

STUDENT THESIS PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

Thesis Proposal

Students *must* work closely with their advisor to develop the proposal.

Proposal Form

The research proposal is expected to be completed during the normal time for a three- credit course.

In a preliminary consultation, the advisor and the student determine the nature of the question the student wishes to address, the approach the student wishes to take in addressing the question, a methodology that is appropriate for the approach, and a format that is appropriate for the methodology.

The proposal is intended to specify what the student wishes to study, why this is worth studying, who stands to benefit from the results of the study, how the investigation will unfold, and why this is an appropriate approach to the investigation. Usually the proposal is written in future tense (as the work is not yet done), except for the review of relevant literature which is written in the past tense.

NOTE: Completion of the thesis proposal should take no more than one academic term.

Chapter Format

The proposal can follow the outline used for the first three chapters of the completed thesis. This format is appropriate for studies using quantitative or qualitative methodologies.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

- Background of the Problem
- Statement of the Problem Situation
- Purpose of the Study
- Empirical Questions or Research Hypothesis
- Theoretical Framework
- Importance of the Study
- Scope and Limitations of the Study

NOTE: This document draws heavy from material published in the Master of Education Program Guide at Brock University.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The chapter should be sufficiently comprehensive to map out the literature foundation on which the study is situated. The review should be organized conceptually or thematically, which establishes a framework for the investigation.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

- *Introduction*- remind the reader of the purpose of the study, its importance, and the general methodological decision
- *Research Design*- describe and justify the design choice (e.g. experimental, quasi- experimental, survey, case study, phenomenology, ethnography, descriptive,, interpretative)
- *Site and Participant Selection*
- *Data Collection*
- *Data Analysis*
- *Reliability and Validity/ Establishing Credibility*- describe the steps that will be taken to enhance the quality of the data and the knowledge claim arising from the data
- *Methodological Assumptions*
- *Ethical Considerations*
- *Summary and/or Restatement of the Purpose*

The following explanations will assist in developing content for each of the sections of your thesis proposal.

Introduction

This section states what the investigation is about. It is a brief and concise overview of what the student plans to study and how this area of investigation is situated in an educational and/ or social context.

Literature Review

This section is a critical review of the literature that pertains to the topic under investigation. The review should be organized conceptually or thematically, which sets out a framework that can serve as a guide for the investigation.

Problem/ Research Context

This is the reason for doing the study. It should be derived directly from the literature or from compelling personal or professional reasons for pursuing the investigation. It could be related to one or more of the following situations:

- A professional conundrum

- A current debate in the field
- A gap in the literature
- A lack of recent studies
- Inconclusive results
- Ambiguous terminology and/ or definition
- Poor measurement devices (weak instrumentation)
- Missing factors
- Debatable statistical analyses

Purpose Statement

In general, there are two components to every problem. The first is a general statement telling the reader exactly what is expected to be the research focus. The second component is more specific. Often, it is stated in the form of a series of empirical questions that reflect the conceptual framework developed from the review of the literature or selected from an author's published work.

The purpose should be of real interest to the student as it will "live with them" for at least one year.

Methodology/ Research Design

The student uses this section to describe the research design chosen to frame the study (e.g. case study, experimental design, narrative, survey design, action research, single subject) and to justify this design by linking characteristics of the design, as found in the research methods literature, to aims and objectives of the student's investigation. This section also outlines and describes the chosen methodology or approach (e.g., positivist, interpretivist, critical theory) underpinning the design and the methods (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, conceptual, philosophical) by which data will be collected and analyzed.

Data Collection

This section specifies the instrument that should be used to collect data and the procedures that will be followed. Instruments can be borrowed from others or developed by the researcher. For quantitative studies, if students develop their own questionnaire, it should be pilot tested and checked for content and face validity. If instruments are borrowed, written permission must be sought for use. If possible, students should only use instruments that are valid and reliable. Statements about validity and reliability must be included in the proposal.

For qualitative studies, students must outline the questions they expect to ask in an interview or the types of items they will look for in an observation. Thesis must be accompanied by an explanation of how the student decided on these questions/ items (e.g., from specific concepts in the literature, from a previous study, or from some other source). If the student plans to analyze documents, the proposal

must specify which documents will be collected, where they can be found, and how the documents advance the investigation.

Sample and Population/ Site and Participation Selection

When relevant, this must be identified for all research designs. Students should specify the type of sampling that is expected to be employed and should describe the steps that will be taken to gain access and to solicit participation. Sampling options include:

- Simple random sampling
- Stratified random sampling
- Cluster sampling
- Systematic sampling
- Convenience sampling
- Purposive sampling
- Snowball sampling
- Reputational sampling

Data Analysis

The proposal must indicate how the student plans to analyse the data in order to generate answers to the research question. It is helpful to think about analysis in relation to the empirical questions listed in the Purpose section. Students should consider which elements of data are likely to address each of the empirical questions and what they might do with the data to derive an answer.

Quantitative analyses should be attached to research hypotheses and can include descriptive, parametric, and nonparametric statistics. The type of test that will be used should be specified for each hypothesis, and students might also provide a preliminary version of the form within which the findings will be displayed: chart, graph, and/ or table. *It is essential that quantitative terminology and statistical tests are clearly understood and appropriately used in the research proposal.* Therefore, students planning on using quantitative methodology are well advised to take a statistics course (e.g., EDUC 8100).

Qualitative analyses can be approached from a within- case and/ or cross- case perspective and using an inductive and/ or deductive approach. The type of analysis should be matched to the purpose of the study and to specific study questions. Students should also give some consideration to how the data will be organized and displayed. *It is essential that qualitative terminology and analytic tools are clearly understood and appropriately used in the research proposal.* Therefore, students planning on using qualitative methodology are well advised to take a qualitative research course (e.g., EDUC 8300).

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This section is intended to set out the parameters or boundaries within which the study is being conducted. In quantitative studies these are concerned with the external and internal reliability and

validity of the work. In qualitative research these include a discussion of the researcher's preconceptions, credibility, trustworthiness, and epistemological stance.

Every undertaking has specific conceptual limitations and the researcher must acknowledge their existence. External validity is related to selection, testing, and treatment biases. Internal validity is confined largely to experimental studies. Here, concern is with the effects of extraneous variable on the dependent variable. Factors to consider include a) maturation; b) statistical regression; c) experimental mortality; and/ or d) deviations in the procedures for data collection.

In qualitative studies, the researcher's preconceptions must be addressed with regard to their previous experiences in the area under investigation, their social location *Vis –a-Vis* those researched, and their understanding of the situation prior to undertaking the work. The epistemological stance includes a discussion of the tradition of research within which they have chosen to work and a clear indication of the assumptions upon which this work is based.

No one investigation can encompass all the relevant factors, sites, people, or issues embedded in a topic or study. Researchers, therefore, must delimit their study by establishing specific boundaries in terms of site and sample limits, time limits, data collection limits, and any other delimitation they impose on their work. Each of these choices will limit the extent to which the results can be applied. Students must acknowledge limitations and indicate why they are appropriate for the chosen research design.

Importance of the Study

The proposal should describe the potential impact of the study on participants, on the field, and on the knowledge base. It is helpful to think in terms of why this study needs to be conducted, who stands to benefit from the results, and how those benefits might be expressed. Potential implications for the practice and/ or recommendations for changes that might emerge from the results could be noted.

Ethical Considerations

The proposal should include a discussion of the ways in which the participants might be at risk in this study and the steps taken to protect their rights. Reference should be made to the ethical review processes that must be conducted prior to commencement of the study, including seeking approval from the University of Windsor Research Ethics Review Board and other relevant Research Ethics Review Boards.

Dissemination

The proposals should inform the reader of how distribution of results, conclusions, and/ or recommendations will be made. This can be achieved through workshops, presentations, newsletters, and/ or journal articles. Students should identify specific venues for dissemination.

Feasibility

This section states:

- **The cost factor:** All necessary resources required to complete the study should be listed to generate an expected expense. For example:
 - Printing fees for permission forms and/ or surveys if applicable
 - Envelopes and mailing fees
- **The time factor:** List all stages of the study and state what needs to be done at each stage and how much time is required to complete each stage
- **Accessibility of data:** State how much travelling is required or how much time is needed to secure resources
- **Inconvenience to participants:** State whether they are going to be expected to travel or detained for extended periods of time.