
What is a Research Proposal?

A research proposal is a succinct and coherent summary of a proposed research. It specifies the central issues, problems or questions that you intend to address. It sets out the general area of study within which your research falls after referring to the current state of knowledge and any recent discourse on the topic. It also indicates a researcher's contribution in filling in the existing gap in knowledge related to the area of the study and demonstrates the originality of the proposed research.

It gives an opportunity to demonstrate the researcher has the aptitude for graduate level research, showing that he/she has the ability to communicate complex ideas clearly, briefly, rationally and critically.

Format of a Research Proposal

Your research proposal should normally include the following parts:

1. Title

A working title should indicate the key words associated with your research, be consistent with the outline further developed, and give some idea of the original aspects of the project. For example, if the analysis will be comparative, this should be reflected in the title. If one particular theoretical perspective will be tested and criticised, then this should be mentioned. If the analysis will be a case-law, this should be manifested. There will of course be an opportunity to refine the title during the course of the research.

-Level of education, proposal writer, school, academic institution, date and year to be stated.

2. Abstract

The proposal should include a concise statement of your intended research of no more than a maximum of 250 words. This may be a couple of sentences setting out the problem that you want to examine or the central question(s) that you wish to address.

3. Research Context/Background/Introduction

You should explain the broad background against which you will conduct your research. You should include a brief overview of the general area of study within which your proposed research falls, summarizing the current state of knowledge and recent debates on the topic. This will allow you to demonstrate a familiarity with the relevant field as well as the ability to communicate clearly and concisely.

4. Identify existing literature

A student/researcher needs to identify the main literature in the area and to demonstrate awareness of the major existing debates. Specific sources should be identified and cited. The purpose of this section is not to provide a detailed summary, but to identify the ways in which the applicant's research is able to make a contribution: what are the gaps? Which elements remain unresolved or untested? What new light remains to be shed? If you are dealing with a new area of law, you should still include a section on the existing literature. The relevant literature may lie in related or adjacent fields. What does study of this new area bring to existing debates? What will be the enduring contribution of your research?

All literature cited should fully be referenced and included in the bibliography. This is an important demonstration of your research skills. The existing literature which you review can be located in a variety of places: academic journals, reports, academic monographs (books), policy papers, court decisions and so on.

5. Research Questions

The proposal should set out the central aims and questions that will guide your research. Before writing your proposal, you should take time to reflect on the key questions that you are seeking to answer. Many research proposals are too broad, so reflecting on your key research questions is a good way to make sure that your project is sufficiently narrow and feasible.

You need to explain what issues you are addressing which have not been studied before, or not in the way that you intend to address them. What problem are you trying to resolve? What new understanding are you trying to provide? You should consider what justification there is for research in this area (why?). Research questions are questions which you seek the answers. While it is acceptable to have (and to mention) working hypotheses, the core of your research (and hence, of your proposal) should be an attempt to answer a question or cluster of interrelated questions.

You might find it helpful to prioritize one or two main questions, from which you can then derive a number of secondary research questions. The proposal should also explain your intended approach to answering the questions: will your approach be empirical, doctrinal or theoretical etc?

6. Research Methods

The proposal should outline your research methods, explaining how you are going to conduct your research. The student should be aware of different methodological tools that could be used. Your methods may include visiting particular libraries or archives, field work or interviews.

If your proposed research is library-based, you should explain where your key resources (e.g. law reports, journal articles) are located (in the Law School's library, Westlaw etc). If you plan to conduct field work or collect empirical data, you should provide details about this (e.g. if you plan interviews, who will be your interviewee? How many interviews will you conduct? Will there be problems of access?). This section should also explain how you are going to analyze your research findings.

You need to explain why the chosen one is the most suitable for his/her research. For example, your research may be primarily library-based. If so, does it require access to specialist collections? Does it require access to comparative or historical materials? If your research is a comparative or international study, you will need to explain how you will get the relevant international materials and whether or not this will involve travel elsewhere.

If empirical or fieldwork is planned, is this intended to be qualitative or quantitative? How will any data be analysed and used? **You should give some thought to any ethical or safety issues that may arise in respect of fieldwork in particular (ethical issue)**

7. Significance of Research

The proposal should demonstrate the originality of your intended research. You should therefore explain why your research is important (for example, by explaining how your research builds on and adds to the current state of knowledge in the field or by setting out reasons why it is timely to research your proposed topic). In other words, it should

- i. Demonstrate how your research ‘fills a gap’ in existing research.
- ii. Explain why your research is important – it is not enough to say that this has not been studied previously; you need to explain why it should be studied. In other words, you need to explain why it is interesting/important.

8. Outline

The schedule should attempt to break down the work required into manageable segments, which will often be based on sections of the thesis. It is a brief explanation of the table of contents, in other words.

9. Timetable

You should provide a very approximate timetable for the research. It is important to include some estimated time-frame as research often does not proceed entirely to plan. Be realistic: feasibility is one of the criteria applied in judging your proposal.

9. Bibliography

The proposal should include a short bibliography identifying the most relevant works for your topic.

Length/size

The proposal should usually be around 2,500 words.

Abstract Guidelines

Abstracts must include sufficient information for reviewers to judge the nature and significance of the topic, the adequacy of the investigative strategy, the nature of the results, and the conclusions. The abstract should summarize the substantive results of the work and not merely list topics to be discussed.

An abstract is an outline/brief summary of your paper and your whole project. It should have an introduction, body and conclusion. It is a well-developed paragraph, should be exact in wording, and must be understandable to a wide audience. Abstracts has to be between 150-250 words, formatted in Microsoft Word, and single-spaced, using size 12 Times New Roman font.

It highlights major points of the content and answers why your work is important, what was your purpose, how you went about your project, what you learned, and what you concluded.

In summary, an abstract is a short summary of a larger work, such as a dissertation/thesis or research paper. It allows potential readers to quickly identify what your paper is all about and decide if it's worth reading. All abstracts should include:

- A statement of your main topic, purpose and objectives
- A brief description of the methodology
- An overview of the most significant findings or arguments
- A summary of your conclusions and recommendations

The abstract appears at the very beginning of a document, but it should be the last thing you write. In a dissertation or thesis, include it on a separate page, after the title page and acknowledgements but before the table of contents.

What is the difference between an Abstract and an Introduction?

An introduction provides the reader with some background information to your topic and introduces the rationale for the project, explaining and defining the problem. It then details the content of the thesis or dissertation and the intended structure. It is different from the abstract in that it does not give any information about the **methods, results and conclusion**.

Is this an Abstract or an Introduction?

“This essay is an overview of the theoretical, methodological, pedagogical, ideological and power-related issues of world Englishes: varieties of English used in diverse sociolinguistic contexts. The scholars in this field have critically examined theoretical and methodological frameworks of language use based on western, essentially monolingual and monocultural frameworks of linguistic science and replaced them with frameworks that are faithful to multilingualism and language variation. This conceptual shift affords a “pluri-centric” view of English, which represents diverse sociolinguistic histories, multicultural identities, multiple norms of use and acquisition, and distinct contexts of function. The implications of this shift for learning and teaching world Englishes are critically reviewed in the final sections of this essay” (Bhatt, 2001).

Is this an Abstract or an Introduction?

“This article focuses on major current theoretical and methodological issues related to what has been characterised as “World Englishes”. In the past three decade, the study of the formal and functional implications of the global spread of English, especially in terms of its range and functions and the degree of penetration in Western and, especially, non-Western societies, has received considerable attention among scholars of English language, linguistics and literature; creative writers; language pedagogues; and literary critics. It is in this context that the late Henry Kahane remarked: “English is the great laboratory of today’s sociolinguist” (1986, p495). There is now a growing consensus among scholars that there is not one English language anymore: rather there a many (McArthur 1998), most of which are disengaged from the language’s early Judeo-Christian tradition. The different English languages, studied within the conceptual framework of World Englishes, represent diverse linguistic, cultural, and ideological voices” (Bhatt, 2001).

Sample Abstract

Environmental non-profit organizations in the UK currently face a significant funding gap. Research has shown that donation intention is influenced by campaign messaging strategies, and that representations of individual victims are generally more effective than appeals based on abstract concepts like climate change. This study aims to determine how environmental organizations can target fundraising campaigns to increase donations. Building on existing work on targeted fundraising, it asks: To what extent does a potential donor's social distance from climate change victims in fundraising campaigns affect their intention to make a donation? In this context, social distance is defined as the extent to which people feel they are in the same social group (in-group) or another social group (out-group) in relation to climate change victims.

Based on a review of the literature on donation intention and theories of social distance, an online survey was distributed to potential donors based across the UK. Respondents were randomly divided into two conditions (large and small social distance) and asked to respond to one of two sets of fundraising material. Analysis of the responses demonstrated that large social distance was associated with stronger donation intentions than small social distance. The results indicate that social distance does have an impact on donation intention. On this basis, it is

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The first sentence establishes the topic and main problem that the research will address. This problem will lead to the objective and research questions.

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Commented [u4]: The topic is narrowed down even further in the main research question, which shows exactly what the study aims to find out

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recommended that environmental organizations use social distance as a key factor in designing and targeting their campaigns. Further research is needed to identify other factors that could strengthen the effectiveness of these campaigns.

Commented [u7]: Finally, the study's main conclusions are stated, directly answering the research question and objective. As this research focused on a practical problem, it also includes recommendations.