</b>
<b>Title of book/journal</b>
<b>Volume number</b>
<b>Publisher and city</b>
<b>Where available</b>
<b>Notes.</b>



**Can I begin to write my Proposal?**

You should be able to write your proposal when you are confident that you can answer 'YES' to the following questions

Questions	YES	NO
1. Have I read broadly and deeply in the area of my research topic		
2. Have I spent time thinking critically about the research topic		
3. Have I spent time discussing my research topic with others		
4. Have I found out how people in other disciplines think about my research topic		
5. Do I feel ready to begin writing my research topic		



## The Content of a Research Proposal

The following are key sections in the research proposal

### 1. The Topic

Points to note:

- Topic must have a business focus
- Topic must be interesting to you
- You are already knowledgeable about the topic. You will be the expert
- The topic will contribute towards your career goals



### Activity

Write down your topic

## 2. Research Problem

Before your proposal can make sense to your reader, he/she must understand clearly what the proposed research will be about.

### **For example:**

This research explores the extent to which vigilantism is growing within different sectors of the South African population. In particular the research focuses on the factors which promote and maintain vigilantism in our society.

Recent reports in the media detailing the operation of extensive and organized vigilante groups have created public interest and concern and there are important implications for policing policy.

A 'vigilante' is defined as being a volunteer committee of citizens for the oversight and protection of any interest, especially one organized to suppress and punish crime summarily, as when the process of law appears inadequate.

In the above example the following can be answered;

- Where does this research come from
- Clarify or quantify any concepts which may not be clear

Note: A problem statement is one paragraph that explicitly states the purpose, nature and reasons for the study in order to achieve a specifically stated outcome.

**Activity**

Fill in the blanks to help you write a precise, direct statement of what your research is all about.

The purpose of the study is to .....in order to.....so that.....ensure that.....is achieved.

**3. The Aim/Objectives/ Research Questions****3.1 The Aim**

Formulate a clear and definite aim that sheds light on the whole topic.

For example: The aim of this study is to investigate the causes and impact of high labour turnover in hospitals.

**Activity**

Write the aim for your study.

### 3.2 Objectives

Break the aim into about FOUR objectives. These objectives form the basis of your Literature Review as well as your instrument.

For example: The following objectives are based on the above aim:

- To ascertain if salaries contribute to high labour turnover
- To assess how demotivation affects the quality of service delivery
- To assess the impact of a lack of medical equipment on hospital operations
- To make recommendations on how skilled manpower may be retained



#### Activity

Write your research objectives

### 3.3 Research Questions

Answers to your research questions ensure that your objectives have been achieved

For example: The following research questions have been based on the above objectives:

- Are salaries an issue in labour turnover?
- Does motivation affect the quality of service delivery?
- What impact does a lack of medical equipment have on hospital operations?



### Activity

Write your research questions

**NOTE:** the aim/objective/ research questions must be aligned. This is a critical success factor

#### 4. The Significance of the Study [Importance of the Study]

This section is referred to as the Rationale of the study. It is very important as it provides you, the researcher, the opportunity of convincing the reader, supervisor, external examiner that the research is worth undertaking.

There are different ways of doing this:

- Describe how the results will be used

- Explain how each stakeholder involved in the study will benefit
- Describe the contributions your research will make
- Think how your research may:
  - ❖ Resolve theoretical questions in your area
  - ❖ Develop better theoretical models
  - ❖ Influence managers and decision makers
  - ❖ Change the way people do their respective jobs or may change the way people live

Information regarding the above will help you in producing a convincing argument as to the usefulness of the study.

For example, the following examples are based on the 'Labour Turnover' topic

- The results will be used to improve salaries, job expectations and working conditions of doctors/ nurses and medical personnel
- Improve awareness amongst managers and leaders about the plight of employees
- Amend the current policies on remunerations, and basic conditions of employment
- Ensure that all hospitals are equipped with adequate medical supplies and equipment
- The lives of patients will improve

**Activity**

Write down the significance of your study

**5. The Literature Review**

The Literature review presents one of the greatest challenges of the research proposal to all researchers. The literature review provides a conceptual framework, based on your objectives, so that your research questions and methodology can be better understood. It is imperative that you provide an integrated overview of your field of study. This means that you must show awareness of the most important and relevant theories, models and studies pertinent to your study.

This section gives you the opportunity to show that you have benefitted from the MBA coursework. Read widely on the topic. Ideally use current literature [not more than five years old]



**For example. The following extracts demonstrate successful and unsuccessful literature review:**

**Unsuccessful Literature Review:**

High labour turnover among hospital health workers is a problem which management must address. The problem is critical in that the workers attending to hospitals are overworked. The workers look after un-recommended number of patients. Health workers are dissatisfied with their working conditions . Therefore, lack of job satisfaction is the cause of turnover.

**Successful Literature Review:**

This study will draw on the diverse approaches to a study of the causes and impact of high labour turnover in hospitals. A reflection on the nature of staff and hospital organisations indicate that there are several factors that contribute to high labour and the resultant adverse effects of it (Russell and Taylor, 2004: 757). For example skilled human resources are important in successfully completing tasks and the lack of it results in failure.

Therefore, it is important that managers in hospitals appoint the right personnel for the right job in order to ensure job satisfaction and successful completion of tasks. A study by Luthans (2002: 230) revealed that if there is considerable job dissatisfaction, there is likely to be high turnover.

**NOTE:**

- The objectives of your study form the basis of your literature review as well as your instrument. Your objectives/ literature review and instrument must be aligned
- Use current literature to write up your overview
- Use full Harvard referencing



Notes:

## 6. Research Methodology

This is also referred to as the strategy for the research. You need to indicate the following:

- The methods of data collection within a quantitative or qualitative methodology
- The techniques of data collection [questionnaire, interviews, observations, case study, etc]
- The measurement for validation of the techniques [attitudes scales, rating scales etc.]
- The target population [definition, who constitutes your target population, size, etc]
- The respondents and the sample size [choice of sample, definition, size]

**For example****Research according to quantitative methodology**

In this study, the researcher utilizes a quantitative methodology to obtain primary data. Quantitative research is associated with analytical research, and its purpose is to arrive at a universal statement from analysis of the data collected.

Data can be collected by observation, pilot studies and surveys. A research instrument [questionnaire] was compiled to collect primary data. This method is considered suitable because ....

**Research according to qualitative methodology**

In this study the researcher used a qualitative methodology to obtain primary data. Qualitative methodology refers to research which produces descriptive data through the written or spoken word. In qualitative research, methods such as case studies, in-depth interviews, participant observation and perusal of personal documents are used to obtain primary data.

For the purpose of the study, interviews and participant observation was used to obtain primary data. The methods were considered suitable because ....

**Activity**

Are you going to use qualitative or quantitative methodology?

Why?

## 7. Measuring Instruments

Measuring instruments are applied to test or measure the reliability of the methods of data collection.



### Activity

List some of the questions you will include in your research instrument.

## 8. Validity and Reliability of the research methodology

This is crucial to scientific research

### 8.1 Validity

This refers to the potential of a design or measuring instrument to measure what is supposed to achieve and or measure. It is concerned with the what of data collecting procedures. The researcher must cite the following types of validity and then explain how he applied them to his instrument:

- Content validity

- Criterion- related validity
- Construct validity
- Face validity
- External validity

## 8.2 Reliability

This pertains to the accuracy of measures. The same instrument must be able to produce the same data at a later stage under similar conditions. The researcher may do this by means of a test – retest.

## 9. Hypothesis or Research Questions to be Tested

A **hypothesis** is a tentative answer to a research problem, while **research questions** are general questions about relations among variables.

### Examples of research questions

- What factors determine job satisfaction in a library
- What are the causes of a decline of the use of libraries at RBS
- What are the factors that lead to user satisfaction in the library

**These questions can be converted into a series of hypotheses on job satisfaction.**

**For Example:**

- Job satisfaction is significantly related to salary offered to employees in the library
- Job satisfaction is significantly related to opportunities for promotion provided in the library
- Job satisfaction is significantly related to the environment prevailing in the library.

You may either use hypothesis testing if you consider it feasible and necessary for your study or you may pose research questions.

## 10. Data Gathering

There are three methods of data gathering

- Observations: is the systematic recording of nonverbal and verbal behaviour and communication
- Measurement: the researcher uses a instrument to express judgement or opinion regarding a phenomenon, based on a criteria
- Questioning: is one method for gathering data. Within the questioning method, there are number of techniques such as questionnaires [structured and unstructured], interviews, checklists and diaries.

Although you may use one or several methods of data collection, it is important that you justify the reasons for use.



### Activity

List the data gathering methods you are going to use.

State the reasons for choosing these methods



## 11. Data Analysis

Once the data has been gathered, the analysis of the data is undertaken.

The basic steps are:

- Categorizing data: is concerned with actual assigning of data into different categories. Data about managers can be categorized by personality, age, gender
- Coding data: is the process of identifying and classifying each answer with a numerical score or other character symbol. Coding is used for converting data or responses to numerical numbers so that they can be tabulated and appropriate statistics can be applied
- Calculating appropriate statistics: descriptive statistics (uses measures of central tendencies: mean, median, mode) or inferential statistics (is used for making inferences or judgements about a population on the basis of a sample. It is used for hypothesis testing)



### Activity

What data analysis are you going to use?

Why

## 12. Conclusion

In the initial stage of research, a researcher develops a statement of the problem. He/she selects the research approach according to the nature of the problem and then proceeds to prepare his/her proposal after intensive reading around the problem under investigation in accordance with the above guidelines

## 13. Bibliography

Use the Harvard Method of referencing.



\*\*\*\*\*



### **Guidelines for Submission of your Research Proposal**

Before submission, ensure that you have satisfied the following:

#### **1. Title**

The title must be management related and contain the key concepts of the study. It must be specific. Avoid words like “a study of”, “an empirical investigation into”, “and an investigation of”. Ideally the title should be around 8 words long.

#### **2. Introduction**

Clear reference must be made to the research topic and the research problem must be introduced. You must specify what is to be expected in the proposal.

#### **3. Background Information**

In this section information about the organisation under study must be discussed as well as the researcher’s role in the organisation. This discussion must occur in direct relation to the research problem.

#### **4. Research Aim**

Ideally, it should be one major aim that directly relates to the research problem and be consistent with the research topic and objectives.

#### **5. Research Objectives**

These must be linked to the research aim, topic, and questions – they must not be repeated study aims. The objectives must be very specific and should be cross referenced with the research design/data collection method to ensure that relevant data is collected to address the objectives.

## **6. Problem Statement**

Use the problem background to explain the research problem in about 6 lines. The expected outcomes of the study must be emphasised.

## **7. Research Questions**

Each objective must be turned into a research question. Ensure the research questions, aims, and objectives are aligned.

## **8. Hypotheses**

If students use hypotheses, ensure that the hypotheses are clearly stated, the relationship between variables are simple and non-directional. The independent and dependent variable must be made clear. Ensure that the hypotheses are consistent with the research question. You must follow the hypothesis testing convention.

## **9. Study Significance**

The value of the study should be made clear in terms of the benefits of the study in applying results through making recommendations, advancing theory, or particular research significance.

## **10. Literature Review**

A brief but comprehensive introduction must be provided explaining the research problem and what the literature review will cover. Ideally each section must be discussed in line with each objective. This must then be linked to the research question. MBA related theory must be discussed. Students should broadly but briefly cover theories related to the research problem, but, students must select one theory. This theory must be critically discussed and related to the

organisation under study. Subsections should be linked to form a coherent argument that is related to the research question. Scan references cited and ensure that recent literature is used. The literature should be specialist books and journal articles. Avoid reliance on the prescribed text book or course notes. Ensure that opinionated discussions are avoided.

## **11. Research Methodology**

You must clearly justify using the chosen research method using the relevant theory specific to the study. There must be clarity on the method used (qualitative vs quantitative). The method must be aligned to the objectives and aims to ensure that the relevant data is collected. The sampling method must be clarified in terms of the sampling method, the sample characteristics, and the sampling process or procedure. It is imperative that the issue of a representative sample is addressed. If students are using an interview schedule in qualitative research, they must show how the questions are created and provide this schedule in the appendix. If quantitative, you must show how the research instrument was created. This must then be linked to validity and reliability. You must also demonstrate that the data collected is valid and reliable. The data analytic process must be explained procedurally from the time of data entry. The importance of the pilot study must also be clearly shown in terms of the study procedures and how the pilot study results will be used to make necessary adjustments.

## **12. Ethical Considerations**

Ethics should be addressed from the perspective of RBS as the educational institution, the organisation under study, and the participants.

### 13. Writing Style

- The following issues should be focused on:  
Sentence construction, grammar, punctuation, lay versus scientific, argument coherency
- All abbreviations must be introduced before they are used in the document
- Quotations must be done in italics and should not form an extensive part of the review. Any quotation should be contextualised within the study.
- References
  - Ensure that the Harvard procedure is strictly adhered to.
  - Cross check with bibliography and in text citations
  - Scan the extensiveness of references and suitability – ensure that reading occurs beyond the prescribed text book
- Presentation style
  - 12 point font, times new roman or Arial at 1.5 line spacing, 1.25 inches margin, and justify right.
  - Length: about 4000 words.

.....

**Now that you have completed your research proposal, you may submit it to the research dept at RBS.**

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