

If you are going to undertake a dissertation as part of your final year work, you will need to write a proposal. This handout gives **general advice and information** about writing a research proposal. **It does not replace the requirements given in the handbook for the unit.** If there is a discrepancy between this handout and what your unit handbook says, always follow the advice given in the unit handbook.

Before you identify an area for research

Carefully review the aims and learning outcomes for your unit which you will find in the unit handbook. It is important when choosing an area for investigation, that it demonstrates how it meets the specific learning outcomes for your unit.

How to approach your proposal – general advice

The Portsmouth Business School website suggests that your proposal should clearly identify the **research problem** to be studied and the **general and specific aims** of the proposed research. Some issues you may seek to address in your proposal could include:

- **The problem to be studied**
 - The nature of the problem (and why it is a problem)
 - Its significance (in terms of who it is significant to, and why)
 - Why it is appropriate to study this particular topic now
 - The academic research undertaken on the topic so far (this is your literature review)
 - The authors and theories that have been most influential in the past (and why)
 - How the research you are proposing will build on existing research in this area
- **A definition of the research aims**
 - The general and specific aims of your proposed research
 - How these will help people to understand the issues involved
- **Proposed methodology**
 - The methodologies that you have considered
 - Which authors led you to consider these methodologies and why
 - The most useful methodology for you to use, the reasons for using it and the type of data it will give you
 - What kind of hypothesis¹ you will start with (if required)

¹ **Hypothesis** - a proposition assumed as a premise in an argument. You could consider this to be *your idea of what the outcome of the research will be*. Remember that it is only a starting point and may be proved wrong during the course of your investigation. If your final dissertation proves your hypothesis to be incorrect, it usually means that you have undertaken good research without bias. This is what is meant by *testing your hypothesis*.

- How you are going to test your hypothesis
- **Access to data**
 - How you will find the information you need in order to complete the research
 - The problems that may arise in gaining the information, and how you will deal with them
- **Ethical considerations**
 - Any ethical issues that you can foresee arising as a result of your research (e.g. data protection)
 - How you intend to overcome these issues

Top Tips on writing dissertation proposals – from the PBS Study Support Tutors

1. **Give hints, not conclusions:** your proposal can hint at what you think the research might discover (that is what your hypothesis is for) but it should not contain definite conclusions or assertions that are not yet backed up by evidence.
2. **Keep it impersonal:** your work should be written in the third person, so instead of saying “I will look at the hibernation habits of polar bears”, it should say “This research will look at the hibernation habits of polar bears”.
3. **Be methodical:** you should make sure that your research methodology is designed to produce the information that you say the research will uncover. It is easy to design a research methodology that does not provide information to answer your research question.
4. **It’s never too soon:** this is one piece of work you simply cannot rush, so start well ahead of time. You need to plan carefully to meet all of the criteria of a research proposal and ensure that it will work.
5. **Choose wisely:** choose your topic carefully! It is easy to start a topic that is far too big to address in a dissertation. Narrowing down the questions at this stage will prevent you from having to rework your ideas once you are doing the dissertation.

References:

Denscombe, M. (2005), *The Good Research Guide* (2nd ed.). Maidenhead: Open University Press. (Original work published 1998)

Portsmouth Business School. (n.d.) *Your research proposal*. Retrieved June 15, 2012, from the Portsmouth University website:
<http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/faculties/portsmouthbusinessschool/researchdegrees/yourresearchproposal/>