

How to Write a Proposal: Outline Download

Title

Abstract

If required provide a brief (350 words for Dissertation, 200 words for Thesis) overview of the proposal that gives the reader a basic understanding of your proposal. The abstract should summarize your introduction, statement of the problem, background of the study, research questions or hypotheses, as well as methods and procedures.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Your introduction should put your project in conversation with other similar projects and provide necessary background information that establishes the purpose of your study. A good introduction establishes the general territory in which the research is placed and includes some references to existing literature.

Statement of the Problem

This section may be incorporated into your introduction or stand independently (ask your advisor for the most appropriate format). Regardless of placement, you need to clearly identify the problem or knowledge gap that your project is responding to.

Purpose of the Study/Research Questions

Like the "Statement of the Problem," this section can be included as part of the introduction or it can be separate. The statement of purpose/research objectives involves a description of the question(s) the research seeks to answer or the hypotheses the research seeks to advance. When doing this, however, remember to show how your approach will be different from the previous research and add to the field of knowledge.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Review of Research (organized by themes)

The literature review identifies potential gaps in knowledge significant to the research you are proposing to carry out. Here, you need to be able to identify the key texts which contribute to your thesis or dissertation. Literature reviews often include both the theoretical and empirical approaches in order to effectively demonstrate your familiarity with the topic and the appropriate approaches to studying it.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

How you study a problem is often as important as the results you collect. The methodology section includes a description of the general means through which the goals of the study will be achieved:

Research Design

The research design indicates what type of research is being conducted for the study. This section discusses whether you are conducting a qualitative or quantitative approach and if quantitative what type of design is being used, e.g. experimental, quasi-experimental, or non-experimental. This allows readers to assess the strength of your findings based on the strength of your design.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The literature review should help you determine what gaps exist in the extant literature and what research questions haven't been asked. Research questions should explore new relationships or group comparisons regarding your phenomena of interest and they should never be stated as yes/no questions, e.g., *To what extent do personality characteristics relate to political beliefs in U.S. citizens, controlling for demographic characteristics?* Hypotheses then become nested within the research questions and if stated as a null hypothesis would be structured as: *There will be no association between the personality characteristic neuroticism and political beliefs in U.S. citizens, controlling for demographic characteristics.* Make certain that all potential relationships are formally tested in the hypotheses such that the research question(s) is properly answered.

Setting and Sample

The sample section is crucial because it outlines how and to what extent your findings will generalize to your target population. This section should outline what your target population is, e.g. war veterans who suffered PTSD during Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. It should discuss your sampling strategy, e.g. probability sampling vs. non-probability sampling. It should discuss what size sample you will collect and the extent to whether it will be representative of your target population. Lastly, it should talk about how you intend on recruiting your participants.

Data Collection

The data collection section should discuss the instruments used to measure your phenomena of interest (e.g. survey questionnaire or interview protocols, etc.). It should outline the step by step procedures that you will take to collect the data: recruitment, informed consent procedures, distributing survey materials, recording data, storage of data, and protection of participant confidentiality. Lastly, the variables that will be used in the analysis should be discussed at length (e.g., conceptual and operational definitions, measurement type, and use in analysis such as independent or dependent variables).

Data Analysis

Most quantitative theses and dissertations separate the analysis into three phases: descriptive analysis (frequencies and percentages of categorical variables and means and standard deviations of continuous variables), preliminary analysis (initial bivariate relationships or comparisons), and primary analyses (analysis that tests the hypotheses of the study). You will need to describe the statistical tests in-depth that will be conducted and why for each of these phases of analysis. Some school programs may also require you to discuss details regarding how these statistical tests operate and are interpreted in the proposal so your committee is convinced you understand this process. If you are quantitative, be sure to keep your statistics and research methodology textbooks to work through this section.

Conclusion

The conclusion for the methods section will usually briefly reiterate the problem and purpose. Some degree programs will require candidates to formally provide expectations for the relationships that will be tested, e.g. the relationship between sleep deprivation and mood swings is expected to be positive for hypothesis four, etc. You may also want to include a limitations section that formally acknowledges issues in methodology that could cast some doubt on the validity of your findings. End with a discussion of how you envision your study will impact your field, the extant research, and your target population.

Timeline

Many students also consult their advisors about creating and including in proposals a schedule of anticipated completion dates for parts of their thesis or dissertation. This timeline helps you and your committee determine if your project is realistic given available methods and institutional requirements (such as deadlines for submission) and demonstrates your awareness of the various elements of the study.

References

Your proposal should include a working bibliography of sources you used for your study and methodology. You will want to include all sources cited in your proposal and references that will be cited in the dissertation itself.

****It is important to remember here to check with your institution on the style requirements for citing sources (e.g., MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.).****