

How to Write a Graduate Proposal

University of Utah, Writing Center
www.writingcenter.utah.edu

Purpose of Proposal

- ⦿ A plan of action and justification for research that you plan to do
- ⦿ A step towards gaining approval for thesis and/or dissertation
- ⦿ A way to receive funding for research
 - ⦿ Ex. Write a proposal for grant money

Parts of a Proposal

- Title
- Table of Contents
- Abstract
- Introduction/ Background
- Statement of the Problem
- Purpose/Aims/ Rationale/
Research Questions
- Review of Literature
- Methodology
- Results
- Significance/ Implications
- Bibliography
- Appendix

Writing Thesis/Dissertation Proposals

- Your proposal includes:
 - What you are going to study
 - Research questions
 - How you set up your study
 - Methodology
 - Why this topic
 - Significance

Tips to get started

- Find the gaps in the research
 - Literature Review
- Decide the type of research you are doing
 - Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods
- Plan out your proposal
 - Create writing plan
- Meet with your advisor
 - Every department has different guidelines for proposals
- Form a writing group with other grad students in your department
- Visit the Writing Center

Overview of chapters

- Some proposals include a Table of Contents
 - Located either before or after the abstract
 - Check with your department
 - Chapters
 - Subheading within each chapter

- Example of Table Of Content

Chapter 1: Introduction

Study Purpose

1

Background

2-5

Framework

6-7

Definitions

8-9

Assumptions

10-12

Significance to Nursing

13

Research Questions

14

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

15-30

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

Methodology

Methods

Participant Selection Strategies

Abstract

- Overview of proposal
- Brief (100-400 words)
- Summary of your proposal
 - Introduction, Statement of the Problem, Background of the Study, Research Questions or Hypotheses, and Methods and Procedures.
- Write the abstract after you finish your proposal.

Introduction

- Provide background information on your chosen topic
- Include the reason for your research.
- Ranges in length from a few paragraphs to several pages.

Introduction Example

- Collegiate athletes must devote considerable time, energy, and resources to reach and maintain a high level of proficiency, and significant time away from training and competition negatively affects their performance (Mujika & Padilla, 2000a, 2000b). Johnson (2000) emphasized that the majority of athletes “at a competitive or elite level practice almost daily and compete regularly during the season in order to be optimally prepared physically, mentally, and technically” (p. 207). Any significant disruption in such training and competition can significantly impact athletic performance. In their study of the effects of short-term and long-term detraining, Mujika and Padilla (2000a, 2000b) concluded that while regular training helps produce the physiological adaptations that contribute to high-level athletic performance, a break in such training often results in a reversal of such adaptations and negatively affects athletic performance. Researchers have looked at collegiate-level athletes taking time off from training and competition because of injury, illness, pregnancy, psychological distress, and burnout and have identified the adverse physical and psychological effects and challenges associated with such breaks.

However, little research has focused on collegiate athletes voluntarily taking a long-term break from training and competition for religious or humanitarian reasons.

Statement of the problem

- Find the gap in the research
 - Ask yourself:
 - What is the gap that needs to be filled?
 - What is the problem that needs to be solved?
- State this gap/problem in paragraph form
- Focus your question on a specific gap/problem
 - Limit the variables

Statement of the problem example

- Despite the growing interest in nineteenth-century geographical representation, **no geographer has yet seriously examined the remarkable discourses that emerged during the latter half of the century to represent the geographies of worlds beyond Earth.** Popular histories of geography (e.g. Sheehan 1996; Morton 2002) indicate that astronomers collected extensive geographic data about the nearby planets, usually recording their findings in detailed maps that were strikingly similar in appearance to many of the well-studied imperial maps produced during the same time period. Although much of this astronomical-geographical knowledge compiled during the late nineteenth century has since been revised or discarded on the basis of twentieth-century remote sensing images, **I contend that colonial era discourses had widespread scientific and cultural significance at the time they were created.**

Eves, Rosalyn. "Writing Thesis and Dissertation Proposals."
Powerpoint presentation, Penn State.

<http://www.slideserve.com/presentation/13740/Writing-Thesis-and-Dissertation-Proposals>

Purpose / Aims / Rationale / Research Questions

- Explain the goals and research objectives of the study.
- Identify the “gaps” in the research that you will be filling.
- Provide a more detailed account of the points summarized in the introduction.
- Include a rationale for the study.

Purpose/ Research questions example

- The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the impact that a two-year break from sport to provide full-time service has on college-level athletes' return to sport and the physical, psychological, and environmental factors that affect this return. The proposed qualitative study will be exploratory and descriptive, providing an increased understanding of the phenomenon of what it means to be an RM athlete. The study will investigate the following research question and subquestions: What does an RM athlete experience in returning to collegiate-level training and competition? How does a two-year break from sport and focus on spiritual issues affect an RM athlete's return to sport? What physical, psychological, and environmental factors affect an RM athlete's return-to-sport experience?

From Jacob Jensen's Master Thesis

Review of the Literature

- To explain the historical background of a topic
- To **highlight gaps** in the existing research
- To describe and compare the schools of thought on an issue
- To synthesize the available research
- To highlight and critique research methods
- To note areas of disagreement
- To justify the topic you plan to investigate

Lit. Review example

Most of the professional and scholarly literature on downtown development has neglected small cities. Frieden and Sagalyn's (1999) widely cited book *Downtown, Inc.* concentrates on large-scale projects in Seattle, Boston, St. Paul, and San Diego, while Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee (1998) profile Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego in their book on downtown design. Almost all the examples provided in Whyte (1988), Abbott (1993), and Robertson (1995) are from large cities, and Brooks and Young (1993) use New Orleans as their case study. The Downtown Development Handbook (McBee, 1992), considered by many to be the bible of downtown development, is heavily dependent on projects in large cities to illustrate key points. Articles addressing a particular downtown development strategy such as retailing (Robertson, 1997; Sawicki, 1989), stadiums (Noll & Zimbalist, 1997; Rosentraub, Swindell, Pryzbylski, & Mullins, 1994), pedestrianization (Byers, 1998; Robertson, 1993), and open space (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993; Mozingo, 1989) all emphasize large cities as well. The professional magazine *Urban Land* has published numerous articles on downtown development in recent years, most of which feature a single large city (e.g., Holt, 1998; Howland, 1998; Lockwood, 1996)

Methodology

- Decide what methodological approach you will use.
 - Qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods
- Explain why you will use this approach.
- Describe how data will be collected.
- Include how you will analyze and interpret the results.
 - What is your theoretical framework?
 - Will you use a statistical analysis?
- Include rationale for using your chosen framework and analysis.
- Explain the limitations of your study.

Tips on Drafting Methodology

- Use subsections.
 - In the physical sciences, these sections may include subjects, design, apparatus, instrumentation, process, analysis, etc.
 - In the social sciences, these sections may include selection of participants, interview process, profiles, interpretive and analytic framework, methods of qualitative analysis, etc.
 - In the humanities, these sections may include scholarly research, archival research, theoretical orientation, etc.
- Cite sources in your methods section.
 - Ex: Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings)
- Acknowledge problems with your research design
- Provide support for your chosen approach by showing how benefits outweigh problems.

Methodology Example

- The research plan will proceed in **two phases**. During the **first phase**, I will select three international students that took Writing 2010 their first semester at the University of Utah. During the **second phase**, I will conduct **in-depth interviews** with the three students. The research design has several strengths. First, ethnographic study will yield data with high internal validity about how responses to Writing 2010 is consistent among international students (Johnson and Liu 2002). Second . . .
- After providing a rationale for the research design, the author goes on to describe in detail the site selection and methods of data collection and analysis.

Results

- Report the data you have collected
 - Write about the data collected
 - Use tables, graphs, etc
 - Make sure to discuss the different tables that you include
- Reminder: Just report the facts, don't make interpretations (yet)

Significance/Implications

- Discuss the significance of your study.
 - Why is this study important?
- Include a discussion on the benefits of your study to the research community and to the world.
- Include the implications of this research
 - Teachers should incorporate more computer use into their lessons.
- Include your recommendations for more research
 - This study was done with freshmen and further research could be done on both freshmen as well as upper division students. Future research should include upperclassmen who may feel like their time is more of a priority than incoming freshmen and may value the flexibility and convenience of online workshops more than freshmen.

Significance example

- My research on identity and development is innovative because it brings together analysis of national discourses about Indians with a study of the practices and choices of the individual Indians whose identities are at issue. I believe this research can be helpful to the nation, development agencies, and indigenous organizations as Bolivia works out what a multicultural identity will mean for its people. I am particularly committed to sharing the results of my analysis with the Guaraní people with whom I work, in the hopes that my work will not just be an extraction of truths, but will give them information with which they can better control their lives and resources.

Eves, Rosalyn. "Writing Thesis and Dissertation Proposals." Powerpoint presentation, Penn State.
<http://www.slideserve.com/presentation/13740/Writing-Thesis-and-Dissertation-Proposals>

Bibliography & Appendices

- Include a Bibliography/Works Cited/References
 - Include all the sources that you cite
 - Lit. Review
 - Other sections
- Include Appendices. These may include:
 - Experiment Diagrams
 - Permissions for Human Subject Testing
 - IRB mandated Participant Consent
 - Interview questions
- Both Bibliographies and Appendices are discipline specific.
 - You need to know your departments requirements
 - MLA, APA, CBC, Chicago

Timeline/Plan of Work

Some things to keep in mind:

- Plan your thesis/dissertation with your advisor.
- Create a timeline of due dates
 - Do not procrastinate
 - Include all aspects of the writing process on your timeline, including:
 - IRB paperwork
 - IRB approval
 - Travel
 - Design
 - Testing
 - Equipment needed
 - Drafting
 - Revising
 - Multiple drafts
- Write down the dates for submitting and defending

Proposal for Grant Money

- **Private Foundations:**
 - ◉ The Foundation Directory (Marriott Library)
 - ◉ Lists Foundations by state and by subject
 - ◉ Charge for use: <http://www.fdncenter.org/>
 - ◉ Another useful website:
<http://www.foundationcenter.org/>
- **Federal Grants**
 - [Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance](http://12.46.245.173/cfda/cfda.html) (<http://12.46.245.173/cfda/cfda.html>)

Works Cited

- Eves, Rosalyn. “Writing Thesis and Dissertation Proposals.” Powerpoint presentation, Penn State.
<http://www.slideserve.com/presentation/13740/Writing-Thesis-and-Dissertation-Proposals>
- Jensen, Jacob. “Research Proposal”
- Provides multiple examples of proposals
 - https://webpace.utexas.edu/cherwitz/www/ie/sample_diss.html