

CHAPTER 6

WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

"The research proposal is often the key element to the successful dissertation and, as such, the most important step in the whole process" (Madsen, 1983, p. 35). Therefore, it should not be considered as a time-wasting task.

Reasons for Writing a Research Proposal

When the preliminary analysis of the problem is written out in a formal way as in a research proposal, the researcher will confidently carry out the study, and do the interpretation, creation and improvisation on the study with great ease. This is because by preparing the research proposal, the researcher finds the opportunity

- to consider the critical issues involved in the study,
- to lay the foundation of the research,
- to see the ways of solving the problem efficiently and effectively.

Once the proposal is written, the researcher will conduct the research based on the proposal which serves as a "road map" for the research (Allen, 1987, p. 37). In this way, the researcher will have little chance of getting lost in what he/she is doing. As Avery (1978, p. 27) puts it, a research plan helps the researcher to maintain himself/herself on the right track.

By preparing a research plan, one finds the opportunity to obtain advice and suggestions from colleagues and committee members' constructive criticisms before initiating the study.

Contents of a Research Proposal

A research proposal has to give the advisory committee some information on the aim, and the scope of the study together with the research design to be conducted to arrive at the hypothesized results. Since the committee members decide on the applicability of the research by reading the information in the research proposal, it should be very well stated and formulated, covering the main areas to be investigated.

In general, each institution prescribes the exact format and the content of a research study plan. However, the format of an acceptable research proposal tends to include the following guidelines most of which are cited by Madsen (1983, p. 36), Allen (1987, p. 36), and Avery (1978, p. 29):

Format of a Research Proposal

1. The title page
 - a. Proposed title
 - b. Investigator's name
 - c. The degree sought
 - d. Name of the advisor
 - e. Name of the institution
 - f. Date of submission

2. Abstract

3. Table of contents

4. Introduction

There is also a tendency to recognize the contributions of the scholars in connection with the study by stating what theory the study is going to be based on. It is also good for indicating awareness of what has been done and from which point on the research needs to be carried out. What is important here is to give a sound explanation of why theories and studies cited are important to the study to be undertaken.

5. Statement of the problem

- to state the nature of the problem and the scope of the study
- to discuss the importance of the study and to bring a justification for the study by stating the objective clearly
- to speculate on how to contribute to the solution

6. Background of the study

- to provide background information about the topic
- to mention the contributions of the scholars in connection with the study

7. Hypotheses

- to state the main hypothesis
- aside from the main hypothesis, to state any minor problems

8. Operational definitions

- to define specific terms to be used in the study

9. Assumptions and limitations

It is important to state what the main constraints of the study will be by mentioning some of the difficulties that are likely to be confronted while conducting the research.

10. Procedure (Method of Analysis)

- a. A general description of the theoretical framework if necessary
- b. Sources of evidence or data (subjects)
 - to give a precise definition of sample units to be studied
 - to describe the method of selecting units from the whole population

- c. Data collection
 - to describe the method of data collection (duration, kind, etc.)
 - to cite the special problems anticipated in data collection
- d. Analytic techniques and research design
 - to explain the basic method of analysis
 - to state the specific measurement and evaluation to be utilized
 - to mention the special instruments and techniques to be employed

11. A short bibliography

12. A work schedule

The preparation of the proposal is very important since it is the initial and vital step in the planning of a research. The success is twofold. A good research proposal easily gets accepted by the advisor and also gives the best guideline for conducting the rest of the research.

Title Page

The title of the proposal should be neither too long, nor too short. The recommended length of a title is 12-15 words. It should be long enough to describe major variables of the proposed study; however, it should not give too detailed information. The following are other aspects to avoid:

- The title should not consist only of unqualified nouns.
- The title should not include any underlining or quotation marks.
- The title should not include irrelevant expressions like "A study of" or "An investigation of."

The title page, if not stated otherwise by related institutions, usually carries the following information in the order provided:

- The title of the study (at the top of the page)
- The name and the degree of the author
- The degree sought
- The name(s) of the advisor and/or the advisory committee,
- The name of the institution, and
- The submission date (at the bottom of the page)

Abstract

Since readers look into the abstract before they read the thesis or the dissertation, the researcher needs to state briefly and concisely the theoretical framework of the study, giving brief information on the procedure of data collection and analysis. The following are some suggestions that most scholars give regarding the formulation of an abstract:

- An abstract is usually 100-200 words in length.
- It is written as one paragraph.
- It includes numerical information about the procedure and the results.

- It should not include any information that has not been reported in the proposal.
- Abbreviations should not be used unless they are defined in the abstract.
- Citations or references are not generally given in the abstract.

Table of Contents

Major headings and their page numbers should appear on a separate page under a separate title as "Table of Contents." Institutions may vary in their requirements about the organization of headings in the table of contents. If no requirement is given, the headings introduced in the proposal should be reflected in the table of contents in an outline form.

Introduction

In this section of the proposal, the researcher indicates the reason for choosing that particular subject to study. The researcher also focuses on the significance and the possible contribution of the study referring to his/her experience or training if needed.

The information in this section should be given in a brief and clear manner. The major points that need to be indicated should be reported in one or two pages. The references to be made to these points are also included in this section on a separate page.

Statement of the Problem

After the purpose of the study is indicated in the introduction section, the problem is introduced in a statement or a research question in order to focus on the central theme of the study. Once the problem is stated, the purpose of the study mentioned in the introduction is extended by indicating what is aimed to be achieved at the end of the study.

In this section, information on the procedure to be applied to solve the problem is also indicated. In the purpose statement, the relationship between two or more variables is presented, and the population to be examined is stated.

Background of the Study

In this section, general background information regarding the topic to be studied should be given. The research to be conducted is generally based on a theory to draw the frame of the study. For that reason, the most related studies from the literature should be selected along with general references regarding the field of study.

There is also a tendency to recognize the contribution of scholars, in connection with the theory the study is going to be based on, and to inform the reader what has been done regarding the problem and from which point the research needs to be carried out.

What is important here is to give a sound explanation to indicate the importance of the cited theories and studies to the study to be undertaken. In other words, the assumed results to be obtained from the research that are formulated in

the form of hypotheses to be will most probably be based on these theories and studies.

Hypothesis

A hypothesis states what solution is expected at the end of the study. It is based on previous scientific and personal knowledge in relation to the research topic. It is usually stated in a single sentence in the present tense. Therefore, the hypotheses need to be supported with rationale derived from theory, research, and/or personal experience.

Since the hypothesis is directly relevant to the data that are collected, it has to be stated in a way that the obtained results could be interpreted according to the stated hypothesis. For that reason, a hypothesis should include information on the variables to be investigated and the possible degree of their relationship. This information should be very brief so that it will not seem redundant in comparison with the statements made in the methods and procedure section.

Operational Definitions

Since the research to be conducted is geared to a specific field of study, there are certain vocabulary items that are used as key words in explaining the aim, problem, hypotheses, and procedure of the study.

If these words are not defined in the sense they are used in the study, the reader may be misled. Therefore, in this section, the measurement instruments to be employed and the variables significant to the study should be described and defined by including examples from the related literature.

Assumptions And Limitations

In this section, the assumptions the study is based on are given. The assumptions are usually about:

- the validity and reliability of the test measures,
- the selected subjects regarding the representation of the population,
- the degree of generalization of the results to be obtained from the study.

Procedure

Subjects

In this section, all the relevant information on subjects is given as indicated below:

- The necessary attributes of the subjects, such as their age, IQ levels, educational level, and socio-economic backgrounds
- The techniques employed in selecting the subjects

A generic term such as "students," "participants," "children," etc. is recommended to be used in the text instead of the word "subjects" in order to give the reader a better idea about the level and status of the subjects.

Data Collection

In this section, enough information has to be given in order to convince the reader that the procedure adopted for data collection is relevant to the purpose of the study. The duration and type of data collection are described clearly in this section. Moreover, special problems expected in data collection should be mentioned.

The length of this section depends on the type of research method. In experimental studies, for example, a more detailed description of the materials and procedures is necessary.

Data Analysis

This section should describe the method in which each hypothesis is intended to be tested. Since a minor change in the design of the research might affect the results, it is necessary to explain exactly how the hypothesis will be tested.

It is unnecessary to include statistical formulas for analysis to be used or the details of data processing procedures in this section.

Bibliography

Every publisher, journal, or university requires a different format of bibliography. As long as they are consistent, bibliographic entries for proposals can be in any format.

If bibliographical cards are prepared for every entry, it makes it easier for the researcher to put these cards into alphabetical order. Researchers who have access to computers can utilize the facilities provided for them in sorting out the bibliographical entries in alphabetical order.

Work Schedule

The time allotted for the completion of a thesis is normally one year, and for the dissertation, two or three years as required by different institutions. For this reason, each researcher should make his/her work schedule accordingly throughout the period.

Once the schedule is made, the researcher feels obliged to meet the deadlines. A schedule of this kind will provide the researcher with a disciplined pace of study to continue towards the completion of a thesis in a successful manner. (Example)

Schedule

July 1997	Data collection through recordings to be repeated every month for one and a half years.
January 1999	Organizing the data collected up to this date.

Completion of the first draft of the dissertation except for data analysis and results.

July 1999 Revision of the first draft.

January 1999 Data analysis
Writing the data analysis and the results sections
Final editing of the revised sections

July 1999 Handing in the final form of the dissertation