Session Six:
Writing research proposal and report

Research Proposal: What is it for?

The main purpose of a research proposal is
to tell others that you **have a worthwhile project to conduct** and **pursue the necessary competence to carry it out**.

In a research proposal, you have to tell people
what you plan to do,
why you want to do it, and
how you are going to do it.

You need to convince your reader that **you have an exciting research idea**, and that **you have a good grasp of the relevant literature**, **the major issues involved**, and **the appropriate methodologies**.

A good proposal need not be long. Typically, it runs anywhere between 20 to 40 double-spaced pages.

It is designed to…….

……enhance your skills in the following areas:

1. Formulation of a research question.
2. Identification of a "gap" in the research literature.
3. Formulation of a set of hypotheses.
4. Preparation of a literature review pertinent to the hypotheses.
5. Choice of a methodology that is appropriate to an examination of the hypotheses.
6. Choice of techniques that are appropriate to an examination of the hypotheses.
7. Description and justification of the chosen methodology and analyses.
8. Organization and presentation of material into a logical, clear, convincing statement of the proposed research.

The process is somehow iterative….

The process of preparation of your research proposal should be iterative. Your proposal should be subjected to constant revision as a result of constructive comment and criticism.

You should actively seek out expert opinion on your proposal; it is far better to develop a viable research project at the outset than commence with a research project that proves to be unrealistic after a great deal of time and effort has been put into it.

It involves variety of activities…

You should continue with your literature study, discussions with experts and/or exploratory work until you are absolutely sure about your research problem and have a proposal which constitutes a clear, crisp definition of the research project.

The research proposal should contain a brief but clear statement of exactly what you want to do and how you propose to do it. Do not expect your supervisor and other advisers to consult any other document to obtain a clear idea of your research project.

General outline of research proposal

The research proposal should basically consist of the following areas:

I	**Summary**
II	**Introduction**
III	**Significant prior research**
IV	**Research objective**
V	**Research approach or methodology**
VI	**Importance of the research**
VII	**Limitation and key assumptions**
VIII	**Contribution to knowledge**
IX	**Proposed thesis chapters**
X	**Research plan**
XI	**References**

Contents of each part……

I Summary

This summarizes what the research project is to do and how it is to do it.

II Introduction

A brief introduction to the research project is provided leading up to a brief statement of the problem, hypothesis or question.

III Significant prior research

A comprehensive summary of all major sources of information leads to an expanded statement of current problem, hypothesis or question. This summary should be pertinent to the current problem, hypothesis or question and not merely an undirected literature summary. What is known about the research question from the prior literature? What is not known and why?

IV Research objective

It should be stated clearly, preferably in the form of a question.

Methodology

V Research approach or methodology

Your research approach should be as explicit as possible. Major questions yet to be decided should be listed. Your proposal should include:

- Theoretical framework: What theory is driving your research?
- Research Design: What type of approach do you propose and why is it appropriate?
- Sample: What population (of persons, departments, organizations, economies, societies) do you intend to study? Why? What type of sampling procedure do you propose? Why?
- Procedure: How will data be collected?
- Measurement of Variables: How will you measure each variable in the study, and why did you choose to use that measurement procedure? What evidence can you provide regarding the validity and the reliability of all measures?
- Data Analysis: What analysis will you use to examine each hypothesis? Why?
  (Include shells of Tables and Figures (no data) where appropriate.)

VI Importance of the research

Addresses the question of whether or not the research is important or significant enough to justify doing.

VII Limitation and key assumptions

Defines the limits of the dissertation work. It is common for students to try to do too much: this section is thus useful for defining how much you will undertake and the key assumptions you will make.

VIII Contribution to knowledge

State the way(s) in which your work will make a contribution to knowledge. How is the proposed study unique? In what way will it go beyond existing research? How will it advance knowledge and contribute to the literature?

IX Proposed dissertation chapters

Describe each chapter in terms of its major headings or by a short paragraph describing what will be covered in that chapter. For example:

Abstract
Introduction
Prior Research (Review of Literature) - leading up to
    statement of research problem
Research methodology
Research results
Conclusions
References

X Research plan

Prepare a chart that shows when you plan to complete key components.

XI References

Provide a full set of supporting references.

Research Proposals: A Check-list

Ask yourself about your own proposal:

1. Does it show imagination and intellectual craftsmanship?
2. Is the problem clearly stated?
3. Are hypotheses clear, unambiguous and testable?
4. If no hypotheses, are objectives clearly stated; can they be accomplished?
5. Is the problem too large in scope?
6. Is the methodology feasible?
7. Can the data be collected?
8. How will the data by analyzed?
9. Will the analysis allow the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses?

Research Proposals: A Check-list

Ask yourself about your own proposal:

10. Is the population from which the sample is to be drawn receptive to the research?
11. What might the results of the analysis look like?
12. What would be the consequences of the following:
    Experiment fails?
    Data (for each major item) not available?
    Analysis inconclusive?
13. Can major research activities be listed?
14. Can a time estimate be attached to each major activity?
15. Is the thesis trying to do too much?
16. If yes to 15: What would make the project more manageable?

Characteristics of a good thesis topic

1. Need for research

A significant need for the research should exist. The results need not have immediate application but the topic should not be trivial. The candidate should that his/her research is important and worthwhile. This will help to retain motivation in periods of routine work on the thesis. The need to understand the nature of some specific phenomenon is the motivation for much research that has no immediate practical relevance, but there should, at the same time, be some need, importance or significance in knowing the results.

2. Amenable to research methods

Your topic needs to be feasible both as to the availability of data and the availability of tools for analysis. Some research projects and research methods are beyond the capabilities of students because of technical, cost of time requirements.

Characteristics of a good thesis topic

3. Achievable in a reasonable time

Typically, a Masters thesis should be capable of being completed in a one year and a Ph.D thesis within three years. A Masters thesis should normally be in the range of 20,000 - 40,000 words, or between 80 and 120 double spaced pages. A Ph.D thesis should normally be in the range of 50,000 - 100, 000 words. The nature of the subject may require you to exceed these typical ranges. Your supervisor will guide you on this.

4. Symmetry of potential outcomes

A research project will typically have more than one potential outcome: a hypothesis may be proved, disproved or inconclusive. Any of the potential outcomes should be satisfactory in terms of the acceptability of the thesis topic. Avoid topics which are dependent for their success on a paticular outcome.

Characteristics of a good thesis topic

5. Match with student's capabilities and interests

The research topic should match both your interests and capabilities. This will sustain you in times of frustration and offset the possibility of entering areas in which you are less competent.

6. Attractive for funding

The topic should be attractive for funding - if relevant. When acquiring funding for research, extreme care should be given to ensure total independence to pursue the research: in other words, to ensure that the funding in no way affects or biases the research design, methodology and conclusions.

7. Area for professional development

Your thesis may often be only the beginning of research on a topic. Candidates can make their thesis a stepping-stone in their careers by selecting a topic that provides development in areas in which they hope to work.

Characteristics of a good thesis topic

8. Contribution of knowledge

The definition of this concept is difficult. A Masters thesis does not have to make a significant contribution to knowledge. Thus it does not have to be entirely original, yet it should be based on a significant problem, research question or hypothesis. For example, you may replicate a study in a new geographical area, or with improved data and/or techniques. Your work should relate to, explain, solve or add proof to the question, problem or hypothesis. The results of your research should increase knowledge of that particular field of inquiry. Knowledge can be increased by: -

- New or improved evidence
- New or improved methodology
- New or improved analysis
- New or improved concepts of theories
- or any combination of the above

The Ph.D is recognition of successful research experience. The student must make a distinct contribution to knowledge, of fact and/or theory. Thus, for a doctorate, considerably more original work is required than for a Masters thesis

Organizing your thesis

Organize your material in a logical way. No set structure exists but the following arrangement will fit most studies except those using the interpretative paradigm.

1. **Abstract**
2. **Chapter 1: Introduction**
3. **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**
4. **Chapter 3: The Research Question**
5. **Chapter 4: Research Methods**
6. **Chapter 5: Research Results**
7. **Chapter 6: Discussion of Results**
8. **Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendation**
9. **References**
10. **Appendices**

Organizing your thesis

1 Abstract

Summarizes what you have done and how you have done it as well as the main conclusions you have drawn.

2 Chapter 1: Introduction

Lead the reader to a clear understanding of the broad objectives of your study. Be brief but interesting. Include a brief statement of your problem, question or hypotheses, your methodology, the importance of the research, the limitations and key assumptions and the contribution to knowledge. Briefly describe the lay-out of your thesis by mentioning what you will do in subsequent chapters.

3 Chapter 2: Significant Prior Research

Present the theoretical foundations of your study, including a statement of your research paradigm. Critically review the literature that has a bearing on your problem and lead logically towards a statement of your research question. This part of your thesis need not be limited to one chapter and you can also separate purely theoretical issues from empirical research relating to the problem area. Move logically in the direction of a statement of your research question.

4 Chapter 3: The Research Question

Give a comprehensive account of your research problem or question. Present your research model, and testable hypotheses or objectives. These hypotheses should be grounded in your literature study and a brief rationale for each should be provided. This chapter may not be necessary if you have given a comprehensive account of your research problem at the end of chapter 2.

5 Chapter 4: Research Methods

Provide a comprehensive account of your research methods and techniques you will employ. Give special attention (where appropriate) to your sample, measuring instruments and any statistical analyses that you will undertake.

6 Chapter 5: Research Results

Describe your results and interpret them. Do not refer to other studies at this stage.

7 Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

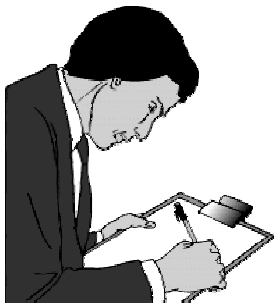
Discuss the outcomes of your study with reference to other relevant research and the underlying theoretical framework.

8 Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendation

Summarize your investigation and critically discuss your main findings, including limitations. Make recommendations and suggest areas for furthers research (if appropriate).

9 References

10 Appendices



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