

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The purpose of a research proposal is to ensure you are on track for developing an appropriate, well justified, well thought out research project. Preparing a proposal outlining the major aspects of your project is an excellent way to get started, and a valuable document for starting discussions about a more detailed plan of action with your educator or research supervisor.

The requirements of a research proposal can vary, so check your unit outline or with your educator/ research supervisor for the requirements for your particular assessment. As a general guide, a research proposal typically includes the following sections:

Title

An initial working title should be provided that describes the content and direction of your project. (Note: In some cases, a separate title page is needed with the title of the proposed research, the author's (student's) name, and the institutional affiliation, i.e., the Australian College of Applied Psychology).

Introduction

The introduction should provide the background to the research problem or issue. This may include the social/political/historical context of the study, the theoretical background, or your personal motivation for the study.

Following this, you should outline the need for the research to persuade the reader that the study will be useful and/or interesting. You could do this by referring to a 'gap' in the research literature, the need to apply certain ideas in a new context, or the significance of your particular topic to the field.



Aim of the study

In this section, you need to clearly and succinctly state the aim(s) of the study and the key research question(s); what is it that you want to know, prove, demonstrate, analyse, test, investigate or examine? Limit the number of aims/research questions to ensure that the project is focused and manageable. Use language such as, *The aim of this project is to... This study is guided by the following two research questions...* (Note: Sometimes this section is presented *after* the literature review).

Tip

A good way to determine an appropriate scope for your project is to look at past ACAP students' research projects. When looking at past projects, consider:

- the types of projects students have undertaken,
- the amount of work involved (research, writing, practical activities), and
- how the work was structured and presented.

Ask your educator, research supervisor or school manager about how to access past theses/research reports.

Literature review

In this section, you will briefly review literature that you judge as relevant to your topic. This is by no means an exhaustive literature review; it is a preliminary review to demonstrate that you have done some reading around your topic and identified who the key authors are, and what are the most significant ideas, theories, and findings in your topic area. The overall aim of this section is to map the field and to show where your research could possibly belong.

The literature review section usually includes a part that describes your theoretical framework, which is the model you are using that underpins and guides your research.

Methodology

This section describes the proposed research methodology. You do not have to describe the methodology to be used in great detail, but you should explain why you have chosen the type of methodology over others. For example, you could explain the reasons for using:

- a certain paradigm or theory
- qualitative or quantitative research
- a case study of a specific kind
- surveys, correlational experiments, field studies, specific statistical measurements, etc.
- certain dependent or independent or moderating variables
- a particular sampling frame and the size of a sample

This section may also include a description of and rationale for selection of participants, methods of data collection and analysis, and procedures you will use to ensure ethical practice (although this may be done in a separate section – see below).

Ethical considerations

This section outlines ethical issues to be considered in conducting your research. For example, you may need to address how you are going to deal with areas such as informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, data security, and so on.

Significance of the study

This section predicts the significance of your research project and the expected outcomes. Explain how your research project will contribute to the current state of knowledge on the topic and outline the practical or theoretical nature of the outcome(s). (Note: This section is sometimes titled “Expected outcomes of the study” or “Contribution of the study to the field”).

Project timeline

In this section, you need to provide an outline of how you will complete the work within the time scheduled. The aim of this section is to show that your project is feasible in the time period available. Indicate the timeframe for each broad stage such as reviewing the literature, data collection, data analysis and writing up the final report/thesis.

Keep in mind that some stages will rely on other stages being completed. For example, if your study involves human participants, then you will need to apply to the ACAP Human Ethics Research Committee for ethics approval. The committee meets monthly and has deadlines for submitting your ethics application, so make sure you factor this into your timeline.

References

The references section contains a list of all the articles, journals, books and other resources referred to in the text. Keep in mind that your references should provide the reader with a good sense of your grasp on the literature and how you can contribute to it.

