

Writing the Research Proposal

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OVERVIEW

- What is a research proposal?
- Organizing a research proposal
- Writing the research proposal

What is a Research Proposal?

- Written for thesis & dissertation
- A statement of intent: outlines what you *propose* to do
- Why research should take place

Length

- Will vary depending on:
 - Purpose and details provided
 - University requirements, discipline and topic
- 10-15 pages; others 75 pages average
- Be brief without losing the meaning

Defining your research topic

- *Find your passion and topic of interest*
 - What are you interested in?
 - What question do you want to answer?
 - Are you willing to study this for 1-5 years?

Organizing Research Proposals

- Title of Study
- Introduction
 - The Problem
- Literature Review
- Methodology
 - Research design
 - Data analysis
- Ethical statements
- Timeframe/Plan
- Primary references

Title of Study

- Not too general: encapsulates what you are doing
- Clearly indicates your topic and the key issues to investigate
- No more than 15 words
- Catchy and attention grabbing (if possible)
- May change as you progress

Introduction

- Acquaints reader with the topic
- May begin with a brief historical overview
 - Outlines the general field of interest → how your chosen topic fits within it
- Why you are interested in the study → statement of the problem

The Problem

- a) Rationale or Significance
- b) Statement of the Problem
- c) Hypothesis/es
- d) Delimitations

a) Significance of Study

- Purpose
 - What is the purpose/overall aim of your research?
 - What objectives do you expect to achieve?
 - What specific research question/s will be addressed?

a) Significance of Study

- Significance
 - Why is the research important?
 - What is your study's contribution to the field of knowledge?
 - What are its wider implications or uses?

b) Statement of the Problem

- State clearly and briefly
- Must follow logically from the purpose statement
- May be a question or a statement
- Do not promise more than is necessary

Example: Filipino Women Writers in Spanish: A Literary History & Anthology (1900-1969)

Introduction

Background of the Study

The evolution of feminist criticism in literature has contributed much to the study of women's writings and the experiences they depict. The latter half of the 20th century placed significance on the study of women writers and their works, with numerous published anthologies and poetry collections. All these were attempts to understand the female psyche and explain what it meant to be a woman. Certainly, except perhaps for the last decade, women's literature in the Philippines was not conscious of the feminist agenda...

However, surprisingly, previous to known Filipina writers in English, Filipino, or the various vernacular languages, no research is found on the Filipina writers of Spanish. Although the society was decidedly more patriarchal then, it seems impossible that no works were written by our "foremothers."

It is, thus, the intention of this study to make known the foremost Filipina writers of Spanish. For instance, not many are familiar with the names Evangelina Guerrero-Zacarias, Nilda Guerrero-Barranco, and Adelina Monasterio Gurra. They were considered important and major writers of their time yet in the study of the country's literary history, they remain silent and unrecognized. They wrote in Spanish, with significant literary contributions, but they are not even included in the roster of women writers in Philippine literature classes. Who were they? What did they write? Did their writing reflect the social, political, and moral issues and concerns of their time? Did their literature develop with the times and with their male counterparts?

Example: Nutritional status of migrant Mainland Chinese children in Auckland

Introduction

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. The New Zealand Ministry of Health has emphasised the importance of nutrition and physical activity to the growth and development of children in New Zealand. Children living in New Zealand come from a variety of different countries, with their own natural traditions and beliefs about food and health (Ministry of Health, 1997).

The number of migrants in New Zealand arriving from Mainland China has increased in recent years (Statistics New Zealand, 1997). While migrant Mainland Chinese families bring their original food habits and food beliefs to their new country, the culture of the new country also influences their food choices strongly at the same time. Food habits changes as the culture changes...

Childhood diet influences the long-term health of the child. An understanding of the food habits of migrant Mainland Chinese children, their cultural background and the transition in their dietary practices and lifestyle is important when making nutrition recommendations, designing nutrition education materials, and counselling immigrant Mainland Chinese families about nutrition. However, a question arises: what do we know about the nutritional status of Mainland Chinese children?

At present, limited data are available on children including migrant Mainland Chinese school age in New Zealand with regard to their dietary intake and nutritional status (Ministry of Health, 1997). The only study that has been done was on a small sample of 17 pre-school Chinese children in Dunedin (Soh et al., 2000). Nothing is known about the determination of food choices and dietary acculturation among migrant Mainland Chinese children in older age groups in New Zealand.

c) *Hypothesis/es*

- Shrewd guess, assumption, or inference
- One or more may be generated
- Rare for a study not to have at least one

d) Delimitations

- Integral to the research design: sets the parameters; tells readers what will and will not be included, and why
- Only when imposed by the nature of the problem being studied

Literature Review

- Identifies your study's contribution to the field of knowledge
- Shows the relationship of your research to other local and international researches in the field
- Points out improvements in the field

Research design vs Methodology

Research design

The ***overall plan*** for collecting, manipulating, and analyzing data to answer your research question/s, accept or reject your hypothesis/es, or fulfil your aims and objectives.

Research design vs Methodology

Methodology

Describes not only the way in which data is collected (practical), but may include the ***discussion*** of theoretical issues (research methods)

Methodology & Research design

- Should demonstrate the reasons behind your choice of :
 - Methodological approaches
 - Techniques for data collection and analysis
- Justify your choice of one approach over another and its consequences for the research

Methodology & Research design

- Your research questions guide the inquiry process:
 - Instruments or tools to gather data?
 - Show link between your research question/s and the tools you will use
- Include practical/theoretical/conceptual framework you will employ

Example: *Selection bias operating against skilled candidates from countries-of-origin other than New Zealand*

Procedure

Ten people participated in a pilot study. These people were employed in management and administrative positions in the education, law, and religious sectors. The purpose of the research was outlined, and each individual completed the questionnaire in their own time, and returned it to the researcher at their convenience. All participants in the pilot study completed and returned the questionnaire to the researcher. After receiving the completed questionnaires, and oral and written feedback from these individuals, the questionnaire was modified before distributing it to the main group of voluntary participants... Subsequently, the research questions and pre-brief were substantially modified by the researcher and researcher's supervisor so that participants felt free, at their discretion, to answer as much, or as little of the questionnaire as they determined. As well, the researcher stressed in the pre-brief that participants were simply to leave any question 'blank' where they chose not to complete the question.

Data analysis

- Specify how you will present results
- Statistical tests you will use
- Methods used to prove your hypotheses
- Tip: deal with each hypothesis separately and mention the analysis that will be conducted

Ethics Section

- Identifies specific ethical issues of your research, how you intend to conform to the relevant ethical codes
- Protect confidentiality, anonymity, and the physical and mental well-being of participants
- Other codes of conduct must also be mentioned (e.g., governmental/committee codes)

Timeframe

- Timeline for the study:
 - Times and dates of each step of your research process
 - Be as specific as possible

Research proposal sample timetable

Month:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
	Literature search												
	Literature review				Review updated/refined								
	Specify guide questions			Analyze ethical issues			Data analysis						
	Select strategy & methods			Pilot research tools			Data collection						
	Start writing sections			Summarize findings				Interpretation & conclusions					
		Draft sections			Construct chapters				Final draft & Finishing				

Primary References

- Highlight appropriate texts cited in your proposal
- Supervisor guidance for other essential texts is important
- *Never underestimate the value of a good reference list*

Writing the Research Proposal

- Well-structured → well written
- Clear, concise, and to the point
- Paragraph organization
 - Follow T – Topic sentence/controlling idea
 - E – Explain, elaborate, or define
 - E – Evidence, examples, or illustrations
 - Between 100-150 words
 - Avoid long paragraphs of 250+ words
 - One main idea = one paragraph

Writing Checklist: Sentences

- Have you conducted a grammar and spell check?
- Have you defined words correctly?
- Is there one idea per sentence?
- Have you avoided overly long sentences?
- Have you read it out loud to pick up errors?
- Have you written a complete sentence?

Writing Checklist: Paragraphs

- Is there one main idea per paragraph?
- Is your paragraph relevant to the topic?
- Have you used topic sentences?
- Have you avoided short or overly long paragraphs?
- Is there a progression of ideas from one paragraph to another?
- Have you linked paragraphs together?
- Have you read it out loud to pick up errors?

Writing Checklist: Sections

- Is there a logical progression of ideas?
- Are sub-sections clearly labelled or sign-posted?
- Does it relate to an understanding of the thesis topic?

Writing Checklist: Style

- Is correct referencing style used?
- Is there appropriate use of evidence?
- Have you avoided clichés?
- Have you excluded emotive language?
- Is it the appropriate tone and level?
- Have you avoided slang or jargon?

The Proposal is more than a Plan...

- It provides the supervisor and the staff → information
- A highly explicit proposal ensures a higher possibility of the final thesis being accepted

Finally...

- Save frequently and print copies
- Save multiple copies



SUMMARY

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References

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