



**Postgraduate  
Workshop:  
Research  
Proposal**

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**What is a Research  
proposal?**

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## Assess your present state of mind

- Good news – writing a passing dissertation is not about earth-shaking research, perfection or any other unattainable goal
- It's about completing a good research-based work, and presenting it in a **well-structured and well-written** manner in a **reasonable amount of time**

Overcome your state of mind through *Planning*

## Three predictive factors towards completion or not

1. Goal: time + focus
2. Process: **what** to do, **how** to do it and **when** to do it
3. Discipline

## Benefits of planning

- Break large and intimidating piece of work down in small, clearly achievable tasks
- Correctly order tasks
- Right amount of effort to each task
- No necessary tasks are forgotten
- Create deadlines

## Research Proposal

- Document that outlines how you propose to undertake your research project
- Crucial stage or milestone in research project cycle or process
- Outlines your thinking about your research problem
- What** you wish to study and **How** it should be done

## Research Proposal

- Project planning document
- The more thought you have put in => The better developed, organised and logical the proposal
- Forms the working relationship with you and your supervisor
- Undertake the study according to the guidelines in proposal

## Title of the study

Choosing a topic rationally, not emotionally, will greatly increase your chances of finishing and passing your dissertation on time (Hofstee, 2006: 13).

## A short descriptive title

- Succinctly define problem to be investigated
- Avoid generalisation, abstraction, vague metaphors
- Be concrete, specific, exact
- Subtitle only where strictly necessary (e.g. case study)
- Avoid academic clichés: “analysis of/ study of/ investigation into ...”
- Remember: title must direct potential researcher to your topic

## Research proposal is underpinned by 3 principal questions

- **What?** – the research question
- **Why?** –significance or contribution to the body of knowledge
- **How?** – the research design

## **Background to the study**

### **Introduction / Research problem statement**

There has to be a problem that you will investigate – it helps to put the problem statement as a question, and then explore and explain further (Hofstee, 2006: 85)

## **Introduction / Research problem statement**

Research questions are used when not enough is known about the problem to allow a thesis to be convincingly argued (Hofstee, 2006).

- Depending on the specific study and/or where required by supervisor you might only need research questions.

## **Background and outline of the research problem**

- Detailed explanation of research problem
- Briefly establish context of the research
- Pose research question/ problem/ hypothesis (state what dissertation will deal with)

## **Background and outline of the research problem**

- Amplify and refine research problem
- Remember: research topic should be formulated as a question, not as a descriptive account
- Postulate your hypotheses

## **Rationale of the study**

- Explain why your research will be worth doing
- Your literature review will support what you write here, but it is important to describe rationale/significance of study already here
- The theoretical and/or practical significance should be outlined

## **Research questions**

- Questions essential for consideration of main topic
- Should display, in logical order, all the sub-parts of research topic
- Clarity is all-important: reduce all you want to discover to a series of specific questions

## Research questions

- Questions should be formulated in terms of research design and analysis of data to be employed
- Proposed study should be directed toward suspected alternatives rather than toward a scanning of 'interesting' findings

## Research questions

- Avoid a 'fishing' approach to research (collecting material, applying a number of techniques 'to see what will come out')
- Hypothesis form is employed when state of existing knowledge and theory permits formulation of reasonable predictions about the relationship of variables
- Key questions determine and anticipate the theoretical framework

## **Aim and research objectives of the study**

### **Overall aim**

- Orientates the reader
- Problems and issues more broadly framed in philosophical/ social terms
- General questions in a larger context
- Evidence of larger social/ philosophical significance of project
- Test of whether proposal has imagination

## **Research objectives**

- Specific research objectives that will guide the research
- You need to make it clear what you want to achieve with your study

## Literature review

- Purpose of literature review is to provide a synthesis and critical evaluation of relevant literature that serves as conceptual background to specific objectives/research questions that guided the study and/or to specific hypotheses or conceptual model tested in the study

## Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

- Principal theories upon which research project will be constructed (these will be the basis for your research design)
- Theoretical framework is the guide to writing the entire research plan (will determine literature review, selection of sample, methodology, techniques for data analysis)
- Clearly outline the theory/ model/ perspective/ conceptual framework(s) within which you will investigate the problem/ test the hypotheses

## Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

- New theory - clearly explain in detail, defining relevant terms and providing examples
- Established theory - explain **why** and **how** its application to this research problem is appropriate and useful for providing answers
- Select an appropriate research design, e.g. Principal theories

## Conceptual framework for the study

Depending on your study and specific relevance of available theories you might want to develop a conceptual framework – consult with your supervisor.

## Research methodology

- Purpose of research methodology = describe steps that you will follow
- Methodology section = justification for methodological choices made and demonstrate that these choices aligned with current “best practice” principles that apply to the specific methodology and methods used

## Research methodology

- Details to be described in this section will depend on specific research approach (methodology) and methods that you will use
- Grewal and Levy (2007) suggest that it is best to err on the side of detail and complete explanations when writing methods section

## Research design

- Empirical study using primary data (survey, experiment, case study, programme evaluation, ethnographic study)
- Empirical study using/analysing existing data: text data (discourse analysis, content analysis, textual criticism, historical study) numeric data (secondary data analysis, statistical modeling)
- Non-empirical study: philosophical analysis, conceptual analysis, theory building, literature review (Mouton, 2001)

## Target population/Unit of analysis (Mouton, 2007)

- Human beings (individuals or groups)
- Scientific concepts/ notions/ ideas
- Human actions and historical events
- Scientific theories/ models/ interpretations/ typologies
- Social interventions (programmes, policies, strategies, laws)
- Scientific methods and techniques

### **Target population/Unit of analysis (Mouton, 2007)**

- Social/cultural objects (art or literature), texts, technology
- The body of scientific knowledge or literature
- Collectives (cities, nations, countries, economic sectors)
- Scientific data or statistics
- Social organizations (political parties or clubs) and institutions (schools, banks or companies)
- Schools of thought, philosophies or worldviews

### **Data collection methods (including selection of cases) - Research instruments**

- Identify** techniques, methods, instruments that you will use for measurement
- Specify** which tests/ scales/ questionnaires you will use and which procedures
- Explain why** they are appropriate for your research question
- Discuss** the **reliability and validity** of specific instruments and procedures and of entire method (will the results be replicable? generalisable?)

## Analysis of the data

- Explain **how** you will analyse your data (what statistical method? is the sample sufficiently large to enable detection of differences?)
- Method of analysis** is important: there are generally accepted methods in a field – apply known techniques accepted as valid before embarking on untried methods of analysis

## Delineations/scope of the study

- The study is linked to the related project as outlined in the background of the study, and population discussed in Section....., therefore the scope will be limited to ..... in the district of .....
- The delimitations and scope of the study determine the scientific application of the results and will only be applicable to the district of .....

## Ethical considerations

This study will involve human beings and therefore the four basic ethical issues will be taken onto account, namely protection from harm, informed consent, the right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues. Research activities will begin after ethical clearance by both the Faculties of .....

## Ethical considerations

The participants will be identified through the process described in Section .....

Possible participants will be invited to voluntarily participate, and no respondents will at any stage be subjected to any form of coercion, or feel compelled to participate in the activities and/or evidence collection of the study.

## Bibliography/Reference list

- ❑ At the end of your proposal/dissertation, you need to list the full details of all documents cited in the text
- ❑ Review your institution's guidelines to find out what information it requires in that list and how it should be laid out before you put your bibliography together, i.e. before you start your literature review

## References / Acknowledgements

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