

## Chapter 4: How to Write a Research Proposal

### Lecture Notes

#### Framework of the Research Proposal

A research proposal is a written document that includes the following information:

- Summary of prior literature.
- Identification of research topic and research questions.
- Specification of procedure to be followed to answer research questions.

The purpose of your proposal is to sell your idea by showing you have thought it through very carefully and have planned a good research study.

There are three major sections of a research proposal, although the exact headings can vary:

I. Introduction

II. Method

III. Data Analysis

Two examples of Tables of Contents for a research proposal are shown in Table 4.1.

- Notice that the headings can vary.
- When you write a proposal, check with your committee or funding agency to determine if they have a preferred layout of headings.
- Note that Chapter 20 (p. 553) shows how to put your headings into APA format

■ **TABLE 4.1** Two Examples of the Major Headings of a Research Proposal\*

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*Example A: A Traditional Approach*

Title Page

Table of Contents

Abstract\*\*

Introduction

1. Statement of the research topic
2. Statement of the research problem
3. Summary of prior literature
4. Purpose of the study
5. Research question(s)
6. Research Hypotheses (of the study if a quantitative study is being conducted)

Method

1. Research participants
2. Apparatus and/or instruments
3. Research design\*\*\*
4. Procedure

Data Analysis

References

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*Example B: A "Three-Chapter" Approach*

Title Page

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Statement of the purpose of the research study
2. Statement of the research question(s)
3. Limitations of the proposed research
4. Key terms

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

1. Insert major headings relevant to identifying the different segments of the literature review.
2. Statement of the research hypothesis

Chapter 3: Method

1. Participants
2. Instrumentation
3. Research design
4. Procedure
5. Data analysis

References

Appendixes

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\* To learn how to put headings into APA format, see Headings (1.2D) in Chapter 20.

\*\* An abstract sometimes is included in a research proposal; you will need to check to see if one is needed in your context.

\*\*\* Research design is sometimes incorporated into the Procedure section; when this is done, the Procedure section is sometimes renamed Design and Procedure.

**I. The introduction section of your proposal.**

- The purpose of this section is to introduce your research idea, establish its importance (i.e., you want to “sell” it to your reader), and explain its significance.
- Flow of the introduction:
  - Start with a general introduction that
    - defines the research topic.
    - demonstrates its importance.
  - Then review the relevant literature.
  - This review should lead directly into a statement of the purpose of the study and your research questions.

**II. The method section of your proposal.**

- This provides a written description of the specific actions, plan, or strategy you will take to answer your research questions.
- It includes information about your proposed
  - Research participants
  - Design
  - Apparatus or instruments, and
  - Procedure.

**Participants**

The subsection of the method section entitled participants should provide a written description of the individuals who will participate in your research study and how they will be recruited.

Be sure to specify the following:

- Their demographic characteristics such as age and gender.
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria you will use.

- Any inducements for participation you plan to use.
- Where they are located.

### **Design**

In this subsection of the method section, entitled “Design, you present your plan or strategy to be used to investigate your research questions.

- You must include a separate design section if your design is complicated; otherwise you can put in your procedure section.
- The following is included in the design section:
  - Type of design and design layout of your study (e.g., you might use a pretest-posttest control-group design).
  - Description of all the variables being examined in your study.
  - Description of how your variables are to be combined.
  - Description of the points of measurement and manipulation in the design.

### **Apparatus and/or Instruments**

In this subsection of the method section you describe any apparatus and or instruments you propose to use in your research study.

- The following information should be included:
  - General description of the apparatus or instruments.
  - Variables measured by instruments.
  - Reliability and validity of instruments.
  - Why the instruments or apparatus are used.
  - Reference indicating where apparatus or instruments can be obtained.

## Procedure

In this subsection of the method section of your proposal, you carefully describe how your study will be executed.

- The following information should be included in the procedure section:
  - A description of the design if it was not previously described.
  - A detailed step-by-step description of how the study will be executed.

The reader should know exactly what you intend to do after reading this description. It should include enough information to tell the reader how to do the study if he or she wanted to replicate it.

**III. The data analysis section of your proposal** describes exactly how you propose to analyze the data you plan on collecting.

In a quantitative study, you will use some type of statistical analysis. You need to specify those analyses.

In a qualitative study, there is no one or “right” way of analyzing the data. You must explain the approach you propose to use and justify its use. In general, qualitative analysis will involve coding and searching for relationships and patterns in qualitative data.

Mixed research uses multiple data analysis methods (quantitative and qualitative). Table 19.8 in Chapter 19 will show some general types of mixed analysis.

An abstract is required in completed research studies; it is an optional section in a research proposal. You will need to determine if one is needed in your case.

The elements of the abstract will include the following:

- Concise statement of research hypothesis or research questions.
- Statement of expected number and characteristics of participants.
- Brief summary of procedure or way data will be collected.
- Brief statement of how will analyze results.

- Abstract is optional in proposals.